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Abstract

The Concept of the Country Park - A Critical Evaluation.

Sheila Marshall 1985.

This study is about the rise of a new phenomenon in the long history of the English countryside, - the 'Country Park' or 'Leisure Park' as defined by the Countryside Commission under the Countryside Act of 1968; 'a park which will be accessible to large numbers of people within easy distance of large conurbations; which will provide facilities and services for the enjoyment and convenience of the public... and which will therefore ease pressure on remote places, i.e. The National Parks and reduce the amount of damage caused to agriculture by recreation.'

The purpose of the study is to examine the ancestry of such parks, to trace their development from their idealistic origins through the complexities of legislation and the changing needs of the public to the realities of country park provision in the 1980's.

The study is divided into two sections each related to the other by a common theme, namely the perception and interpretation of the countryside within a recreational context.

Section one includes five chapters:-

Chapter 1 focuses on specific philosophical ideas, i.e. -

'romanticism' and on attitudes towards the English countryside which have persisted since the 19th century.

Chapter 2 looks at the 'institutionalised' countryside to find out how local authorities, the Countryside Commission and such bodies as the National Trust set the 'style' for Country Parks.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the changing concept of the Country Park from 1969 to the 80's and focuses on interpretive schemes, educational services and the role of the designer/manager as image-maker.

Chapter 4 which is the largest part of Section 1 - develops this theme and draws upon material collected from site visits to give a critical evaluation of the facilities offered in specific Country Parks. It concentrates particularly on the educational/entertainment aspect of interpretive exhibitions and their relevance to the visitors' expectations and needs. It also examines within the context of these individual studies the interconnecting roles of Designing/Marketing/and Management.

Chapter 5 examines the Country Park concept and its alternatives in the light of more recent developments, for example the creation of 'linear parks' and the new awareness for the need for 'urban greening'.

Section two is a report on a design participation experiment carried out with the co-operation of the Leicestershire County Council Department of Planning and Transportation. This feasibility study for the design and development of one area of a proposed 'linear park' - the Wanlip Country Park (due to be opened in 1990) is an attempt to explore the 'innovatory' role of the artist/designer.

The Concept of the Country Park. -
A Critical Evaluation

by

Sheila Marshall

*A Master's Thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of Master of Philosophy of the
Loughborough University of Technology.*

Contents

INTRODUCTION.		Page I
 <u>SECTION 1.</u>		
CHAPTER 1.	Historical perceptions.	Page 1.
CHAPTER 2.	The 'institutionalised' countryside.	Page 10.
CHAPTER 3.	Changing concepts 1969-80's. - the development of interpretive schemes.	Page 23.
CHAPTER 4.	A view of the Parks.	Page 36.
CHAPTER 5.	The Country Park concept and its alternatives.	Page 95.
Map.	Distribution of approved Country Parks 1972.	Opp. Page 26.
Table.	Voluntary countryside organisations - direct membership 1950-1980.	Opp. Page 29.
 <u>SECTION 2.</u>		
	A feasibility study for the design and development of the proposed Wanlip Country Park.	Page 107.
	Introductory Note.	Page 108.
	Acknowledgement.	Page 111.
Part 1.	Background to the Feasibility Study.	Page 112.
Part 2.	Designers Diary 1984-85.	Page 119.
Maps.	1. Wanlip Action Area Local Plan.	Opp. Page 112.
	2. Extent of Feasibility Study/ Design brief.	Opp. Page 116.
	3. Sketch Plan of the proposed Wanlip Country Park.	Opp. Page 117.
Tables.	1. Survey of leisure time activities. Visitors to the Leicestershire countryside 1972, 1977 and 1981.	Opp. Page 114.

2. 1981 Census of Leicester 10% sample population of social class, and;-
3. Operating costs per admission against annual admissions to Country Parks.

Adj. Page 144.

Illustrations.

The Designer's Sketch Book Between Pages 126-7.

Examples of Industrial
Components. Opp. Page 129.

Note:-

Photographs illustrating the individual Park Studies in Chapter 4. and Wanlip Country Park are contained in the slip case accompanying this study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Page 147.

Introduction

"There is a mechanism within the law which allows everyone to be involved in environmental decisions. But all laws require exercise - they have to be used and explored.... a society which accepts the workings of bureaucracy without protest deserves to be strangled with red tape" - THEO CROSBY "THE ENVIRONMENTAL GAME".

This study is about the rise of a new phenomenon in the long history of the English countryside, the 'Country Park' or 'leisure park' as defined by the Countryside Act of 1968. The purpose is to examine its ancestry, trace its acceleration into a 'boom industry' and assess its successes and failures in relation to its ideology, social impact and the long term use of the land. The discussion will be broadly based and will cover a wide range of topics, the emphasis being on the interaction of ideas rather than on chronological developments.

The 'Country Park', in this new context, evolved from the difficulties experienced by the National Parks Commission in carrying out their dual role. It had become increasingly clear that recreational planning was incompatible with conserving large areas of wild country. The function of the commission was broadened and re-named the Countryside Commission. Under the 1968 Countryside Act provision was made for implementing and financing country parks. To be recognised parks had to:-

- (1) be accessible to large numbers of people
- (2) make it easier for town dwellers to enjoy open air leisure without travelling long distances
- (3) be able to absorb large numbers of people and to support a large range of facilities
- (4) be able to ease pressure on remote places
- (5) reduce the amount of damage caused to agriculture by recreation.

Rearranging the landscape to suit prevailing tastes and objectives is hardly new; but the speed at which the Country Park

concept has been implemented, particularly by local authorities, and the scale of the exercise - 156 since 1968 and with more to come - together with the proliferation of attendant disciplines and professions, for example, designers, planners, interpreters, recreation managers, and park rangers - suggests that a critical assessment is due.

The study is divided into two sections, each related to the other by a common theme:- i.e. The perception and interpretation of the countryside within a recreational context.

Section 1. consists of five chapters:-

- Chapter 1. examines certain aspects of historical background and focuses on specific philosophical ideas and attitudes towards the countryside which have persisted since the time of the Industrial Revolution.
- Chapter 2. looks at the 'institutionalised' countryside and tries to ascertain how such bodies as the National Trust, the Countryside Commission and local planning authorities set the 'style' for the Country Parks; who does what and by whose authority?
- Chapter 3. is concerned with the changing concept of the Country Park from 1969 to the '80's and focuses on the development of interpretive schemes, educational services and the role of the designer/manager as image-maker.
- Chapter 4. contains a critical evaluation of facilities offered in specific Country Parks, drawing on material collected from site visits, from interviews and correspondence with those responsible for their management and from published reports.
- Chapter 5. examines the Country Park concept and its alternatives in the light of very recent developments; for example, - the growing popularity of the ecology movement and the new awareness for the need for 'urban greening'.

Section 2. is a report on a design participation experiment

carried out with the co-operation of the Leicestershire County Council's Department of Planning and Transportation. This feasibility study for the design and development of the proposed Wanlip Country Park attempts to explore the 'innovatory' role of the artist/designer.

Chapter 1

It is not the intention in this opening chapter to give a history of the English countryside, - the subject is well documented - but to draw from that rich quarry a number of related factors which appear relevant to the concept of the Country Park in the 1980's and to see what light they throw on our own attitudes towards landscape and the use of recreational space.

How do we 'see' the countryside? How do we use it? What are our expectations when confronted with it?

It is more than fifty years since the ramblers of Derbyshire confronted the High Peak landowners over access rights to the moors and some four hundred and fifty years since the citizens of London clashed with leaseholders over the right to use the recreation grounds of Moorfields, - "so that the young men may shoot arrows and the ancient persons walk for their pleasure in the fields". (1).

In the four centuries that separate these two incidents major changes occurred which were to alter the face of the land, - particularly the lowlands; these were, the growth of the Country House and Park, Parliamentary Enclosure and the Industrial Revolution - changes which still influence our emotional attitudes to land use and development.

By the 16th. century with the increasing power of government and the law, the need for fortified manor houses became obsolete. Landowners began to build and design for pleasure. Ideas of taste brought home by travellers from the 'Grand Tour' and the prevailing styles of landscape aesthetics shaped the elements of the 17th. and 18th. century country house park as we know it today. Formal parterres were replaced with lawns, lakes, woodlands and water-courses with, if possible, a view of wilder country in the distance. Nowhere can this be seen to greater advantage than at Chatsworth in Derbyshire. Standing in the long scooped valley one is in Arcadia; the wooded slopes above the great house, the river meandering through the park, an abundance of sheep, cattle and deer and in the distance the wild moors and the dramatic outline of Froggatt Edge.

As well as these developments in domestic parklands a more pervasive change was taking place in the agricultural scene. Some partitioning of the open field system had been in operation since early medieval times but it was not until the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the 18th. and 19th. centuries that the visual implications became obvious, - 'enclosure' was to mark the beginning of planned landscape on a major scale.

W.G. Hoskins describes it in 'The Making of the English Landscape':-

"Up to about 1730 most of the enclosure was carried out by private agreements between owners of the land in question.... But under George II and above all from 1750 onwards enclosure by private act of Parliament working through special commissions in each of the affected parishes was the great instrument of change. This revolution affected three thousand English parishes.... In the great majority of parishes it was a complete transformation from the immemorial landscape of the open fields with their complex pattern of narrow strips... into the modern chequerboard pattern of squarish fields enclosed by hedgerows of hawthorn, with new roads running more or less straight and wide across the parish in all directions. It was a triumph of planning in so short a time for so complicated a matter, most of it carried through in most places within a year or two years of the passing of the act."

In this seminal work Professor Hoskins goes on to refute categorically any suggestion that the English landscape as we know it is only the result of Parliamentary enclosure, - nevertheless, there still remains a popular conception, based on what we are familiar with rather than what we know as historical fact, of the English agricultural lowlands as a patchwork of small undulating fields interspersed with copses and dotted with farmhouses, with the occasional country house and park set like a jewel in its midst. Any attempt to change this picture with, for example, the recent developments in arable farming, which have resulted in the destruction of hedges and the enlargement of fields, is met with strong opposition, not only from the committed conservationist lobby but from the public in general.

The effect of the Industrial Revolution on our collective consciousness is very complex and poses questions which are social as well as environmental. It was of course the scale and speed of the change to mechanised industry and the deeply ethical problems it engendered which mark this period as a watershed between two completely contrasting ways of life. From an environmental standpoint, far greater than the assault on visual sensibility - which was in itself horrific - was the ecological breakdown, the lasting damage done to the very structure of the soil, - damage which is now only just beginning to be repaired. One hundred and fifty years after the event new technology is being used to reclaim large tracts of derelict land. New enterprises such as 'Groundwork Trust' are tackling the problem right across the North West and new Country Parks are being planned for these reclaimed sites.

As modern technology is being used to heal the wounds inflicted by the first industrial period we might pause to consider whether the same mistakes are not being repeated in our Nuclear Energy Programme. The scenario appears to be the same; - innovation under economic pressure, - too much too soon without thinking through the total technological processes.

Early mechanization had been greeted with some enthusiasm by contemporary populists - Arkwright's new mill and model cottages at Cromford and the iron works at Coalbrookdale were a tourist attraction as early as 1780. Yet, even at this early date, some writers and thinkers were sensing the possible outcome of events. As Alisdair Clayre points out, there was a completely contrary movement of thought, one that criticized the effects of 'civilisation' and of technology on human life; - "The increasing desires that seemed to be the inescapable accompaniment to economic development, the effects of industrialization upon the landscape, and the effects of mechanization upon the inner life of man." (2).

This movement of thought, 'Romanticism', had its roots in the writings of Rousseau and Schiller and is the term applied to the movement in European literature and the visual arts that began towards the end of the 18th. century. It was basically a reaction to Neo-Classicism and the 'Age of Reason' and was generally supposed

to emphasise the importance of the imagination and emotions over reason and intellect. On a philosophical level this movement was opposed to Utilitarianism and was in some degree responsible for bringing about the division of arts and sciences which is a feature of the modern world.

The influence of the Romantic Movement has an important place in this study because it was the source of many of the philanthropic ideas put forward to counteract the evil effects of the Industrial Revolution and its confused legacy can be found in our institutionalised concerns for health, outdoor pursuits, education and town and country planning. This was a paradoxical idealism which, while proclaiming the virtues of personal freedom and individualism, - in some cases to the point of revolution - could also display an overwhelming passion to instruct, plan and organise in the name of the 'common good'.

In "The Making of the Industry Landscape" Barrie Trinder remarks that this period in the history of English landscape was of critical importance "not so much for the changes that took place on the ground but for the changes in the ways people perceived what they saw;.... it was a time when people were so incensed with the worst that it shaped their attitude to the landscape as a whole and these attitudes, formed in the 1830's and 1840's were to affect how industrial landscape was seen for a century or more."

'The Condition of England' debate occupied the minds of thinking people for more than three decades. From the 1840's onward philosophers, poets, novelists and journalists were all instrumental in bringing the social and environmental problems of the period to the attention of the reading public. It is a roll call of the great, the famous and the popular, - Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Dickens, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, Engels, Marx, - their readers were legion, their influence immense.

Connections and consequences are not always direct and it would not be possible nor indeed relevant within the compass of this study to attempt to unravel all the connecting strands of influence and thought which inspired the reformers of the

latter half of the 19th. century. There was however one man above all who gave credence to the spirit of the age and who, with his scattered intellectual leadership, informed many disciplines and inspired enthusiasm in many fields, - not least in his care and concern for the natural landscape; that man was John Ruskin.

Ruskin is remembered today chiefly as an art critic and teacher. But it was his writing on painting and the glories of the natural landscape which led him to an analysis of man and nature which, in turn, drew him in later life to concern himself with social and political problems. His main criticism was of the way men were made to work in an industrial society. His theme was practical and he increasingly sought ways of helping the working classes. His hatred of mass production and its consequent effect on the environment led him into many abortive Utopian schemes and his presentation of his political theories - drawing upon what appeared to be fanciful analogies - brought ridicule from those already inclined to disagree with him. But his strengths lay in his role of teacher and mentor, his passionate argument, his humanity and his ability to "touch the heart as well as to convince the understanding". (3).

Ruskin was a practitioner in the arts and natural sciences as well as a theorist - indeed his theory sprang from his practice. He was no advocate of 'art for art's sake' and it is worth noting that when faced with landscape under threat Ruskin's reaction was not to seek refuge in aesthetics but to advocate direct action. He was to develop this theme of 'artistic responsibility' in a series of lectures given at Oxford in 1871. In his fourth lecture 'The Relation of Art to Use' he tells his students, - "The beginning of art is getting our country clean and our people beautiful, - I assure you that is a work of art.... I can easily teach you as any moderately good draughtsman could how to hold your pencils and how to lay your colours, but it is little use my doing that when the nation is spending millions of money in the destruction of all that pencil and colour has to represent."

This was Ruskin in full flood - the man of action. His students and admirers took up the challenge. Some projects were over-ambitious

and economically suspect, as, for example, 'The Guild of St. George' - a complex medievalist concept of work which was Ruskin's challenge to capitalist society. But when schemes were based on his educational beliefs that the natural landscape was the "fundamental discipline of all healthy studies" (4) people from all walks of life were prepared to follow.

One such scheme was the 'Thirlmere Defence Association' 1877. Here, where reforming zeal and aesthetic sensibility were matched with practicality, we see the beginning of organised public protest against the violation of the landscape by a governmental body. Ruskin, William Morris and Carlyle were among those opposing the Manchester Corporation's plan to build a reservoir in the Lake District. Other campaigners were Octavia Hill and Canon Rawnsley, later to become founders of the National Trust. The battle for Thirlmere was lost, but it highlighted the need for voluntary groups to join forces when the amenities of the countryside were under attack and it gave impetus to what was to become a conservationist movement.

The 20th. century brought with it new problems for the countryside, the growth of cities, the spread of industry; and - perhaps even more insidious from the conservationists' point of view - the quickening pace of 'leisure activities'. Tourism, trips to beauty spots and the use of the countryside for healthy outdoor activity had all been limited pastimes in the 18th. and early 19th. centuries. But it was the opening of the railways and the passing of the Bank Holiday Act (1877) which was to give impetus to the trend and set the pattern for the mass exodus from towns and cities on day excursions to the sea and countryside.

The 1920's and 30's saw the beginning of the 'great age of weekending' and the rise in popularity of hiking, picnicking, cycling and motoring, pastimes which, while providing people with great enjoyment, began to take their toll on well known beauty spots and the remoter areas of the country.

It was at this time that contention between the divergent interests of countryside recreation and conservation began to make itself apparent. While the recreation lobby pressurised for more

access to the countryside to accommodate the growing number of people who wished to spend their leisure time there, the conservationists campaigned for more legislative control.

Ian Jeffrey in an illuminating preface to his book 'British Landscape 1920-50' describes the work of landscape artists of the period and in so doing introduces us to a vivid pictorial record of many of the thoughts and feelings expressed at that time about the British countryside - attitudes which to a large extent remain with us today and can be seen reflected in many English Tourist Board and National Trust marketing promotions'.

"Although British landscape art was founded in affection for the countryside, it was not necessarily a disinterested affection springing solely from exposure to a perfect land. There was often a background of disquiet, of threats to be contended and fears to be allayed".

There was the threat from industrialization, - "embodied in modernization and the possibility of old agricultural landscapes being obliterated."

There was the "nightmare implanted in the British psyche during the Great War, - in the 1920's and 30's it dominated living memory. Behind every comforting image of garden and sheltered valley lay memories of Sanctuary Wood and Passchendale."

A possible exaggeration, - but it does remain a fact that landscape painters of the period showed a marked preference for intimate pastoral 'man made' landscapes and historical 'heritage' symbols such as beacons, stone circles, white horses, ancient camps and chalk downland.

There was another side to the picture. In Britain 'modernism' as a style, was associated with leisure as the term 'contemporary' is today and there was a whole 'Holiday Genre' - epitomised in the work of McKnight Kauffer - of poster design and graphic illustration reflecting the interests of the young outdoor pleasure seekers who crowded the roads and railways in search of leisure activities in the newly accessible landscapes.

The threat of destruction in the 1940's again focused attention on 'our heritage'. War artists were commissioned by the Ministry

of Labour and National Service to record 'The Changing Face of Britain', and a new Romanticism was to be found in the poets and painters of the period, for example, John Piper, Graham Sutherland, Dylan Thomas and Norman Nicholson. "Though flag waving patriotism did not appeal to the poets of the forties... the threat of invasion caused them to look again at their national inheritance and to attempt to grapple with that strange love of ones own place..." (5).

Our fears change. Today's threat to the land is on a global scale and far more insidious than anything we have met before. Our battles are not only about the disfigurement of the countryside by motorways and hypermarkets but about ecological issues such as acid rain and nuclear fallout. But along-side this there still persists a debased 'romantic image' of England as a green and pleasant land, an image which has been sentimentalised, distorted and commercialised. Evidence of this can be seen in popular art forms, for example, department store reproductions of nostalgic 'views', birthday cards, calendars and the 'nature' novelties such as place mats to be found in Country Park Visitor Centre shops.

Coupled with this view is the idea of the countryside as a separate entity, - something one enters into as an escape from 'real life' - the rustic idyll.

Since the 1950's the increase in population and the emergence of a car owning public with more leisure and paid holidays has created even more demand for countryside access. Legislators and planners have found themselves in the position of trying to solve a 'leisure problem'. Their formula for doing this is based on the idea of isolating areas and designating them as places of special significance or interest, - National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and now, Country Parks, - thus reinforcing the popular perception of the countryside as a separate place, an Arcady, to be visited but not necessarily to be lived in. Is our countryside to become, as Jane Brown has recently asked, "an embalmed dream?" (6).

Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

"Planning involves the interference by law, incentive or other means with the natural order of things or likely cause of events. It is the precise amount and type of intervention that lies at the heart of the debate concerning the role of the countryside planner."

Andrew Gilg "Countryside Planning."

Britain is a small, highly populated island with only a limited amount of land space. How this space is used and by whom and to what purpose is the constant concern of its people and its government. Debates about land use are often highly emotive. Legislation and planning are carried out against a background of the conflicting interests of amenity pressure groups, industrial lobbyists and political manoeuvrers, with every protagonist, whether crusader, mercenary, camp follower, or seeker of holy grails regarding him/herself as the true defender of the faith.

In countryside matters there was from the beginning a certain disparity in aims among those who wished to exercise public control over the natural landscape. There were those who wished to maintain freedom of access to mountains, moorlands, commons and footpaths; those who wished to see nature protected and conserved and the sports and recreation lobby who wished to have fresh air and space in which to follow their pursuits.

The earliest of the amenity societies was the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpath Preservation Society (1865) founded to campaign for free access to the countryside. This pressure for 'freedom to roam' was highlighted in the 1930's by the mass trespass in the Peak District. Several organisations concerned with access were founded about this time, notably, the Y.H.A. in 1931 and the Ramblers Association in 1935.

The conservationists formed the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (1891) and the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (1912). The National Trust (1895), operating as a privately run body, acquired land by gift and purchase, thereby gaining piecemeal control over a number of threatened sites.

In 1926 the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was founded and it was this organisation which led the strong and concentrated campaign for the protection of the countryside which succeeded in gaining government recognition for the case for 'National Parks'. This recognition first came in 1929 when the Addison Committee was appointed to consider proposals for such parks. This committee's Report supported the concept, but action was shelved by the government mainly for economic reasons.

Substantial lobbying by the C.P.R.E. and other concerned groups kept the issue alive during the 1930's and by the early war years, i.e. 1942, with the government's decision to plan for post-war reconstruction a delegation from the C.P.R.E. and the S.P.N.R. (1) were able to persuade the committee responsible of the need to include National Parks in the post-war scheme.

John Dower, an architect and conservationist, was asked by the government to undertake a study to consider the purpose of a National Parks Policy and to compile a report as a basis for further discussion. This report (The Dower Report 1945) set out the general philosophy and concept for National Parks. "They should comprise an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country where the aims should be, to preserve characteristic landscape beauty, to provide access and facilities for public open air enjoyment, to protect buildings and wild life and to maintain existing farming activities".

Despite all the signs of potential 'areas of conflict', for example between access and conservation, this outline scheme was accepted as a working document for the setting up of a National Parks Committee. This, the 'Hobhouse Committee' under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Hobhouse, decided what measures were needed to secure National Park policies and in the Report gave detailed plans for how the parks were to be selected and designated. The Government accepted the need for National Parks and in the 'National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 set up a National Parks Commission to establish, among other things, the National Parks of England and Wales. Ten Parks were established by 1957.

By the mid 1960's those 'built-in areas of conflict' written into the Act, namely the need to provide for both recreation and conservation were beginning to create serious problems. As Blunden and Curry (2) have pointed out, - "the Hobhouse report underestimated the rate of visitor pressure on the Parks and made assumptions about reasonableness on the part of residents, farmers and land users which did not always prove correct."

It is clear that the new upsurge in interest for outdoor recreation, partly due to the ease of access by car to the countryside on the newly constructed motor-ways, was having an adverse effect on the National Parks. What is not so clear, however, from this distance in time is why this 'threat' was not foreseen - (motorways are not, after all built in a day). This piece of social blindness can perhaps only be explained in the light of philanthropic idealism, - a passionate desire to make the countryside available to everyone through a kind of despotic benevolence. "Those persons" as Wordsworth remarked, "who are over ready to step forward in what appears to them the cause of the poor, but not always with becoming attention to particulars." Wordsworth had no illusions about the nature of man; in his defence of Windermere against the coming of the railway he showed that, unlike some of his idealistic contemporaries, he understood that educating the masses was a more complex business than mere instruction. (3).

To counteract the effect on the National Parks of unsuitable recreational activities and to make provision for more informal outdoor activity throughout the country new legislation was needed. This was provided by the Countryside Act 1968. Within this Act local authorities and private individuals were given powers to provide Country Parks and picnic sites for the enjoyment of the countryside by the public. It was hoped that these facilities would remove pressure from the more fragile areas of the countryside and go some way towards satisfying the leisure needs of the ever growing mass of pleasure seekers referred to by Michael Dower as the 'Fourth Wave'.

Grants for the creation of 'Country Parks' were made available to provide "a country park, that is to say a park or pleasure ground to be used for that purpose.... to provide facilities and services for the enjoyment or convenience of the public, including meals and refreshments, parking places for vehicles, shelters and lavatory accommodation,... to provide facilities and services for open air recreation."; - (The Countryside Act 1968). The Countryside Act introduced another new element, a Countryside Commission to replace the National Parks Commission. This new advisory body was formed to oversee conservation and recreation activities over the whole country and not just in designated areas.

Opinions about planning differ widely. Reformers plead for centralised bodies of control and the formation of overall strategies. Romantic individualists welcome a diversity of activities and see in them not chaos but a true reflection of our democratic principles. Whichever of these two trends appears in the ascendance at any one time depends on the political/socio-economic climate of the day. As far as Country Park planning is concerned reforming zeal headed the list of priorities in the 70's and early 80's and the Countryside Commission's Five Year Action Plan 1983-88 promises more.

The Countryside Commission became an independent body in 1982 and is, - in the words of the Commission - "an advising and promotional body not an executive." "We own no land and manage no facilities. Instead we achieve our practical objectives through collaboration with others, - public authorities, voluntary bodies and private individuals and organisations."

"The work of the Commission is to promote general understanding of the countryside and of countryside issues, to advise decision makers whose actions determine the appearance of the countryside and its value to recreation; to promote research and experimental work, to give policy advice and technical advice; to designate areas of outstanding landscape and to give grant aid to encourage local authorities and others to take action on conservation and recreation provision."

The problem for the Country Parks has been that the Commission's advisory policies and grant aided schemes have been strongly directed towards conservation. To quote Blunden and Curry, - "There are some difficulties in balancing the Commission's recreation and conservation priorities, - at present clear emphasis is given to the latter." Because of this many parks have been caught up in the same set of dual aims as the National Parks - those areas for which the Country Parks were supposed to be a clear cut recreational alternative. The Countryside Commission are now in 1985 talking about "the interdependence of conservation and recreation" which suggests there might in the future be a shift in advisory strategy.

Much of this policy thinking has been due to the paternalistic nature of the countryside movement and is in line with the attitudes which have prevailed for the past hundred years. Briefly; the educated classes of the late 19th. century who saw the need for social and economic reform were people who could mobilize themselves into campaigning groups. Societies were formed as we have seen for the purpose of (a) preserving the countryside and (b) creating opportunities for the working classes to enjoy healthy outdoor amenities. It was inevitable that their ideas of what was good for other people should reflect their own interests, in this case walking, mountaineering and various forms of nature study. Committees are run by the dedicated few and, despite the fact that the new type of Country Park was to be created for people who were by nature gregarious and who required more entertainment than could be tolerated in the National Parks, - this paternalistic middle class attitude has persisted. Although it has been accepted on an intellectual level that there is need for a different kind of recreational amenity on a different scale for a largely car-based public, emotionally there is still the fear of a 'threat' to the countryside even if that countryside is only the local gravel pit; hence the Countryside Commission's emphasis on 'management by manipulation', - training schemes for 'park interpreters and ranger services' for educating the public in 'park values'.

STYLE, POWER AND PROMOTION.

Style is usually considered to be less ephemeral than fashion, to be slower to change and to permeate a whole society.

Historically this has always been seen as hierarchical, - that is, ideas of taste passing down from a moneyed or intellectual elite until the 'fashion' becomes the general style. More recently, however, because of the 'media explosion', some aspects of style have become more immediate, the result being that a number of life styles can be offered - and lived - simultaneously.

'Statistics of preference' is a term used by Ken Baynes (4) and refers to a visual form of judgement based on descriptive rather than ethical aesthetics. For example, a consumer survey might reveal that most people prefer the red version of a particular type of commodity to the green; but this is obviously not an ethical judgement and does not mean that red is better than green. This concept of descriptive aesthetics can be useful when tracing contemporary stylistic influences for 'statistics of preference' - which differ from personal choice - can be taken to mean the judgement of a consumer society. A judgement which is stage managed by the machinery of marketing. It can also be seen as the basis on which some policy decisions are made - 'We had to introduce/offer this or that because of mounting pressure from the public.' Style is always related in some way to power whether it be that of the lord of the manor or I.T.V. and the style of a Country Park is determined by those who have the power and authority to promote it. Local authorities were given powers by the 1968 Countryside Act to create such parks and they account for at least two thirds of the 180 or so areas designated since 1970.

To discover how many organisations and interested bodies are involved in this type of development, we will turn for a model to the Leicestershire County Council's Action Plan for Wanlip Park, - a feasibility study for which will be found in Section 2. Leicestershire's original intention - according to their published report - (5) was to play a catalytic role in investment in the area by acquiring land to improve access, in the hope that the private and voluntary sectors would assist with environmental

and recreational improvements. In their 1983 report they list the following agencies who are able to provide grants, loans and services for a variety of projects. They include - in addition to the public sector i.e. County Councils, District Councils, Parish Councils - voluntary organisations such as The Woodlands Trust and The National Playing Fields Association, and national agencies including the Sports Council, The Countryside Commission, The Department of the Environment, The English Tourist Board, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Theoretically, it is the Local Authorities who control the management of the Parks, but a closer look at the aims and powers of these supportive agencies reveals a breadth of managerial involvement not immediately discernable.

- (a) The Sports Council can offer capital grants from three budgets:-

For club and voluntary association schemes up to a capital cost of £40,000, grants up to 50% may be offered.

Interest free loans are available in certain circumstances - these could be used to help with small schemes within the plan area.

The third category of grant relates to special need.

An additional sports participation budget now also operates, aimed principally at participation rather than facilities.

- (b) The Countryside Commission can provide grants for recreational projects. The capital grants can be up to 50% of the cost of providing Country Parks, picnic sites and facilities for warden services. Grants are also available to help with long term management, for example; - countryside interpretation facilities, clearance of eyesores and dereliction and care of wild life habitats.

- (c) The Department of the Environment under section 9 of the Local Government Act 1966 - is able to contribute 50% towards the cost of derelict land reclamation and tree planting, where these are required as part of 'approved schemes'.

(The Department has the power to formulate national strategies on land use, to co-ordinate the work of the Water Authorities, the Countryside Commission and the NATURE Conservancy Council and to put forward new legislation.)

- (d) The English Tourist Board is able to help with suitable projects under Section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969. To qualify for assistance projects must attract tourists from both Great Britain and overseas, be open to the general public, increase tourist spending in the area, create new jobs or retain existing ones, need financial support to get off the ground, preferably involve capital expenditure between £5,000 and £250,000 and conform to the English Tourist Board minimum standards.

Obviously no one Authority is likely to take up all these options at one time, but it is easy to see how the involvement of even one agency can influence the 'style' of a project, conforming to the English Tourist Board standards being an example. The Countryside Commission also make quite clear what it is they expect in return for their support, - "To encourage both management of the countryside and of facilities and resources for countryside recreation the Commission grant aid the appointment of a number of types of staff, including rangers, field interpreters and project officers for well conceived projects in countryside management, the planning of interpretation at the local and regional scale, and recreation footpaths. The Commission expect the management of such staff and their terms and conditions of service to reflect the importance of the jobs they do and will attach such conditions to grant aid as is considered appropriate to the development of good practice consistent 'with the advice contained in this booklet' (6)." Such pronouncements do tend to conjure up a vision of some benign governmental 'big brother' hovering over our sceptred isle offering inducements and hand-outs to those enlightened enough to follow 'the guide lines laid down'.

RECREATION AND SPORT.

However nebulous the legislation regarding the creation of Country Parks may appear and in however many ways it may be interpreted, there is one factor which remains constant, - the requirement to provide facilities for recreation. But what sort of recreation? For whom, how and when? Today, much of the power for influencing the official decision makers on these matters lies with the Regional Sports Councils.

Sport as a national obsession dates from the late 19th. century. Beginning with the introduction of compulsory games into the public schools in the 1880's, games took on an importance they had never had before:- "the cricket and football fields.... are not merely places of exercise and amusement, they help to form some of the most valuable social qualities and manly virtues" (7). This view of sport as an instrument in the training of character and social awareness proved invaluable to the philanthropists who saw in it a way of dealing with many problems of the age, - sport was to be a panacea - "Slum housing, urban poverty, nutritional inadequacies.... could all be obliterated if only the working classes, like the upper and middle, could be taught to "play the game".(8). How the working classes took football, made it their own and turned it into a gargantuan spectacle - much to the dismay of Lord Baden-Powell - is another story, but the idea that sport was beneficial to the moral and physical welfare of the nation - particularly in the form of outdoor activity - persisted and from the beginning was 'locked in' to the ethos of the countryside movement.

Since the Second World War the overwhelming demand for informal recreational facilities has resulted in a change of bureaucratic attitude. There is now much more stress on the enjoyment aspect of sport rather than the moral. Ironically however, the 80's obsession with the 'body cult' shows a return to the 'keep fit' spirit of the 1930's. The popularity of jogging, cycling, swimming, mass marathons and the emphasis on competitiveness and skill, - with participants attempting to emulate the standards of Olympic superstars 'as seen on television' - adds yet another

chapter to the seemingly unending saga of 'the leisure problem'. Regional Sports Councils carry out the policies of the National Sports Council at local level. Through research programmes they establish priorities for recreational facilities in specific areas. Local Authorities are advised to consult them before proceeding with detailed planning schemes.

THE NATIONAL TRUST.

As Patmore has pointed out it is not the concept of the Country Park that is new but the recognition of the need to apply public funds at national level to such schemes. The Countryside Commission in its advisory notes on organisation concedes that local authority park management is to some extent modelled on that of the private estate. "The management of the private estate has a long and sound tradition upon which the management of local authority estates is by and large based" (9). The National Trust, founded at a time of general public and governmental indifference to the plight of the countryside, has over the years built up a reputation for good practical management and for well maintained properties. Its achievements can be taken as a standard with which to compare new ventures. In some instances the Trust does actively co-operate with local authorities in the running of Country Parks, - Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire being one example. It is the Trust's policy that land owned by them and situated on the periphery of densely populated areas is best cared for by the local authority. "Where the Trust owns such properties as at Clumber, Kinver Edge, Kyson Hill and Morven Park, the local authorities either manage them on behalf of the Trust or are closely associated with their management" (Fedden).

The aim of the National Trust is to ensure that places of natural beauty and historic interest are held permanently for the benefit of the nation. Initially concerned with conserving the unspoilt countryside, the Trust has, in the last forty to fifty years, concentrated more on the preservation of country houses. In the words of Robin Fedden, - "From 1937 the Trust was no longer associated predominantly with open spaces but became the surveyor

of vast mansions, the curator of extensive collections and the foremost gardener in the country". (10). To be fair, the Trust has in recent years begun to pay more attention to its commitment to the countryside, as can be seen, for example, in its concern for coastal areas. However, it is the 'County House Scheme' which has given credence to the popular image of the British landscape as a pastoral idyll and has helped to create that collective passion for what is generally referred to as 'our heritage'.

The 'otherness' of the countryside is underlined by the 'house style' of the Trust. It is a style which attracts and feeds the need for historical nostalgia. This can be seen in its most persuasive form in the design of goods offered for sale in the National Trust Shops: - Orange Soaps (boxed in a reproduction of a 17th. century orangery), Crystal Tumblers engraved with game birds, Garden Herb table mats, - all presented with bland good taste and an air of faded gentility, qualities which suggest a kind of aesthetic condescension and contrast strangely with the vigorous and imaginative works of art to be found within the great houses.

In her research memorandum on Country Parks (11) S. Waterhouse writing in 1972, observes "The Countryside Commission were apparently very keen to obtain the National Trust on its list of Country Park managers..... there is little public knowledge of a Trust site taking on the additional status of a 'County Park', and more important, as the Trust itself points out, it has no policy at all to provide for public recreation". Can we from this assume that the inclusion of the Trust by the Commission was primarily to provide kudos for the Country Park Scheme as a whole?

To summarize, - we have looked at the complexities of the planning process and seen how a number of agencies can affect the style and management of a Country Park. Little has been said about the consumers - those members of the public for whom all this effort is being made. What entitlement have they to participate in the consultative process? Apart from the right

to object the answer is none - unless they are prepared to belong to a Society. Organisation speaks to organisation; park planners are often under the impression that they are having 'wide consultations' when all they are doing is listening to representatives from organisations which have vested interests in the matter, - for example, grant aid for specialist activities. But there are thousands of people enjoying informal outdoor recreation whose opinions never reach committee stage.

It is hoped that the new open style of working of the Countryside Commission - 'We invite comment from all our partners in central and local government and from voluntary bodies and private individuals... and the encouragement of volunteers in 'the greening process' will help to bring about a new style in the design and management of Country Parks.

Chapter 2

Numbered References

- (1) S.P.N.R. Society for Promotion of Nature Reserves founded 1912.
- (2) 'The Changing Countryside' - The Open University in assoc. with the Countryside Commission. Ed. by John Blunden and Nigel Curry. Croom Helm. 1984.
- (3) 'Guide to the Lakes' William Wordsworth. O.U.P.
- (4) Ken Baynes - Designer, writer and lecturer at the Royal College of Art.
- (5) Wanlip Action Area Local Plan, Report of Survey and Written Statement. Leicestershire County Council 1983.
- (6) Countryside Rangers and Related Staff, Advisory Series 7. Countryside Commission 1979.
- (7) Royal Commission on Public Schools, quoted in 'Edwardians at Play' Brian Hobbs. Pelham Books 1973.
- (8) 'Edwardians at Play' Brian Hobbs. Pelham Books.
- (9) Countryside Rangers and Related Staff, Advisory Series 7. Countryside Commission.
- (10) 'The Continuing Purpose, A History of the National Trust' Robin Fedden. Longmans 1968.
- (11) Country Parks and the West Midlands - Research Memorandum No. 17, Oct. 1972. Suzette Waterhouse. Birmingham University.

Chapter 3

THE CHANGING CONCEPT 1969-80.

"We need far more.... pleasure grounds and Country Parks - to direct from the uplands those with no particular interest in the scenery, or who, if they have, might well prefer groves of flowering cherries and thickets of rhododendron and roses to bare stony hillsides with four times the rainfall. Even a marginal preference for mountains might be out-weighed by the effort needed to reach them and park the car, and provision of other areas nearer home could greatly diminish the numbers who reach the (National) Parks."

Nan Fairbrother.

"New Lives New Landscapes."

Whether after fifteen years of 'designation' and promotion of Country Parks the numbers of visitors to the National Parks has actually been reduced is a matter of conjecture. What is certain is that in the years immediately after the creation of the 1968 Countryside Act there was a firm commitment on the part of the Government through the Countryside Commission to divert 'recreation' away from the National Parks and to regard the Country Park concept as the first line of defence.

This defensive policy as S. Waterhouse (1) has pointed out, can be traced to the 1966 White Paper on Leisure in the Countryside - a paper which outlined a number of policy objectives for Country Parks - ones which were closely followed in the 1968 Act. - "they would make it easier for town dwellers to enjoy their leisure in the open without travelling too far and adding to congestion on the roads; they would ease pressure on the more remote and solitary places; they would reduce the risk of damage to the countryside - aesthetic as well as physical - which often comes about when people simply settle down for an hour or a day, where it suits them 'somewhere in the country' - to the inconvenience, and indeed expense of the countryman who lives and works there."

This attitude was reinforced in a speech given by J.M. Davidson - Senior Planning Officer to the Countryside Commission - at a conference at Loughborough in 1969. In it he said - "The provision of Country Parks has been designed to meet some of the urgent needs.... to provide a variety of recreational opportunities for the family near where they live, and away from fragile areas, - for example, - good agricultural land, very high quality scenery, rare species etc. The Parks have this two-fold aim - provision and protection." (2).

At the same conference Michael Dower, Director of the Dartington Amenity Research Trust, expressed his conviction that - "of these needs the most clear cut is that for specific intensive recreation areas, designed for the purpose and able to act as sponges or honeypots in order to keep pressure off the remaining countryside". Writers on countryside recreation at that time were apt to echo these sentiments, for example:-

Ivor H. Seeley:- "they will provide recreation facilities and draw people away from high grade land". (3).

R.J.S. Hookway:- "they will serve as honeypots.... and filter traffic off the day trip routes." (4).

It must be evident that this concept of the Country Park was being launched without any positive policy for design and management or any systematic approach to siting. There was merely a general idea for creating recreational areas to divert public attention away from the more sensitive and highly regarded landscapes - an idea put forward with more than a hint of paternalism and moral overtone. Even those attempting to promote the concept appeared confused in their aims. Some saw the new Country Parks as providing 'the ordinary pursuits of country life' such as walking, riding, fishing; others talked of a mixture of organised sport and informal recreation. Michael Dower expanded his vision to include ideas of linear systems with Country Parks taking their place in a hierarchy of recreational facilities, - a far ranging concept which is gradually gaining credence with a new generation of planners. Some advocated the upgrading and

development of older 'outer urban ring' parks to provide the necessary facilities for city dwellers.

The initiative for taking up the Country Park scheme was left to local authorities or interested private bodies. The incentives offered were:- grants up to 75%, extra publicity, registration in an official guide and permission to display the Country Park symbol. It was however the job of the Countryside Commission to lay down guide lines for grants and because of the vagueness of the Countryside Act a considerable amount of effort had to be expended before a sound selective policy could be agreed upon. "Money is limited, we must be selective and to be selective we must have a reliable criteria." (Davidson).

The Commission decided that when dealing with applications it would take into account such factors as, - distance from large urban conurbations; the variety of facilities to be offered; the demand for recreation in the area and any other local provisions for recreation. This selection process was later to be refined and more guidance offered on the practicalities of setting up a Country Park.

Although the Government was offering these incentives with a view to gaining its principal objectives, namely, the 'defence of the wilderness' and the removal of unsuitable activities from the National Parks, there is no reason to suppose that local authorities - the main recipients of grant aid - saw their own parks as part of this national policy - except, perhaps, indirectly, as in 'following the guide lines' in order to qualify for financial assistance. Many authorities must have seen this scheme as an opportunity for getting things done in their 'own backyard', for example; - to implement plans already in the pipeline but held up because of lack of money; to buy up land and explore new initiatives for recreational use; to re-vamp old parks and bring them up to standard, or, - to make a start on the reclamation of derelict land in their own area. (Countryside Commission guide lines lay particular stress on the need to develop derelict under-used publicly owned land.)

MAP 1

Country Parks & Picnic Sites recommended by the Countryside Commission and approved by the DOE/Welsh Office for Grant Aid as at 30 September 1972

COUNTRY PARKS

LOCAL AUTHORITY PROJECTS

- 1 Sun River
- 2 Euxine Estate
- 3 Barton Farm
- 4 Beach Park
- 5 Gypsyway Hall
- 6 Ingham Park
- 7 Colnwood Water Park
- 8 Fox Hill
- 9 Berrwood
- 10 Budgeley Park
- 11 Buryton Woods
- 12 Barn Wood
- 13 Tenny's Common
- 14 Westnash Wood
- 15 Forest Farm
- 16 Sunnycroft Park
- 17 Sun Lane
- 18 Cannon Farm
- 19 Redgrave Country
- 20 Ingham & Ingham Hall
- 21 Home Farm
- 22 East Coast & Barton
- 23 Angulston
- 24 Stone House
- 25 Epsom Woods
- 26 Bush Park
- 27 Colnby Abbey
- 28 Rainsford Hall
- 29 Fox Vicarage
- 30 Moorpark Common
- 31 Foxthorpe Common
- 32 Water Park
- 33 Moor House
- 34 Lee & John Rowland
- 35 Tack Farm
- 36 My Lady Common
- 37 Cannon Hill
- 38 Cannon Hill Park
- 39 Great Wood
- 40 Thornhill Park
- 41 Langley Park
- 42 Ingham Forest
- 43 Leath Hill
- 44 Black Wood
- 45 Foxthorpe Hall
- 46 Lee Wood
- 47 Foxthorpe Park
- 48 Moorpark Common
- 49 Tenny Park
- 50 Lyne Park
- 51 Alton Park
- 52 Cannon Park
- 53 Cannon Park
- 54 Stone & Cannon Park
- 55 Moor Wood
- 56 Sunnycroft
- 57 Moorpark
- 58 Cannon Park

PROJECTS BY NON-PUBLIC BODIES

- 1 Sunningwell Estate
- 2 Berrwood
- 3 Barton Common Estate
- 4 Colnwood
- 5 Fox Hill
- 6 Wood & Downland Open Air Museum
- 7 Bee Hill
- 8 Tenny Park
- 9 Ingham
- 10 Ingham Hall
- 11 Ingham Farm
- 12 Ingham Hill
- 13 Ingham
- 14 Langthorpe Estate
- 15 Cannon Park
- 16 Foxthorpe Park
- 17 Sun Lane

EXISTING LOCAL AUTHORITY PARKS RECOGNISED BY THE COMMISSION (See grant panel)

- 1 Leas & Cannon
- 2 Tenny Hill Park
- 3 Fox Hill Park
- 4 High Country Park

EXISTING NON-PUBLIC PARKS RECOGNISED BY THE COMMISSION (See grant panel)

- 1 Sunnycroft & Cannon Park

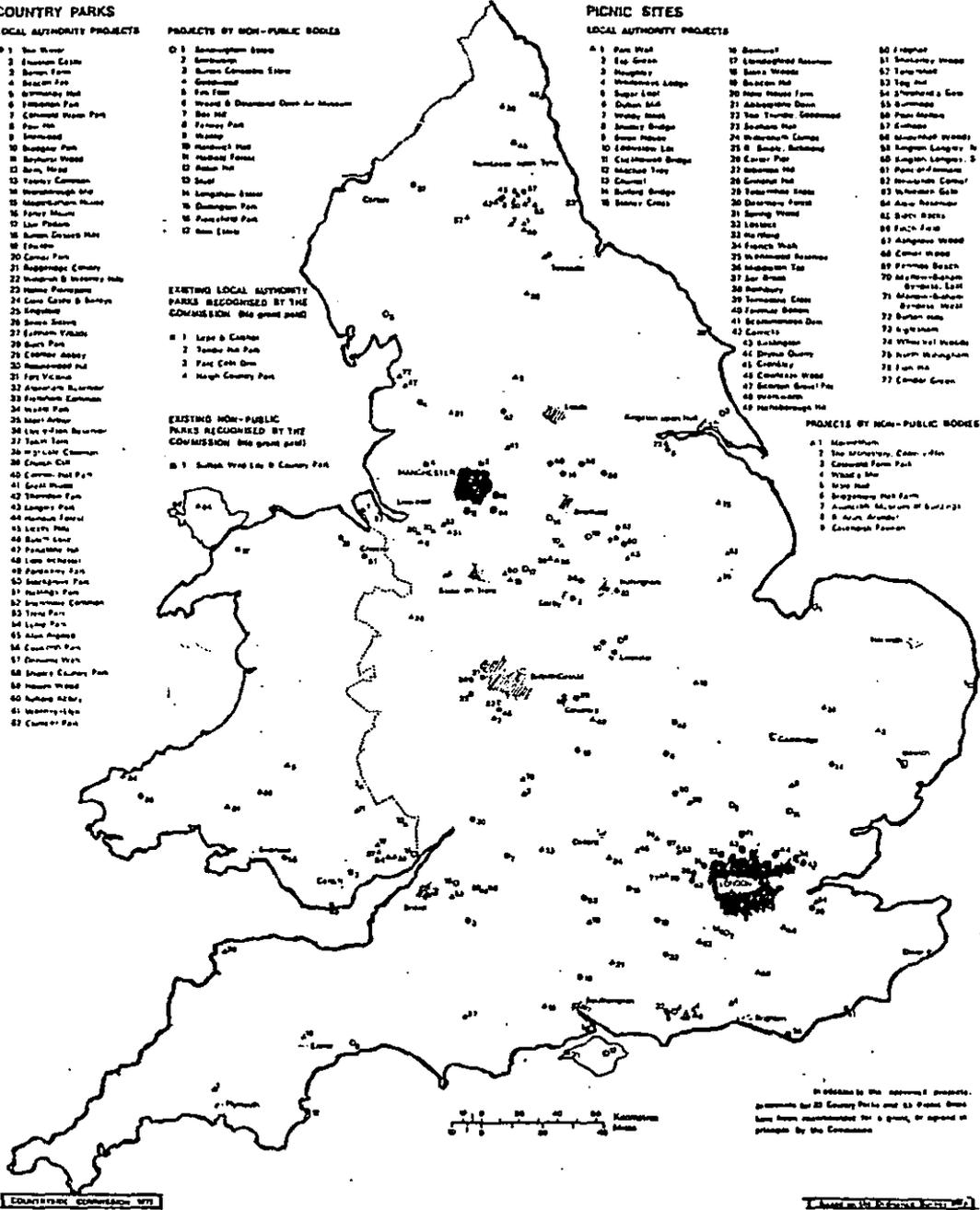
PICNIC SITES

LOCAL AUTHORITY PROJECTS

- 1 Sun Wood
- 2 Fox Hill
- 3 Ingham
- 4 Ingham Lodge
- 5 Ingham Hill
- 6 Ingham Hill
- 7 Ingham Hill
- 8 Ingham Hill
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PROJECTS BY NON-PUBLIC BODIES

- 1 Moorpark
- 2 The Moorpark, Cannon Hill
- 3 Cannon Farm Park
- 4 Wood & Hill
- 5 Ingham Hill
- 6 Ingham Hill
- 7 Moorpark Common
- 8 Moorpark
- 9 Cannon Farm



Source: Country Parks and the West Midlands. Suzette Waterhouse Birmingham University 1972. MAP 1.

An examination of the distribution of approved Country Parks for the year 1972 - see Map 1 - fails to reveal any pre-conceived plan. There is no evidence, for example, of the 'interception factor' - that is of a park being strategically placed on route between a large urban centre and a National Park, or alternatively on the fringe of a National Park to act as a 'sponge or honeypot'; and the only indications of the 'outer urban ring' theme are in areas north of London and south of Manchester.

There are several reasons why there should be this sporadic distribution of parks, apart from the obvious one of lack of fore-thought.

1. The Countryside Commission's early policy of treating applicants on a 'first come first served basis'.
2. The need for authorities to utilise particular areas of land already earmarked for recreation in their structure plans.
3. The necessity for planners and others, for example, local amenity pressure groups to 'justify' the need for a park to their own councils - bearing in mind that the adoption of a Country Park programme is only one aspect of countryside recreation planning.
4. Most important;-
there was no central agency mandated to plan for recreation as a whole.

SURVEYS.

One of the earliest problems encountered in assessing the need for Country Parks and recreational facilities was the lack of factual knowledge on which to base these assessments. As recreation became an increasingly pressing subject for planners, ways had to be found of estimating the demand; various methods were formulated. Some were based on demographic analysis of the population, others on observation and interviews.

The Countryside Recreation Research Advisory Group (CRRAG), serviced by the Countryside Commission, with a membership of

officers from such bodies as British Travel, the Sports Council, Nature Conservancy etc., was set up "to co-ordinate research through publications and seminars with the aim of getting efficient research results" (Davidson). The Countryside Commission's own research in this field was to "tackle problems in urgent need of a solution and to get results that local authorities and others can apply; - to experiment, drawing together experience on the ground, evaluating and testing conclusions and preparing advisory manuals." (Davidson). Long term theoretical problems such as measurement and forecasting of demands, motivation etc. were taken up by the universities - indeed, such was the amount of work produced in this area in the 1970's that recreation surveys became something of an academic industry. References to particular surveys will appear where relevant within the context of the study on selected Country Parks.

MANAGEMENT.

As the number of Country Parks increased so too did the need to find suitably qualified people to manage them. Rangers had been employed in the National Parks since the 1950's, now many more were needed to run the Country Parks. The Countryside Commission, using experience gained from its own experiments in countryside management, offered guidance to local authorities on the employment of staff, - (guidance which was to become a condition for grant aid). The Commission recognised that 'recreation management' was a new field demanding a fresh approach and expressed the hope that it would develop its own disciplines and career structure. (5). Meanwhile, it was essential that there should be close co-operation between field staff, i.e. rangers, project officers, field interpreters - and office staff - administrators, landscape and interpretive designers and recreational planners. It was stressed that the warden or ranger, as 'the man on the ground', should be part of the management team and should be consulted on matters related to policy and design. (6). The Commission did, however, concede that it would be unrealistic to prescribe a typical staff structure, as already a number of authorities employed 'in house' teams of interpretive planners

and graphic designers; others used commissioned design consultants from outside, while some preferred to encourage the talents of their own wardens or rangers.

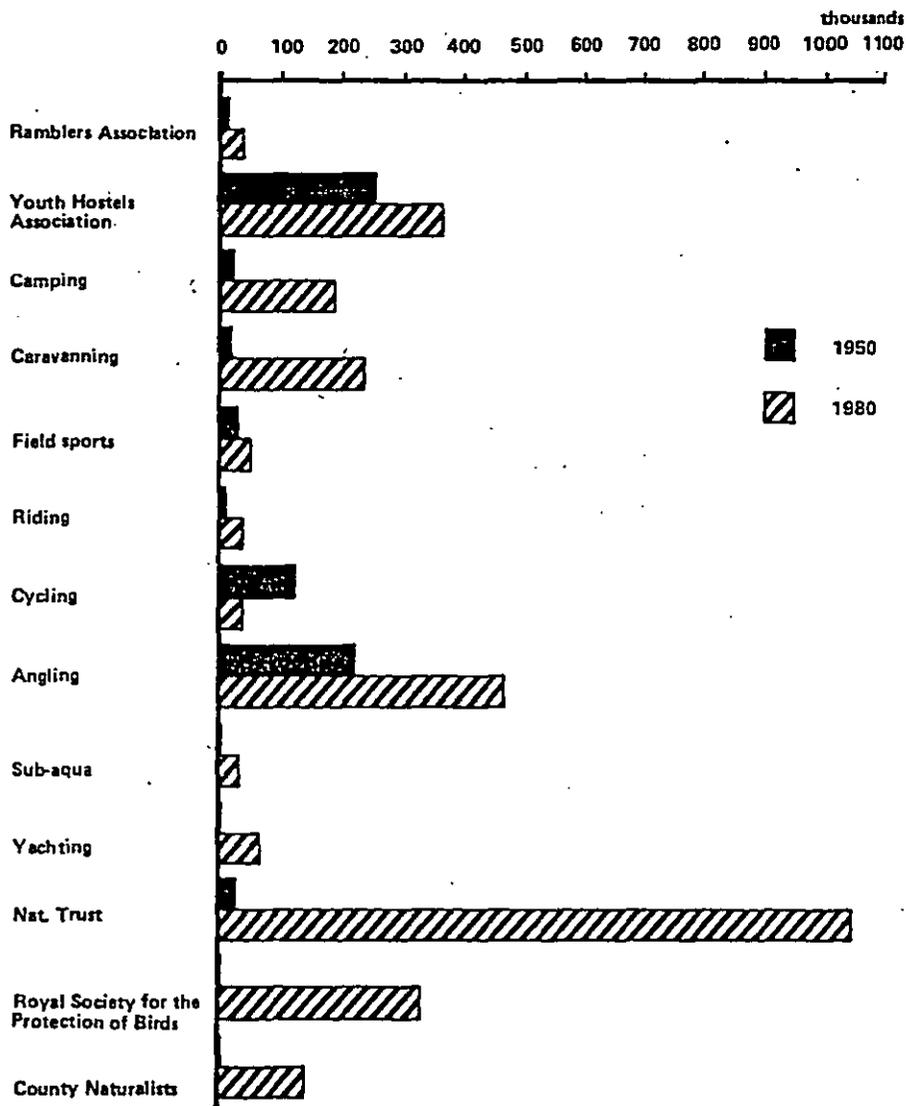
In the four years 1968-72 Country Parks proliferated. The total number developed by local authorities and approved of for grant aid was 68 (England and Wales); 13 privately owned sites were also recognised. At the same time there was an expansion in the provision of privately owned pleasure grounds run on a commercial basis, - i.e. not supported by grants - catering for the growing demand for country-based entertainment. These included safari parks, theme parks, stately homes and such enterprises as Alton Towers.

The Countryside Commission continued to advise local authorities and others on their proposed schemes; but after the first defensive campaign to protect the National Parks there was a change of tactics. Without a mandate to plan for recreation on a national scale a more realistic goal had to be found, - attention turned to the regions.

Parks were now perceived as facilities 'in their own right' and this change in emphasis brought about a much wider interpretation of the Country Park concept. While some authorities settled for modest schemes, others joined with neighbouring counties to create regional parks; some specialised in outdoor sporting facilities, while those counties fortunate enough to contain sites of national importance, for example, battlefields, developed them with an eye to attracting tourists as well as local visitors. The Parks could now be seen to fall into several distinct categories:-

1. Parks based on lakes, nature trails, views and bridleways.
2. Those based on 'multi-use', that is a mixture of formal and informal recreation often centred on a country house.
3. Specialised parks based on high grade outdoor sports facilities.
4. Those based on historic sites or historic settings.

By the mid 1970's due to a number of economic factors, for example, the rise in unemployment and the high price of petrol,



Source: Countryside Commission

Fig. 1. Voluntary organisations - direct membership 1950-1980 (GB).

Source: Walip Action Area Local Plan.
 Leicestershire County Council 1983.
 TABLE 1.

the numbers of visitors to Country Parks levelled off. There was also a 'new' environmental concern, one which was to take the place of 'recreation' as the considered major threat to the landscape. This new threat was the impact on the land of agricultural technology, for example, the widespread use of pesticides and the grubbing out of hedgerows. The conservation movement gathered in strength, and through campaigns, national appeals, schools' programmes and press and television coverage the general public was made aware of the devastation to our countryside and the destruction of wild life. The response to this was national concern, evidence of which can be seen in the number of people joining conservation movements and organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the National Trust in the years 1977 to 80. (see Table 1).

This new eagerness to learn about the countryside and 'our heritage' was noted by those responsible for park management and a strong educational element began to appear in park interpretation schemes. Exhibitions and explanatory pamphlets had always had their place in the parks, but from the mid 70's 'Interpretation' became one of the main pre-occupations of the management teams. "The normative reformist spirit which has enveloped public recreation policy" (Loew) - rose again, - the old moralising philanthropy was never very far below the surface! - but this time it had a new edge to it - marketability.

INTERPRETATION 1.

"Interpretation answers the questions; - Why was this area of country considered worthy of special attention? What is its significance?

(Countryside Commission)

It is ten years since the Countryside Commission published its guide to countryside interpretation. This was at a time when the idea was relatively new to Britain especially in the public sector. Earlier in 1970 interpretive ideas had been introduced at the first commercially run Visitors' Centre - Landmark, at Carrbridge in the Spey Valley. David Hayes who created this

Scottish venture brought to it a concept developed from his study of American National Parks, one which was to have a strong influence on interpretive planning in this country.

The Countryside Commission Guide was directed not at trained designers but at land managers, planners and others concerned with countryside recreation and conservation. The guide was very detailed, covering a range of examples and techniques. Its aim was to stimulate thought and to extend knowledge of interpretive possibilities. "Much useful advice can be obtained from those who have already established interpretive facilities. It is hoped therefore that readers will take the opportunity of visiting as many as possible of the sites referred to." (7). It was stressed that the examples referred to were only representative and were not models to be copied slavishly - nevertheless, the models were there to be seen and with grants available it was inevitable that authorities not rich in imaginative skills would rely heavily upon guide lines. Thus were established a series of interpretive facilities mainly of the 'books on walls' variety, consisting of schematic projections of geological formations, natural history, and everyday life in the countryside. Although the Countryside Commission emphasised that these schemes should be designed to interest the casual visitor and not school parties, the educational side of Country Park interpretation developed rapidly, often due to the fact that local education authorities held an economic stake in park projects.

There was also another facet to this development; with the problems of economic recession, authorities had to make their country parks - like any other social service or commodity - cost effective, and here the aim was to make the most of limited resources. In some cases commercial marketing techniques were introduced to help achieve the required result. In the survey of Nottinghamshire parks these techniques will be analysed and the resultant effect on interpretive facilities evaluated.

Within the 'Country Park concept' interpretation and conservation education have become inextricably intertwined and are directly aimed at the preservation of 'our heritage'.

This constitutes a major shift in thinking from the earlier ideas of the Country Park as simply a pleasure ground, a place for informal recreation and relaxation. Indeed, conservation itself has now been turned into a series of recreational pursuits as can be seen in any park 'Events Programme' advertising 'discovery trails' and 'nature games'. Co-operation with education authorities and teachers' centres has led to some Country Parks becoming large outdoor classrooms for hundreds of pupils, - many of junior school age - who are bombarded with interpretive material. Many of these teaching aids - often permanent exhibitions showing how things used to be - lie in that grey area between entertainment and education. Young people 'see' history and industry and the uses and abuses of the environment through the eyes and minds of designers and recreation managers. The designer/manager has become the image-maker and the projection of these images, whether as ideas or objects, has become a manipulative device in the education of the public.

In the 'Principles of Countryside Interpretation' the Countryside Commission set out its objectives as follows:-

"Countryside Interpretation is primarily concerned with explaining the significance and encouraging an awareness and understanding of:

- (a) The landscape and the physical forces which bring about changes and have led to its present day appearance.
- (b) The natural resources of the countryside including wild life.
- (c) The Role of Man in the countryside and the socio-economic conditions of the past and present which contribute to the character of the area.
- (d) The interdependence of these factors, - the relationship between rocks, plants, animals and man.

Its objectives are:-

- (a) To enhance the enjoyment of visitors to the countryside by increasing their understanding and appreciation of the site.
- (b) To lead to improved standards of behaviour and respect for the countryside.

- (c) To facilitate the management of specific resources or areas by influencing the behaviour and pattern of movement of visitors. "

Distinctions were made between 'direct interpretation' meaning field studies, nature trails etc. and 'indirect interpretation' meaning the use of media, exhibitions and lectures. Great play was also made of the subtle distinctions between information and interpretation, but, in fact, these nuances were never really made explicit.

All very high sounding motives but how do they work in practice?

A study carried out in 1981 by Research Bureau Ltd. for the Countryside Commission on 'The Role of Visitor Centres' - the focal point for countryside interpretation - revealed that the general public as consumers are not really aware of any difference between a Tourist Information Centre and a Park Visitor Centre. "They are both seen as sources of information and if information is supplied by an exhibition or an A/V display in addition to a person behind a desk, that matters little to the 'man in the street'. Any member of staff in a park centre will tell you, the commonest question, as in Tourist Information Centres is, 'Where is the loo?' and not a deep question about natural history. The distinction between tourist information and interpretive provision is no doubt genuine, but is provider drawn, and largely irrelevant to the public." (8). Devastating criticism, but in many cases valid. If we are to accept that such experiences as 'site significance' should be packaged, then it is essential to use the sensibilities of those who understand the factors involved in conjuring up such experiences. Too often, as Jon Wilkinson (9) has said, the reason for mismatch between visitor provision and visitor need in the public sector parks is lack of management skills and experience, and the fact that different departments are responsible for different types of provision. "They start things which cannot be sustained either financially or aesthetically - they simply have not got the expertise. They fall back in desperation on facilities which generate short term income and

therefore miss the point of good interpretive provision, which can greatly increase enjoyment of a visit and encourage repeat business." (See report on Ferry Meadows and Elvaston Castle.)

INTERPRETATION 2 - Landscape and Illusion.

"Certain places which we see always in isolation seem to have no common measure with the rest, to be almost outside the world..... I knew that Beaumont was something very special, very remote, very high - it took a very long time to get there in a carriage. But the motor car respects no mystery and having passed beyond Incarville whose houses still dance before my eyes, as we were going down the cross road that leads to Parville, catching sight of the sea from a natural terrace over which we were passing I asked the name of the place, and before the chauffeur had time to reply recognised Beaumont, - so Beaumont, suddenly brought into contact with places from which I supposed it to be so distinct lost its mystery and took its place in the district".

Marcel Proust 'Remembrance of Things Past'.

In a closely packed island such as ours, where every inch of space is at a premium, the destruction of the mystery of a place by the knowledge of its relationship to other places is a well known Proustian experience. The creation of Country Parks as refuges from an urban world of noise, pollution and modular anonymity is of course only one way of attempting to overcome the problem. But it is this illusionary aspect of landscape and its interpretation with which the designer of parks is concerned. The visual interpretation of a site is essentially an exercise in changing perceptions. Anything that comes between the site and the visitor acts as an interface or buffer zone - preparing the visitor for that change in mood from the everyday world to the dream landscape of the park. Many people arrive at Country Parks carrying their house on their back - namely the car. The car ride, the importance of which is measured in surveys in terms of time and distance, does not include a mental hiatus. It is

clear from observation that many families arrive at sites - sometimes many miles from their homes - still absorbed in domestic matters and the mechanics of 'getting there'.

Interpretive material should be used as a way of persuading them to adjust their vision and acquire a sense of 'place'. This sense of place - recognition of the genius loci - is essential if the true character of the landscape is to be understood. No amount of technical wizardry, in the form of ingenious displays and educational directives, will be of use if this first objective is not achieved. Obviously, it is harder to do this in some cases than in others, but to project this ambience should be the main objective of every designer/manager.

Chapter 3

Numbered References

- (1) 'Country Parks and the West Midlands.' Research Memorandum No. 17. Suzette Waterhouse. The University of Birmingham 1972.
- (2) 'Recreation in the Countryside'. Abstracts of Papers given at the Loughborough Conference September 1969. L.U.T. Library.
- (3) 'Outdoor Recreation and the Urban Environment'. Ivor H. Seeley. Macmillan 1973.
- (4) 'Planning of Land Resources, Recreation in the Countryside'. R.J.S. Hookway. Countryside Commission 1968.
- (5 & 6) 'Countryside Rangers and Related Staff.' Advisory Series 7. Countryside Commission 1968.
- (7) 'Guide to Countryside Interpretation Part 1'. Countryside Commission.
- (8 & 9) 'Was it Good? - The Role of Visitor Centres'. Jon Wilkinson. C.C.R.A.G. Conference, University of Bath 1982. Report published by C.C.R.A.G.

Chapter 4

A VIEW OF THE PARKS.

If the aim of Country Park interpretation and management planning is to heighten the visitors' preception and make the visit more enjoyable, what is it that the visitors themselves expect from a visit to such a park? From observation at different sites it would appear that there are generally three basic types of visitor:-

There are those who use the countryside as a scenic backdrop for their family activities - to 'let off steam', give the dog a run or play ball games. These are often car based picnickers who like to spend a day in the open air but expect to be 'serviced' with car parks, lavatories and a cafeteria, - with perhaps some extra entertainment, such as a boating lake or miniature railway, and a shop from which to buy souvenirs. The more adventurous will be prepared to hire bikes, walk the nature trail or take a perfunctary look at the interpretive exhibition.

There are others with interests in natural history or 'the heritage' who will be attracted to parks with historical or literary connections or with facilities for observing wild life. These visitors expect to find information to supplement or enhance their own background knowledge - guide books, maps, exhibitions, postcards and possibly a ranger service. Visitors in this category include those using educational services.

Local visitors are more likely to regard the park as their nearest stretch of countryside in which to enjoy a walk. There are others, also relatively 'local' who use the parks for sporting and club activities, for example, fishing or sailing or bird watching.

This chapter contains a critical evaluation of the facilities offered in specific Country Parks, drawing on material collected from site visits, interviews and correspondence with those responsible for their management and from published reports. This evaluation - or appraisal - focuses particularly on 'park

perception' and the educational/entertainment aspect of interpretive schemes, and considers their relevance to:

- (a) The intentions of the management.
- (b) The subject - i.e. the park - or site to be interpreted.
- (c) The visitors' expectations and needs.

There are to date more than 150 designated or proposed Country Parks in England and Wales. The ten parks which feature in the following Case Study were chosen generally to illustrate examples of the four basic categories of Country Park itemized in Chapter 3* and specifically to explore and test the concepts and philosophical ideals outlined in the Countryside Act of 1968 - 'to provide facilities and services for the enjoyment or convenience of the public' etc. (see page 13 of this study).

There were other considerations; for example, Kingsbury Water Park and Ferry Meadows had been recommended by the Leicestershire Planning Authority as possible models for the proposed Wanlip Scheme and were looked at partly with that possibility in mind.

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum and the Heights of Abraham were selected as examples of private sector enterprise in this field of design.

The historic sites were chosen because of their ambitious interpretation facilities, the evaluation of which forms a major part of this chapter; concentrating, as has been said, on the educational/entertainment aspect of these exhibitions and on their relevance to the visitors' expectations and needs.

* The Parks and their Categories.

The following table shows the relationship of the parks selected to the categories of parks referred to in Chapter 3.

1. Parks based on lakes, nature trails, views and bridleways.
2. Those based on multi-use, that is a mixture of formal and informal recreation, often based on a country house.
3. Specialised parks based on high grade sporting facilities.
4. Those based on historic sites or historic settings.

<u>Park</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Page Ref.</u>
Creswell Crags	4	41
Bosworth Field	4	50
Weald and Downland Museum	4	55

<u>Park</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Page Ref.</u>
Elvaston Castle	2	60
Seven Sisters	1 & 4 (A.O.N.B.)	65
Kingsbury Water Park	1 & 3	70
Ferry Meadows	1	75
Wanlip Park	1	80
Heights of Abraham	4	81
Sherwood Forest	4	87

Illustrations to Chapter 4.

Photographs illustrating the text are contained in a separate slip case accompanying this study.

RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST.

Creswell Crags Visitor Centre Welbeck, Worksop, Notts.

Bosworth Field and the Battlefield Centre Ambion Hill,
near Market Bosworth, Leics.

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum (designated Country Park)
Singleton, Chichester, West Sussex.

These three sites though totally different in character have two things in common:-

1. They are all places which have acquired 'Country Park' status yet have as their principal objective something quite different from the simple aim of providing informal recreation facilities. In the case of the Weald and Downland Museum this objective is to establish a centre for rescuing representative examples of vernacular building from the south east of England. At Bosworth it is to define the battlefield and to create an imaginative interpretation of the conflict between Richard III and Henry Tudor. At Creswell Crags the aim is to undertake a programme of archaeological research based on the finds in the Creswell Caves.
2. The second common factor is that they are all concerned with historical interpretation and are all strongly committed to educating the public.

RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST.

"Today's past is an accumulation of mankind's memories, seen through our own generation's particular perspectives. What we know of history differs from what actually happened, not merely because evidence of past events have been lost..... but also because the changing present continually requires new interpretations of what has taken place."

David Lowenthal, 'Age and Artefact'
 'The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes'.
 O.U.P. 1979.

The graphic depiction of historical concepts can have a considerable influence on the way those concepts are assimilated. Even the most cursory examination of 'historical illustrations' produced over the last hundred years will reveal a range of styles which demonstrate clearly the controlling force of what Eric Newton has taught us to recognise as 'period vision'..(1). Many of these drawings which set out to show how people lived in the past reflect the artistic and social pre-occupations of the period in which they were produced. Some of the illustrations which accompanied the 'History of Everyday Things' series by Marjorie and C.H.B. Quennell, - a series which cornered the market in children's history books in the 1930's are a case in point. To take one example. In 'Everyday Things in Homeric Greece' (2) the Quennells expressed the hope that this book - which was written for 'boys and girls' would 'set the scene' and 'secure the atmosphere of his (Homer's) time'. The 'full colour frontispiece' accompanying this statement is entitled 'The House of the Swineherd'. Here is a Greek temple fully decorated with scarlet columns and geometric patterns complete with Sussex thatch and set in what appears to be a Japanese landscape. The figures casting hard-edged shadows across the foreground are a straight crib from the theatrical poster designs of William Nicholson. It is an amazing scene, - and there must be many people alive today who carry in their collective memory this curious image of pig keeping in ancient Greece. This early example of 'making learning fun' serves to emphasize the need for designers to understand the long term responsibilities involved in providing popular interpretations of historic events in an educational context.

CRESWELL CRAGS - INTRODUCTION.

Creswell Crags - a limestone gorge on the Derbyshire/ Nottinghamshire border near Worksop is a site of geological and archeological significance. It is here - within the caves - that the fossiled remains of animals and tools dating from the Old Stone Age were discovered in 1875-6.

This area is now managed jointly by the Derbyshire County Council Planning Department and Nottinghamshire County Council Leisure Services Department and receives some support from the Countryside Commission. "The park was originally set up in 1977 in response to 'the desire to conserve and have access to a nationally famous archeological site'. At that time knowledge of the site was based on inadequate Victorian accounts. For this reason the local authorities sponsored a research project aimed at extracting more information from the site, particularly from the caves." (3).

A visitor centre was built at the head of the Crags gorge and at the same time a ranger/archeologist was recruited to collate information from the cave research and to present it in an appropriate form to visitors. All interpretive and publications projects are drawn from this continuous research work.

The basis for the visual interpretation is a permanent exhibition 'The Age of Ice' which attempts to portray Creswell's past within an overall account of the Ice Age in Britain. There is also an audio/visual programme entitled 'The Reindeer Hunters' which concentrates upon the history of early man at Creswell. Other interpretive services include 'story telling' for young children, discovery trails and seasonal programmes of 'special events'. Particular attention is given to the educational side of interpretation - there are links with Teachers Centres and some development of curriculum based activities. There is also a growing demand for scientific and technical information about the field work at Creswell from researchers, undergraduates and sixth formers; a wide range of publications is now available from the centre for those with a serious or professional interest in archeology. Creswell is designated as a 'Site of Special Scientific Interest'.

EVALUATION - The Gorge.

What precisely can be seen at Creswell Craggs? The gorge, inaccurately described in the 'hand out' as narrow, (this is not Gordale Scar) - is situated in that surrealistic landscape of the South Yorkshire/Notts/Derbyshire coalfield where slag heaps and winding gear appear to erupt suddenly amid the peaceful farmlands and villages of the 'Dukeries'. Creswell colliery with its accompanying spoil tip acts as a 'vista closa' to the view down the gorge - a reminder, perhaps, that modern Creswellian man is not unfamiliar with life underground.

The main road which runs at the foot of the cliffs on the north side carries heavy traffic from the local quarries; here a wall of stone filled gabions has been erected as protection from falling rock and also as a safety barrier for those visiting the caves. (Apparently the appearance of the north side of the gorge was altered drastically in the 1960's during the installation of a main sewer.) The pond at the western end of the gorge is a remnant of the Duke of Portland's duck shooting lake created in the late 19th. century. A footpath from the Visitor Centre leads through a small copse and by the pond to caves in the south crags. The vegetation here is dominated by nettles; the crags above, emerging from wooded slopes, are best described as picturesque rather than spectacular.

The five well known caves and others recently excavated are heavily barred with steel grilles and the general public is not admitted. The largest, 'Robin Hoods cave', is opened occasionally for pre-booked educational tours and for specially supervised events. It is evident that some 'casual visitors' sense disappointment when, after the publicity build up and the interpretive exhibition, they discover that there is 'nothing to see'. This of course is not strictly true but there is a fault in management if it is not made clear to people at the start of the visit that there is no show cave. This information "Public access to the caves is prohibited in the interests of safety" appears as a footnote at the very end of a well produced illustrated leaflet 'The Cave Dwellers of Creswell Craggs' giving a guided tour of the

caves. This leaflet which can be purchased at the Visitor Centre is a publication which might well merit scrutiny under the Trade Description Act!

INTERPRETATION - INTENTIONS.

Michael Wood, presenter of the popular television series 'The Trojan War' and co-presenter of the 'Doomsday Project' has been attacked by the critic from the 'Times' for his 'Star Wars school of Archaeology'. Wood defends his popularist approach; - "We're living in the 80's my programmes are not aimed at stuffy academics and staid university students, - the music, the dramatic historical re-constructions, the glossy cut away shots, are all deliberate ploys to inject some kind of magic and drama into a traditionally stodgy subject. I do try to convince my audience that archaeology is the most romantic of sciences because it brings back lost time".

Something of this magic and drama is being attempted at Creswell even to the extent of presenting the ranger/archaeologist as a media personality:-

"Archaeologists are not always elderly bespectacled professors clad in raggedy tweeds and aloof from the world you and I inhabit. Far from the dusty popular image you'll find Rogan Jenkinson, ranger and digger-in-residence at Creswell Crags Visitor Centre, youthful, down to earth, passionately involved with the present as well as the past and keen as mustard to talk about what once went on 'down at the crags'. For Creswell Crags straddling the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border is Rogan's domain.... etc.

(Publicity leaflet Notts. and
Derbyshire C. County).

THE VISITOR CENTRE is a simple one storey building set in woodland at the head of the crags gorge. The drive from the road ends in a roughly circular car park. The central island is edged with logs to prevent parking on the grass and picnic benches are provided - the whole approach creates a pleasant atmosphere.

The Centre houses an interpretive exhibition, an A/V show, lecture room, information/bookstall and lavatories. Ice cream and chocolates are sold in the information area.

The interpretive exhibition is an attempt to get away from a museum approach to history. It has to deal with historical facts which are hard to visualise. Accepting this as a challenge the designers took the decision that this was to be an entertaining exhibition aimed at stimulating interest in the subject, - formal educational needs were to be met in other ways. "From the large variety of 'Ice Age' themes available two sub-themes were selected, i.e. Stone Age Man and Hyaena use of caves - really because these aspects of the site are unique and because publications on these themes produced before the exhibition was set up proved to be most popular with the public (this popularity was reflected in the sales.)" (Rogan Jenkinson).

As an introduction to the uninitiated this exhibition has much to recommend it - although criticisms of 'artiness' and 'gimickry' are bound to be levelled at it by those accustomed to thinking of archæology only in terms of stratigraphic distribution charts and tables identifying the anatomical variations in vertebrate fauna. There are, however, despite the innovative intentions and high standards of execution, - good use of a small space, immediate impact etc. - some aspects of the design which are questionable.

The theme 'In the Shadow of Extinction' has in some areas been taken too literally, the lighting is so poor it is impossible to see the exhibits - the engraved bones being a particular example. If the exhibition is to 'entertain rather than educate' it certainly should not confuse - luminous perspex is not an ideal medium for producing three dimensional graphs of complicated time scales - this exhibit was cluttered and difficult to understand. The 'finds' - skulls and other bones - are suspended in perspex cylinders and spot lit from below - they appear as items in a design exercise; remains from a remote age seem to merit more respect. Bond Street window display techniques are much in evidence throughout the exhibition and work best in the blown up slightly off focus photographs of moving animals. The use of

red lighting gives a good atmosphere of cave claustrophobia and slight panic. Some use of sound effects like the ones in the A/V show would be effective here and conceal the noise of the cash till in the bookstall area.

The most serious criticism of this exhibition, however, is related to management and the way the project is used, and points to some of the problems involved in 'matching' a schematic arrangement to an actual event. How this interpretive facility affects a visitor depends on the order in which it is 'read'. If it is seen before the visit to the gorge - and this is the way it has been organised - it reads as a 'surprise shock'. Coming from the car park the visitor opens the door of the Centre and finds himself in a Space Age Ice Grotto. Confronted with dramatic darkness and spot lit artefacts anticipation runs high, (the information is confusing but the ambience overwhelming) - what next? What next is a walk passed the sewage works into a pleasant enough valley flanked by limestone cliffs which contain a number of gated caves. Unless the visitor has purchased a leaflet in the bookshop on the way out of the centre he will have no way of telling which cave is which or who discovered what and when. If, on the other hand, the visitor is first directed to the gorge and supplied with the leaflet describing the site and the programme of research it will soon become clear why the caves are inaccessible to the public. He/she will be able to adjust to the reality of the situation and obtain some enjoyment by climbing up to the cave entrances and peering through the grilles. Returning to the Visitor Centre the Interpretive exhibition will now be seen as 'compensation' - the finds will be of more interest and the atmosphere appreciated. The really enthusiastic visitor who is prepared to make a return visit will now be able to book a place on one of the once monthly guided tours to Robin Hood's Cave.

The audio/visual show, designed expressly for children as a starting point for their educational tour, but suitable for the uninformed of any age, is well produced. The only criticism here would be technical. A way should be found of reducing the

noise of the slide change - it spoils the atmosphere. The room is designed as the interior of a cave with brush drawn 'cave paintings'. Concealed lighting ensures that large shadows of the audience project across the walls. The 'story telling' with voice over, simple captions, excellent photography and striking sound effects - howling arctic wind, cracking ice etc. - rivets the audience's attention. This is an excellent back up to the on-site interpretation programmes and suggests that audio/visual techniques sensitively used may have more impact than static exhibitions in creating 'instant atmosphere'.

'On-site' interpretation is highly developed at Creswell - the advantage of 'Events' is that they are controlled and when over disappear without leaving any permanent mark on the site. Two programmes have been developed, one to cater for the weekend casual visitor and the other to tie in with the educational service.

EDUCATION.

In 1983 a 'Story Telling' scheme was launched for children of junior school age. Before this date it had been noticed by the rangers that, although the archeology of paleolithic times is a difficult subject to understand, children were "avidly consuming" the publications then available at the Visitor Centre. It was therefore decided to produce "interpretation specifically for these younger visitors". A recent report 'Living Pre-History for Children' Creswell Crags Occasional Report 3, describes in detail the development and monitoring of this service.

To summarise - the report deals with three main points, i.e. the dramatic production, the children's response and the marketing techniques used to launch the scheme.

THE PRODUCTION.

For the story telling a young actress was recruited and, with the help of professionals, - drama directors etc. - a script was produced. The story traces the fortunes of a fictitious family of cave dwellers. The performance relies on the imaginative use

of 'props' - cave girl doll, animal masks and 'fossil bones' - and on audience participation. The story is narrated by the actress in the role of 'Reindeer Lady' and takes place in Robin Hood's Cave which is large enough to accommodate thirty children without risking damage to archeological deposits. Full lighting is felt to be inappropriate and to detract from the experience, so the children are each provided with a low powered hand torch. According to the report the children respond well; there is a high degree of participation in the story and discussion about the fate of the characters. "The feedback generated by this service achieves the objective of highlighting the importance of Creswell Caves and the fossils". Certainly, the children encountered on the day of the visit seemed happy enough and well satisfied with their trip to the cave, but, if this type of 'experience' is to retain educational credibility a great deal must depend on the follow up work undertaken in the schools.

Activities for schools are to be extended this year (1985) to include older pupils in the 11-15 age range. This will be welcomed by secondary school teachers who often find that their pupils are reluctant to visit a 'heritage site' if they have visited it before on a junior school outing. Failing to understand that there are different levels of interpretation, these pupils equate the 'subject' with their first encounter and dismiss it as 'kids stuff' - one of the dangers of offering entertainment as 'education' to the very young. The programme for older pupils will include an excavation and "the chance to reconstruct past events and discover the skills man needed to survive" - this will involve the use of simulated stone age tools. Other educational services available for people of all ages include discovery trails and project work, i.e. field work in a variety of disciplines. There are also on and off site courses run in conjunction with the University of Nottingham and the W.E.A.

Despite the exhibitions and 'events', interpretation at Creswell does rely heavily on the written word; there are leaflets and reports on every conceivable facet of the subject, ranging from simple straightforward guides for the casual visitor to

specialised reports on the 'digs'. There are guide line notes for teachers contemplating school visits and work sheets for children. "The authority recognise the need to make this enterprise profitable - 'formal educational needs are met through our retail outlet via publications and interpretive material for sale". (Rogan Jenkinson).

VISITORS.

What has Creswell Crags to offer the visitor who just wants a day in the country? There are ranger led walks, - 'relaxing evening rambles round the local villages', cycle trails, Sunday morning jogging sessions and the opportunity to take part in other leisure based activities, for example, 'Death of a Wolf Treasure Hunt' 'fun for all the family in an exciting Crags setting' or, 'Exploring Nature' - an educational event which uses game techniques. The management at Creswell are critically aware of the formidable task they have set themselves in keeping the balance between conserving the site as an S.S.S.I. and providing for the interests of visitors. They appear to be tackling it with enthusiasm and inventiveness. One development has been the formation of a Voluntary Service - made up of local people who "undertake general duties and a great deal of research". Volunteers are also responsible for operating a number of footpath improvement schemes; management are interested in extending visitor access to the surrounding district and give assistance to these projects.

CONSERVATION.

Conservation at Creswell is centred on the caves and the magnesian limestone grassland flora - for which the site is designated. A management policy has been established for the woodlands and in the interest of re-generating the plant life a number of selected sycamores has been removed. The lake - heavily polluted with colliery washings - was dredged in 1982. The authorities are aware that the decision to erect barriers at the cave entrances is a contentious one, - local people raise

objections - 'we used to play in those caves as children' - but maintain that it is necessary if the archaeological sediments and the rare cave flora and fauna are to be protected. Given the fact that the public are now actively encouraged to visit the area in large numbers, - "Travel into the prehistoric world of Creswell Crags" - (4) and that since opening in 1977 the site has received annually an average of 120,000 visitors, one is reluctantly inclined to agree.

Maintenance of the gorge is patchy, there is no litter nor any sign of vandalism, but waymarking signs are poorly designed - these are general 'Sherwood' markers and not exclusive to Creswell. The wooden steps to some of the caves and the rock fall warnings need replacing as a matter of urgency and should receive priority, even at a time of staff shortages or lack of funding.

Presumably, because of public demand there are now plans to provide interpretive signs outside the caves. It is hoped that the management will resist this pressure - it would certainly be a drop in standards for Creswell who, with their innovative approach to historical interpretation, must surely be able to evolve a more sensitive way of conveying such information.

BOSWORTH FIELD - DESCRIPTION.

The Battlefield of Bosworth lies two miles south of the town of Market Bosworth in the pleasant undulating countryside of south Leicestershire. It is the site of the battle which virtually ended the Wars of the Roses, where Richard III died and where Henry Tudor was proclaimed king. This site has been open to the public since 1974 and is an enterprise of Leicestershire County Council. Many local people assisted with the project, including the landowners and farmers who work the area. (The Battlefield is intensively farmed and privately owned.) A network of waymarked paths form the Battlefield Trail with information boards set up at intervals to explain the positions and tactics of the opposing armies. The battle standards of Richard III and Henry Tudor are flown at the sites of their command posts.

The Visitor Centre at Ambion farm includes an exhibition area, shops, bookstall, cafeteria, car park, lavatories and picnic site. There are three other points at which visitors can enter the Battle Trail; - these are at the car park/picnic sites at Shenton Station, - where there is also an Information Point - Sutton Cheney and Sutton Wharf.

EVALUATION.

The Battlefield Project, when launched over a decade ago, was considered to be a triumph of design and management co-operation and well deserving of its award as 'Britain's best interpreted Battlefield' (5). In the year of the 500th. Anniversary of the Battle (1985), when changes are being made at the site in design and management techniques, it is interesting to compare some of the different styles of approach, for example, in marketing. The following excerpts from publicity leaflets, one from the 1970's the other published in 1985, each advertising the same 'attractions', illustrate the point and also pose an ethical question.

The earlier extract reads as follows:-

"This historical site is where the future King Henry VII defeated Richard III in 1485.... an ideal family outing. Adults will be gripped by the sense of history and there is plenty to thrill

the children, - models, flags, armour, cinema. On fine days walk and picnic on the battlefield,.... there is a Battlefield Centre at Ambion Farm."

(Leics. County Council.)

and the 1985 version:-

"Imagine the thunder of hooves, the crack of guns, the ring of sword on sword, the shouts, the cries, screams,.... Visualise if you will the armies of the ruling Plantagenet King of England Richard III and those of the Lancastrian claimant to the throne Henry Tudor..... Come roam the Battlefield Trail..... visit the totally redesigned and extended Visitor Centre and re-live that fateful day on the site of the Battle of Bosworth Field in the attractive county of Leicestershire".

(Leicester County Council with financial assistance from the English Tourist Board.)

The purple passage of the second extract about thundering hooves and visualising armies can be seen simply as a melodramatic version of being 'gripped by a sense of history' - (excerpt 1). But the piece beginning 'visit the totally re-designed and extended Visitor Centre' not only suggests that there will be a different approach to interpretive techniques, but, by inviting us to 're-live that fateful day.... in the attractive county of Leicestershire', suddenly projects us into the more insidious realm of the 'commercial plug'. Many battlefields are left to drift into the mists of time, become lost, built over, remaining perhaps in the memory as the name of a house or a road, but at Bosworth someone has decided to identify it, draw attention to it, label it and in so doing has effectively turned it into a memorial.

How this memorial is presented is the responsibility of those who have taken it upon themselves to conserve it. Before considering the extension of its commercial possibilities. - 'to bring in more tourists, to put Leicestershire on the map and make some money' (6) a visit to Culloden Field might have proved salutary; - here, outside the Interpretive Centre which features the latest in exhibition design

and audio visual presentation, there is a strip of grass by the roadside and a notice for visitors, - 'Please do not park on the grass as this is a burial ground'.

This criticism might seem over solemn to those who see medieval warfare primarily as a colourful scene of banners and knights in shining armour and the Quincentenary as a good excuse to have a spectacular tourist season. But, judging from the lack of co-ordination in the 'new presentation', - some of which was not in place at the time of the visit - (six weeks into the season) it would seem that the organisers themselves are not all of one mind. The tone of the advance publicity is certainly not entirely matched by what is actually happening on site.

THE BATTLEFIELD.

The battle trail is well presented in its original 1974 form. The information plaques - now showing signs of wear and soon to be replaced - are well designed with simple outline drawings and written material etched on metal. These are angled horizontally to facilitate reading. With this information most visitors can imaginatively re-construct for themselves the battle scene on the landscape before them. A truly ingenious interpretive touch is the use of the battle standards; - the 'field' needs nothing else. Waymarking is generally of a high standard and the style is consistent throughout.

The Battlefield Trail 'doubles' as a Country Park and this arrangement works very well. The footpaths provide an attractive walk through field and woodland; the picnic sites give access to other country lanes and an extended path leads from the battlefield to the Ashby Canal where horse drawn boat trips are available. By using the Shenton Station car park visitors can enjoy 'Country Park facilities' without going to the Battlefield Centre. Drinks, ice cream and guide books can all be purchased at the Information Point in the former station ticket office.

THE BATTLEFIELD CENTRE - EXHIBITION.

The exhibition at Bosworth has been designed by Leicestershire

Museums Service. Originally it consisted of graphics tracing the history of the Plantagenets and the Tudors, a collection of heraldic devices and flags, an effigy of a knight, some medieval brasses and, in a separate building, the diorama of the battle. For the Quincentenary year this exhibition has been re-furbished and extended to include new material. Although many of these items are individually interesting, especially the beautiful scale models of knights and foot soldiers, they are not used imaginatively within an over-all theme. The presentation is 'formal museum', - spot lit glass cases line the walls in what appears through the gloom to be a series of vaulted tombs. Briefly it could be described as 'Too much, too wordy and too dark'. (To perceive one needs light, - should be the motto for all exhibition designers!)

Groping ones way around this space it is possible to find the germ of several good ideas. One such idea - 'the scene of action' - is perhaps the most important for an exhibition about a battlefield which is meant to function as an 'interpretive experience'. Visitors on average spend twenty to thirty minutes in Visitor Centres, (7) and cannot be expected to look at a medieval street, six models of villages, the genealogies of several knights and endless church brasses, all labelled with the most detailed information in tedious sepia type on buff backgrounds before coming to what they really want to see, - which in this case is the Battle of Bosworth. With the splendid diorama of miniature horsemen and archers in battle formation as the central 'set piece', a selection of about one third of the large collection of material they have on this theme could be assembled around it. This would include the heraldic devices of the various contestants, the life size models of men in armour, together with the display of weapons. A large well designed map of the routes to Bosworth Field taken by the several Armies would bring in the very fine model of the ship used for Henry Tudor's voyage from France, which, in this exhibition, is shown in an isolated case somewhere near the exit.

Another theme equally relevant is that of 'requiem'. From the extremely difficult to decipher captions over the vaulted cases, i.e. 'Our strong arms bear our conscience, swords our law'

and 'Untimely smothered in their dusty grave', it could be assumed that the designers were trying to express some idea about the fortunes of war. They have the opportunity to underline this 'death and glory' theme by bringing together the alabaster effigy of the knight and the models of Richard and Henry mounted on their richly caparisoned horses. But the opportunity is lost; the curatorial spirit prevails and we are left with more artefacts and even more 'information'.

VISITORS.

The visitors to this exhibition, mainly families with one or two children, were trying hard. It was usually the father who read out the descriptions and information and explained it to the children. Some found reading difficult. Great interest was shown in the individual models and the details of the workmanship much admired, but what really drew the crowds was the model of the battle. It was noted that people were prepared to 'skip' quite a lot of the exhibition to see it.

The audio-visual show was a failure. The 'new sophisticated display techniques showing a variety of interesting and exciting films' (8) did not materialise and what was offered was a poor video recording of an excerpt from Laurence Olivier's 'Richard III', unsuitably prefaced by a heavily humorous cartoon account of the battle with a commentary by Harry Secombe - (humour of this kind dates very quickly). The sound from the audio-visual area can be heard throughout the exhibition which, by any standards, is bad design practice. It is unfortunate that with such good material at its disposal the authority has not been able to put together a more dynamic exhibition. It seems they have relied too much on the services of departmental specialists without first agreeing on a clear well thought out policy based on sound interpretive ideas.

THE WEALD AND DOWNLAND OPEN AIR MUSEUM - WEST SUSSEX.

Founder: J.R. Armstrong, M.B.E., M.A.

INTRODUCTION.

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum is situated in the Lavant valley near the village of Singleton four miles north of Chichester in West Sussex. This museum, one of the few privately sponsored Country Parks in Britain, was founded in 1967 by J.R. Armstrong with the specific aim of rescuing outstanding examples of Wealden vernacular buildings which were in danger of destruction and placing them in a suitable Downland setting. This idea has been expanded and now offers educational, recreational and research facilities for 'the growing number of people interested in the national heritage'. The hope is that the exhibits will help people to understand the importance of other old buildings still in use and give them an awareness of the need to conserve them. 'The Museum authorities strongly believe that buildings should not be removed from their original sites unless there is no alternative', - and are at pains to point out that 'a building is a functional artefact'. (9). By pursuing this train of thought the management has devised a unique strategy for presenting these buildings; by concentrating exclusively on materials and construction it avoids - with one or two exceptions - the pitfalls of historic romanticism. Artefacts are generally allowed to 'speak for themselves'. The fine 18th. century timber-framed barn, for example, which houses the introductory display, needs no additional commentary.

THE SITE AND MUSEUM.

At the present time (1985) there are 25 re-constructed buildings on site ranging from medieval timber-framed houses to barns and a working water mill. The buildings are arranged in such a way that they will eventually form self-contained groups. For example, the Market Hall from Titchfield in Hampshire will form the centre piece for a town and village group, while stables and granaries will be re-erected around the 'Wealden' farmhouses.

The introductory display which has been planned to interfere as little as possible with the structure of the 'Hambrook' barn in which it is placed, is uncluttered, easy to follow and highly professional in execution. Items featuring traditional regional building materials and working methods are shown against a background of drawings and photographs of specific buildings together with maps indicating the geological areas and original locations of the Museum exhibits, thus providing both information and interpretation. (Another timber-framed barn contains an excellent exhibition of plumbing and lead work).

All the buildings on site are open to the public. In the houses furnishings are limited to a bench or two and a wood fire burning on the central open hearth. Our attention is directed to the interior planning of hall and chamber, to the design and construction of roofs, window frames and wattle and daub walls. The 'human element' in this interpretation is contained in the contemplation of craft skills and not in speculations about 'who lived here' and what was eaten or worn.

Some late medieval timber-framed houses, i.e. 'Pendean' farmhouse from Midhurst and 'Bayleaf' from Chiddingstone in Kent have had additions from later periods removed in the reconstruction, so that the building can be seen as it 'was first built'. It can be argued that to do this is 'academic' or 'purist' and not in sympathy with the spirit of vernacular building - which is for each generation to alter and re-shape according to its needs in a manner which is empirical rather than conceptual. However, the Museum authorities defend their action by pointing out that the 'Wealden' house is a special case, - each, they say, was built in a 'single operation' and all conform to the same symmetrical structure, that is, a central hall with no upper floor, with both end chambers jettied out at the front of the building, giving it a characteristic style. Whether the 17th. century outshots and chimney stacks should have been removed is still a debatable point. Compared with photographs of the houses before removal to the Museum these reconstructions look like three dimensional projections of history book drawings.

One small building, the 'medieval cottage from Hangleton', seems totally out of place in this museum of practical history. It is the reconstruction of a flint cottage based entirely on archeological evidence obtained from an excavation of a deserted village. Despite the fact that 'above the level of the eaves everything was conjectural' it was decided to attempt a full scale archeological reconstruction on the grounds that it would represent a form of flint and rubble building once widespread over the whole of the chalk area. The result has more in common with a 19th. century 'cottage ornée' than anything one can imagine coming from the 13th. century, and calls into question the myopic 'period vision' of some historians. (It is perhaps worth noting here that an agricultural survey of 1808 reported that 'three mud walls and a hedge bank form the habitation of many of the peasantry'). It is hardly likely that their medieval forebears fared much better. Apart from these two historical travesties the principal policy scheme is well maintained and presents an instructive and enjoyable experience for visitors.

The volunteer stewards many of whom are 'Friends of the Museum' provide an excellent on-site interpretation service. They are briefed to 'circulate' and to talk to individual visitors or groups as they meet them about the park. Their expertise, local knowledge and easy friendly manner add greatly to the interest of a visit.

Design standards are high and site maintenance is good. There is a well produced catalogue and map obtainable at the entrance. Items for sale in the shop are all relevant to the site or the surrounding countryside. Interpretive literature is designed to meet different levels of understanding. There are teaching packs and guides suitable for young children as well as specialist publications on craft techniques for the expert. School parties are catered for by appointment and the educational service well organised.

This park puts across its message with clarity and style. It is popular with visitors and is a good example of how a well managed site can also attract local voluntary enthusiasm. The

Museum receives no regular grant and depends mainly on private donations, its entrance fees, and sale of goods and publications. It remains to be seen whether this Country Park/Museum will be able to keep up its standards in view of mounting costs and the inevitable pressure to diversify. At the moment all commercial ventures are contained within the park theme, it would be unfortunate if this enterprise had to resort to money-spinning side shows.

INVENTING THE LANDSCAPE 1 - The Country House Park.INTRODUCTION.

The Country House Park is a prime example of the 'invented landscape'. Designed originally to provide a setting for the enhancement of the 'great house' these parks can be seen today as a reminder of a way of life that no longer exists. They are visited by thousands of people, who, if they think about it at all, would probably find themselves deeply unsympathetic to the social structure which brought about their creation, but, who, nevertheless, take pride in their existence as part of our national heritage and welcome these parks as a nostalgic escape from the 'everyday present'.

The National Trust formula for creating this dream world is well rehearsed; it is to take a country house and make it look 'lived in', to manipulate the visitors into playing the role of audience and to gently guide them through a series of nostalgic experiences. These experiences usually follow a set pattern; first the tour of the house and garden. Here the visitor is invited to admire and wonder at 'the way they used to live' and to consider how pleasant it is to see everything so well maintained. Next comes the home farm managed as a show piece for the working estate. There is usually a place for tea, - often in the stable block, somewhere to buy souvenirs and guide books and, with certain restrictions, the freedom to walk and picnic in the surrounding parkland. Judging by the number of people who visit country house parks it is obvious that this formula of conscious role playing is something they are prepared to accept. But what happens when a local authority decides to turn a country house park into a 'Country Park' as defined in the 1968 Countryside Act, - a pleasure ground for the people? Such change of use means a change of concept and nowhere is this more evident than at Elvaston Castle Country Park in Derbyshire.

ELVASTON CASTLE COUNTRY PARK - NEAR DERBY.

This park is situated five miles south east of Derby in a landscape which is a mixture of flat agricultural land, commuter villages and scattered industry. The tall chimney of the 'Celanese' factory at Spondon some two miles away dominates the view to the north.

Elvaston was formerly the seat of the Stanhope family, the Earls of Harrington, and the 'castle' and grounds were developed in the 19th. century by the 4th. Earl. The house is a Gothic Revival structure designed by James Wyatt - 1812, and replaces most of the earlier 17th. century building. The gardens and ornamental lake were designed by William Barron in the 1830's and conform to the then prevailing taste in landscape gardening. Formal paving and parterres are to be seen near the house, terraced lawns lead down to a serpentine lake which is dotted with islands and surrounded by trees. 'Rocky archways' frame the views across the water and various 'theme' gardens, for example, the Italian Garden and the Alhambra Garden - with its summer house disguised as a Moorish temple - are to be found interspersed with wooded walks and green avenues.

The family left in 1939 and the castle was occupied by the Derbyshire Teachers Training College until 1950. The estate was acquired by Derbyshire County Council in the late 1960's and was opened as a Country Park in 1970 with its gardens carefully restored. This more recent scheme provides for informal recreation and 'unorganised family activities' within the 160 hectares of parkland and garden. There is a large landscaped car park which includes picnic areas and lavatories, a site to take fifty five touring caravans and a large show ground for special events. The Park Centre is located in the castle courtyard. There are lavatories, a cafe, and interpretive and information facilities. There is also within the park a riding school and a working estate museum. There have been several plans put forward for the use of the castle, for example, the possibility of a field study centre, or a conservation museum or hostel accommodation, but none so far have come to fruition. A number of local societies use one or two rooms for meetings.

THE PARK IN 1985.

In 1970 the park attracted 160,000 visitors; it was acclaimed as a great success and earned itself a 'Countryside Award'. This award in the form of a plaque can still be seen surrounded by graffiti and dirty plastic cups in the crumbling porch on the east front of the castle.

The problems of Elvaston are accumulative - caused not only by the obvious lack of funding, poor maintenance and low staffing levels, ('they start things they cannot maintain') - but by the basic inflexibility of the park design and the lack of perception displayed by the authorities. This lack of perception shows in their continuous unrealistic image of 'the visitors' as people who will immediately appreciate the varying 'park values' to be encountered at this site, and who will adjust their behaviour accordingly. A glance at the visitors leaflet for 1985 confirms this view;

'.. it offers wide open spaces for your children and pleasant walks for those who simply wish to relax and take in the scenery.'

'.. discover the elegance of the formal gardens with its extensive ornamental topiary.'

'.. stroll along the lakeside.. and take refreshment in the Edwardian Parlour Tea Room...'

A visit on a summer Saturday followed by a weekday visit reveals a very different picture - not at all like the neat plan of multi-use zoning so beloved of Country Park managers.

Litter is everywhere, and it is a measure of the wide gap between managerial perception and visitor perception to see the more tidy minded members of the public placing their picnic rubbish in the wire cages designed to protect young trees. On plan there is provision for informal recreation but it is the terraced lawns and grassy avenues which suffer constant erosion from football games and bike riding. Bikes can also be 'discovered in the elegance of the formal gardens' along with children playing tag among the flower beds. Another form of 'unorganised family

recreation' is BXMing up and down the stone steps which lead from the main avenue to the house. 'A stroll by the lake' brings one in contact with the adventure playground - extended by local youths to include the rock works and arches provided by Barron to create 'vistas' but now bearing a marked resemblance to the Mapping Terraces at Regents Park Zoo. 'Taking refreshment in the Edwardian Parlour Tea Room' means weekends only, the alternative being ice-cream and fizzy drinks queued for at the Tuck Shop and consumed in a gritty open shadeless courtyard.

These observations lead not so much to a diatribe on the awfulness of people - though some do behave badly - but rather to a condemnation of the woolly-minded thinking which first brought this Country Park into being. It must surely have been clear from the outset that to develop 'informal recreation' on such a scale would be totally incompatible with the preservation and proper use of the original concept; (and one must bear in mind here that the County had already gone to the trouble and expense of restoring the formal gardens.)

The sheer size of the car park and caravan site guarantee a surge of activity to the lakeside on a scale never envisaged by the designer of the original park - indeed all the visual links and spatial concepts devised by Barron are completely destroyed by the unimaginative siting of these facilities. The entrance from the car park leads straight into the most sensitive 'zone', the historical heartland of the park by the lakeside; 'strolling by the lake' becomes a constant shuffle of people trying to orientate themselves. There is nothing at the entrance to prepare visitors for this experience except one notice board stating briefly that this was the home of the Stanhopes. The information desk and interpretive exhibitions are a fifteen minute walk from the main entrance.

The whole of the original park is trapped within a cordon of extraneous 'Country Park' provisions - the caravan site, car park, show ground, museum, riding school, cricket ground and informal games area are all sited on the perimeter. As these facilities are mainly for those with specialist interests and the informal

games area is 'too far' from the lavatories, shop and cafe, most casual visitors converge on the Centre. The central area is in fact where most visitors stay, either by the lake or in the avenues within sight of the castle. Even on a hot Bank Holiday afternoon very few people were to be seen walking in the woodlands - though the woodlands are exceptionally beautiful. What does this tell us about the visitors? It tells us that visitors to Country Parks are gregarious and that they like to congregate near a base which provides them with creature comforts. If the authority want to combine informal recreation with the delights of a formal ornamental park the simplest solution to the circulation problem is to put that base in the 'Country Park' area.

It would be quite feasible at Elvaston to create a circular linked park around the castle grounds for informal recreation, close off the formal park and charge people to go in. Visitors to the Castle are already conditioned to paying fifty pence to see the Estate Museum - which is litter free and well maintained. A combined ticket might ensure the peace of the Castle Park.

INVENTING THE LANDSCAPE 2 - CONSERVING THE WILD.

The subject of the following study is the Seven Sisters Country Park in Sussex. This is an invented landscape, in the sense that it has been designated and labelled as 'An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. Left to 'nature' it would not look as it does today. The invention lies in the decision taken to protect and manage it. Its 'beauty' conforms to a set of pre-conceived notions about -

- (a) nature conservation and ecological balance,
- (b) aesthetics based on the English passion for the traditional and familiar in landscape, and
- (c) the patriotic appeal of 'The White Cliffs of Albion' and Sussex by the Sea.

THE 'SEVEN SISTERS COUNTRY PARK' - Local Authority -
Sussex County Council.

DESCRIPTION.

The Seven Sisters Country Park includes Cuckmere Haven and the tract of downland leading to the famous range of chalk cliffs known as the 'Seven Sisters'. The whole park - (280 hectares) lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, (A.O.N.B.) i.e. the 'Sussex Heritage Coast' and links up with National Trust property near Birling Gap to form one of the few stretches of natural landscape left on the South Coast of England.

One has only to look at Birling Gap - east of the area - with its shanty town buildings and shoddy amenities, to understand the need for, and the significance of, this Country Park. Seven Sisters, situated as it is between the holiday resorts of Seaford and Eastbourne, is subject to heavy pressure by visitors. Access is from the main A829 at Exceat. Large car parks are provided at the head of the valley for the general public who are not allowed to drive down to the sea as at Birling Gap. A Visitor Centre is housed in an 18th. century barn opposite the car park and from here the breadth of the downs and the Cuckmere valley with its meandering ox bow river can be viewed as a spectacular panorama.

Sussex County Council manage this great sweep of downland with skill and sensitivity. Today it is grazed by cattle and sheep, "this allows for maximum public use of the land, and short term grazing licences held by local farmers ensure a flexible approach to conservation objectives". (10). An example of this flexibility is that in some places grass and scrub have been left to provide cover for nesting birds and to provide suitable conditions for a large variety of plants and animals to flourish. To help conserve the area the authority have removed a caravan site from the valley and have with co-operation from voluntary conservationists constructed a shallow lake for the use of wading birds and wildfowl.

INTENTIONS.

"The main objectives of this Country Park are the conservation of its scenic beauty, relative remoteness and wild life and within that context, the creation of opportunities for people to enjoy and appreciate its qualities".

Sussex County Council.

How are these opportunities created?

It would seem that in making provision for visitors one of the main concerns at Seven Sisters has been to keep 'on-site' visual interpretation and labelling to a minimum in order to preserve the amenity. On site information is limited to discreetly designed marker posts (in some instances, too discreet) and notices about the danger of walking too near the edge of the cliffs. The authority hope that the public will make full use of the Centre to obtain information about the park and to increase their understanding of what they have/or are about to experience.

THE VISITOR CENTRE - DESCRIPTION.

The barn is divided into two levels. The entrance level contains the bookstall, information desk, a set of reference books about Sussex and a study area (table and chairs). Attached to the walls are glass cases containing back-lit text and photographs explaining the geological structure of the park, its history, its wildlife and the reasons why it should be conserved. Individual displays contain information about the Cuckmere River, the Seashore and Shingle and pose questions such as, Why Conserve the Downland? Others describe 'What happened in the Past' and 'How the Country Park is managed Today'. Above this exhibition are hung examples of Sussex crafts - baskets etc. and various 'extra' diagrams, maps, and photographs related to conservation.

On the lower level are; - a static exhibition describing 'Man in the Landscape', posters about the dangers of Rabies, stuffed animals and birds and a set of 'for sale' slides. In a small side room is an exhibition of photographs of downland birds and animals. There is a second barn approached through a courtyard from the

Visitor Centre devoted to 'marketable goods' - plants, herbs and souvenirs, and an exhibition called 'The Living World' - this latter being a display of live insects - some, exotic species - which can be bred in captivity.

To assess the value of these facilities one must first ask 'to whom are they addressed? "What sort of people are likely to visit this Centre?' In 1978 the Dartington Amenity Trust included Seven Sisters in its study of interpretive services provided at visitor centres. This study was limited to how visitors reacted to the material presented and was not concerned with evaluating the content of interpretive exhibitions. There are, however, within this study some useful observations on the types of visitor using the centre. Questionnaire survey results showed that Seven Sisters had roughly equal proportions of day trip visitors and tourists. 83% had a general interest in the countryside and 31% belonged to some relevant club or organisation, for example, bird watching, marine biology, the National Trust etc. It was also established that the park attracted a high proportion of 'repeat visits'. Site observation seemed to confirm the Dartington findings. On the day of the visit (Easter 1985) everyone generally appeared to know what they wanted to do. Organised school parties were studying geography and marine life, groups of rambles and individuals were walking the downs with rucksacks, cameras and binoculars, family parties were picnicking in the meadows, taking short walks to the sea or canoeing on the river. One wondered whether 'interpretation' was necessary, given this context - are the authorities preaching to the converted?

The Visitor Centre - An evaluation:

If a visitor centre is meant to prepare one for a unique experience the barn at Exceat is (unavoidably) in a somewhat unfortunate position - i.e.:-

1. The area concerned is a famous beauty spot - most people know what they are coming to see.

2. The car park - the arrival place for the majority of visitors is on the sea side of the A829; the way to the cliffs from here is self evident and the wide valley with its meandering river and distant view of the sea is immediately enticing.
3. To reach the visitor centre from the car park one must turn one's back on the view and negotiate the main road.

To make up for this psychological distraction it could be said that the barn is a work of art in itself and well worth visiting, if only to see the splendid timber roof. But what of the facilities inside the centre? It is one thing to issue policy statements based on a plethora of philosophical outpourings about the 'need to educate people for leisure', but quite another to present these ideas in such a way that they can be readily assimilated by an unwitting public 'just out for a day by the sea'. It must surely be the aim of the management at Seven Sisters to provide basic information about the area and to give some visual indication of what is to be observed in the park. These two elements are indeed to be found in the service offered, but neither is clearly defined nor effectively arranged. It is as though the organisers, having this large barn at their disposal, have decided to embark on a policy of accumulation, - adding more and more objects and 'themes' in a frantic attempt to fill the space. The result is a muddle of half hearted efficiency and downright 'folksyness'.

The country craft display and static exhibition about 'Downland Man' (both presented in a rather amateurish museum style) are not really necessary, as both these subjects are extensively covered by regional museums and craft centres. Nor is there need for the dusty tableau of stuffed sheep and lambs. In a setting where there are hundreds of live sheep to be seen within yards of the centre this exhibit appears not only superfluous but somehow macabre.

Given more space the back-lit 'conservation panels' would come into their own and, with the addition of a strong introductory panel near the entrance to the barn, would provide an excellent interpretation scheme. These well designed graphics deserve better positioning.

The bookshop displays, scattered about in free-standing bookshelves with 'nature sheets' pinned casually on the back, need re-focussing on the sales point and there should be a more selective range of items relating to the Sussex landscape.

The reference library is an interesting inclusion and shows that there is some appreciation on the part of management of the kind of visitor likely to use this park, - but why place it in the middle of a circulation area? The small ante-room off the lower level would be an ideal place for this facility, where visitors could study maps and specialist literature in peace.

The lower level of the barn, cleared of static exhibitions, could be used as an occasional lecture room, but could also serve as an indoor picnic area. It is very exposed on the Downs and even the most enthusiastic walkers would welcome a sheltered place - and what better place than a barn? - to eat their sandwiches. (An alternative would be to do away with the Visitor Centre concept altogether and have two Information Points, one of these being in the park itself. This would provide 'on-site' office accommodation for rangers and a refuge hut for visitors.)

On the occasion of this visit there was only one member of staff on duty at the barn and she was confined to running the Information Desk. The information leaflets published by East Sussex County Council are excellent value and form the backbone of this Information/Interpretation service. But clearly displayed notices are needed - preferably at the Desk - about such matters as safety, i.e. - times of the tides, nearest Rescue Service etc.

There is evidence to show - in the careless mounting of photographs and the poor condition of notice boards - that the maintenance standards at this centre are not as high as they should be. If the service is over stretched then it should be re-thought in terms of what visitors really require. Re-designing does not necessarily mean the need for more capital investment. It can mean simply - pruning, re-focussing, and making the best use of what is already there.

INVENTING THE LANDSCAPE 3 - WATER PARKS.

Water parks, products of the new 'gravel pit' school of landscape design are much in evidence throughout the Midlands. Relying for their appeal on 'natural style' and low keyed facilities these utility versions of the Country Park are very popular with local authorities. They are considered to be an excellent way of making good the dereliction left by old mineral workings. Often located in urban fringe country on the edge of large cities these sites can be quickly developed as nature reserves, centres for water based sports and areas for informal recreation. One of the most notable of these restored gravel pits is Kingsbury Water Park in Warwickshire. "Based on a series of worked out and partially restored wet gravel workings in the valley of the river Tame" Kingsbury has set the pattern for other Country Park developments.

KINGSBURY WATER PARK - DESCRIPTION.

The Water Park is approached through a network of main roads which carve their way across the Midlands between Birmingham and Tamworth. It is a world of 'green field sites', new industries and hypermarkets, perpetual road works and wide intersections. The park itself occupies a wedge of land between the A4091 and the A51 near the village of Kingsbury. A motorway is being constructed which will link these two roads cutting straight through the park and isolating the nature reserve. A connecting underpass is planned for the future.

The park is managed by the Warwickshire County Council with the "dual objectives of countryside conservation and water recreation" and provides for a variety of activities. These include windsurfing, dinghy sailing, canoeing, power boating and fishing. There are opportunities to walk, picnic, ride, and study wild life. There is a flourishing education service based on Ranger guided tours and a 'Teachers Pack' giving suggestions on how to plan a visit and the possible areas of study available.

The Visitor Centre situated at the main gate close to a

landscaped car park/picnic area is a complex of one storey brick buildings and contains an information centre combined with an audio/visual area, an interpretive exhibition, lavatories and a weekend cafe selling drinks, ice cream and sweets.

Within the park there is a site for touring caravans and tents and a separate camp site 'on rough heathland' in the centre of the park for Scouts and Youth Groups. The park falls basically into three sections. There are the sailing lakes to the south, the main fishing pools and nature reserve to the north - now cut off from the main park by the motorway and served by a separate entrance - and a triangular shaped central area containing woodland walks, heathland, children's play area, camping ground, some smaller ponds and the Visitor Centre and main car park. Lakeside car parks and the central Far Leys parking area can be reached by 'spine' roads from the main entrance. There is a pedestrian way into the park from Kingsbury village, which lies to the east.

THE USE OF THE PARK AND ITS ATTRACTION FOR VISITORS.

This country park was opened in 1975, but the sailing lakes had been in use for some years before this date. Tamworth Sailing Club has sailed Bodymoor Heath Water since 1953 and the Midlands Hydroplane Club - also formed in the '50's - shares this lake, racing on alternate Sundays. The Club also runs a water ski section. Both clubs have a large following and the lake is used as a championship venue. A new club house was built by the lakeside in 1984. Day Membership is offered by the Tamworth Club for dinghy sailing and wind surfing. The Hydroplane Club offers a 'Social' as well as a 'Racing' Membership and their calendar of 'off water' events includes barbecues, folk suppers, fancy dress parties and dinner dances.

The gravel workings have been fished for nearly fifty years. With the co-operation of the Severn Trent Water Authority specimen ponds have been developed and stocked with 'quality coarse fish'. These include carp, tench, rudd, roach, perch, pike and bream. Coarse angling is a very popular sport and there is a waiting

list for permits in operation.

The landscape of the park, particularly the central area - reserved for informal recreation - is well maintained. The maturing woodland of willow, birch, alder, oak and hawthorn is especially attractive and the marsh pools have an undisturbed primeval quality. (Unfortunately it is the sylvan peace of this area which is soon to be shattered by the completion of the motorway section which cuts clean through this wooded sanctuary. How this will be screened and what measures will be taken to reduce noise is difficult at this stage to envisage. There is, to date, no apparent evidence of cosmetic work being carried out.)

EVALUATION.

It would seem that Kingsbury Water Park, with its ready made clientele of sailors and fishermen and sporting spectators, would have little need to 'market' its existence - yet, on a summer Saturday afternoon at the end of May (1985) this park appeared extremely quiet. There were no families at the picnic tables or keeping fit on the 'trim trail' or avidly studying wild life. Where were the 'casual car based visitors, the 'families from Birmingham, Coventry and Tamworth' with whom - as the descriptive leaflet claims - this park has proved so popular'? A member of the staff explained. "They usually wait to see if its going to be really hot and then they start arriving after 2 p.m. - we're busiest on Sundays when people come from all over the County to watch the Power Boat racing".

It was a dry warm day with intermittent sunshine and in sheltered places quite hot, but the crowds did not arrive. The few car based visitors observed concentrated their attention on the model power boats at the southern end of the park. About half a dozen windsurfers were out on the large lake. The rest of the visitors, mostly middleaged couples walking dogs, seemed to be local. Despite the added attractions of the 'trim trail' - "consisting of twelve pieces of sturdy equipment to improve your fitness" - and the children's playground, the waymarked walks and heathlands were quite deserted.

Deserted too was the interpretive exhibition, except for a small group of rather disgruntled people looking for 'something to do'. The information desk was open and it was possible to obtain leaflets on the various specialist activities and on how to use the equipment on the trim trail, but there was no ranger on hand to 'stimulate interest' in the park and the audio-visual presentation was out of order. It seemed at Kingsbury that all activities were in the hands of clubs and organisations and that the authority, having spent money on a fairly elaborate static exhibition and a slide show, had decided that nothing else was needed to capture the imagination of the casual weekend visitor.

THE INTERPRETIVE EXHIBITION.

The problem with this type of exhibition is that it so quickly becomes dated. It also becomes boring to park staff who have to administer it. Exhibition design is closely allied to advertising - it is the poster writ large. Its function is simply to display something and to put across a message. If it does this quickly and with style it is successful. But an exhibition can only do this ONCE, - it is not a 'work of art' - not a painting or a piece of sculpture which may require many readings before it reveals its true meaning. This is something that local authorities should clearly understand before they embark on expensive interpretive schemes. In the case of conservation this job can often be done better by a ranger in the field. (You can't ask questions of a static exhibition.) As Jon Wilkinson (11) has pointed out in his survey report - "The chief stimulus for the development of interpretation and Visitor Centres as one means of carrying out interpretation were the Countryside Acts of 1967 and 1968.... Providers are over influenced by their perceived statutory requirements and tend to be inflexible when applying them to particular sites".

Providers can also be over influenced by preconceived ideas about what constitutes 'the average visitor'. The exhibition at Kingsbury appears to be aimed specifically at the 'young urban family' - well heeled and white and eager to be 'educated'.

This display, which is totally concerned with conservation, consists of a series of panels telling in story book fashion with painted wooden cut-outs the history of the park and what can be found in it. Families, consisting of young parents and small children are depicted strolling through the park clad in 'leisure wear' and gazing with interest and delight at the passing scene. The graphics are a pastiche of the 'look and learn' genre of the 1960's, a style which was epitomised in 'Ladybird' books. The tone of the exhibition is avuncular, the presentation anthropomorphic and clearly directed at young children. The Kingfisher, symbol of the park, addresses us directly. He 'speaks' through written statements painted on wooden clouds; - "Hi! I'm the Kingfisher I live at the park, try looking through my eyes and find out what the park would look like if you could fly high in the sky." The spectator is directed to a large flat wooden kingfisher painted like a kite with two holes for eyes. By looking through the holes one sees a diorama of the park. A nice touch - but one beset with design problems. One problem is that a large percentage of the target audience will be unable to read, and a second point is that by placing the kingfisher so high most children will have to be lifted up to see through the 'eyes'. This exhibition does have a certain superficial attraction, but as 'interpretation' it is very limited in scope. If it is designed to educate young children it fails, by not presenting its simplified pictorial concepts in a logical sequence. To make sense, it must be re-interpreted for the child by an adult, as understanding the pictures depends on knowing what the Kingfisher is 'saying' about them. For older children it simply misses the mark. Accustomed as they are to the sophisticated standards of television presentation they will find it unsophisticated and not sufficiently informative. Adults will find it amusing or condescending according to their tastes - or degree of social awareness - and its whimsical dated charm will quickly pall. In the words of the Countryside Commission, - "Countryside interpretation should be for the casual visitor.... it must be readily distinguishable from formal education." - the interpretation at Kingsbury is neither.

FERRY MEADOWS COUNTRY PARK - PETERBOROUGH.INTRODUCTION.

Ferry Meadows, situated on the outskirts of Peterborough, represents a new breed of Country Park of the type envisaged by Michael Dower in his speech at the Loughborough conference in 1969. (see Chapter 3 of this study). It is part of a linear recreational scheme designed by the Peterborough Development Corporation to provide for the leisure needs of Greater Peterborough - which includes three new satellite townships. The park is seen as 'flowing from the countryside into the centre of the urban area with a gradual transition from informal low key use, such as fishing, riding and walking to formal sports provision as the city centre is approached.' (12).

The area now known as Ferry Meadows Country Park, part of the Nene Park complex, lies five miles west of the city centre and occupies about 210 hectares within the ox bow curve of the river Nene.

This park holds a special place in the history of park design because it was one of the first to be created by a process of controlled sand and gravel extraction. In 1971 the Peterborough Development Corporation gave permission for the A.R.C. Gravel Company to extract sand and gravel from Ferry Meadows on the condition that they ceased work in 1977, that within three months of that date plant and machinery would be moved and the land reinstated in accordance with the Corporation's design specification. This specification gave details of the position, shape and depths of lakes to be constructed. With this programme agreed upon the Peterborough Corporation, with its multi-disciplinary team, worked closely with the gravel company to achieve their goal. Towards the end of A.R.C.'s contract time the Gravel Company carried out the shaping of the lakes and created the necessary slipways and roads. The Corporation moved in to landscape and to plant trees. A Visitor Centre was built to provide basic facilities and the park was opened to the public in the summer of 1978.

FERRY MEADOWS: - DESCRIPTION.

Ferry Meadows, which could be described more accurately as an 'urban fringe' rather than a 'Country Park', is approached from the south at Orton Winstow. Access is by a long straight lane leading from the A605. This lane, which is the only vehicle access, is flanked by a new housing estate and a golf course. Crossing the Nene Valley Railway it passes the Park caravan camping site (run by the Caravan Club) and terminates at the Visitor Centre car park. The Centre, a brick based single storey wooden building, contains a combined shop, information/interpretation area and a cafe.

The three lakes created from the worked out gravel pits have been designed to follow the ox bow line of the river. To the east directly in front of the Centre is Overton lake with its sandy beaches and 'cruise' boat - 'Nene Star'. Centrally placed is the small shallow Lynch lake, created especially for children. This also has a beach. To the west is Gunwade the largest of the three lakes and used for sailing. Near Gunwade a Watersports Centre has been built with the aid of funding from the Sports Council.

The central grassed area and the areas between the lakes have been contoured and planted extensively with a variety of trees. By using different methods of grass management the Development Corporation, with advice from the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, has encouraged the growth of plant species which provide cover for birds and insects. It has also created habitats for wild flowers. A bird sanctuary has been established in a shallow lake setting east of the main water park and hides have been built for visitors' use.

Other facilities at Ferry Meadows include a miniature railway and two children's adventure play grounds. A station on the Nene Valley Railway gives summer visitors the opportunity to visit the Wansford Steam Centre. There are also provisions for pony riding and pony and trap riding as well as for fishing, picnicking and walking.

FERRY MEADOWS COUNTRY PARK - EVALUATION.

On a visit to the park in May 1985 a major programme of re-surfacing was observed to be in progress. All the sandy loose gravelled paths were being asphalted. One can see the sense in this. A park which is popular with cyclists, pram pushers, joggers, riders and walkers and attracts approximately 300,000 visitors a year is bound to show signs of wear - and there was a great deal of erosion to be seen. However, it was unfortunate that they were using 'black topping' for the paths, a red/brown surface would be more in keeping with this setting.

A walk round the site confirms that the park lacks strong focal points. There are few tall trees to break the monotony of the flat landscape and the Visitor Centre, a low lying building without any distinguishing architectural features, almost disappears when viewed from across the lake. The new Watersports Centre, however, built on stilts by Gunwade Lake has a light oriental look and gives this area a sense of style and elegance. But it is not enough to unify the park, much more needs to be done in the way of 'eye-catchers' to give significance to the different lakeside areas.

The proliferation of signs telling us where to go and what not to do appear crude and superfluous. But seen against the background of the visit to Elvaston Castle their presence takes on a new meaning. The Peterborough authority would seem to have more understanding of its clientele than the Derbyshire authority has at Elvaston. For example; here at Ferry Meadows 'Cycling is prohibited' has become 'No Cycles' and 'It is Dangerous to Swim' is changed to 'Don't Swim'. Visitors to the park are 'directed' rather than 'requested', and that quite frequently! It seems to work - there is no vandalism to be seen and scarcely any litter.

THE VISITORS' CENTRE.

The provision of 'interpretation' at this centre is minimal and very amateurish and it would be better if it were not there at all, as it adds nothing to the quality of the park. A few glass

cases containing stuffed birds and animals poorly labelled and a schoolroom display of geological specimens are totally unacceptable. These exhibits are housed in the same area as the shop which sells souvenirs and 'novelties' and the kind of 'nature' postcards which can be bought in any visitor centre from Aviemore to Lands End.

There seems also to be an air of amateurishness about the detailing of park furnishings. Litter bins, notice boards and picnic tables all need the attention of the design team. It is quite wrong to think - as some authorities do - that because these items have to be constructed by Manpower Services Commission or Y.O.P. teams they must by necessity look 'rustic'! Many of these young workers given proper direction and well designed specifications can turn out excellent work and should be given such opportunities to show their skills.

Looking at Ferry Meadows purely as landscape it is obvious that an enormous amount of time and effort has been expended simply to get the ground covered and the trees planted. But, even allowing for the fact that all this has yet to mature, the design still appears timid and unsure of its direction.

As can be seen from the description of the park the plans follow closely the 'Kingsbury' formula, i.e. - natural styling, low key facilities etc. But Ferry Meadows was not, like the park at Kingsbury, created from old mineral workings already showing signs of 'returning to nature' it was created on a drawing board. It was here at the initial design stage that the developers failed to grasp the unique opportunity presented by this urban fringe site. Instead of clinging to the edges of someone else's concept they could, with a more innovative approach, have made a valuable contribution to contemporary park design. So obsessive has been the Countryside Commission's commitment to conservation that its effect on our institutionalised Country Parks has become endemic and the rich traditions of the English pleasure garden totally cast aside. A pleasure ground approach would certainly have been more suitable for Ferry Meadows as the description by Deyan Sudjic (13) of what actually happens at the park on a summers day bears

out. "On its busiest Saturdays... Ferry Meadows looks more like park than country. It may stretch over 200 hectares but most of the 12,000 visitors who use it on these days will pack themselves into just twelve of them. The car park is full, there are queues at the tea room and miniature railway.... while on the two beaches at Overton Lake sunbathers find that they have hardly enough room to turn over". But there are no plans to alter it. Indeed Sudjic's report tells us that there are proposals to form a trust to ensure that the park 'continues to be run on present lines!'

WANLIP COUNTRY PARK - LEICESTERSHIRE. LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.

Wanlip Country Park near Leicester, due to be opened in 1990 is another Midlands gravel pit development. It is also the subject of the Design Feasibility Study connected with this thesis (see Section 2). Wanlip, like Kingsbury, is being created from a series of old gravel workings some of which have been in use for many years as sailing lakes and fishing grounds. But like Ferry Meadows it is also to be part of a larger park complex - a green wedge reaching into the centre of the city.

By nature of its history this area is already earmarked for development as a 'water park', therefore all design projects must be committed to an emphasis on water-based sports and to the preservation of 'lakeland' flora and fauna. However, the fact that this is also an urban fringe area with a local population who will want to use the park for other purposes than sailing and 'nature study' is a matter which is receiving serious attention at this early design stage.

It must be accepted that there are many casual visitors to Country Parks who do not wish to join clubs, sail, bird watch or be 'educated', but who, nevertheless, like to spend a few relaxing hours in countryside surroundings. (It has been noted from observation at a number of Country Parks that the facilities which receive most attention from local authorities are the ones which attract grants and additional funding, that is, sports and nature conservation; - "organisation speaking to organisation"?)

At Wanlip the Leicestershire County Council has already taken one step towards recognising the needs of the casual visitor by joining forces with a brewery company to carry out a canal side improvement scheme in the grounds of a local pub, - situated only a few yards outside the park perimeter. This scheme, part of the 'Keep Britain Beautiful' campaign, will provide a pleasant sitting out area as an extension to the 'Hope and Anchor's' facilities. It is hoped that this, the first 'flexible design' development at Wanlip will lead to other ways of giving this new Country Park a more positive and regional 'pleasure garden' style.

A NOTE ON 'PLEASURE GARDENS' AND THEIR ROLE IN THE 'COUNTRY PARK CONCEPT'.

Public pleasure gardens originated in the 17th. and 18th. centuries, perhaps the most famous of these being Vauxhall and Ranelagh. Here, within woodlands and arbours, Londoners could walk, eat and drink, listen to music, and in the evenings, dance and watch fireworks in the illuminated gardens. As fashions changed and the public became interested in other types of recreation these parks became associated with disreputable behaviour, fell into disuse and eventually disappeared. But the true spirit of the pleasure garden lingered on at the seaside, or in the provinces, particularly in Spa towns. 'The Heights of Abraham' at Matlock Bath is one such place. Originally laid out in the 1780's the Heights have recently been restored and are proving very popular with a new generation of pleasure seekers.

To suggest that local authorities should follow the example at Matlock when making provision for informal recreation would be unrealistic - they would have neither the spectacular 'natural facilities' of the Heights with which to work, nor indeed the capital required to carry out such a scheme. They could however 'learn by looking'. By analysing, for example, the way in which the design and management plans dovetail, bringing together all the elements required for this project, they would then begin to understand how this successful park has been created.

'THE HEIGHTS OF ABRAHAM' - MATLOCK BATH, DERBYSHIRE.
- A PLEASURE GARDEN.

The small town of Matlock Bath is dominated on its west side by Masson Hill which rises 800 ft from the valley floor. It was on the southern slopes of this limestone hill that the 'Heights of Abraham', a pleasure garden consisting of thirty five acres of woodland, was created some two hundred years ago. (So named because it resembled the 'Heights' below Quebec which were scaled by the troops of General Wolfe in 1759). At that time, in the 1780's, Masson was a desolate waste, riddled with centuries of lead mine workings, - a fact which suggests that the 'Heights'

must have been one of the first parks to be created on re-claimed industrial land.

The hotel owner who was awarded the property fenced in the area and planned a 'savage' garden. This he created by bringing in tons of soil and by planting exotic shrubs and a great variety of trees. His idea was to make a picturesque forest with zig zag pathways leading to vistas - giving an ever changing picture of the surrounding countryside.

The popular passion for 'romantic caverns' and the rising interest in mineralogy among the gentry led to the opening of the Rutland Cavern in 1810 and later, to the opening of the Great Masson Cave. A prospect tower was constructed in 1844, by unemployed lead miners, and a refreshment room was made available to visitors. The gardens followed the fortunes of the Spa town, reaching the height of their popularity in the 'railway era' of the latter part of the 19th. century, when thousands of day trippers poured into Matlock from the industrial towns of the Midlands.

The first phase of restoration was started in 1978/9 with the landscape. "Footpaths were rebuilt, over mature trees felled and original shrub borders rescued from the undergrowth. These areas were then planted in sympathy with the original 'savage' garden theme." Next a sound and light interpretation scheme was designed for the Great Rutland Cavern and this, together with the restored landscape, received a 'Come to Britain' Trophy award in 1981. 1983/84 saw the most dramatic innovation - the construction of a cable car system to enable visitors of all ages to reach the summit. There is now a new Visitor Centre near the Top Station housing a restaurant, coffee shop, licensed bar and gift shop. Picnic areas are provided and there is a children's playground.

THE PLEASURE GARDEN IN 1985.

The success of this pleasure garden can be measured by the ability of its organisers to carry out very clear objectives in an exciting and innovative manner. The introduction of an alpine-style cable car system into this historical parkland could - in

the wrong hands - have proved a total aesthetic disaster. As it is it works beautifully, fulfilling its practical function of getting visitors up and down from the summit and at the same time introducing a new aerial dimension to the original park theme of 'view points and vistas'. The route has been carefully designed to pass through a 'lane' of trees and then to swing perilously out over the open valley, with road and river below, offering spectacular views across High Tor to the moors beyond, an experience which would have delighted the 18th. century 'Romantics' who were first attracted to this place. The whole concept, the mechanism of towers and cables, the clusters of cars gliding silently through the trees and the Tree Top Centre, echoing the 'tension structure' theme in its balcony design, presents an elegant and lively counterpoint to the original garden lay-out.

From the summit a short walk down the zig-zags takes the visitor to the entrance of the Great Rutland Cavern - (from the element of air to that of earth.) Here at the entrance is a refreshment room, light and airy with large windows giving out onto the park. This is well placed for visitors to rest while waiting for the next guided tour or to come back to after their half hour trip down the mine. On the walls of this refreshment room are six panels each relating with the minimum of text and six well selected items - drawings, photographs, geological specimens etc. - a different aspect of the gardens development. They tell, in the space of time it takes to wander round with a cup of coffee, all a visitor needs to know to 'understand' the park. There are publications on specific subjects, for example, Mines and Caves and the minerals of Derbyshire for those who care to purchase them.

The 'sound and light' interpretation within the cavern which gives the visitor the experience of being in a working Derbyshire lead mine is of a very high standard and has been widely acclaimed by education authorities and by tourist organisations. The young guides who accompany parties on the cavern tours are enthusiastic, well trained in presentation methods and knowledgeable.

The maintenance of the garden is excellent - there is very little litter (and it was noted that the park rangers automatically picked up any they saw). Benches, summer houses and grottoes are in good repair and there is no graffiti. Picnic sites are imaginatively designed, one, for example, is furnished with long tables to enable whole 'parties' to sit together. The children's play area, situated in a hollow on a wooded promontory, is furnished with picnic benches as well as play equipment, so that adults can create 'base camps' for their children. The equipment is better designed than most, with slides and 'crawl through' tree trunks following the contours of the hollow.

By keeping the park theme simple and not trying too obviously to 'provide something for everyone' as at Elvaston - and other Country Parks - the management at 'The Heights of Abraham' have paradoxically achieved that goal. With a clear idea of 'what there is on offer' visitors to the 'Heights' can all enjoy the same views and the same excellent service, whether they are there for a simple family picnic, an educational outing or an expensive celebratory lunch in a countryside setting.

PACKAGING THE MYTH 1.

The commercial exploitation of 'places of interest' is hardly a new problem. There are many travellers' tales dating from quite early times which give graphic and even lurid accounts of such enterprises. In this country these crude exploitations probably reached their zenith in the inter-war years when, because of lack of adequate planning control, great damage was inflicted on many sensitive areas.

Today we have legislation and organisations set up to protect our 'heritage' and, generally speaking, these work remarkably well. But we also have the English Tourist Board and its twelve regional satellites, part of whose brief is to market tourism throughout the country. This is often done through 'Mini-Guides' which can be purchased for a few pence from most information centres and some travel agencies. Although attractively produced, some of these leaflet 'promotions' are highly questionable as, by over publicising their 'product', they do little to preserve from over-use some of our more fragile landscapes. To take one example - Penistone Hill Country Park near Haworth in West Yorkshire; this park is described in tourist literature as 'an area of moorland with free car parks, picnic sites, toilets and splendid panoramic views.' It is indeed beautiful but differs very little from many other stretches of moorland to be found in the vicinity. Why, therefore, was this particular patch selected for a Country Park? The answer is because it is in 'Brontë Country'.

'Brontë Country', like 'George Eliot Country', 'Emmerdale Country', 'Last of the Summer Wine Country' and many other 'countries' is the invention of the English Tourist Board. It is part of a tourist organisation ploy to 'spread the load' and relies for its effect on making play with literary, historical and even television fiction associations. The Tourist Board has a specialised interest in 'packaging the myth', exuding 'ambience' and creating landscapes of the mind.

Haworth is the 'Brontë' shrine and a commercial 'honey pot' beyond redemption. But it does at least contain the factual evidence of the existence of those three remarkably talented

sisters. There is the Parsonage containing their books, diaries and other possessions and one can feel grateful that they have been preserved. But what of the moorlands? The elusive landscape of heath and sky which helped to form the poetic imagery found in the writings of these sisters - how should this be protected? About two miles from Haworth out on the moors and approached by a rough path is a small waterfall known locally as the 'Brontë Falls'. Since the opening of the Penistone Hill Country Park it has been made 'easily accessible'. Now visitors are invited, through the publicity leaflet to "walk to the Brontë Falls... this was one of their favourite places." By drawing massive attention to a 'mere trickle of water and moss-covered rocks' (15) - a tiny stream which can only reveal its meaning to those who already have a deep and lasting affection for the work of Emily Brontë - the Tourist Board, by exciting the visitors' curiosity and trying to evoke instant rapport, has only succeeded in spoiling the atmosphere for those who really care about the place and in confusing those who do not have the key to this 'authored' landscape. It is a classic example of careless and insensitive marketing.

PACKAGING THE MYTH 2.SHERWOOD FOREST COUNTRY PARK - NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.

In the late 1970's Nottinghamshire County Council, with the support of the Countryside Commission, launched an experiment in marketing techniques at three of their Country Parks. One result of this experiment was the 'promotion' of Sherwood Forest Country Park. The strategy here was to 'overcome the bland Sherwood Forest image', to create special attractions to establish reasons for visiting the Forest and to extend the visiting season. The key to achieving this overall objective was to become in effect the 're-packaging' of 'Robin Hood and the Merry Greenwood'.

SHERWOOD - A DESCRIPTION.

Sherwood Forest Country Park situated twenty miles north of Nottingham and near the village of Edwinstowe is one of the county's main recreation areas. Because of its historical and legendary connection with Robin Hood it attracts not only local and national visitors but also a number of overseas tourists. In 1969 an area of the forest known as Birklands was designated as a Country Park and since that time has continued to be developed. The park now houses a Visitor Centre consisting of single storey hexagonal 'pods' arranged in clusters around a compound. Nearby, with direct access to the main road, is an extensive landscaped car park with picnic sites among the trees. The forest in this area is fairly open with silver birch interspersed with oak trees, some of which are very old. About half a mile from the Visitor Centre is the 'Major Oak', - Robin Hood's tree - waymarked footpaths are provided. Guided walks in the forest are led by Park Rangers in the summer season. The Visitor Centre contains an ambitious exhibition, 'The Legend of Robyn Hode and Merry Scherwode', based on the medieval ballad 'The Geste of Robyn Hode', which contains three of the most familiar greenwood adventures. Other facilities include a shop selling souvenirs and Robin Hood 'novelties', Robin Hood's Larder - a cafeteria selling drinks and snacks - and a Tourist Information Centre

which caters for the whole Sherwood area and employs a multi-lingual member of staff to assist foreign tourists. The total number of visitors for the year 1983 was estimated at 400,000. The marketing of the park has attracted a great deal of media coverage and 'show business' interest.

SHERWOOD - AN EVALUATION.

"I know not perfectly my paternoster as the priest it singeth.
But I know rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Earle of Chestre."

William Langland 1377.

The management staff at Sherwood start with a great advantage. They have a legend which has survived six hundred years of 'marketing' and shows no sign of falling off. Every visitor to the forest is part of a continuous 'captive audience', ever ready to be ensnared and charmed by the stories and adventures of 'England's most popular outlaw'. All they need is a little help in imagining correctly and they are able to visualise figures in Lincoln Green in every forest glade.

The designers have served them well. The exhibition at the Visitor Centre is not simply a display of artefacts but a theatrically presented series of three dimensional tableaux showing, for example, Robin and his Merry Men helping a penniless Knight by robbing a rich monk or capturing the Sheriff of Nottingham, all depicted in the style of a medieval manuscript. This is a clever device, for, by using these mythical stories as a 'vehicle', the designers have been able to incorporate a great deal of factual information about Forest Law - that special medieval code which controlled 'venison and vert' - without being tedious or 'educational'. This is an exhibition which has acquired something of a 'cult' following. Far from being bored by it, children return on repeat visits to look at favourite tableaux.

The publicity brochure offers "the choice of a peaceful walk through the forest" or "the activities of the visitor centre". It is the quality of the management of the park that makes this

choice possible. They have understood that for most visitors the walk to the Major Oak will be the high light of the trip, and have therefore created a subtle arrangement of way-marked paths leading to this famous landmark and back to the car park or visitors' centre, thus exercising a psychological control over visitor movement within the forest. Those who wish to take a peaceful walk simply avoid the waymarked paths.

As at Creswell, Sherwood relies heavily on 'Events' programmes to provide their visitors with entertainment. These include 'Nature Detective Workshops' and 'Forest Magic', a Saturday morning activity run with the assistance of volunteers. The new marketing techniques do seem to have brought new life to Sherwood and the ghost of Robin Hood appears robust enough to cope with it.

A SUMMARY OF 'PARK PERFORMANCE'.

Although it has been said by the Countryside Commission that there is no 'truly typical Country Park' - a point underlined by the wide variety of approaches to park provision revealed in this sample survey - it would nevertheless be reasonable to expect each park to show some commitment to the basic concept outlined by Davidson (see page 24 of this study) of 'providing a variety of recreational opportunities for the family near where they live and away from fragile areas.'

In the following summary each individual park is briefly assessed according to this principle of providing for visitors' needs and expectations.

1. CRESWELL CRAGS.

This is a bold scheme which brings the visitor into direct contact with a 'fragile area', i.e. the archaeological material on site. Its success as a Country Park depends on the ability of the management to keep a balance between conserving the site as an S.S.S.I. and providing for the interests of visitors. Much has been achieved by relating all visitor activities to the main archaeological theme, offering events at different levels of interpretation. There is, however, some dissatisfaction among visitors at not being able to enter the caves.

2. BOSWORTH FIELD.

The battlefield which is attractively laid out with picnic sites and woodland and canal walks, provides a popular recreation area for local residents and relates well to the original concept of Country Park provision. The interpretive centre does not impose itself on the casual visitor. It can be, and is, avoided by those who simply want to walk in the country. However, the exhibition area could be made more interesting for family visits, - more thought needs to be given to different levels of interpretation. Without departing from historical accuracy a simpler version of events could be more dynamically displayed.

3. THE WEALD AND DOWNLAND OPEN AIR MUSEUM.

Why this Open Air Museum has acquired Country Park status is not immediately discernable, as the principal reason for its existence is to provide a 'home' for representative examples of Wealden buildings. It is the addition of woodland walks, a family nature trail, picnic areas and the presence of a working charcoal burner's camp which turns this Museum into a 'honeypot' for casual visitors, school parties and tourists. The on-site interpretation service run by volunteers and 'Friends of the Museum' gives the local community direct involvement in their regional heritage and their presence in the park adds greatly to the visitors' enjoyment and understanding of the setting and the exhibits.

4. ELVASTON CASTLE COUNTRY PARK.

The management at Elvaston started with good intentions but the scheme has proved to be unrealistically grandiose for the area. Conceived as something of a County status symbol in 1972 the planners envisaged a park which would attract visitors from all parts of the country. This has not happened and the park provisions, including formal gardens and a privately run riding school, are not geared to the needs of the local community, i.e. the majority of people who use the park. The park is used, but not in the way it was planned with zoned areas for particular activities. If Elvaston is to survive as a 'peoples park' it needs totally re-designing.

5. SEVEN SISTERS COUNTRY PARK.

Despite criticism of the Visitor Centre Seven Sisters does, on the whole, succeed as a Country Park, as it represents a controlled recreation area within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. By providing access to the coast, well-designed car parks away from the shore and amenities such as guided walks, trails and an information service, together with facilities for the elderly and the handicapped, it fulfils its function of providing recreational opportunities for all the family.

6. KINGSBURY WATER PARK.

This is a Country Park designed around existing club activities. The Sailing and Hydroplane Clubs flourish in their own right, but to succeed as a recreational provision for the local population the management needs to put more effort into attracting the casual visitor. The amenities of the park, lakes, woodlands, etc. are excellent and well maintained, but totally under-used. Very little is done to 'market the product'.

7. FERRY MEADOWS.

It is clear from the recent report on Ferry Meadows by Deyan Sudjic (see Case Study) that management goals at this park could be somewhat at variance with what is really required by the visitors. Casual visitors would welcome more entertainment - such as the miniature railway provides - safer swimming areas and extended cafe facilities. Management is perhaps too concerned with conservation matters at this urban fringe Country Park where enjoyment of recreation should be the prime concern.

8. WANLIP COUNTRY PARK.

This park in the making has reached a crucial stage in its development. Much can be learned from studying other parks and from discussing the needs of particular organisations, but if this scheme is to succeed more attention must be given to local needs and to public opinion.

9. THE HEIGHTS OF ABRAHAM.

This is a highly professional design and management project, wholeheartedly committed to family recreation. It attracts a wide variety of visitor and can offer a range of recreational experiences all within the compass of the main park theme.

10. SHERWOOD FOREST COUNTRY PARK.

Sherwood is an excellent example of how a Country Park should

be run. Plentifully supplied with landscaped car parks, picnic sites, toilets, shops, cafes and a lively Visitor Centre it presents an enjoyable experience for those on family outings. By the use of modern marketing techniques the Robin Hood theme is used to enhance the image of the Forest as a whole - yet the pleasure park element is confined to a relatively small area. Visitors have the choice of taking part in the events and entertainments provided at the Visitor Centre or of walking in the peace of the Forest.

This park is extremely popular with the people of Nottinghamshire and the management policy of encouraging community participation in the design/management programme ensures that this popularity will continue to grow.

CONCLUSION.

One of the main points to emerge from this limited study of Country Parks is the importance of continuous design and management 'after care' to protect, enhance and indeed to justify the initial investment. Though lack of money must always be seen as a strong contributory factor to a park's 'poor performance' it cannot always be said to be the basic reason for it. In this evaluation, parks which are shown to have site management problems are also the ones which appear to suffer most from fundamental faults in design and policy making. As Ian Laurie has pointed out, "Once the decision to develop sites as Country Parks has been made then it is a false concept to expect them to remain substantially as they are for all time and not to apply design principles and skills to them on a continuous basis": (17). Two authorities who are developing such a 'continuous design programme' as an integral part of their recreational schemes are Nottinghamshire County Council and the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation.

In Nottinghamshire the aim is to provide and promote a complimentary series of parks and recreation services throughout the county. Each park is of a different character and provides for different needs. For example, Holme Pierrepont specialises exclusively in water sports, Rufford houses a nationally known craft centre and sculpture collection, Creswell is a base for archaeology and nature study and Sherwood is a pleasure park for family outings. The Interpretive Design Unit based at Rufford Mill is responsible for all promotional and interpretive matters within the Countryside Division. The team undertake research; design, produce and erect exhibitions and produce soundtracks and film for the A/V programmes; "Enabling costs to be reduced significantly and new exhibitions and programmes to be introduced more speedily than heretofore." (18). An 'area management' scheme has been set up to identify and analyse problems and opportunities associated with informal recreation. Volunteers under the 'SPADEWORK' banner are encouraged by rangers to help with park development and maintenance. In the Erewash Valley, for example, voluntary groups have cleared rubbish, laid all-weather paths

and built bridges and steps, while pupils from the local schools have been engaged in tree planting.

Community involvement is also a feature of the Park Ranger Service run by the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation. This service, which is a Manpower Services Commission project, has been established to 'encourage community participation in the care of the new park systems'. It is hoped in this way to 'offer people an initiating role in shaping the quality of their outdoor surroundings' and to bring up a new environmentally aware generation. The Warrington and Runcorn authority understand the importance of deploying well trained rangers in their urban fringe parks and they employ a strong team. Under the leadership of the Head Ranger - who works alongside the designers and managers - there are over forty full time and part-time rangers working throughout the five major park systems. A large proportion of their time is spent patrolling and meeting people. Children are encouraged to join the Ranger Helpers Club - 'thousands of children in Warrington and Runcorn are currently members and the rangers have contacts with eighty eight schools'. These children help with 'events' and participate in simple maintenance tasks. Robert Tregay, writing in 'Landscape Design' (June 1985), finds that "the active presence of the Park Ranger Service working in the parks and with the community has had a profound effect upon the opportunities for landscape design." He observes that "it is now possible to introduce facilities which in other parks would be misused or vandalised. These include such items as band-stands, sculptures, shelters, butterfly gardens, ponds for teaching purposes and amphitheatres for outdoor concerts and events. The existence of this service has enabled landscape designers to innovate in a way too frequently confined to student exercises.... and garden festivals. It has also helped make feasible the wholesale establishment of new landscape frameworks, amongst which according to all available evidence, people actually want to live."

"Getting our country clean and our people beautiful that is a work of art." Ruskin's words seem to echo down the years. It is these 'new landscape frameworks' with their emphasis on

community participation and the need to bring the Country Park to the people which will form the content of the concluding chapter of this study.

Chapter 4

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Chapter 5

INTRODUCTION.

Since the late 1970's there has been a general move by local planning authorities towards integrating the Country Park concept with a more specific environmental regeneration strategy. Merseyside and Greater Manchester in particular, among the metropolitan authorities, have seen in the Country Park ideal the possibility for creating 'link parks' which will bring countryside recreation into the heart of the cities, a possibility made feasible by the pressing need to clean up large areas of uncommitted or derelict land left by declining or obsolete industries within these metropolitan areas. These ideas are not of course new; Ebenezer Howard, 'the father of the Garden City movement' had, in the late 19th. century, envisaged ideal habitats for about 30,000 people. These were to be informally planned, encircled by green belts and to have walkways and parks penetrating the city.

Similar ideas were proposed by Patrick Abercrombie in his regional report on Greater London. (Greater London Plan 1944). He also advocated 'greenways' based on river valleys, a suggestion which led to the setting up of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority in 1967, the purpose of which was to create a twenty mile long park complex penetrating the North East of Greater London. Such 'green wedge' concepts, albeit on a smaller scale are now becoming a standard element for recreational provision in many regional structure plans. Leicestershire, for example, in its 'role forward' plans to the 1990's envisages five such wedges: - "A new policy is proposed to protect some key green wedges between selected communities. In these cases built environments will be resisted to avoid communities merging together and losing their identity." (1). Regional identity and community involvement are key factors in this new concept. Many authorities are aware that the isolated urban fringe Country Park is not proving so popular as was at first imagined. Many are under-used, especially at mid-week, despite the effort to make them 'educationally viable'. 'Bringing the parks to the people' could in the long term prove to

be a more satisfactory way of solving at least some of the cities outdoor leisure problems.

Making Good between Town and Country.

Large scale recreational developments in the public sector depend for their success on a variety of expenditure programmes and complex negotiations between the various authorities concerned. Any change in government policy, such as the proposed abolition of the Metropolitan County Councils, could have a devastating effect upon long term environmental regeneration schemes, as, for example, in the river valleys strategy for Greater Manchester or the greening campaign in the West Midlands. (2).

One means of securing continuity for these major schemes is through Groundwork Trusts. The initiative for these 'Groundwork' environmental improvement experiments came from the Countryside Commission who, for the past ten years have supported a number of urban fringe management projects, - thereby gaining valuable experience in this field. "When the Commission proposed that the same principle might be applied to a whole 'free standing' town, St. Helens in Merseyside, the then Secretary of State for the Environment insisted that this project should take the form of a Trust, - designed as a mechanism to bring together public, private and voluntary organisations in a co-ordinated effort to upgrade the environment." (3). This Charitable Trust was to receive in its first five years special funding from the government to help local councils clear the backlog of industrial dereliction, but the main function of the Trust was to promote matching schemes through co-operation with industry, private landowners and voluntary groups and also to offer special design services and expertise on 'project finance'. The success of this scheme has now led to the extension of the idea on a national basis.

On a recent tour of 'Operation Groundwork' in Knowsley and St. Helens it was possible to explore some of the different approaches to landscape regeneration and recreation management being made in these areas. The particular point of this site visit was to look at the way in which 'Groundwork' is (a) -

involving the local community in the design and after care of schemes; (b) - developing 'natural landscapes' designed to be self sustaining and rich in wild life; and (c) achieving a commercial return through some of its projects.

Stockbridge Village, Knowsley, Merseyside.

The urban fringe problems of Knowsley have been brought about by a post-war planning development of unbelievable ineptitude. This overspill housing estate, consisting of high rise flats and blocks of maisonettes, dotted about a wide area of flat agricultural land was set up in the 1960's. It was presumed that eighty percent of the estate dwellers would have cars. In reality only fifteen percent owned their own transport. The site contained no recreation facilities; thirty percent of the tenants became unemployed through the closure of a car factory and very few had any previous experience of living in the countryside. The result was that most of the population drifted away, empty flats were vandalised and the people left on the estate became apathetic about their surroundings. After inspection by the Minister of State for the Environment and the local council the housing stock was sold to the Stockbridge Village Trust, who are now engaged upon a programme of re-development. Operation Groundwork is working on site liaising with schools and the local community to provide a new functional landscape. Areas of old woodland are being replanted, there are technical difficulties here because of vandalism, but it has been decided to allow weeds to grow to give protective covering for the young trees. A B.M.X. track is being constructed quite close to the houses with the approval of the residents - who prefer to see where their children are. Man Power Services are carrying out this work. The green deserts between the flats are being contoured and the open meadow land in which this estate is situated is to be 'gang-mown' once a year by the local council and the grass sold for cattle-cake. A section of motorway which was constructed on the edge of the estate after the flats had been built is proving to be a major environmental threat and Groundwork, grant aided by Knowsley, is

planting trees to create a noise barrier and wind shelter. Using ash, willow, oak, mountain ash and briars this structure planting is designed to create a sculptured mass.

As well as turning this 'prairie' into a liveable-in parkland Operation Groundwork are trying to win the confidence of local farmers. The farmers have suffered greatly from vandalism since the coming of the estate and the motorway and some have stopped trying to grow high grade crops and are using the land for grazing. Some are beginning to show interest in Groundwork's suggestion that they should diversify and exploit the potential for leisure and sport; for example, - riding, angling, shooting syndicates and farm trails. But they are still uneasy about ideas for creating 'wild life areas' on their own property.

Prescot Reservoir.

This is a Country Park landscape in the making. The North West Water Authority, because of pollution problems, built this reservoir underground, leaving mounds from excavations and some very poor 'lollipop' tree planting. The whole site adjoins Knowsley Park which was landscaped by 'Capability Brown' in the 18th. century. Operation Groundwork are attempting to 'match up' the quality of the landscape and to provide amenity and nature conservation benefits as well as a productive grass area which will bring in a commercial return. This project is receiving grant aid from the Countryside Commission.

St. Helens.

St. Helens is a 'scene of widespread dereliction resulting from two centuries of intense industrial activity', and could be said to epitomise the problems of all Northern industrial areas. But it is also a fascinating shattered landscape of industrial archaeology. The diversity and extent of this strange landscape is part of the town's history and has been recognised as such by the Groundwork team who are prepared to argue the case for a change in perception rather than for extensive changes

in the landscape structure. Whether they succeed in persuading 'interested parties' to their point of view remains to be seen, but there are hopeful signs. The 'Friends of Operation Groundwork', after hearing a presentation of the History of St. Helens given by lecturers from Liverpool University, have become very keen to see new emphasis placed on preserving and developing features of interest which mark the unique contribution made by St. Helens to the Industrial Revolution. These include the 'Sankey Navigation' which was the first working canal in England and the Pilkington Glass works founded in the 1820's and still flourishing. The Department of the Environment has allowed a Derelict Land Grant for the construction of a net-work of greenways to follow the lines of the canals and disused railway tracks. It is considered (by Groundwork) that not much modification is needed on the waste tips which over the years have accumulated a magnificent range of flora and fauna. Unusual plants follow the trail of industrial devastation, for example, plants more usually found in limestone areas such as yellow wort and wild mignonette are growing in the lime rich waste produced by the Leblanc process - a technique previously much used in the chemical industry. Also in the wasteland around St. Helens is a saline pond - created from spoil from the glass works - harbouring *Scurfus Maretimus*, a plant associated with coastal salt marshes.

Sutton Mill Dam - a new 'greenway' on the outskirts of St. Helens demonstrates the influence 'Groundwork' thinking is having on the community. This overgrown site with a meandering stream was due to be tidied up with the aid of a derelict land grant, - plans were in hand to grass the area and straighten the stream - but with pressure from residents who formed themselves into a Local Amenity Group the area is now a 'low maintenance' informal site and is already attracting a variety of water-birds.

Sankey Valley Country Park. St. Helens, Merseyside.

This is an excellent example of the 'Country Park' come to town. Sankey Valley is an established 'greenway' informally

landscaped to bring the countryside experience into a built up area and caters for the usual pursuits of walking, riding, and fishing. One of its main features is the St. Helens canal. This canal, (the Sankey Navigation) built by Henry Berry in 1757, provided a waterway to the town centre of St. Helens along which was transported the raw materials for the manufacturing industries. It finished as a working canal in the 1950's and became silted up and neglected. Recently, as part of the Country Park's development, Operation Groundwork has been involved in a survey of its whole length. The silted up stretch through Sankey Park provides a variety of water based habitats and 'Groundwork Conservation Volunteers', - many of them schoolchildren, help to work this stretch, keeping the water flowing and the reedbeds protected. (This park also comes under the 'umbrella' of the Park Ranger Service discussed in the conclusion to Chapter four and hosts many family activities and community events.)

'Operation Groundwork' are clearly doing the job they set out to do. Their work in the North West demonstrates yet again that, with a well thought out project policy and a team of skilled professionals, it is possible to capture the interest of the general public and to motivate them towards making a practical contribution to the care of their own environment.

ECOLOGY PARKS; - are another way of bringing the countryside to the town.

In recent years a number of local authorities have shown a willingness to release vacant land in cities on a temporary basis for 'interim management in the interests of the community'. (4). One such scheme has been the William Curtis Ecological Park near Tower Bridge on the South Bank of the Thames. Created in 1977 from an old lorry park, obtained on a five year lease, this was the first 'consciously created City Nature Park in London.' The Ecological Parks Trust who manage this venture set themselves four main objectives:-

To learn about urban ecology and how it works.

To learn as much as possible about land management and conservation in towns, - how one goes about getting tenure and how much work is needed in man hours and materials.

To help young people gain some insight into the natural processes at work, and to prove that Ecology can be studied in towns.

To make the park a magnet for the local community and other visitors.

The Park, which attracts some 11,000 visitors a year, contains a freshwater pond, a developing woodland and meadow grasses of various kinds. Most of the visitors are pupils on school visits and indeed, the main benefit of the park to the local community has been as an outdoor educational centre for primary school children. A warden and an experienced primary school teacher are based at the site to give guidance and to co-ordinate school groups. (Having gained an extra three years on the original lease this Park is to close in the summer of 1985 to make way for flats and offices.) As an educational venture it is obviously successful; but how is this site 'perceived' by the ordinary passer-by? Entering the William Curtis Park from the rubble and demolition of Vine Street one is struck first of all not by the 'interesting and diverse habitats providing a focal point for educational use', but by the startling 'close up' of Tower Bridge juxtaposed with a field of wild flowers; and it is evident from the number of

tourists photographing this scene that this is the main 'park attraction' for the casual visitor. It is an impression worthy of consideration, for if Country Parks in the city are to attract people as enjoyable places to visit, they must be able to offer more than basic instruction in conservation methodology.

At Lavender Pond, down river of Tower Bridge, The London Borough of Southwark have 'provided both the funds and the initiative' to transform two acres of the former Lavender Dock into a permanent Nature Park. It is here, in this sophisticated version of 'William Curtis', that we find the clue to a new style of urban greening. Lavender Pond Nature Park designed by Land Use Consultants shows how a specific urban setting can be successfully integrated with a 'Country Park concept', combining both conservation and informal recreation interests. This small dockland area is situated between Rotherhithe Street and a newly built housing estate in a U bend of the river Thames at Rotherhithe. The one acre pond has adjoining wetlands and flood meadows. An alder wood has been planted on the southern edge of the pond and a protective bank of mixed woodland to the East. A roughly hexagonal arrangement of board walks projects into the lake leading through the marshlands to look out over deeper water. A small pumping station has been retained in the centre of the site and this forms an architectural link with surrounding buildings. A series of paved areas and 'gangway' walks around the pond link the estate with the main road, shops and bus routes. Colour and materials are well used. The elegant vermilion metal railings create a durable barrier without obscuring the view of the water and the detailing of textured paving, wooden seating, bollards and a swing bridge give the site a lighthearted 'nautical' air without ever descending into pastiche. This is an excellent design, - uncompromisingly urban but retaining a delicate balance between the naturalness of the 'water park' and its industrial setting.

THE FUTURE OF PARK DESIGN.

"There is a dichotomy in the minds of planners and others between THE PARK as a distinct entity and focus for social activity and recreation and THE ENVIRONMENT seen as a backdrop for recreation rather than as A SPACE DESIGNED FOR IT".

(Report on Conclusions, Liverpool Congress 1984, 'Green Towns and Cities'.

The design of the Country Parks is becoming a contentious issue. The ecological approach to landscaping has dominated the 'Country Park concept' since its inception, despite the fact that these parks were to be specifically designed 'for large numbers of people to take part in informal recreation..'. In its funding and management schemes the Countryside Commission has strongly supported this approach by laying great emphasis on conservation education and in encouraging the formation of wild life habitats. It is understandable that such concerns should take precedence in a country where so much land has been - and continues to be - devastated by industrial activity. (Chemical dumping, for example, is still very poorly controlled and there is no national register of polluted sites.) It is also heartening to know that wide spread public awareness of environmental issues has led to an upsurge in voluntary conservation pursuits. However, there is a danger that the rich variety of traditional and regional landscaping forms to be found both in town and country could well be swept aside in favour of a blanket policy of 'greening' and tree planting. Committed ecologists have been known to present their point of view in somewhat exaggerated terms, arguing that manicured grass and carpet flower bedding are the only alternatives to their grandiose conception of continuous 'wilderness' meandering through the cities. This is simply not so. The English flower garden in all its delightful forms, from cottage garden to suburban 'gardenesque', is still alive and flourishing. The designs of Loudon or Gertrude Jekyll could even today provide inspiration for small neighbourhood parks. Such parks will be needed in the linear greenways to be used for simple quiet activities where

convenience of access and safety are more important to the residents than acreage of space.

The problem with many of the new Country Parks, especially the 'gravel pit' variety, is that they lack design content. Feeling for shape and form, spatial progressions, well sited buildings and visual links are all sacrificed in the pursuit of 'naturalness' and that managerial zoning which passes for design in some local authority planning departments. Unfortunately, flat lowland and urban fringe landscape is not always immediately attractive to people seeking informal recreation and unless it is defined in some way it soon appears monotonous. As Ian Laurie has said, "In this country as a whole there does seem to have been a reluctance for landscape designers to have been brought in or otherwise become involved in the formulation of inter-related design and management objectives. As a result we find the 'low key' approach has manifested itself widely and a certain timidity has become apparent in the policies adapted towards the visual enhancement of Country Parks." (5).

In 1977 the Arts Council of Great Britain in collaboration with the RIBA, the Landscape Institute and the Sunday Times held a competitive exhibition called 'Art into Landscape', - schemes to enliven public places. This was the second of such competitions, a previous one had been held in 1974, but no funds were available for realising the proposals and none were implemented. The 1977 exhibition was to have more permanent results. Ten authorities offered landscape problems as competition briefs and it was hoped that these authorities with the help of an Arts Council Grant would provide the money for the realisation of some of the best schemes, - in this instance to make appropriate and lasting memorials to Silver Jubilee Year. The competition was open to all with classes for professionals, amateurs and children. Entrants had to design a project selected from one of the ten briefs. These ranged from sites in inner cities to Kingsbury Country Park. There were over 1,000 entries and 150 high quality and innovative designs were selected for exhibition. The thirteen designs for a look-out over Kingsbury Water Park displayed enough

talent to furnish every other water park in the Midlands. But there is no look out over Kingsbury. Enquiries made in connection with this study revealed that only two of the ten local authorities had implemented designs and that at Kingsbury the 'money had run out'.

There is the will and there is the talent, but who is going to provide the much needed backing which will gain recognition for these designers and the money to implement the work? A more positive approach is needed from the Department of the Environment towards the design of Country Parks. It is little use putting out money for reclamation schemes if there is no funding available for design development. Local authorities too, should look for higher levels of professionalism if they wish to succeed in bringing together and giving leadership to the many privately sponsored bodies and voluntary movements whose concern it is to make this country green and beautiful.

Chapter 5

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SECTION 2

The Country Park Concept.

A Feasibility Study for the Design and Development of
the proposed Wanlip Country Park.

'THE INNOVATIVE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER OF PARK LANDSCAPES AND OF PARK INTERPRETATION'.- AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

As Ken Baynes has remarked, 'How you define design depends on what you are trying to do'. What is 'innovation'? Newness, change, breaking new ground, an ability to reach solutions by using unconventional methods? The innovatory element in a design process can be triggered off simply by a change in attitude to the matter in hand, - replacing, for example, 'problem to be solved' with 'opportunity to be grasped'. William Kingston, (1) in his essay 'Between the Dreamer and the Mandarin', cites innovation as being the link between two kinds of human activity:-

- (a) the doers - the active ones who demand of something new that it can be touched and measured before they will take it seriously and -
- (b) the thinkers who operate in a world of imagination.

A fairly simplistic view - as all artist/designers need to have a foot in both camps otherwise they would never produce any concrete evidence of their ideas. However, Kingston does go on to make a further point on this subject, one which has greater significance because it gives a sharp insight into the innovatory procedure, - he is speaking of the difference between entrepreneurship and innovation:-

"For the entrepreneur the components, the 'building blocks', already exist and do not have to be developed, - what is new is the way they are put together. With innovation newness and uncertainty are more in evidence than in entrepreneurship. The area where imagination has to make up for the absence of reliable 'hard information' is greater and the work more concerned with the future than the present. Innovation is intrinsically more difficult than entrepreneurship because the uncertainties of performance of its raw materials are always so much greater".

Every design method has built in adaptability - or should have - to accommodate modifications, but the innovatory process requires a particularly long reach - to cross the boundaries of

other disciplines and to take on board ideas which might to some seem totally outside the scope of a designer's job. But the essence of this methodology lies in the recognition that no one discipline has the monopoly of expertise. The interpretive exhibition at Creswell Crags, for example, is largely the creation of the archeologist/site manager not of a specialist 3D designer; - "The design brief was originated by myself (i.e. site manager)... at the stage when proposals were a going concern our internal interpretive unit was involved. The process was a team activity, comprising site manager, designer, A/V technician and joiner". Innovatory ideas currently being explored in this field of design include:-

The acceptance of the impermanence of some environmental projects and the need to develop new approaches to land use and conservation - (see The William Curtis Ecological Park Chapter 5).

The use of marketing techniques inspired by the 'media' - (The Sherwood Group Chapter 4).

The acceptance of management and organisation as a 'design area' - i.e. design recognised as a continuous process, not just a one off job. (see The Wanlip Study, Section 2).

The use of the designer as a catalyst-feeding in ideas from 'outside agencies' and - it is hoped - speeding up decision making.

The complex structure of the landscape - this accumulation of ideas, motives, realities, histories and mythologies - presenting as it does simultaneously both the past and the present, cannot be subjected to the single minded 'goal reaching problem solving' world of product design. To understand and interpret the richness and variety of the prospect before us requires a broader and more flexible approach.

It could be argued that the designer who hopes imaginatively to exploit the environment for the enjoyment of others should bring to his work not only knowledge and sensibility but some measure of that moral judgement which Norman Potter (2) believes to be part of the working equipment of every artist/designer; -

"If society is geared to satisfactions on the cheap, (novelty, sensation) the designer has a special responsibility to straighten himself out in that respect; to decide where he stands." However such purity of purpose is not immediately available to the designer of Country Park facilities, - (the paths of righteousness do not run smooth) and many compromises may have to be made in the initial stages to carry the public along - if they do not like what is offered they won't accept it. Country Parks are for people, all the people. A designer in this situation must understand that the 'goal to be reached' will very likely resemble a moving target.

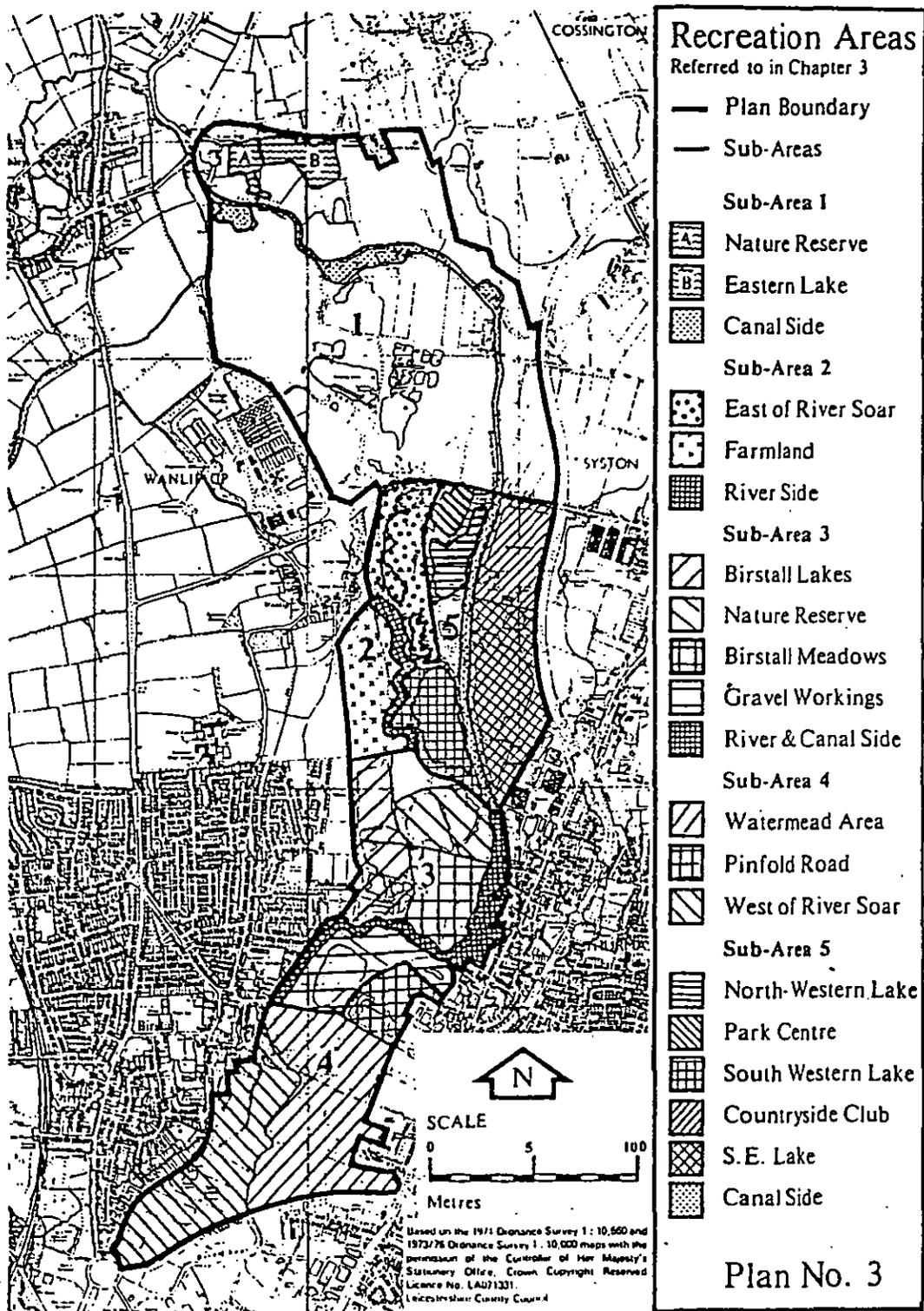
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Sheila Marshall, 1985.

WANLIP ACTION AREA — MANAGEMENT SCHEME



Source: Wanlip Action Area Local Plan.
Leicestershire County Council 1983.
MAP 1. (Section 2.)

REPORT ON AN ON-GOING FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SUB AREA 5 OF THE WANLIP ACTION AREA LOCAL PLAN.

INTENTION.

This is a design participation experiment set up to explore the innovatory role of the artist/designer. The exercise is being carried out with the co-operation of the Leicestershire County Council's Planning Department who responded to the request for a practical environmental design project on which to base this study.

BACKGROUND.

The Wanlip Action Area (Map. 1) "is located in part of the valley floors of the rivers Soar and Wreake and forms a 'green wedge' penetrating into the northern urban fringe of the city of Leicester. The area has been and continues to be worked for alluvial sand and gravel which has been used primarily in construction projects which have fostered the growth of Leicester. In many cases the workings have been left unrestored and have filled with water... For the residents of Leicester and the surrounding villages the proximity of this space represents a potential recreation area... The presence of water in the gravel pits, Grand Union Canal and the rivers suggests a number of recreational uses."

(Wanlip Action Area
Survey and Written Statement 1983).

Accordingly the County Council prepared a plan to attempt to fulfil the recreational use of the area and to provide a clear statement of acceptable future use of the land. In doing so the intention was to resolve conflicts between and with the following interested groups; - mineral operators, land owners, farmers, local residents and recreational users.

This document 'THE WANLIP ACTION AREA LOCAL PLAN - Report of Survey and Written Statement' - to be referred to in this report as the Action Area Plan - was published in June 1983 and officially

adopted on the 3rd. of January 1985.

The Wanlip Action Area Draft Management Scheme - to be known as the Draft Management Scheme - was published in January 1985 and a discussion of its contents and proposals will form part of this report.

THE FEASIBILITY STUDY.

The preparation of the Draft Management Scheme was set out as an objective of the Action Area Plan. (Written Statement). What follows is a summary of selected items from the Draft Management Scheme which relate directly to, and provide a referential framework for, 'THE DESIGNER'S DIARY'. It should be noted, however, that preliminary work was carried out on the feasibility study - drawings and discussions - before the publication of the Scheme. The observations made by the designer on the contents of the Draft Management Scheme are part of the developing design process.

CONSTRAINTS.

The Action Area Plan establishes the range of permissible land uses and forms of development. But there are other factors to be considered in deciding what type of recreation should take place.

- (1) Flood Levels; - the area is within the essential washlands of the rivers Soar and Wreake. This restricts the form of buildings that can be constructed and restricts areas of tree planting.
- (2) The area has high ground water levels, holes fill naturally with water and the land is always wet. This restricts its range of economic uses. It is however a factor which the County Council and others have chosen to exploit by creating lakes and adapting wet gravel pits to recreational use.
- (3) The water quality is satisfactory for fish life but would require treatment for public swimming. Such treatment

Membership of Countryside Organisations

Surveys of leisure time activities show that visiting the countryside is one of the most popular outdoor pastimes — usually second only to gardening. Increased interest in the countryside is most graphically shown by the following table, charting the rapid growth over the last twenty years in membership of organisations concerned with the countryside, conservation and recreation.

Table 2 Membership of 'Countryside' Bodies

	National Membership Totals			
	1960	1970	1975	1978
British Field Sports Society	20,000	21,000	43,000	47,000
British Horse Society	6,000	17,000	22,000	27,000
Camping Club	52,000	110,000	157,000	178,000
Caravan Club*	44,000	84,000	150,000	193,000
County Trusts for Nature				
Conservation	3,000	57,000	107,000	120,900
Cyclists' Touring Club	21,000	10,500	11,300	32,000
National Trust	97,000	226,000	539,000	775,000
Pony Club	30,000	33,000	45,000	50,000
Ramblers' Association	11,300	22,000	32,000	29,000
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	10,800	65,500	205,000	250,800

* Family membership figures

(Source: *Digest of Countryside Recreation Statistics 1979*)

Visitors to the Leicestershire Countryside

The strong upward trend in the number of countryside visitors during the 1960's and early 1970's now seems to be slowing, but numbers at those sites attracting mainly half-day trippers have held up well. The following table shows recent visitor numbers at Leicestershire attractions for which figures are available:

Table 3 Numbers of Visitors to Country Parks & Picnic Areas

	1972	1977	1981	Distance from Leicester
Bradgate Park	750,000	900,000	1,200,000	5 miles
Swithland Wood	50,000	65,000		7 miles
Beacon Hill	250,000	270,000	348,000	9 miles
Broombriggs Farm	—	50,000	50,500	9 miles
Outwoods	50,000	60,000	60,000	10 miles
Groby Pool	—	60,000	60,000	5 miles
Charnwood Forest (Part)	1,100,000	1,405,000	1,718,500	
Rutland Water	—	400,000	400,000	30 miles
Foxton Locks	40,000	60,000	94,500	13 miles
Burrough Hill	—	20,000	21,750	16 miles

SOURCE: Wanlip Action Area Local Plan.

Leicestershire County Council 1983.

TABLE 1. (Section 2.)

would have to be continuous because of ground water flow and periods of flood..

- (4) The communities of Wanlip, Birstall, Syston and Thurmaston are in close proximity to the plan area. The planning authority requires that impact on these surrounding communities be limited by imposing controls on noise, levels of traffic, design, car parking, landscaping and times of opening. There is no scope for intrusive uses such as hydroplaning.
- (5) Because of concern by local communities that on street car parking will increase following the establishment of any new use of the area, it will be necessary to provide sufficient parking space on site and to ensure that any pricing policy for parking does not encourage street parking.
- (6) The area is crossed by a number of footpaths and bridleways. These help to provide good access to the action area but reduce security and restrict opportunities to charge for entry.
- (7) The urban fringe location, although providing a local market, does to some extent detract from the area. These effects include traffic noise, overhead telephone wires, the typical fringe use for horse grazing and apparent neglect.

MARKET TRENDS.

The Report of Survey (Action Area Plan) detailed the anticipatory levels of growth in countryside recreation - see (Table 1). Although this was sufficient justification for the Plans proposals, from the management and marketing view point, there is a need to identify more precisely who the consumers will or could be, what they want, when and at what cost. This information can then be used in determining the facilities that should be provided and by whom.

Water Recreation.

Angling.

Any new water in central Leicestershire can usually be let to a fishing club without difficulty. Fishing properly regulated is compatible with most other water sports.

Sailing/Board Sailing.

There is a forecast demand of 400-500 sailors requiring a hundred acres of water space in the Leicestershire area in the period to 1991. Some of this demand will be met at Rutland Water but increased travelling costs will mean an increase in demand nearer the city.

Water Skiing.

Problems of safety, noise and disturbance to water make it impossible to share water with skiers except by time zoning arrangements.

Swimming.

An open air swimming facility would be an attraction but the cost implications of safety, supervision and treatment to protect against water born transmission of disease should be carefully considered.

Demand.

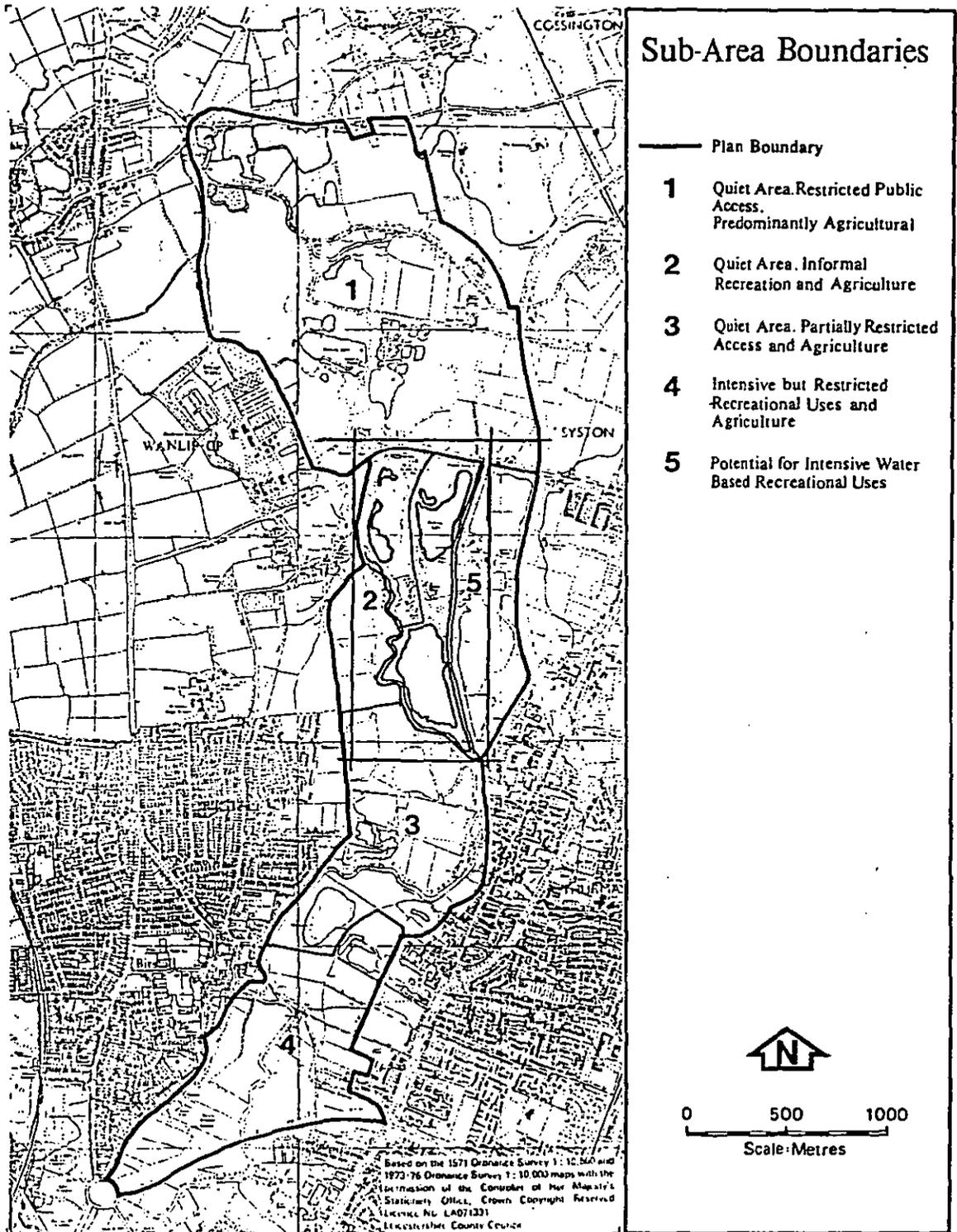
The peak times for recreational activities are summer weekends and Bank Holidays. This has implications for staff requirements, promotional objectives and the level of enjoyment obtained by the visitors.

Age.

Participation in countryside recreation is fairly evenly spread throughout age groups, although types of activity vary according to the age of participants.

WANLIP ACTION AREA PLAN

PLAN No.12



Source: Wanlip Action Area Local Plan.
Leicestershire County Council 1983.
MAP 2. (Section 2.)

THE COUNTRY PARK.

"In order to take advantage of the recreational opportunity it is recommended that the Southern and Middle parts of the Wanlip Area as shown on Map 1. be developed as an Urban Fringe Country Park - hereinafter referred to simply as a Country Park as defined in the Countryside Act 1968."

For the purpose of this report only the middle of the plan area will be discussed in detail as this is the section chosen for the feasibility study. However, the complimentary nature of the southern area will be kept in mind as will the management advantages of treating the area as a single park.

It is suggested in the Draft Management Scheme that the southern area is 'ideally located for tapping the urban market', while the middle area is thought to be more orientated to the country than the city. There is good access to the middle section from Wanlip Road but there are currently no public bus services along this road. The area is therefore more likely to be used by people with cars. There is a potential here for diverting people from using other (over used?) sites by providing an attractive alternative*. It is possible that the forecast demand for sailing, board sailing and angling facilities could be met by the development of the gravel pits in this part of the park.

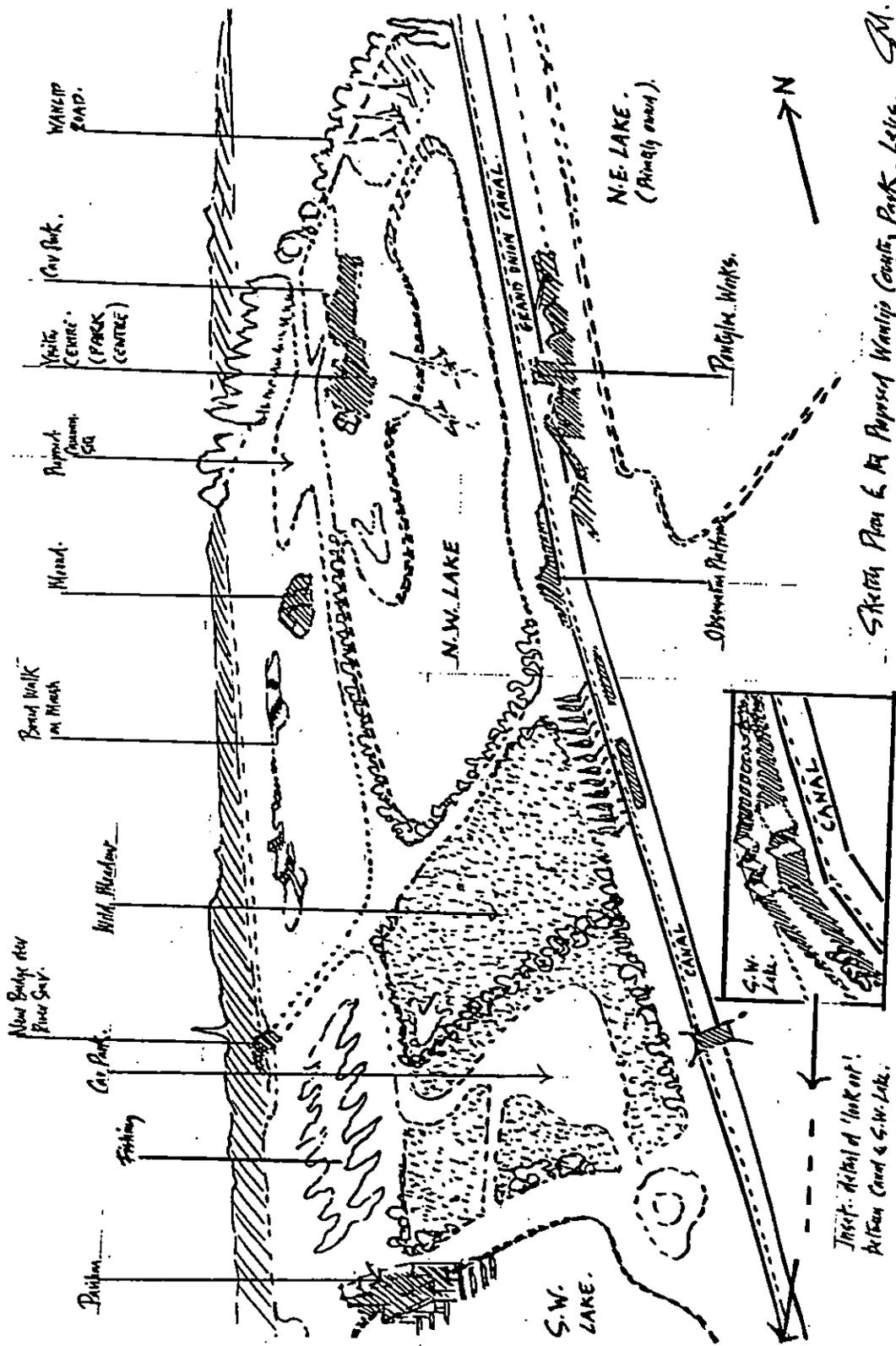
*The main strategic objective of the Action Area Plan was to provide an alternative recreational outlet to Charnwood Forest. The Draft Management Scheme qualifies this by stating "the positive aim of providing a public facility in its own right should be stressed rather than the negative aspect of discouraging people from going elsewhere".

SUB AREA 5 - See Map 2 for extent of Feasibility Study/Design Brief.

Sub area 5 is one of the two key recreation areas containing both publicly and privately managed sites.

It subdivides into 6 main areas.

- (a) The North Western sailing lake (owned by the Leicestershire Education Authority).



Sketch Plan for Proposed Wanlip Country Park. Leics. M. '84.

- (b) The proposed Park Centre.
- (c) The South West lake known as the Marina Lake.
- (d) The Canal side area - Grand Union Canal.

East of the canal are

- (e) The Wanlip Park Country Club and
- (f) The Waterskiing Lake - both in private ownership and to remain so as far as is known.

Sub-area 5, (a) (b) (c) and (d), together with a section of Sub area 2, i.e. The Riverside Strip and land East of the River Soar - see map 2, form the area considered in the design brief.

- (a) North Western lake - this lake will be developed as an outdoor pursuits centre. Training in a wide range of water sports will be provided. The main activity is and will continue to be sailing. The existing club fishing of the water will continue. Time zoning arrangements may be used. The Education Authority intend at some time in the future to provide a base for changing, storage and equipment and for teaching purposes. A definite site for this building has yet to be chosen. The small lake to the south of the main lake will continue as a fishing lake and will not be used for other activities.
- (b) The Proposed Park Centre - The area to the N.West of the 'education lake' will be occupied by the Park Centre. This will be the nucleus for main public access to the park. The main car park will be adjacent to the Centre and it is from here that the 'spine road' giving access to other areas of the park will start. Other parking places will be created off the 'spine road' near the lakes. Picnic facilities will be provided in the vicinity of the parking areas and on grass land close to the Park Centre - there will also be equipment for children to play on. It is proposed that the Centre should contain provision for information, warden service, storage, refreshments, teaching and interpretation, i.e. audio visual display and exhibitions.

- (c) The Marina Lake - One of the largest lakes in the Action Area. The main activities proposed for this water are sail boarding and fishing. It is considered that the water should provide for both club and casual use and for training. Originally permission was sought for this water to be used as a marina linked to the canal. This proposal has now been abandoned. A car park and new access road will need to be constructed from the main 'spine road'. A club pavilion will be considered. This is very open water - some planting and landscaping will be necessary. The landscape design scheme will take into account the needs of sailors and anglers.
- (d) The Canal side Area - Part of the tow path in this area has been improved but there is much more to be done to enhance the canal side environment. British Waterways Board is anxious to promote the future recreational use of this waterway but its limited resources have to be concentrated on maintaining the navigation to the best possible standard. The Board has to rely on other public authorities or the private sector to invest in recreational development on or alongside the waterway. In return for increased public access to the site the County Council has agreed to carry out improvements to the tow path and to maintain it and to assume responsibility for the canal bank and water safety.

Sub Area 2 - The Riverside Strip - It is desirable that a strip of land should be acquired by the County Council and that a bridleway, cycle way and footpath corridor be developed to link the main route from Wanlip Road with the tracks and paths in area 3 via a new bridge across the Soar. The unspoilt nature of the riverside in this area needs to be protected.

Land East of the River Soar - This is an area of small waters, marsh and scrub, with a developing reed swamp on land which is used as a silt bed for the sand and gravel workings. Part of the former pit is already being naturally re-colonised by vegetation. The sere thus created is of ecological and educational interest and can be promoted by creating a nature trail along a board walk across the 'swamp'.

DESIGNER'S DIARY

1984-85

Thursday, May 17th. 1984.

Meeting at County Hall, Leicester, with the Planning Officer in charge of the Wanlip Park project. The discussion centred upon clarifying points in the Action Area plan and updating recent developments - i.e. work already in hand at Wanlip.

Some landscape design work has been started in Sub Area 3 - area owned by the County.

Planting and 'groundwork' started in A.R.C. Pits area by permission of the owners.

Simple 'hides' have been designed to be built by Manpower Services - one hide designed especially for the disabled. (Looked at the drawings).

The Manpower Services team are already established on-site, the work force includes; - 10 men + 1 supervisor + 3 re-deployed men.

They are constructing; - benches, life belt holders, fencing, a cycle track. They are also engaged in clearance and planting. They will build the nature reserve hides in brick.

Tools for the job ----- low technology? - include:-

- 1 - Portacabin,
- 1 - 15 cwt. Dumper Truck,
- 1 - Minibus,
- 1 - Work bench,

Vice saws etc.,

Router,

Electric Sander and Drill,

NO LATHE OR METALWORKING TOOLS,

Materials budget for year £25000,

Some cut elm from the park other timber bought in.

NATURE RESERVE - new developments:-

Policy now to open it to the general public - but limit access area.

Use diggers to construct long island to discourage disturbance to bird life.

Control entrance and design nature trail and position hides.

Details:-

Depth of water in (nature reserve) gravel pits approx. 5ft. between mounds. Sand and gravel - marl base. Clear water - no silt - mounds do not move - not subject to heavy flooding.

Nature Reserve to be managed by the Leicestershire and Rutland Trust for Nature Conservation. Note - contact the Warden at Rutland Water to arrange visit to see new building for Interpretation Centre. Also advised to look at Kingsbury.

The County Planning Office would be interested in all ideas for design including buildings, display details and graphics. Their immediate concern is the design and siting of the main Park Centre Building.

There are discussions in progress about the placing of this Centre:-

1. At the Wanlip Road end near the N.W. sailing lake:-

Advantages Will be seen from the road and give a 'strong' entrance to the Park.

If placed near the sailing lake should be on N.side where prevailing winds being the boats in.

2. At the South end of the N.W. sailing lake:-

Advantages Will draw visitors into the Park.

Because of its proximity to other lakes would be more central for rescue services.

Disadvantages On the flood plain - would have to be built on stilts, could give 'dead water' problems, for example, rubbish collecting under the building.

Question? Why not two buildings? - possible.

A useful meeting - very open - much enthusiasm for the project. Resolve to concentrate on the central area of the park and to develop ideas for a Visitor Centre.

SITE DESCRIPTION (from the Action Area Plan).

The flood plain of the plan area is very flat having a fall of approximately 6.0 metres along its three mile course and possessing very little natural relief.

The principal features are the meandering River Soar and the direct line of the Navigation.

The only 'traditional' elements in this very simple landscape are groups of tall willows and hedged meadow.

More recently mineral extraction has caused progressive erosion of the 'traditional' landscape.

The Grand Union Canal categorised as a cruising waterway under the Transport Act 1968 is navigable through its length in the plan area. The canal also serves a commercial purpose particularly with regard to the transportation of sand and gravel currently from an area East of Birstall to the Pontylue Sand and Ballast Company processing plant south of Wanlip Road.

"The approved Leicestershire Structure Plan emphasises the need to retain areas of productive agricultural land and to concentrate recreational use on poor quality farmland wherever possible. The majority of agricultural land in the plan area is of grade 4 quality."

DESIGNERS NOTES

First impression of Wanlip Action Area - a desolate place - the kind Nan Fairbrother would describe as a 'disturbed landscape' - 'it consists of the sort of dereliction that can only be cured by a deliberate policy of use'.

The area is penetrated and flanked by gravel works and factories - use them don't screen them - bring the industrial element into the design, ('rustic' themes are the curse of the institutionalised Country Park). Echo the shapes of the processing plant, equipment, machinery and factory roofs - an 'echo' theme reflected in the lakes?

Try to connect visually the intensively used recreation areas with the working canal. Use shapes and colours found in barges and canal engineering to give a general 'nautical' air to this sailing park - WATER + SPORT.

Keep lines clean, robust, functional. Use strong 'Midland' colour:- brick red, green and cream, black and white - suggesting, but not imitating (no historical pastiche) canal-side pubs and railway architecture.

The landscape is generally blank and featureless and, - despite areas of ecological interest and the appeal of the gravel pits for sailing - could to the casual visitor appear dull. The task is to change this perception, not by radically changing the landscape but by emphasizing and re-defining its discovered inherent qualities.

What are these qualities? -

1. Although the study area is described as the 'most ravaged' due to the intensity of the mineral extraction - it is beginning to create its own landscape. It is this new landscape of willow-fringed stretches of water superimposed on the old field pattern system which helps to give it its particular character. Emphasize the contrast - for example - the worked agricultural land immediately adjacent to the park lends distance to the view.
2. Although the general appearance is open and flat there are changes in levels - these can be sharpened and exploited. For example linked 'look outs' of various kinds would provide focal interest - and could be useful as markers for lost children.

"Gregarious people prefer to visit areas where there are proper facilities to cater for visitors and where they know they will be welcome" ----- The Urban Fringe Report (Leics.)

This means, - car parks, lavatories, information, food, exhibitions, opportunities to hire boats and bicycles and shelters and pavilions "to make outdoor living a pleasure in an English winter".

17th. July 1984.

Telephoned the planning office to ask if details were now available for proposed Park Centre Building. Received the following information;

Floor area for building - between 350-400 sq. metres possibly one storey.

Main car park to take 100 cars.

Five more places within the Park to take 30 cars each.

Facilities needed in building:-

Lavatories.

Changing rooms + showers.

First aid/rescue room.

Cafeteria type restaurant.

Interpretive Centre/Lecture Room.

Information.

Wardens office/Garage/Boathouse.

P.O. will send plan of Centre area and Water Authority plan of water level.

Floors of Centre building must be 48.06 cm. above the flood plain.

Other facilities needed:-

Picnic areas and family play area outside the Centre down to the lake side.

Sailing Club changing rooms to be part of complex.

Caravan site possible when A.R.C. Plant closes.

Questions.

Do you see Wanlip as a 'designated' Country Park?

Yes but also 'urban fringe'.

What publicity is there for the park locally?

None until access is secured.

Have designs been drawn up for the Centre Building?

No nothing started yet but have some ideas. Will probably be taken over by the Property Dept.

With this information it will now be possible to construct a design brief.

August 1984.

Carried out a survey of the area; - sketches and photographs.*
 Constructed two sketch models with plans for the Visitor Centre.
 Constructed model for 'look out' between South West Lake (Marina)
 and the Canal. * See photographs in separate slip cover.

10th. September 1984.

Studio visit from Planning Officer to see work in progress.
 The County have not started designing yet - pressure of work but
 have ideas.
 No costing yet - still negotiating over land.

Interest shown in Model 2 (the less controversial)

P.W. Suggested that reception should be central - for caravan site
 and sailing club bookings - also so that a person at the desk
 could keep an eye on the exhibition centre. Agreed to this -
 must re-think boat house and garage for Warden.

Approved steel frame with brick infill and bold detailing
 and 'gantry' walkway.

Discussed the problem of raising the floors above the flood level.
 This could be achieved by raising the ground and building on solid
 foundations instead of stilts. This does not however eliminate
 the need for ramped entrances which are to become by necessity a
 feature of this building.

The Centre will be erected on a restored gravel pit. Technical
 information needed on the precise depth - there could be 10' of
 rubble - and the composition of the infill.

Other points discussed:-

The need for designing in units which can be built stage by stage
 when money becomes available.

Need to keep the construction simple for semi-skilled Manpower
 Service workers.

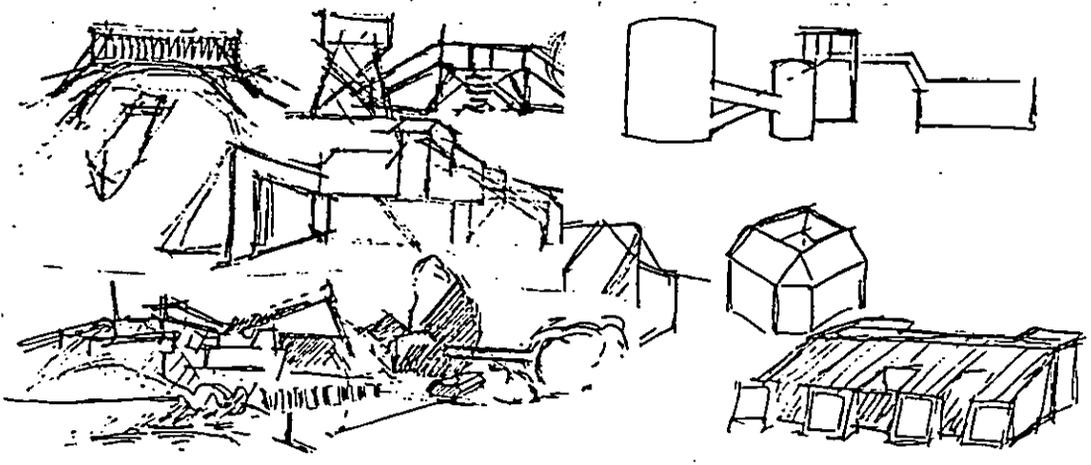
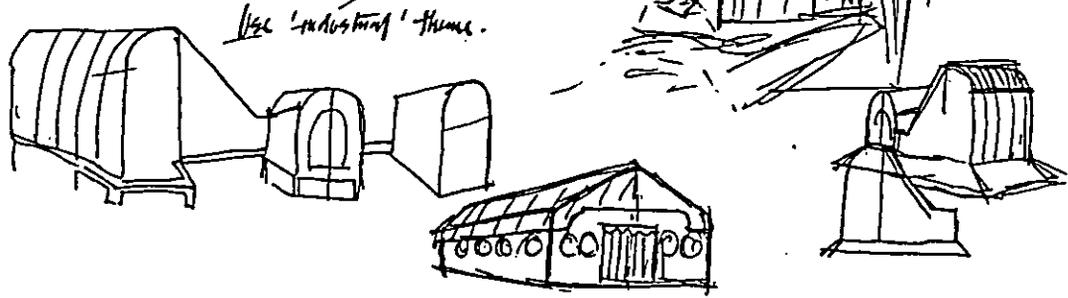
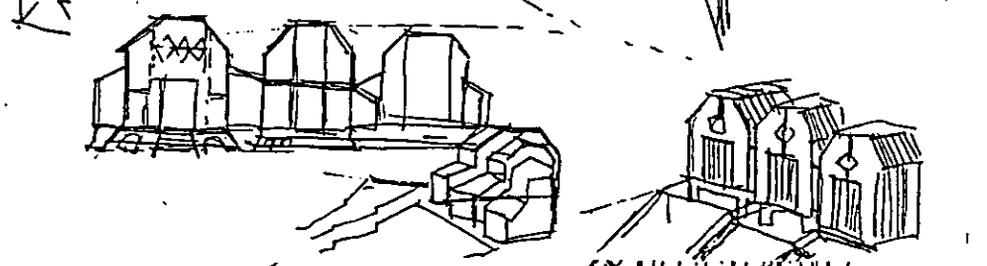
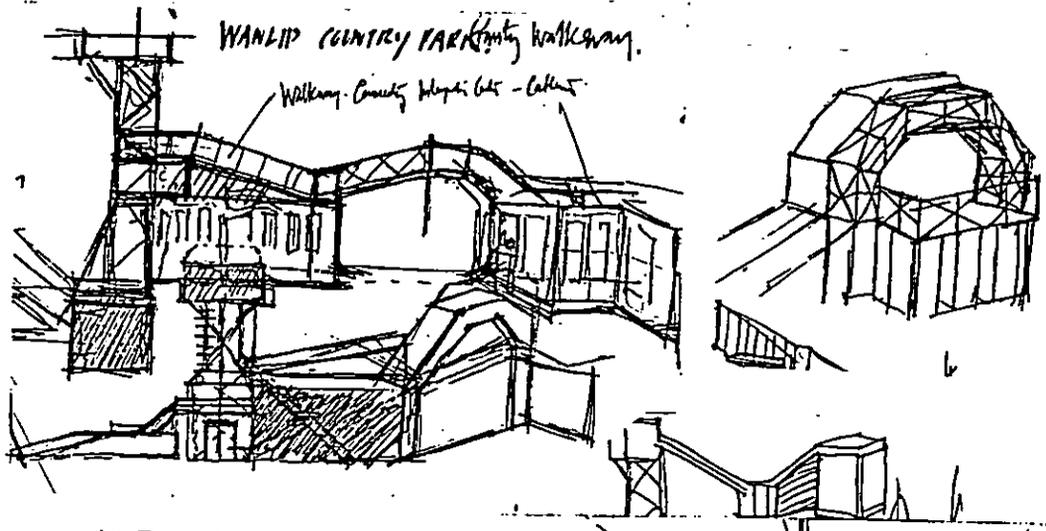
Need to consider the surface for the horse trail which will
 sometimes be under water. How to stop it being washed away.

The design for a pavilion on the N. side of the S. West lake where the ground is too high and must be lowered to the flood plain. A 'stilt' building on the waters edge could be considered here?

The possibility of keeping the meadows 'wild' and planting and encouraging more wild flowers.

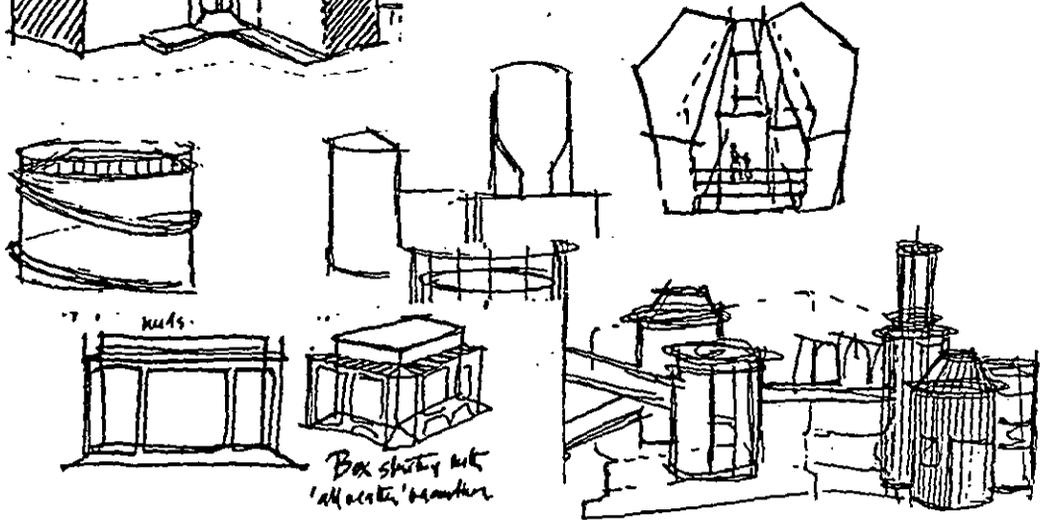
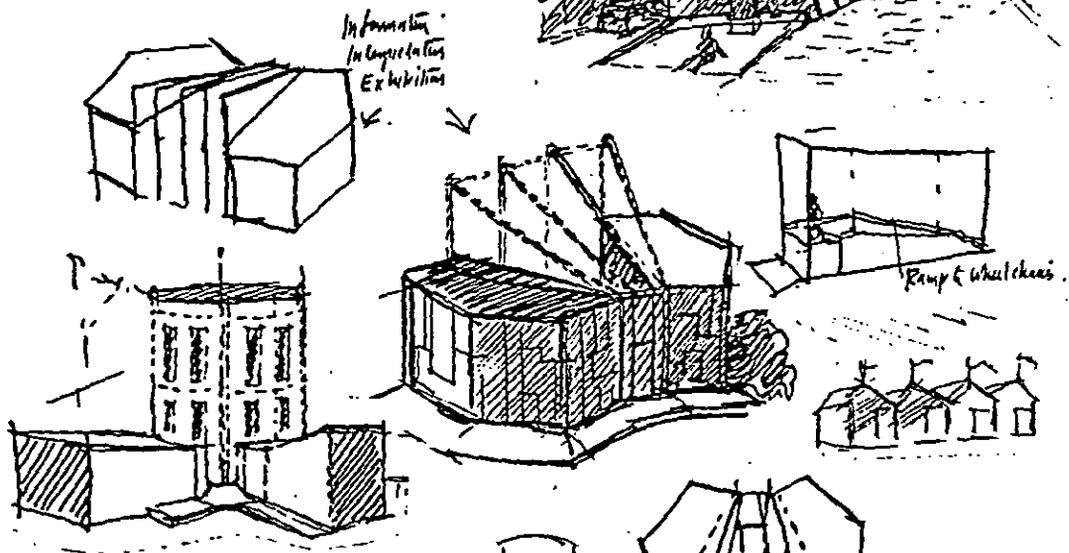
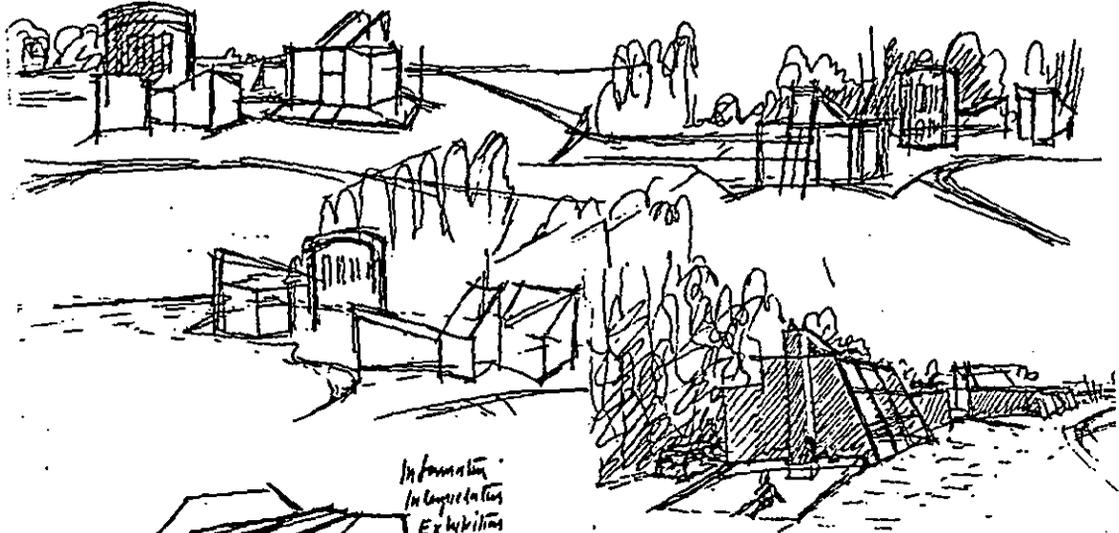
Making a boardwalk nature trail on the marshland.

Bridges. Agreed that an elegant bridge is needed to span the River Soar in the meadows. New bridge over the canal? will this be provided by the Waterways Board?



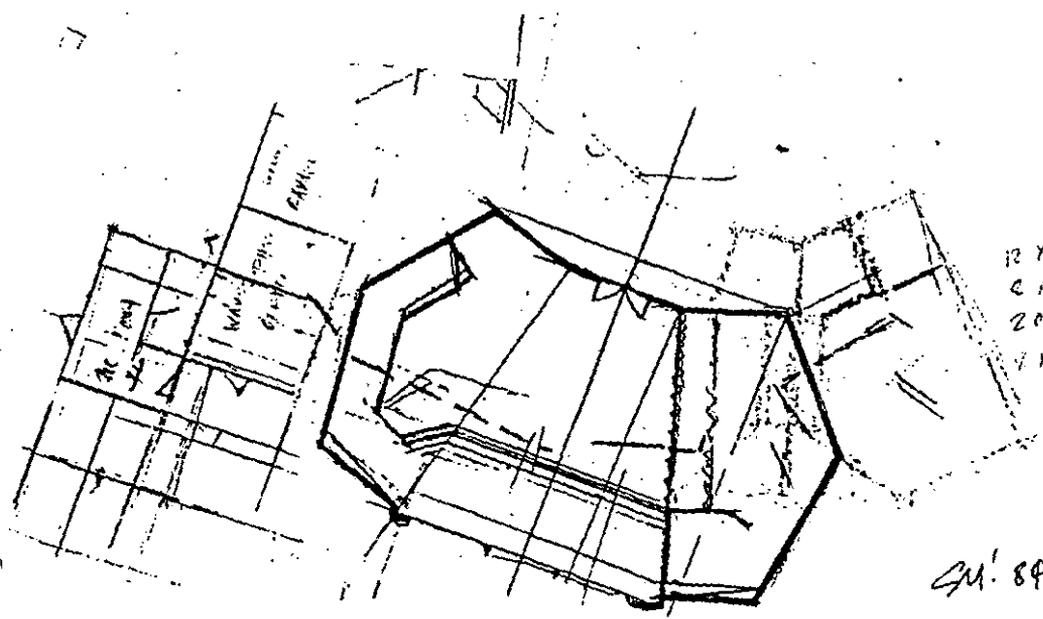
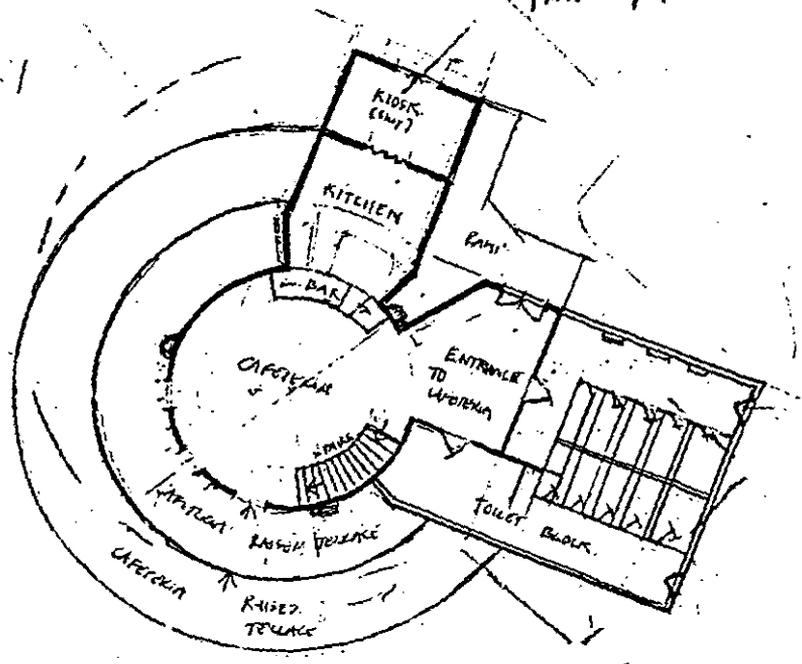
M. '89.

Waukegan County Park. Main & Visitor Center.



GM '84

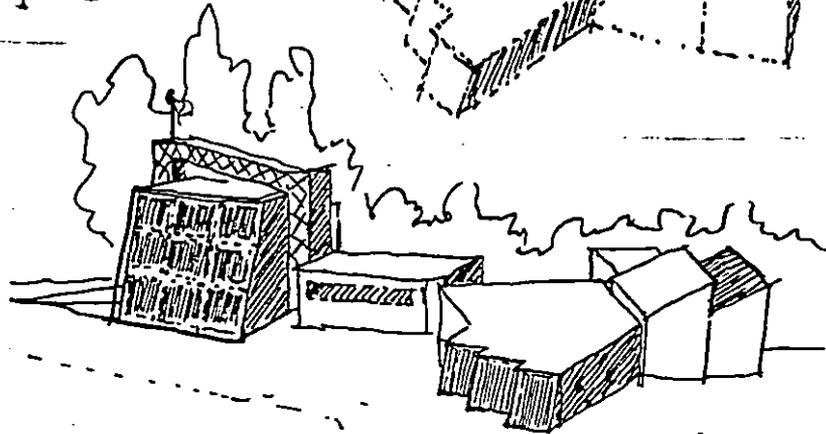
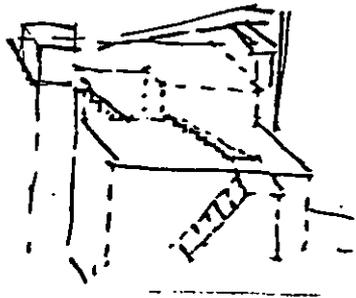
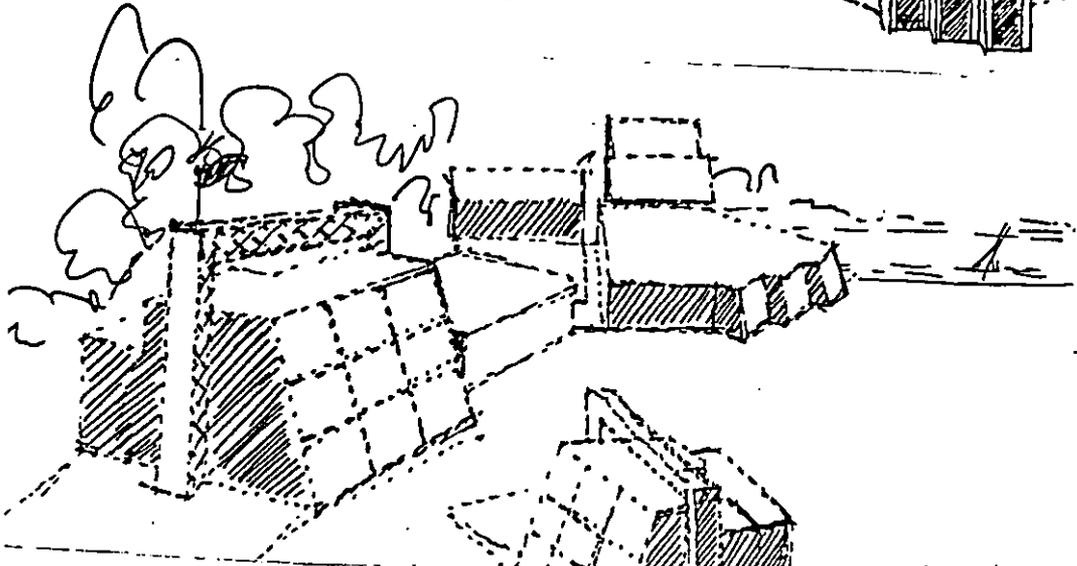
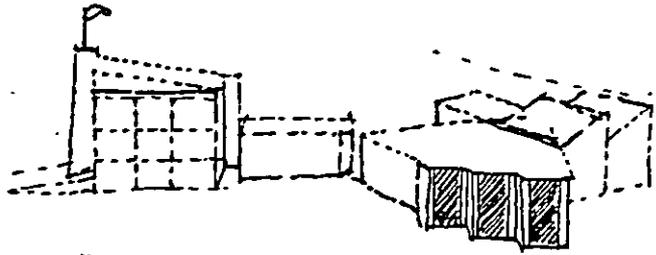
Wantsip Country Park:
Plans to proposed Visitor Centre (1)



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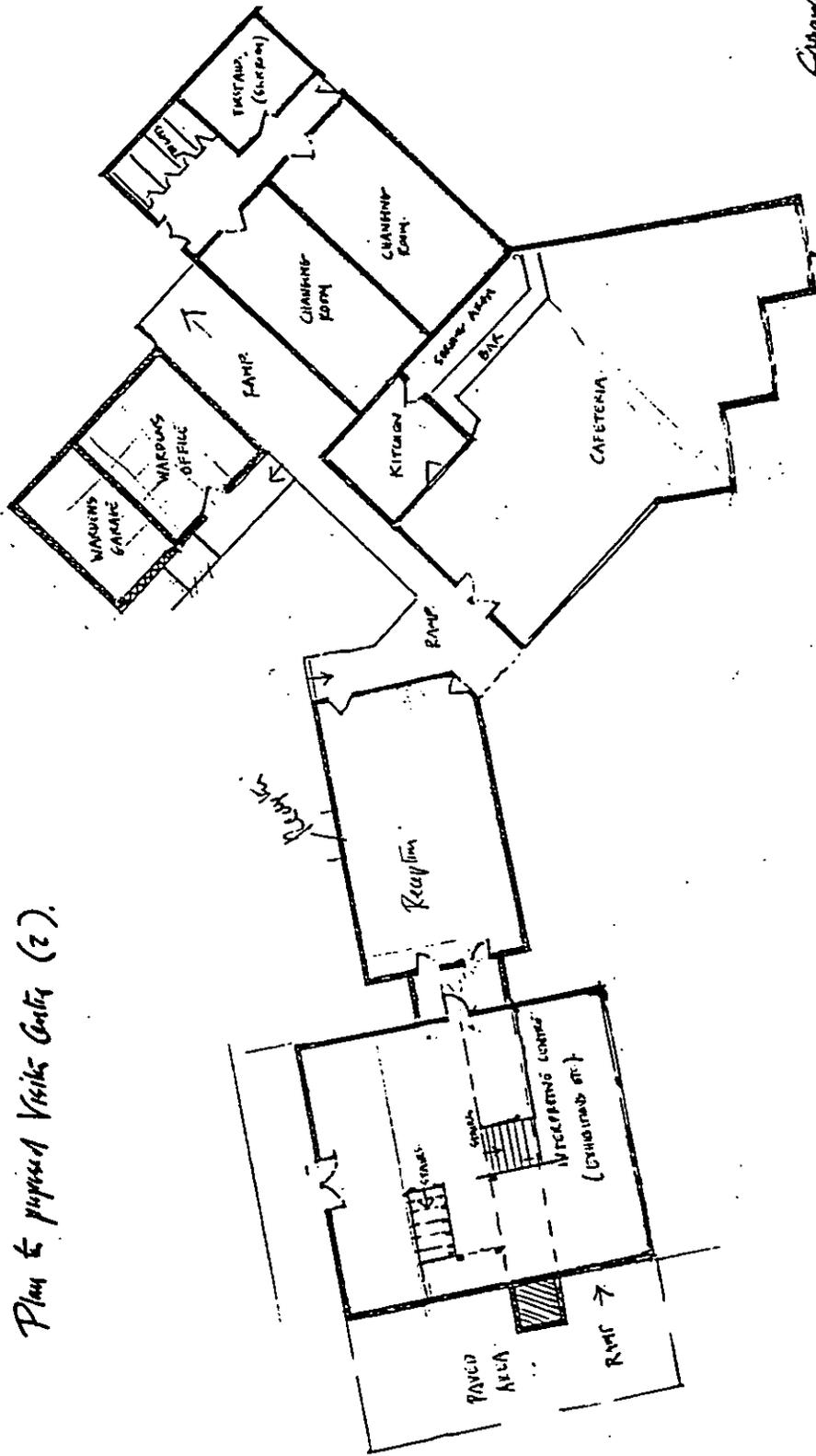
SM' 89

Visite Centre Waulij (2)
Simple structure - steel frame
back wall - gable milk way.
floor screening - fabric.

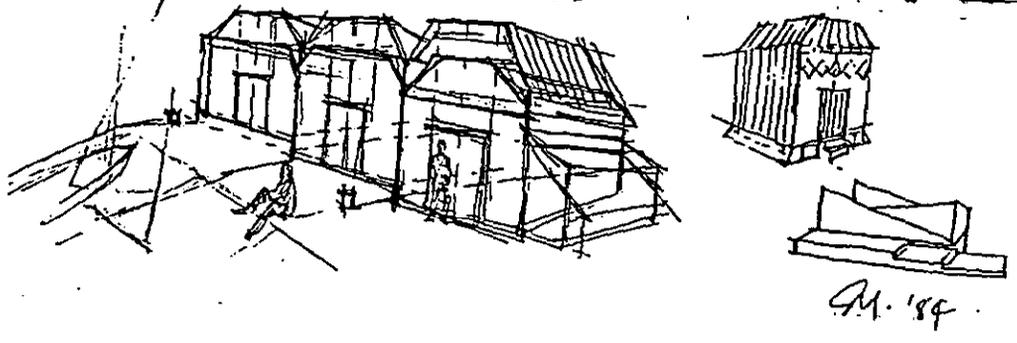
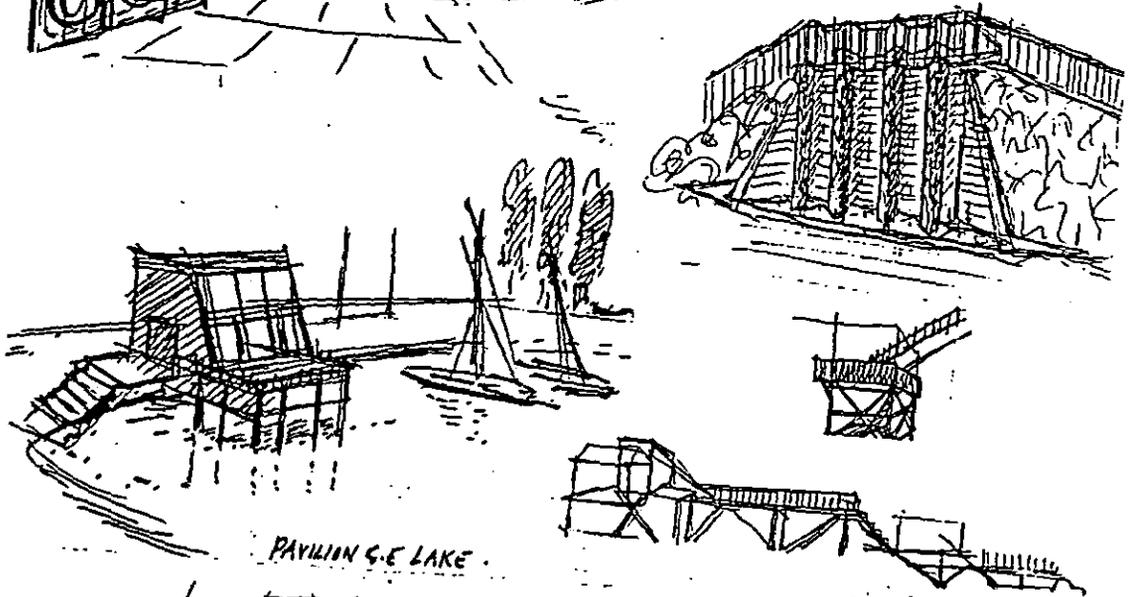
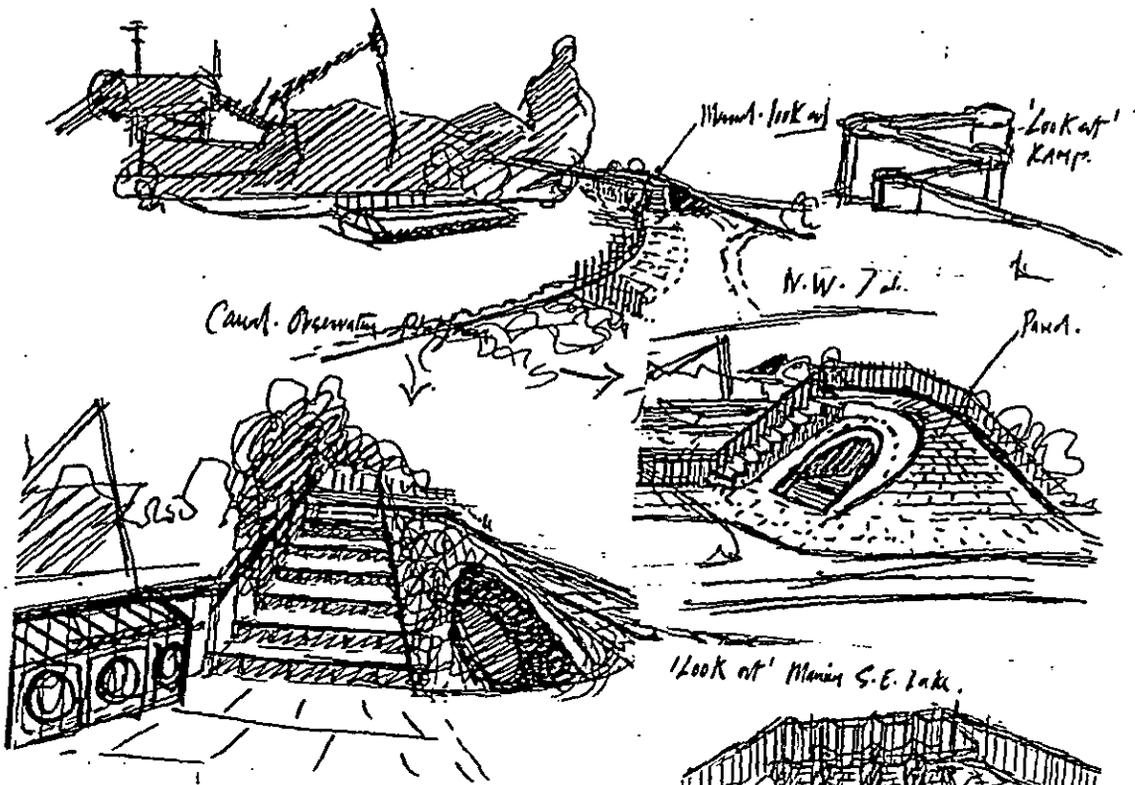


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Washtip County Park.
 Plan to proposed Visitors Center (2).

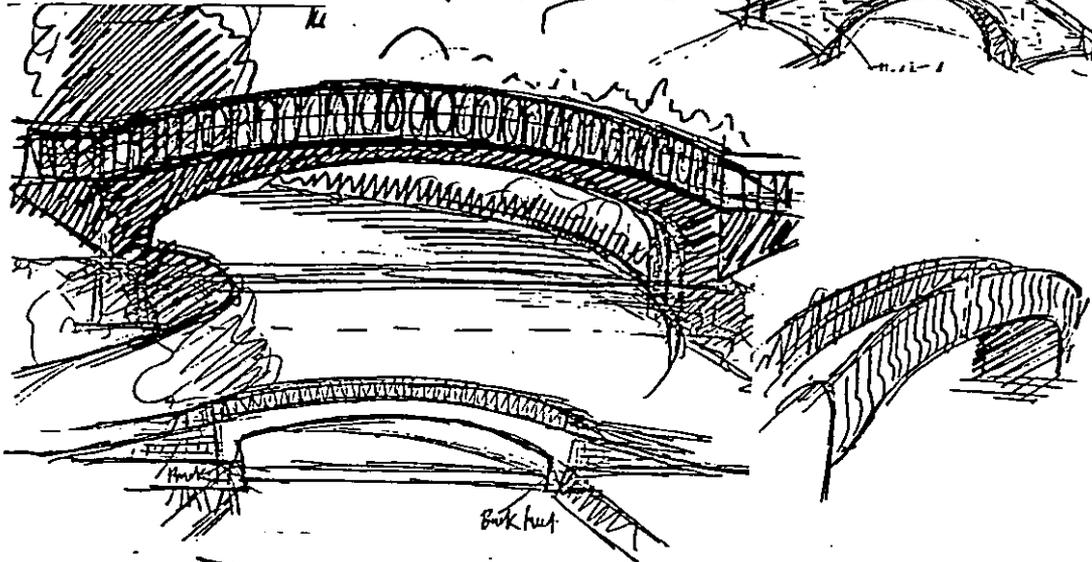
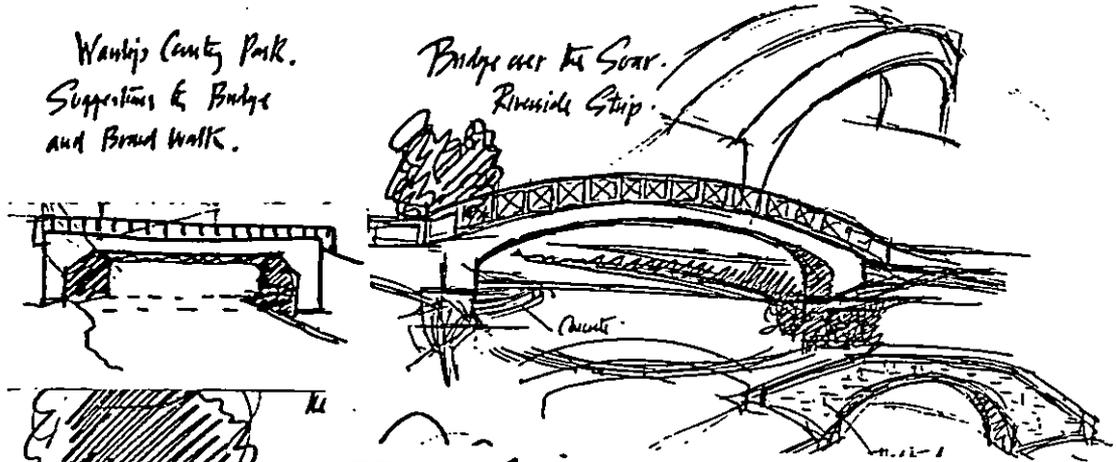


Shawlow et.
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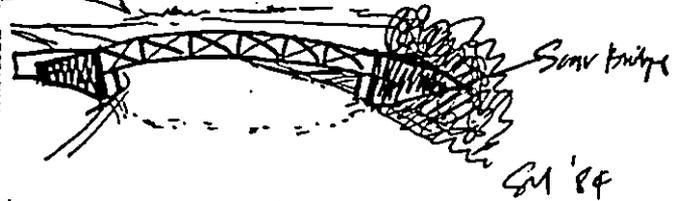


Waukesha County Park.
Suggestions for Bridge
and Boardwalk.

Bridge over the Scar.
Riverside Strip.



Board Walk with raised platform.
Meadow-mush E. of King Scar.



SUGGESTED USE OF 'INDUSTRIAL UNITS' IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
PARK CENTRE BUILDING.

Increasingly industrial units are being used to provide for recreational needs. For example, the recent rise in popularity of ice skating, due to the success of Torvill and Dean, has prompted some local authorities to look for a cost effective design solution for what is usually a very expensive facility - an ice rink. A number of design partnerships have applied themselves to this problem and a variety of interesting solutions have emerged based primarily on the 'warehouse analogy' - that is, a large weatherproof box encompassing the rink and all other necessary accommodation. The designs by Nicholas Grimshaw Associates for the Oxford Ice Rink and for Sports and Leisure Developments at Gillingham demonstrate clearly the inventive possibilities inherent in system structures.

It is suggested that such a systems approach could prove effective at Wanlip. More research needs to be done on the use of the Park and particularly on the users before a commitment to a final design for the Visitor Centre is undertaken; however, a versatile, inexpensive building would be invaluable in the early development stages of the area.

The advantages of such a building would be:-

- (a) that by using 'off the peg' structural framing and cladding there would be a saving in expense.
- (b) flexibility - the building could be designed to be easily erected in portable sections and could be tried out on different sites - perhaps on a seasonal basis.
- (c) that the open interior would lend itself to flexible use, - experiments could be made with the use of floor space.
- (d) that it could be used as a centre for 'pilot schemes' and earn its keep as a base for special events. The building or buildings would incorporate all basic facilities - including information, cafeteria, exhibition space, changing rooms and lavatories.

- (e) that by monitoring the use of this structure a clearer picture would emerge of the requirements needed for a permanent building.
- (f) that it would eventually convert to a permanent building by replacing cladding with traditional brickwork, thus tying it to its immediate Midlands environment.
- (g) that in the event of its being replaced by a permanent building it could easily convert to a standard industrial unit for use elsewhere.

This building need not look mass produced. The following technical notes will show that there is now on the market a wide range of industrial components which can be used with a high degree of freedom by designers and which are capable of being adapted to many individual purposes.

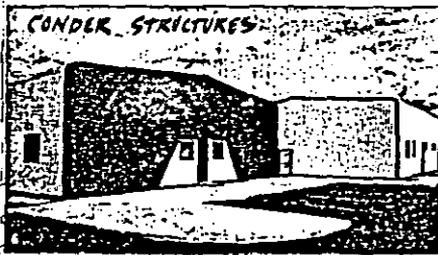
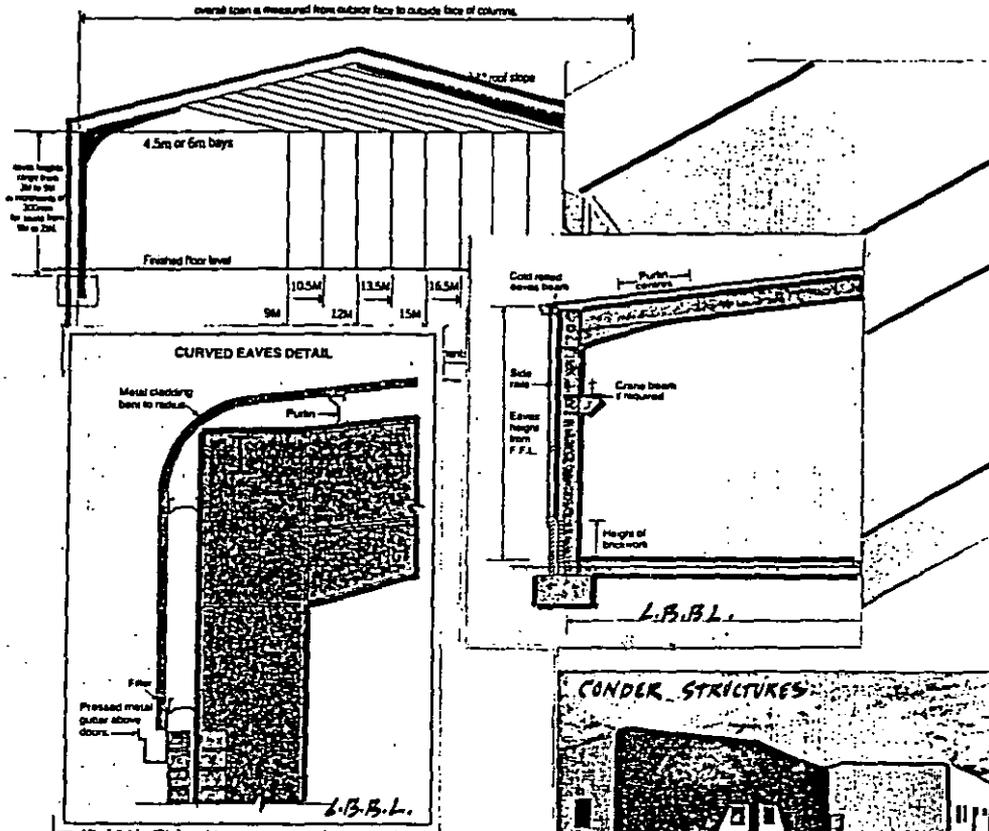
1. CONDOR STRUCTURES - Steel Frame - bolted site assembly.

Produce:-

- a. Portal Frames; wide span - variations can include roof slopes to form mansards and 'A' frames. The system offers 'Curved eaves vertical, horizontal and diagonal cladding arrangements. Co-ordinating colours, curtain walling and other external treatments are also available.
 - b. The Dry Envelope; creates a weatherproof shell at a very early stage ensuring that internal work can proceed regardless of weather conditions. Consists of a fire protected frame, pre-cast concrete floors and staircases, flat or pitched roofing and a weathertight inner wall made up of pre-cast concrete wall units and windows. The wall units are designed to support any form of exterior cladding. Condor claims that this offers the 'fastest possible construction times coupled with virtual complete design freedom'.
2. LBBL - Leofric Broadspan Buildings Ltd. also offer a comprehensive service in steel framework and cladding.

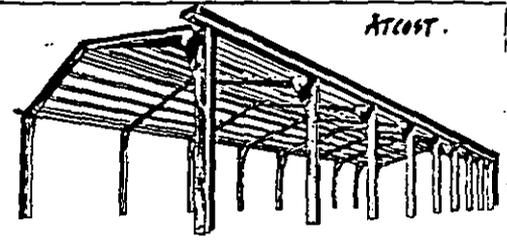
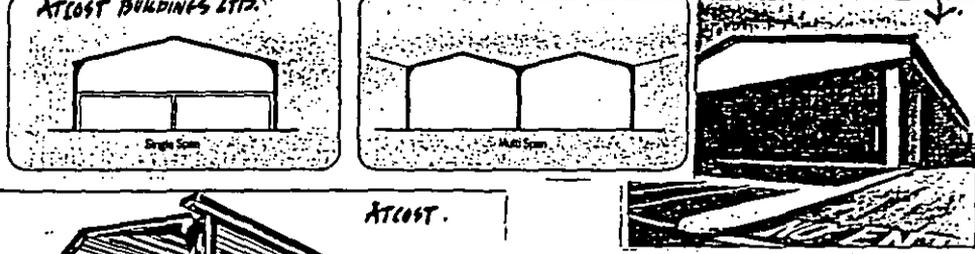
ATCOST BUILDINGS LTD.

M FRAME RANGE



FRAME VARIATIONS

One of the major attractions of the 'M' frame is its versatility. Shown below is a selection of products with this frame by a permutation of standard structural components.



EXAMPLES OF INDUSTRIAL COMPONENTS.
SOURCE ... TRADE JOURNALS.

All LBBL building systems can be used for recreational purposes - none of the internal partition walls are load bearing, they can be removed or re-arranged easily.

'The flexibility of LBBL system building is such that all four LBBL systems can be linked to one another to provide a multi-purpose building. The system is also versatile in other ways. For example, - high buildings can be open plan or galleried, single storey buildings can, for example, be developed in geometric configurations - hexagons or octagons.

3. Vic Hallam System Building; produce both steel and timber frame structures. They also stress the versatility of their components and the freedom allowed for individual design projects.

In February 1985 the Leicestershire County Council published their Draft Management Scheme for the Wanlip Action Area - comments were invited.

The following is an exchange of ideas on this subject between the Designer and the Planning Officer.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE DRAFT MANAGEMENT SCHEME - WANLIP ACTION AREA. 1985.

REF.

1.3.1. from the management and marketing view points there is a need to identify more precisely who the customers will or could be, what they want, when and at what cost. This information can then be used in determining the facilities that should be provided and by whom.

1.3.3. The Countryside Commission's survey indicates that those who own or have access to a car are almost twice as likely to make trips as those without. Nat. Survey 1977.

1.3.4. This raises the question whether in urban areas there is a great latent demand for recreation or whether there is a separate socio-economic factor, which is correlated both with car ownership and a disposition to countryside recreation.

D.OB.

What are the survey methods envisaged?

Figures obtained from interested bodies giving anticipated growth of demand for specific water based activities etc. are of great value. The practicality of 1977 type socio-economic surveys in a 1985 context seem doubtful - given the sudden unpredictable changes in current socio-economic circumstances, for example, redundancy at all levels of society and lack of job opportunities.

Suggest on site 'pilot scheme' promotions coupled with monitoring and 'behavioural observation'.

See also 2.3.1. (special events)

and 1.9.2. (experimentation and careful monitoring.)

P.O.COMM.

The comment in this paragraph was intended partly to bemoan the lack of up-to-date information, partly to put down an indicator that future investigation (possibly including commissioning survey work) may be required and also to refer to on-site monitoring (including questionnaires) of the use to which the Park is put. There are in addition other surveys currently being carried out at a national and regional level. I am concerned that the Local Authorities should not dictate in advance what goes on in each part of the Park, but should be responsive to public demand and requests - may be if necessary being deliberately vague to encourage suggestions. I would therefore agree with your points. Figures from interested bodies forecasting their own growth can of course be over optimistic.

REF.

1.3.7. "On the evidence of our research Country Parks and similar low key facilities are seen as providing precisely what is required: open countryside with limited provision, not highly organised and yet being areas where inhibitions about using farmland do not apply", quoted in this draft management scheme from M. Pitton.

D.OB.

and also where inhibitions about using 'ecologically sensitive areas do not apply? See also 6.1.2. - Nature Conservation.

P.O.Comm.

Yes, but I would stress that the emphasis on nature conservation is seen very much in the recreational and educational context. There is nowhere within the Park so special in its own right that it requires protection. In the nature reserve (and this title probably over emphasises the protection /preservation elements) work on restricting the public has largely been done to ensure that there will be things for the public to see.

REF.

1.9.2. A local market... unskilled and manually skilled groups with medium to low incomes is being considered. The recreational needs of such groups are little known in detail.....

From what is known of the recreational demands of such groups, natural scenery, space for informal activities.... fishing, boating.... are likely to be the main attractions.

D.OB.

The idea of on site monitoring and behavioural observation as visualised in 1.3.4. (ob.) would obtain here.

add to this food, drink, shelter and Special Events to focus interest.

P.O.Comm.

Yes, I agree

REF.

The middle of the plan area (because of its location) is more oriented to the County rather than the City.

1.10.1. This area is therefore more likely to be orientated to the car borne user and to different social class groups than the Watermead Lakes (nearer the City).

D.OB.

On what evidence? It would be unfortunate if the park evolved as a two tier system. It is hoped that people will 'zone' themselves irrespective of car ownership or occupational status.

P.O.Comm.

I agree that this is not very sensitively put. I am sure that in practice people will zone themselves by the activities that most interest them. However, there are currently very few buses travelling along Wanlip Road so that unless routes change (which is unlikely) or a number of special buses are run, access into the Park by public transport users will be predominantly from the City end.

REF.

1.10.1. IV

Few of these (Country Park) facilities would be capable of earning sufficient revenue to be self sustaining.

D.OB.

One facility which could prove popular and perhaps self sustaining would be a good quality restaurant at the Wanlip Road end of the Park. There is evidence - (the Hope and Anchor for example) that there is a demand by the sailing fraternity and others (Workers from the local sand and gravel industry), for a pleasant place to eat and relax. Some Country Parks are earning a favourable reputation for the quality of their catering, - The Buttery at Rufford for example. Such a facility could prove an incentive for attendance at special events especially near the sailing lake.

P.O.Comm.

A restaurant/cafeteria dependant on the Park would because of its seasonal nature be unlikely to be self-sustaining, e.g. the cafeteria at Kingsbury Park (I also doubt that the buttery at Rufford Park pays its own way). A restaurant independent of the Park but feeding off it might well do well given the nature of the location (but the Cossington Mill, for example already runs in this way). I would prefer to build on existing facilities such as the Hope and Anchor at Syston, the White Horse at Birstall and the White Hart at Thurmaston. There is a likelihood that some form of cafeteria will be incorporated within the Park Centre building itself.

REF.

1.3.1. Promotional activity should properly be geared to the target markets... Given that the target markets are local it follows that promotion activity should be predominantly local...

D.OB.

Agreed. A good range of promotional ideas. - Suggest that monitoring of needs be coupled with local 'pilot promotions' see 1.3.1. and volunteer participation schemes such as Nottingham's 'Spadework'. This would mean that the park could be opened to the public at an early stage in its development - depending on the availability of access, car parking etc.

P.O.COMM.

I like the suggestion of volunteer participation schemes but care must be taken not to give the impression that the Park is open before it is ready to attract people and provide a sufficiently enjoyable experience which people will want to repeat.

REF.

2.5.1. and 2.5.2.

The design and use of Signs

D.OB.

Signs, as well as conveying information and being legible should be considered as part of the overall design scheme for the Park. Any national or 'country code' symbols should be incorporated in such signs as standard practice. Particular attention should be paid to the needs of the disabled, for example, - when siting notices and when considering the scale of lettering. Wheel chair users should be able to read signs without being jostled or feeling that they are obstructing others on the pathway. Average wheel chair seated eye levels are:- adult male 1219 mm. adult female 1115mm.

Touch maps should be provided for the partially sighted. The Countryside Commission's Advisory Series No.15 - 'Informal countryside recreation for disabled people' gives advice on dimensional and other requirements that need to be followed when designing for the disabled.

P.O.COMM.

The main logo for the Park will be the subject of a competition which it is hoped will be launched in April.

REF.

3.5.2. Par. 4. The Education Authority intends at some time in the future to provide a base for changing etc.

D.OB.

Does this mean a separate facility not to be included in the main Park Centre design?

P.O.COMM.

Possibly. The Education Authority has not decided to join in on the Park's Centre building although it would obviously like to.

REF.

3.5.3. Park Centre Area. The paths and tracks in the area will be suitable for casual jogging and training for long distance running...

D.OB.

A possible conflict here with walkers if 'training' is encouraged on public footpaths. Perhaps a measured distance track could be incorporated in the riverside 'corridor'?

P.O.COMM.

Yes, possibly; (and also conflicts from cyclists, horses and pedestrians straying from the various routes earmarked for them): but I would not wish to discourage these groups from informal use of the Park.

REF.

3.5.4. Par. 4. A new access road will need to be constructed... and eventually a club pavilion.

D.OB.

Suggest public pavilion for 'casual users' and spectators possibly combined with lakeside picnic site (see designers working notes).

P.O.COMM.

The number of formally designated picnic sites will be limited. This is not intended to discourage those who wish to have informal picnics in any other part of the Park.

REF.

3.6.1. Several sites within the plan area have been indicated as being suitable for 'informal recreation activities'.

D.OB.

See observation on 6.1.2. nature Conservation.

REF.

3.7.1. Par. 3. Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycleways. There will be an operational advantage in being able to divert routes (which are not Public Rights of Way) at short notice if such routes are getting damaged by over-use in poor weather.

D.OB.

Would this also apply to informal recreation areas?

P.O.Comm.

It may be desirable to close such informal recreational areas but I think it unlikely.

REF.

3.7.1. Par. 4. It is advisable to separate the different kinds of user,....

D.OB.

See 3.5.1. on training runs and marker posts.

REF.

4.3.2. (b) if a bridge is required across the River Soar (for mineral haulage) the construction shall be to a standard capable of retention as a combined footbridge/cycle track, horse trail after mineral working has ceased.

D.OB.

If this is to be initially used for mineral haulage what weight would the bridge be carrying? - in terms of lorries, machinery etc.? This poses an interesting design problem. The bridge must be elegant enough to take its place in the attractive sylvan setting of this area of the park but strong enough to take heavy vehicular traffic.

P.O.Comm.

Yes, and not really one yet that I have considered in any detail.

REF.

4.3.2. (c) 1. Riverside area South East of Wanlip. A bridleway, cycleway, footpath 'corridor' to be constructed on a berm of 100' width left to protect the River Soar from mineral extraction which might otherwise lead to loss of support.

D.OB.

This needs very careful designing if it is to take 3 or 4 lane traffic. Presumably there would be a restriction on contouring and planting because of the flood level constraint?

P.O.Comm.

I agree that as a linear link with a number of lanes of traffic it will be difficult to avoid the impression of a "motorway". There is a restriction on contouring and planting within this area. However, such works are not ruled out entirely as long as obstruction to flood flow is avoided.

REF.

4.5.3. Pontylue Sand and Ballast Company. The plant is likely to remain until the 1990's.

The gravel works are particularly obtrusive from the west where the canal side location limits immediate screening of the site. A planting scheme on the west side of the canal would help alleviate some of the impact of the plant....

D.OB.

This raises questions about 'perception' and attitudes towards industrial landscape.

Why not accept the Pontylue works as a landscape feature in an urban fringe park? The sand and gravel industry relates directly to the structure of the terrain and the working barges bringing sand to the plant are visually interesting. With the construction of an observation platform in the Park near the canal bank this industrial scene could become an educational resource.

- People like watching others work! Construction firms such as McAlpine often provide public viewing platforms when they are excavating large sites. If the 'Plant' saw that their work was an object of interest they might be persuaded to clean up their derelict areas.

P.O.Comm.

I find this an extremely interesting idea with great potential and it links well to our general concept of interpretation of how the landscape of the park has developed.

REF.

5.1.2. The use of information notice boards and other interpretive material.... regarding the agricultural activities (of the area) should be examined on the basis of the contribution such a scheme may make to countryside education and the minimisation of trespass problems.

D.OB.

Two points:-

(a) The use of information notice boards.

Hidden illiteracy or semi literacy has become a cause for concern in recent years and appears to be more wide spread than was generally believed. Whatever the reason it manifests itself in a reluctance to read and an inability to comprehend written information and instruction.

This tendency is underlined in a comment made in Nottinghamshire County Council's Leisure Services Annual Report 1983 referring to their Sherwood Forester bus scheme for their Country Parks:-

"From site observations it was clear that some users found difficulty in reading time tables, preferring personal contact with operating staff and County Council officers to answer queries and suggest trips, this is an area which needs careful thought and preparation....." (Similar observations have been made at Rutland Water in connection with this Feasibility Study.)

It is suggested that information notices should be clearly worded and brief, accompanied by clear graphics where appropriate.

(b) Agricultural activities.

People go to Country Parks to enjoy themselves, - farmland is unsuitable for recreation - although Model Farms may have a place in the Country Park concept - therefore the public should be kept away from it. It is the job of management through skilful planning and design to see that the Park visitor is not confronted with conflicting land uses.

P.O.COMM.

I take your points. The agricultural interpretation is being considered for the link 4.3.2.(c), where restoration of the site is also of interest and where people will specifically be kept away from the agricultural area, to the extent that the footpath currently crossing the fields will be diverted alongside the river.

REF.

6.1.2. Even in areas where nature conservation is not of prime importance, management measures to enhance that interest can still be compatible with other land uses, and will help to protect the most sensitive areas by ensuring "good neighbour" activities on adjacent sites,.... In addition sound ecological practice by park visitors will be encouraged....

D.OB.

While accepting and endorsing the fact that there should be a sympathetic attitude towards wild life and ecological matters in general, it does appear that the main purpose of a Country Park, i.e. 'to provide for informal recreation' could become eclipsed by the enthusiasm for upgrading nature reserves, protecting sensitive areas, and providing for educational needs.

P.O.Co--.

This is always a danger but see my comments under para. 1.3.7. We do see nature conservation here in its general educational sense.

REF.

6.1.3. Only a limited necessary mowing should be carried out (perhaps one cut a year in the autumn).

7.1.2. To this end, for example, most grass areas will be of the meadow variety rather than lawn...

D.OB.

Warning! This practice was recently carried out in an area of Knowsley but, - according to a local councillor, - because the public were not told, they did not understand the reason for letting the grass grow. They took the line that the council was 'uncaring' and used the place as a rubbish tip.
Moral - explain - with pictures if necessary!

P.O.COMM.

Yes, agreed. This is reinforced by the comments in the City Wildlife project recent newsletter which I attach.

REF.

7.3. Wild areas.

D.OB.

See separate list of Wanlip Flora made on-site July 1984, as part of the Feasibility Study.

P.O.COMM.

Thank you for the list of flora which I have used in considering management practices and interpretation.

REF.

Chapter 8, Finance. Diagram 1 reproduced from the Rufford Country Park - Marketing Study suggests a close relationship between numbers of visitors and total cost to the Local Authority. It also suggests that at visitor levels of about 300,000 people per annum considerable economies of scale occur in cost per visitor terms. It is estimated that the Wanlip Country Park will be able to cater for up to 400,000 visits per year. This could mean 8,000 visits on a peak summer Sunday....

D.OB.

In view of the cost/benefit would catering for 400,000 be the ultimate aim?

P.O.COMM.

This figure was produced for illustration and rather than being a target in itself is better seen as a projection of numbers that will be generated by provision of the facilities proposed.

WANLIP FLORA - List of common plants observed 23rd July 1984.

LOCATION	COMMON NAMES
Nature Reserve - South of 'Marina Lake'.	Elder Alder Willow Hawthorn Great Willow Herb Meadowsweet Salad Burnet Sorrel Nipplewort Buttercup Ragwort Spear Thistle Dog Rose
North West Lake - West side marshy 'withy bed'.	Willows Wild Hops Reed Mace Meadow Sweet Alders
Meadow - South of North West Sailing Lake.	Coltsfoot Great Willow Herb Nipplewort Buttercup Bitter Vetch Ragwort Teazle Red and White Clover Black Medick Rocket Tufted Vetch Balsom Bramble
Gravelly ground near proposed Park Centre.	Coltsfoot Ragwort Camomile

WANLIP FLORA - List of common plants observed 23rd July 1984.

LOCATION	COMMON NAMES
North West Lake - East side water's edge.	Beaked Sedge Lesser Pond Sedge Black Bog Rush Crack Willow Water Figwort
2/3 ft. inland	Stinging Nettles Great Willow Herb Marsh Thistle Great Thistle (spear) Bitter Vetch Broad Leaved Dock
Canal Tow path - West bank	Camomile Ribwort Great Plantain Dock Stinging Nettles Goosegrass Common Thistle Great Willow Herb Common Sow Thistle Ragwort Tansy Clover (red and white) Teazle Yarrow Horse Radish London Rocket Black Medick Meadow Sweet Wood Woundwort White Briony Greater Convolvulus Cut Leaved Cranesbill Bramble Elder

WANLIP FLORA - List of common plants observed 23rd July 1984.

LOCATION	COMMON NAMES
North West Lake - South side water's edge.	Forget-me-not Polygonum (also group A page 1.)
North East of 'Marina Lake'	Dyer's Greenweed Ragwort Camomile
Land East of River Soar - open meadow shaded by poplars.	Grasses (to be identified) Ox Eye Daisy Sorrel Broad Leaved Plantain Ribwort Plantain
Land East of River Soar - reed swamp	Reed Mace Pond Sedge Water Forget-me-not Floating Polygonum
Land East of River Soar - 1/2 ft. inland.	Meadowsweet Meadow Vetchling Salad Burnet Hawbit Grasses (to be identified)
Land East of River Soar Edge of river - near proposed new bridge.	Yellow Water Lily (in water) Water Forget-me-not (in water) Purple Loose Strife Figwort Stinging Nettles Marsh Thistle Giant Cranesbill Clover (red and white) Dog Roses Brambles Hawthorn Rocket Grasses (to be identified)

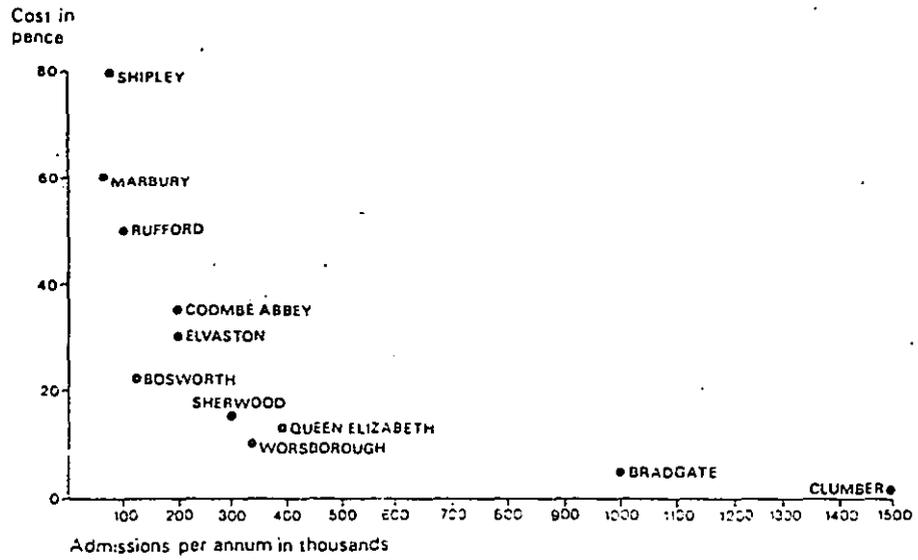
1981 Census of Leicester 10% Sample Population of Social Class

Social Class of Head of Household	Households	Persons	% of people in each group
1 Professional	219	623	2.3
2 Intermediate Occupations	1052	3068	11.2
3 N Skilled Occupations Non-M.	1801	2236	8.2
3 M Skilled Occupations Non-M.	2299	7862	28.9
4 Partly Skilled Occupations	1436	4726	17.4
5 Unskilled Occupations	413	1358	5.0
Armed Forces	285	1079	4.0
Retired 1	1359	2398	8.8
Retired 11	444	1577	5.8
Retired 111	1546	2283	8.4
Total	9854	27210	100.0

In Leicester City in 1981 manual, partly skilled and unskilled groups comprised 51% of the population - compared to 45% for Leicestershire as a whole.

Source: Wanlip Action Area Management Scheme.
Leicestershire County Council 1985.
TABLE 2. (Section 2.)

Operating costs per admission against annual admissions for country parks



Source: Wanlip Action Area Management Scheme.
Leicestershire County Council 1985.

TABLE 3. (Section 2.)

September 6th. 1985.

A PROGRESS REPORT.

Purchase of the Marina Lake and public access.

The Marina Lake - South West Lake, area 5. Map 1 - has been purchased by the Leicestershire County Council. Public access to the park has been established at this point, i.e. from Canal Street to the South East corner of the lake.

Water ski-ing is to continue on this lake for the present.

Canal Tow-path.

The tow-path is being re-surfaced and selected undergrowth removed.

The Picnic Area, i.e. - 'Wild Meadow' on the Sketch Plan.

This area has been liberally planted with trees and whips - mainly willow, alder and birch and will in the course of time be thinned out. A mound has been created - aligned to comply with the regulations concerning the flow of flood water.

Fishing pools have been dredged and enlarged.

A toilet block has been opened and will be in the care of the Property Department.

The 'Hope and Anchor' canal-side improvement.

Development is underway on this joint improvement scheme. (The brewery company have contributed £18,000.)

Though not strictly within the park area this scheme will provide a much needed 'park facility'. It includes a paved area, outdoor seating, canal-side lighting and a bowling alley.

The Nature Reserve.

This area of open water and spoil banks which is still in the ownership of the gravel company is, once the Leicestershire County Council has obtained the freehold - to be leased for management

to the Leicestershire and Rutland Trust for Nature Conservation. The Trust will be responsible under this lease for direct management of the site and for maintaining fences, stiles and watercourses - working to a management plan agreed with the Council.

With this plan in mind the Council have gained permission from the owners to start work on the Reserve before completion of purchase. The result has not been entirely successful. Hides which were built in preparation for the 'take-over' have been vandalised and there has been no attempt to inform the general public about the work being carried out - (though Parish Councils may have been notified). Indeed under the present arrangement it would not be politic to encourage public interest or local voluntary stewarding of the area (as in the Notts. 'Spadework' project) for if 'official' public access were granted liability would fall on the present owners who would be obliged under the Mines and Quarries Act to fence and make safe their property.

Such managerial blunders occur when there is no co-ordinated design/management team to review the situation and illustrates clearly the necessity for local authorities to understand the scale of the work they are undertaking when they decide to initiate a Country Park.

Public Involvement.

Parks are for people - what steps are being taken to inform the local residents about the progress of the proposed park?

At the Structure Plan stage broadsheets setting out proposals were issued to local households and some public meetings were held to explain County Policy and the involvement of Leicester City and Charnwood Borough Council in the Action Area Plan.

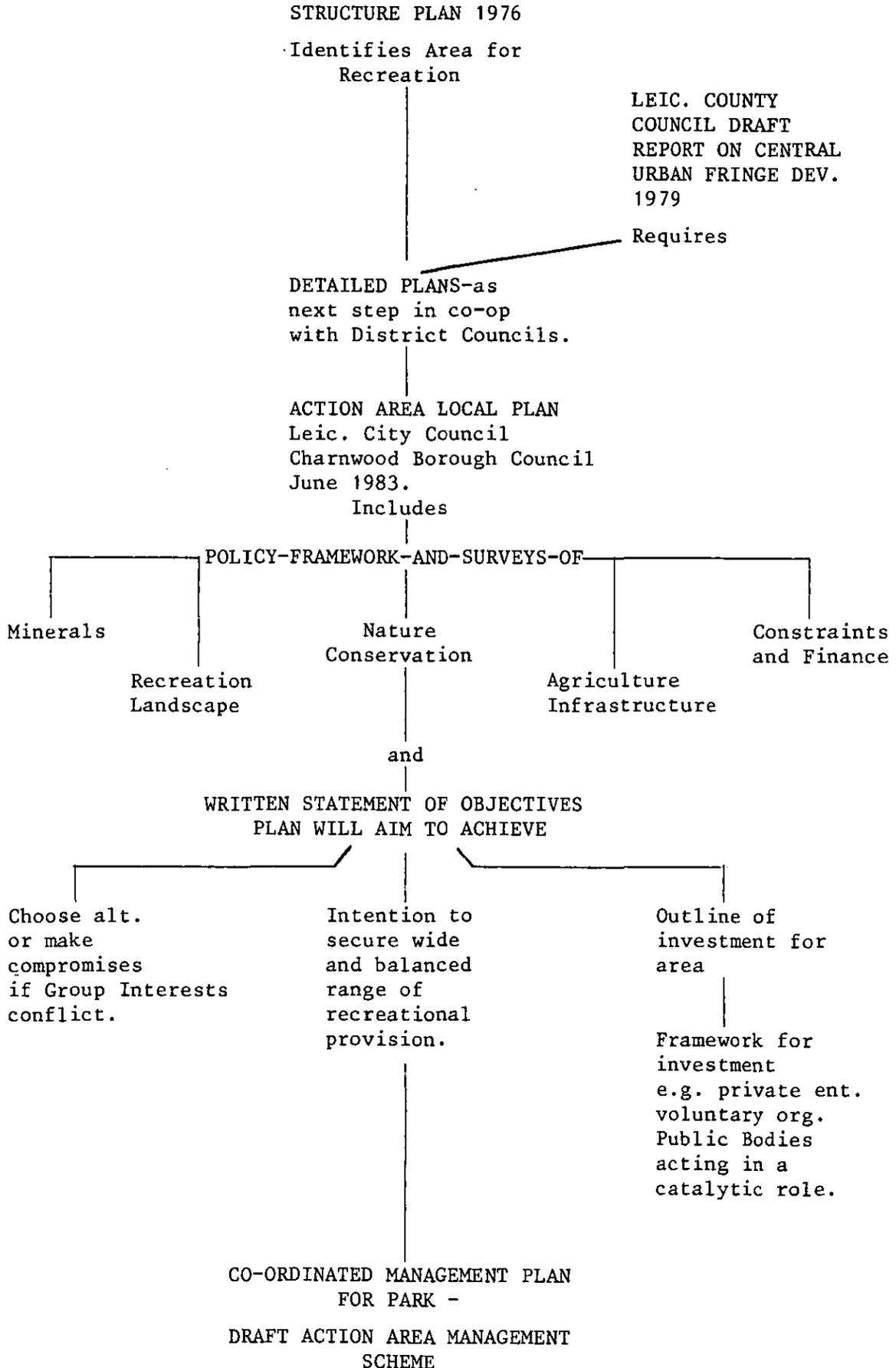
The first invitation to the public to get involved in the implementation of these plans is to be given this month when local schools will be asked to suggest a name and a logo for the park. A good start but one which needs to be quickly followed up with other events and invitations for ideas, if

enthusiasm is to be maintained.

There appears to be no plan at the present time for the Leicestershire authorities to create a Leisure Services Department comparable with the one in Nottinghamshire or to encourage public participation in the running of parks as at Warrington and Runcorn.

Wanlip Country Park has reached an interesting stage in its development - a great deal of thought, enthusiasm and planning has gone into this project but now it is time for it to come alive. It would be unfortunate if because of lack of co-ordinating energies and innovative flair it degenerated into a series of 'island territories' - always a danger if departmental preferences (or prejudices) are allowed to take precedence over the broader and more far reaching aspects of design/management.

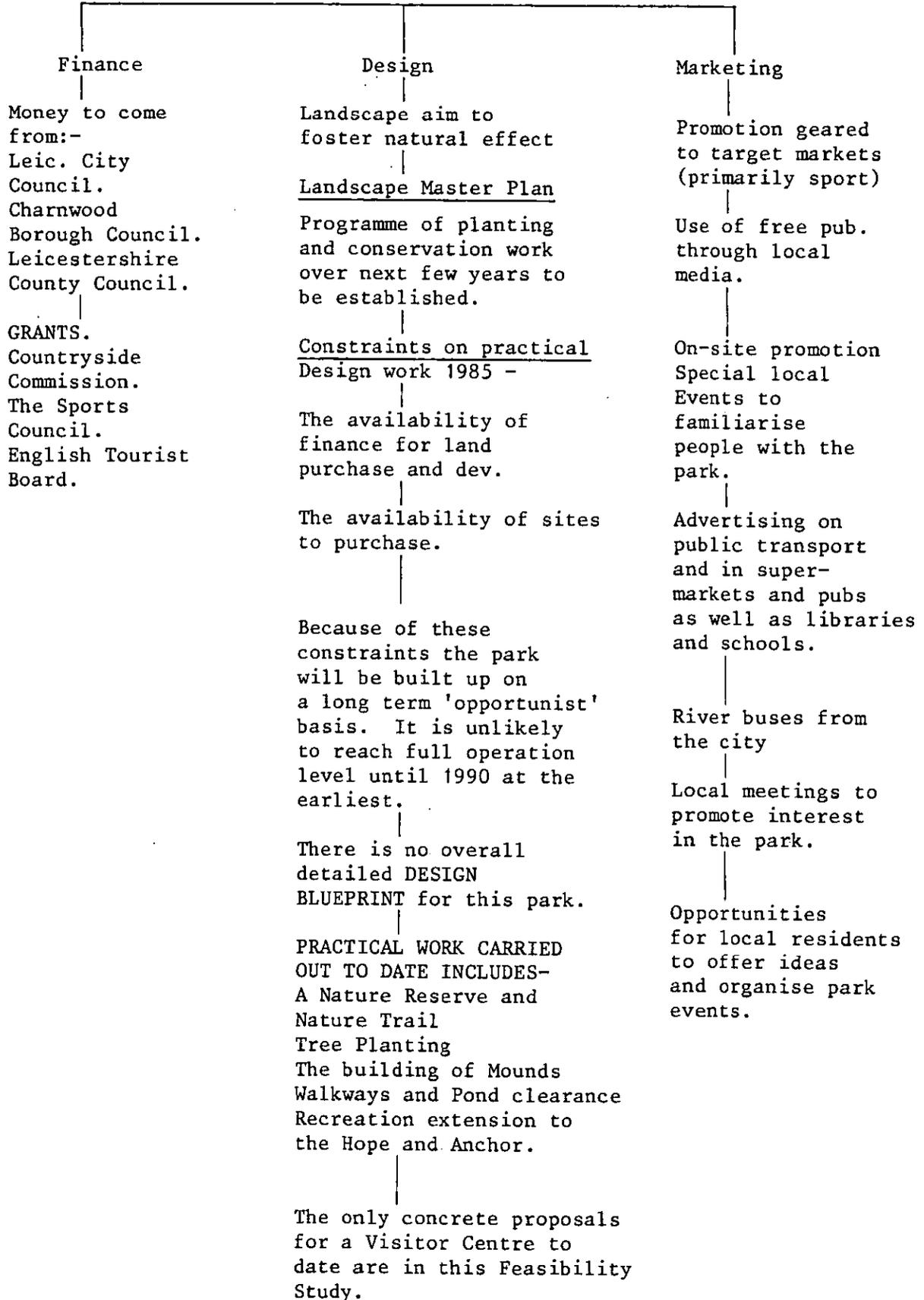
SUMMARY SKETCH OUTLINING THE PRINCIPLE STAGES AND INFLUENCES TO
DATE IN THE DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED WANLIP COUNTRY PARK.



DRAFT ACTION AREA MANAGEMENT
SCHEME-WANLIP COUNTRY PARK

Vehicle for implementing the
objectives of Action Area Plan
and continued management of the
area.

Includes



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