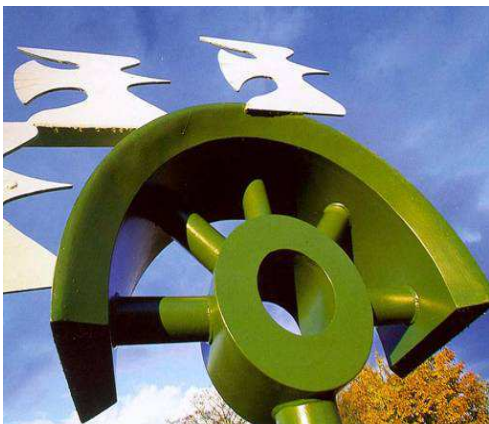
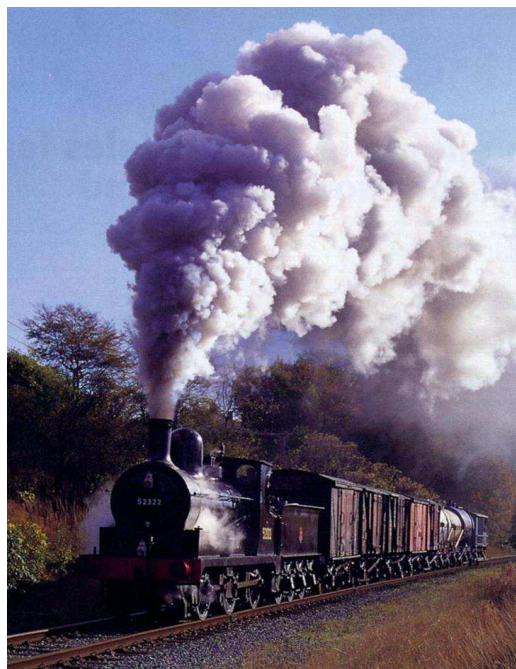


# Burrs Country Park Strategy 2015 - 2029

Draft for Cabinet – 4 March 2015



Resources and Regulation

[www.bury.gov.uk](http://www.bury.gov.uk)

**Bury**  
COUNCIL



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Burrs Country Park is a unique recreational retreat located just one mile north of Bury town centre. Bisected by the winding River Irwell and at what was once the epicentre of the town's contribution to the Industrial Revolution, the site contains remains of former water and steam-powered cotton mills. These industrial remains now tell the story of Burrs' past within a secluded valley setting which allows for a fascinating blend of heritage, recreation and pleasant natural scenery.
- 1.2 In addition, Burrs provides a wide range of events, opportunities for short walks or high-octane leisure activities for the family. The picturesque countryside and passing steam trains of the East Lancashire Railway (ELR) give Burrs the platform to attract tourists, many of whom choose to stay on the site's caravan park and visit Greater Manchester and Lancashire. Burrs also represents a halfway stop on the Irwell Sculpture Trail where an interesting mix of history, art and recreation all come together as one.
- 1.3 Burrs has much to offer the visitor, and the Council is proud of the work undertaken to-date to develop the park over three decades from an abandoned derelict and unwelcoming eyesore to the popular Green Flag award-winning visitor attraction it is today. However, the site still remains full of further development potential and is in need of a refresh to help modernise and sustain it as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century community facility.
- 1.4 This strategy sets out the local and planning policy context which is relevant to the future development of Burrs Country Park. It describes the park's historical perspective as well as its current functions and features before highlighting the key issues and opportunities for Burrs. It then sets out a continuing Vision and Objectives for the park and identifies key projects that will help to fulfil Burrs' potential to establish itself as a 'destination park' of regional significance and form a direct link with Bury town centre and attractions and businesses along the wider Irwell Valley.
- 1.5 This report has the following aims:
  - To reaffirm the Council's ambition to make Burrs Country Park a quality regional family tourist attraction with much to offer the visitor;
  - To capitalise on the Borough's growing strategic offer and reputation as a sub-regional success story at Burrs, helping to generate higher visitor numbers and longer stays, thereby resulting in increased spend within the local economy;
  - To work with a range of interested partners in encouraging investment and supporting funding applications for future

aspirational projects within the park and the wider Irwell Valley;

- To unlock the combined potential of Burrs and the ELR by establishing a direct Burrs Country Park railway halt and developing a shared Marketing/Destination Plan.

## **2.0 THE LOCAL CONTEXT**

- 2.1 Since its establishment in the late 1980s, Burrs Country Park has formed part of an evolving visitor destination offer for the Borough, which now encompasses a vibrant Bury town centre and a set of linked attractions, giving the Borough a strong identity.
- 2.2 Bury has seen substantial investment in recent years which has transformed the town centre and its surrounding areas. This reflects the Council's shared Bury vision in the *Economic Strategy* for the Borough to be 'a great place in which to live, work, visit and study'. As outlined in the Economic Strategy, the Borough starts from a position of strength largely due to its unique sense of place, particularly through the vital asset of Bury Market and supported by other attractions such as the ELR, Bury Transport Museum, The Fusilier Museum, The Met Theatre, Bury Art Museum and the area's attractive valley towns and villages. The addition of the Caravan Club at Burrs along with the Premier Inn in Bury town centre has helped to raise the profile of Bury as an overnight destination.

### **Bury town centre**

- 2.3 A vibrant and viable town, Bury hosts quality retail, leisure and visitor attractions for both residents and visitors and is currently outperforming neighbouring towns in Greater Manchester for both the day and night time economies. In November 2014, the town was voted a top three national finalist in the Academy of Urbanism's 'Great Town Award' for 2015 and in February 2015 became the first town centre in Greater Manchester to achieve Purple Flag status in recognition of the quality of the evening and night time economy offer in the town centre. The national award and accreditation scheme is designed to promote those towns and cities which provide a diverse range of entertainment and a safe environment for all age groups and all users of the town centre.

### **Retail market**

- 2.4 The £350 million retail and leisure development at The Rock opened in 2010 and together with the Mill Gate shopping centre and the vibrant market, has led to Bury being host to a wide range of both multiple and independent retailers. This coupled with other factors such as enhanced cultural attractions and an expanding food and drink offer has created a vastly improved and more vibrant town centre. Bury is now ranked the 3<sup>rd</sup> best retail destination in Greater

Manchester<sup>1</sup> - only bettered by Manchester city centre and the Trafford Centre.

- 2.5 In January 2015, The Rock was at 96% occupancy and in 2013 exceeded the UK footfall figures for High Street and Shopping Centres by 6%. The popular shopping complex includes large anchors such as Debenhams and Marks and Spencer, the former winning Store of the Year in 2013 and the latter one of the top performing stores in the North West. The 408 apartments above the retail units are expected to be completed in late 2015 creating additional town centre living.

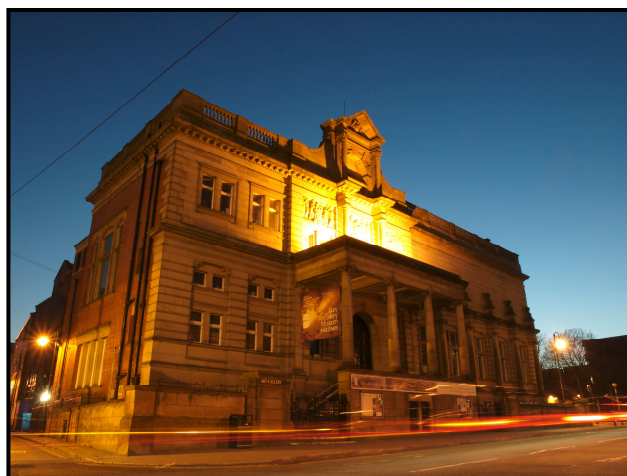
### **Developing a visitor economy**

#### Improved 'Destination' offer

- 2.6 The Economic Strategy notes that whilst the town centre is considered a high quality day visit destination it can be improved further with promotion and well-thought out tourist infrastructure. In order to achieve this, an important objective is to further integrate cultural products, activities and events into Bury's strong retail and leisure offer.
- 2.7 Recent years have seen major investment in Bury's visitor attractions. In 2009, the £4.2 million Fusilier Museum opened in the town centre, a move which strengthened the town's Cultural Quarter product. The Museum also became the new location for Bury's Tourist Information Centre. In 2010, Bury Transport Museum reopened after a £3.15 million redevelopment project which saw the museum become an integrated part of the ELR experience.
- 2.8 The growth in the number of quality visitor attractions, and the increased retail offer provided by The Rock has led to the arrival of the first Bury town centre hotel. The 115-room Premier Inn opened in Summer 2011, contributing to a 16% increase in overnight stays within the Borough the following year.
- 2.9 Bury's success as a destination is reflected in its visitor figures. The ELR saw a 22% increase in visitor numbers between 2010 and 2014 (154,540 from 128,711) whilst The Fusilier Museum saw numbers rise from 18,090 in 2010 to 20,000 by 2013. The award-winning Bury Market continues to go from strength-to-strength attracting high numbers of local residents and day visitors. The number of coach groups visiting the market has increased from 1,429 in 2008 to 1,578 coaches in 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Javelin VENUESCORE Retail Rankings 2014



**Visitor attractions across the Borough**

Clockwise from top left: The Rock, Bury Art Museum, the East Lancashire Railway and Bury Market.

2.10 The story does not end there as Bury continues to develop as a destination. Bury town centre now hosts a series of growing events, including Bury Light Night, and in 2014 the new Bury Sculpture Centre opened as part of Bury Art Museum. In the same year, building on its success, The Fusilier Museum unveiled The Minden Suite which is a £1.4 million conference and events space. The Met won 'Best Entertainment Venue' at the 2014 Manchester Tourism Awards and have plans for a £4.6 million refurbishment with completion expected in Summer 2016, incorporating an increase in theatre capacity (from 220 to 270 seated and from 300 to 380 standing), new rehearsal spaces, offices and a reconfigured main entrance with a larger lift and additional toilet facilities.

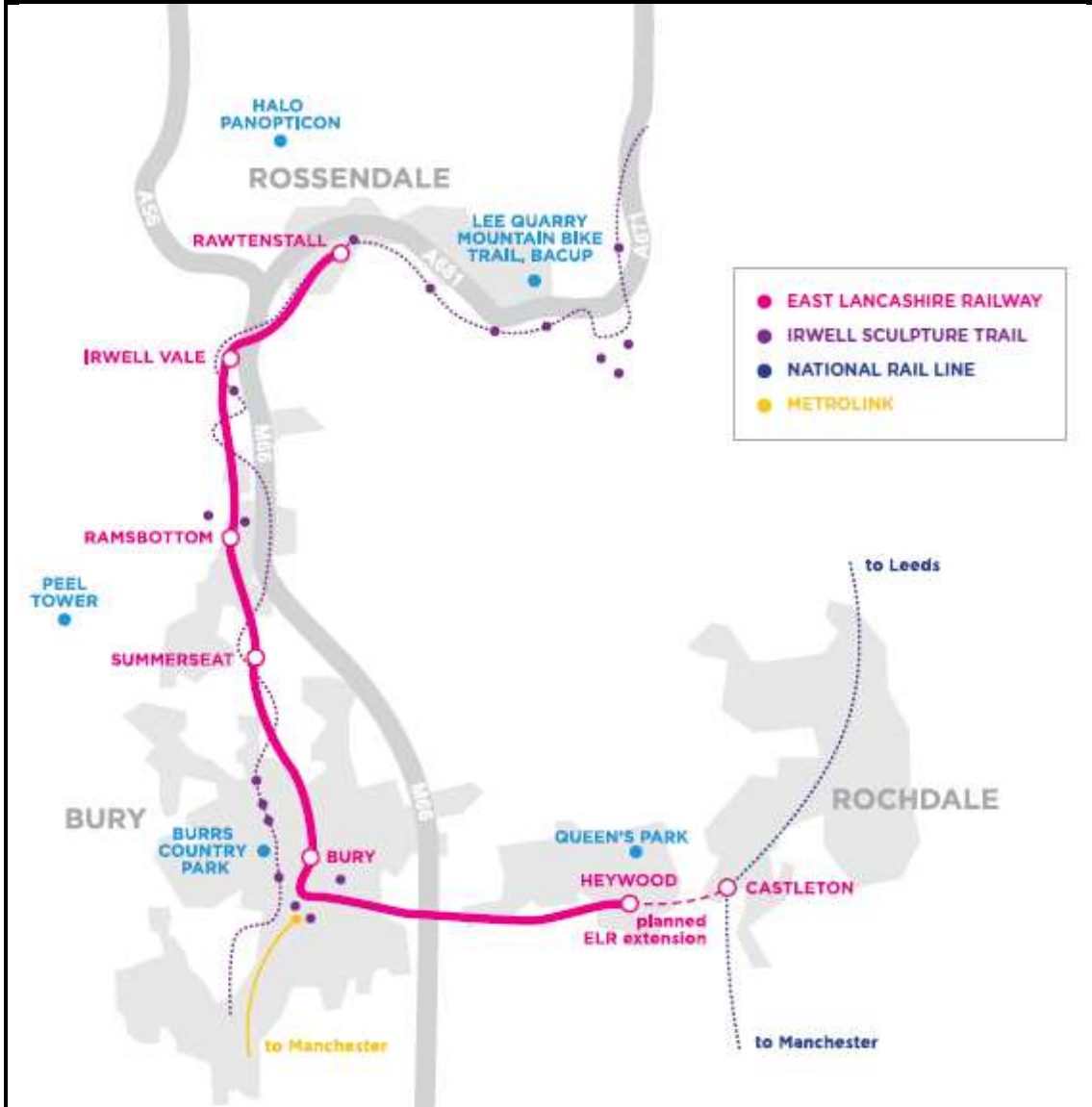
2.11 Research<sup>2</sup> has shown that Borough-wide visitor spend rose from £238 million in 2009 to just over £302 million in 2012, whilst numbers employed in tourism increased by 14.8% from 3,546 to 4,074 in the same period. As expected there was also an increase in visitor numbers with day visits increasing from £4.4 million in 2009 to £4.9 million in 2012, which has coincided with uplift in overnight visitors from 394,000 to 450,000.

<sup>2</sup> Figures from Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) - Bury Report 2009-2012

Irwell Valley and the ELR heritage railway

2.12 The 12-mile ELR heritage railway line has its principal station within Bury town centre and is a visitor attraction of regional importance. **Figure 1** shows the ELR network, the position of Burrs and how the railway connects with towns and public transport infrastructure in the sub-region.

**FIGURE 1**  
**ELR NETWORK AND SURROUNDING AREA**



Source: East Lancashire Railway

2.13 The ELR added 'Large Visitor Attraction of the Year' from the Lancashire Tourism Awards to its many awards in November 2014. Since the release of its *2020 Development Strategy*, developed by Locum Consulting, the volunteer-run organisation has seen a steady increase in visitors from 128,711 in 2010 to 157,540 in 2014. The all year/all weather attraction now has a full programme of events including Special Event weekends. 'Dining with Distinction'

programme, Steam Experience Days, Rail Ale tours, photography courses and the renowned Santa Specials. Its growth has stimulated wide-ranging economic benefits throughout both Bury's section of the Irwell Valley and into adjoining Boroughs.

- 2.14 In future years, through its project development and increased marketing effort, the ELR are seeking to widen the appeal of the railway to the family sector to reach a target of 200,000 visitors per annum by 2020.
- 2.15 One of the ELR's most popular stops is Ramsbottom which has become a major tourist attraction in its own right. In 2014 the town was announced as a Runner Up for the Daily Telegraph's 2014 'High Street of the Year' survey; the only place in the North West to make the Top 10. The town has developed a reputation for independent shopping and award-winning restaurants as well as a successful programme of events. The annual Ramsbottom Chocolate Festival has developed from a small one day event in 2009 to a two-day festival attracting around 22,000 visitors. The town also hosts the annual Ramsbottom Music Festival which in 2014 saw 9,563 visitors to the event over the weekend.

### **Environmental improvement**

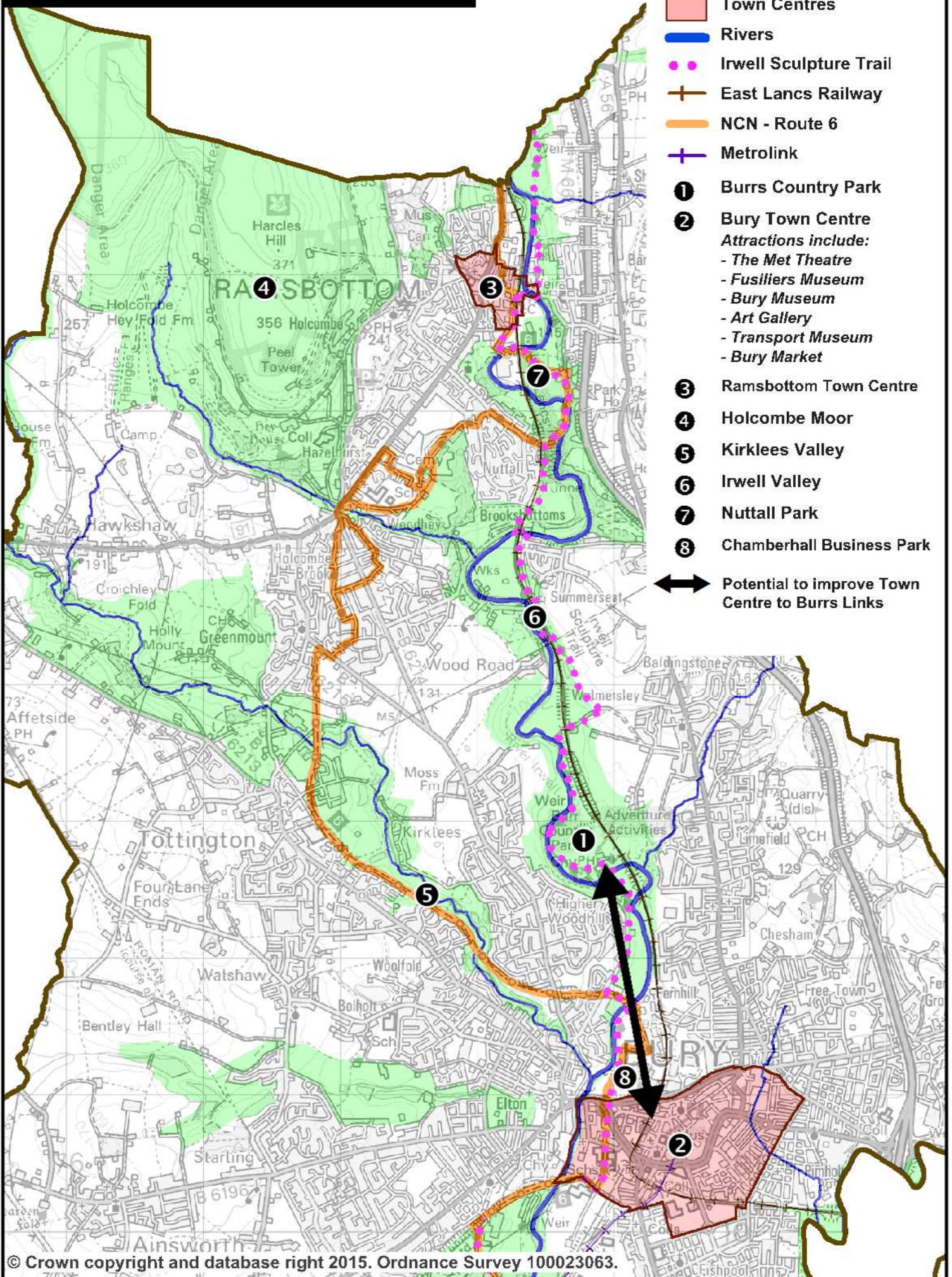
- 2.16 Bury continues to fly the flag for the visual attractiveness and quality of its recreational spaces, winning the 'Best Large Town' category in the North West in Bloom Awards for 11 years running and scooping the Gold Medal Award or Britain in Bloom in 2013. Radcliffe has also won the same category for 4 consecutive years. The 'In Bloom' campaigns and subsequent awards help to inspire voluntary work and co-operation between communities and boost the local economy through increased tourism and inward investment and contributing towards efforts to make Bury a vibrant town centre.
- 2.17 The Borough is also a trend-setter for Green Flag Award accreditation, winning the accolade for a 12 of its main parks for the 5<sup>th</sup> year running. Keep Britain Tidy recognise this achievement for parks that are well-maintained and well-managed with excellent community involvement.
- 2.18 Burrs is the Borough's flagship park and as such is the Borough's showcase for the above awards, not least through the park being a centre of excellence for voluntary work and self-management.

### **An expanded role for Burrs**

- 2.19 Bury continues to buck the national trend, sitting within a very successful sub-region. As recognised in the Economic Strategy, Burrs Country Park is one of the Borough's major attractions in a growing local cultural and tourism sector and is very much part of Bury's success story.



**FIGURE 2**  
**BURRS: WIDER CONTEXT**





- 2.20 **Figure 2 'Burrs: Wider Context'** illustrates the pivotal position that Burrs holds within the Borough. It sits alongside the ELR and forms part of the Irwell Sculpture Trail and has strong links with the wider Irwell Valley (from Bury town centre to Ramsbottom), the Kirklees Valley and the West Pennine Moors. In particular, the links between the park and the town centre along Woodhill Road and the parkland setting of Chamberhall Business Park have much potential for improvement in opening up riverside access and encouraging pedestrian and cycle access between Burrs and the tourist attractions in the town centre.
- 2.21 A key asset for Burrs is the proximity of the ELR which runs through the park. The 2020 Development Strategy describes the park as being 'well established' and notes that the railway provides an 'atmospheric backdrop' to the wide range of facilities the park offers, including the recent addition of the Caravan Club. Locum identify the establishment of a railway halt at Burrs as having tremendous potential in developing family appeal and synergy between the two flagship projects, and outline their view that the halt would stimulate visitor numbers substantially to both the ELR and to Burrs Country Park.
- 2.22 Planning permission is in place for Burrs Halt and for an extension of the adjacent Caravan Club site. Once complete, the halt will support and enhance Bury's growing visitor offer by creating a direct link between Burrs Country Park and the attractions and businesses in Bury town centre and along the wider Irwell Valley.
- 2.23 The Caravan Club attracted 45,000 visitor nights in 2014. In terms of total pitch occupancy this was 20,272 pitch nights, up from 19,317 pitch nights in 2013. Member surveys have shown that the average local off-site spending is £50 per pitch night and so, taking into account the 2014 total pitch occupancy figure above and a multiplier of 5 to reflect economic compounding, this means that the Caravan Club is contributing an estimated £5 million to the local economy on an annual basis. The Caravan Club foresee the proposed extension to generate a pro-rata increase of 25% in terms of occupancy and economic benefit over a build-up period of 3 years.
- 2.24 The construction of an ELR heritage railway halt and expanded Caravan Club site at Burrs will have a number of transformational benefits for the Borough including:
- Further development of Burrs as a host for joined-up Park/ELR events;
  - Burrs as a destination in its own right, stimulated by a wide range of attractions;

- Increased economic benefits for the area by encouraging visitors to stay longer and spend more as a result of an improved visitor offer;
- Tapping into the market of Caravan Club customers – Rail tickets/offers could be offered on the site to help open up the appeal and raise awareness of local attractions such as Ramsbottom;
- A catalyst for improved access to the Irwell Valley both for visitors to the 'gateway' of Burrs and as part of the ELR's 'Every Stop is a Start' marketing campaign.

2.25 The variety of projects listed within this Burrs Strategy, particularly the railway halt, can assist in increasing visitor numbers to the area by linking two major attractions to form a cluster, thereby appealing to a broader market. The strategy will oversee significant improvements to the quality of existing facilities and new facilities will be provided to maximise opportunities for visitor spend.

### **3.0 PLANNING CONTEXT**

#### **National Planning Policy Framework**

- 3.1 With the publication of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) in March 2012, the Government set out to streamline the planning advice previously contained in a wide range of guidance notes and circulars. At its heart is a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' (Paragraph 14) for both plan making and taking decisions on planning applications.
- 3.2 For decision-taking this means that development proposals which accord with the development plan should be approved 'without delay' unless there are adverse impacts which outweigh the benefits or specific policies (e.g. Green Belt) indicate development should be restricted.
- 3.3 Key policies in the NPPF with relevance to Burrs include:

Core Planning Principles (Paragraph 17)	Planning should proactively drive and support sustainable economic development.
Strong, competitive economy (Paragraph 20)	To help achieve economic growth, local planning authorities should plan proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century.
Rural economy (Paragraph 28)	Local Plans must take a positive approach to economic growth in rural areas by supporting sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors,

	and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities.
Transport (Paragraph 29)	The transport system should be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes to give people a real choice about how they travel.
Design (Paragraph 58)	Planning decisions should aim to ensure that developments establish a strong sense of place and optimise the potential of the site to create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses, including green infrastructure, and support local facilities and transport networks.
Healthy communities (Paragraph 70)	Planning decisions should plan positively for the provision of community facilities and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.
Green Belt (Paras 89/90)	New buildings in the Green Belt are considered appropriate where they are for agriculture and forestry or involve extension/alteration, replacements in the same use or redevelopment of brownfield land, providing they do not cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Reuse of a building is also appropriate provided it preserves openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
Flood Risk (Paragraph 100)	Development should be directed away from areas at highest risk of flooding, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.
Natural environment (Paragraph 114)	Planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure.
Historic environment (Paragraph 131)	Planning applications should take into account the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, the positive contribution they can make to sustainable communities and the desirability of new development and its positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

### **Bury Unitary Development Plan**

- 3.4 The *Bury Unitary Development Plan (UDP)* was adopted in August 1997 and remains the Borough's statutory land-use plan. Burrs sits within the River Valley but Policy OL5/2 allows for development or change of use of land where it does not divide the open parts of the valley into sections. The site is also within the Green Belt but, as indicated above under national policy, the conversion and re-use of buildings would generally be appropriate providing that the general openness of the Green Belt is maintained.

- 3.5 In terms of recreation and tourism, Burrs Country Park is protected for recreation purposes under Policy RT3/1, which safeguards the Borough's most important focal points for informal recreation. Furthermore, Policy RT4/1 on Tourism Development encourages and support proposals for the development of appropriate visitor related attractions and facilities throughout the Borough, particularly in the Upper Irwell Valley, noting that this location is 'an area where preference will be given to locating tourist attractions and facilities' and that 'development proposals will be particularly encouraged where they build on existing strengths, such as the East Lancashire Railway, and places of interest including...Burrs Country Park'.
- 3.6 Under Policy RT4/6 the Council encourage and support proposals for the further development and enhancement of facilities associated with the East Lancashire Railway, and includes a proposal for a 'Proposed Station Halt' at Burrs which it argues would greatly benefit the development of the area.
- 3.7 There are also a number of environmental designations in the area relating to Wildlife Links and Corridors, Special Landscape Areas and Ancient Monuments. The design and layout of future development proposals would need to ensure that these policy designations are taken into account and features protected or enhanced where possible.
- 3.8 Appendix 1 contains further background information on the national, regional and local context underpinning this strategy.

## **4.0 BURRS – PAST AND PRESENT**

4.1 Burrs has played a key role in Britain’s industrial past and has undergone significant transformation and improvement in getting to where it is today.

### **Industrial History**

4.2 The following sets out some of the key milestones in Burrs’ historical industrial growth and subsequent decline.

200 BC - 250 AD	First evidence of a settlement was an iron age hillfort at Castlesteads, a sandstone bluff, overlooking the River Irwell at Burrs.
1752	Farmhouse built on How Lane (now The Brown Cow PH).
1780-1800	A major site for the development of water power industrial processes. Two cotton mills were built by Robert Peel Snr. and Robert Calrow at Higher Woodhill and Lower Woodhill, and two self-contained communities including workers’ cottages formed around them based on family and child labour. Burrs had one of the largest water wheels at the Calrow’s Higher Woodhill site similar to that at Quarry Bank Mill in Styal, Cheshire.
C. 1803	Burrs canal feeder was constructed to supply water to Elton Reservoir south of Bury Town Centre which served the Manchester Bury and Bolton Canal.
1850	Boom period in cotton industry. Higher Woodhill Mill rebuilt with new water wheel and steam engine.
1861-80	Cotton famine leads to Calrow family business going into liquidation. Burrs cottages consisted of 28 homes housing 141 people. Mills sold in 1870 and bridge built across river.
1880-1900	Change in function for both mills: Higher Woodhill used for paper manufacturing and Burrs Mill operates as bleachworks.
1920-1925	Bowling green and cricket ground laid out for mill workers to north of Burrs Mill lodge. Woodhill Road and Mill Manager’s house built (now The Garsdale PH).
1930-35	Higher Woodhill Mill demolished and Burrs Mill closes during the Depression.
1939-45	Brief history as an internment camp for Italian prisoners of war during 2 <sup>nd</sup> World War.
1982	Burrs Mill demolished.

### **Developing a Country Park**

4.3 Since the decline of Burrs as an industrial area, Bury Council has continuously developed the site to help transform the area into a country park. The Council is also one of the four Trust partners involved in developing the ELR. Both the Burrs project and the heritage railway project were conceived within the same overarching regeneration strategy for the Upper Irwell Valley and share the vision of establishing a sustainable economic revival for

the valley's towns, villages and countryside. The following identifies some of the key developments throughout this process.

<b>Mid 1980s</b>	Site bought by the former Greater Manchester Council in a derelict and semi derelict state as part of a wider programme of improving derelict land within river valleys in the sub-region. The closed Bury to Rawtenstall British Rail line was identified by GMC as having potential to lead a wide ranging regeneration strategy for the Upper Irwell Valley.
<b>1986</b>	GMC abolished and Bury MBC inherited the site with an interest in developing it as a Country Park in line with the Croal Irwell Valley Plan proposals. ELR Trust established to carry on work started by GMC.
<b>1987</b>	ELR line from Bury to Ramsbottom opened with an aspiration to open a halt at Burrs to compete with other heritage railways around the country.
<b>Late 1980s</b>	Woodhill Road bridge rebuilt, archaeological excavations carried out at Burrs Mill and at Castlesteads, site cleared.
<b>1989</b>	Work began on forming the canoe slalom.
<b>1992</b>	Higher Woodhill Mill excavations, replacement of former aqueduct with footbridge.
<b>1994-1996</b>	Old workers' cottages demolished and rebuilt to create new self-run activity centre, cafe, bunkhouse, kitchen, changing rooms, showers and equipment store.
<b>1995</b>	Interpretation of historical features. Formed a canoe slalom in the Irwell and practice pool with floodlights at the lodge behind the former Burrs Mill. Agricultural showground moved to Burrs from Bury Ground.
<b>1995-1998</b>	Introduction of public art to Burrs. 'Waterwheel' public art installed at entrance to park in December 1995. Further art pieces were added as part of the Irwell Sculpture Trail with the 'Stone Cycle' in 1997 and the 'Picnic Area' in 1998.
<b>2003</b>	Attained the Green Flag Award standard for parks.
<b>2005</b>	Suite of interpretation panels and signs installed.
<b>2006</b>	Permission granted for installation of high and low ropes course near to activity centre.
<b>2007</b>	Caravan Club site opened.
<b>2009</b>	Permission granted for Caravan Club extension and railway halt.



## Burrs Today

- 4.4 Since its acquisition in the 1980s, the 40 hectare Burrs site has been progressively reclaimed and developed into a flagship country park for the Borough that has achieved Green Flag status for its high standards of maintenance, range of facilities and future ambitions. The images below show the transformation of Burrs from the derelict remains which the Council inherited to the pleasant recreational asset it is today.



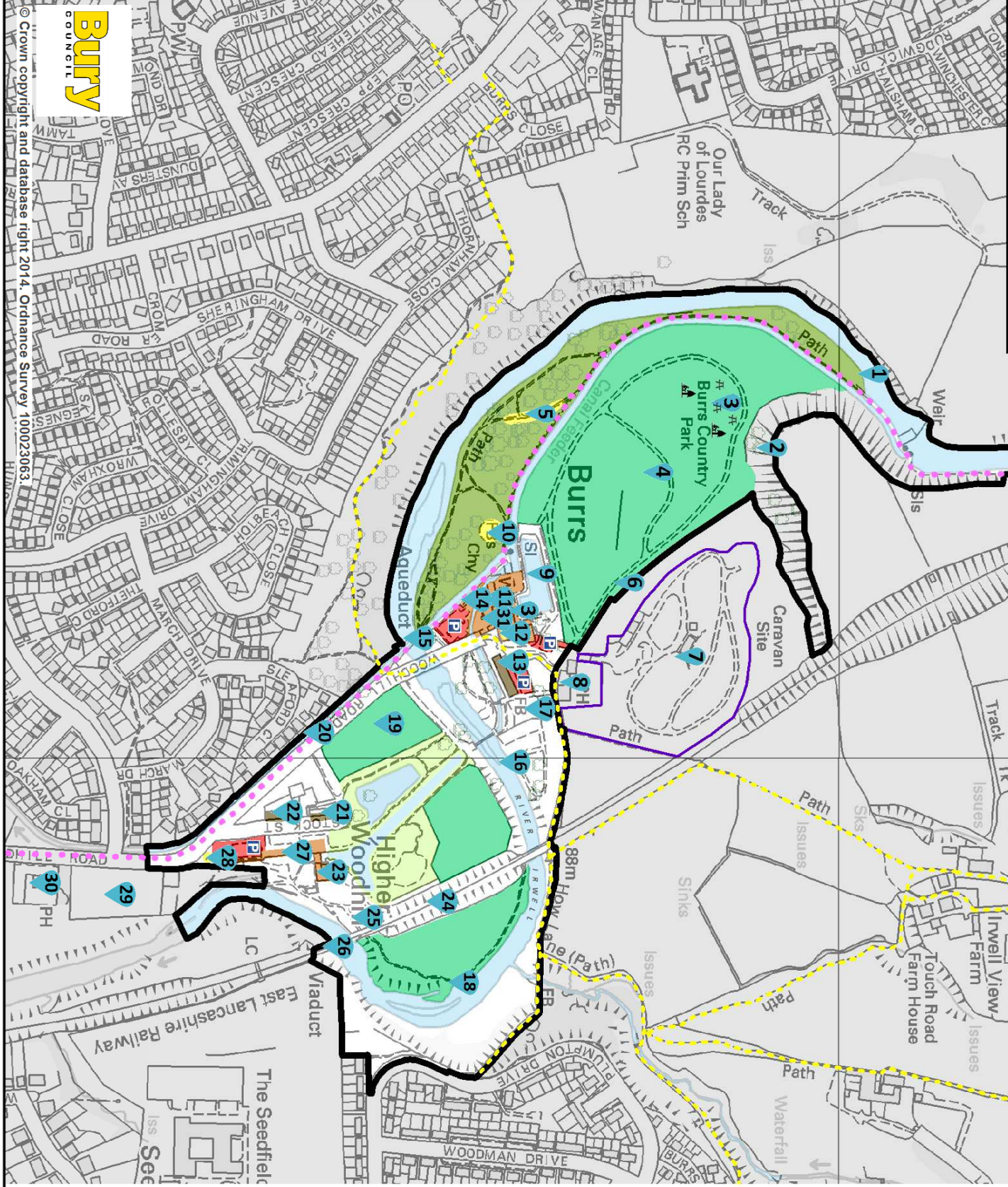
- 4.5 **Figure 3 'Burrs Today'** sets out a plan of the park, its key buildings, areas and facilities. Currently, Burrs has been developed to a stage where it encompasses a collection of key elements as set out below:

- ❖ **Industrial archaeology:** The historical remains of the two mills at Burrs and Higher Woodhill and associated wheelpits, goit systems and waterways have been restored and reclaimed and are supported by interpretation on-site which includes an insight

into the social history surrounding the families that first set up the two mills. In particular, the significance of the site in harnessing water power has been a guiding influence in its reclamation strategy to-date and helping to give an insight into manufacturing technology and life in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

- ❖ **Water resources:** The unique site characteristics comprising the River Irwell, Canal Feeder and former mill water system fuelled local enthusiasm for the establishment of a canoe white water training centre that has since expanded into an activity centre offering a range of sporting short courses to schools and family groups including canoeing, canoe polo, kayaking, rafting, fishing and angling.
- ❖ **A focus for outdoor recreation and learning:** The park has been developed as an outdoor classroom for school groups on day visits and general park users. In addition to the watersports listed above, the activity centre also offers training for climbing, abseiling, mountain biking, archery, orienteering and tackling high ropes, with opportunities for adventure games, team building and problem solving. Equipped play facilities are also provided at the entrance to the park on Woodhill Road and also recently in the form of a 'Trim Trail' exercise training area adjacent to the Caravan Club site.
- ❖ **Wildlife and ecology:** Former industrial reservoirs have been converted into fishing ponds and wildlife wetland areas for local angling societies and quiet walking areas for other park users.
- ❖ **Good access on foot or by cycle:** Burrs lies just off National Cycle Route 6 from Manchester to Preston, the Kirklees Trail which has recently been improved by the construction of a viaduct at Woolfold (aided by Sustrans funding) and a new riverside path at Chamberhall.
- ❖ **Sculpture Trail "cluster":** Five significant public art works have been established to provide interest for park users and for the visitors passing through on what is a significant 'stop' on the 32-mile Irwell Sculpture Trail.
- ❖ **'Caravan Club' site:** An 85-pitch national touring caravan and camping site was established in 2007 and has been a major success, with demand for pitches often exceeding availability.
- ❖ **ELR:** The sights and sounds of the steam railway which runs directly through the park add its distinctive character and similarly the views across Burrs and the wider Irwell Valley from the railway are major drivers for tourism in this part of Bury.
- ❖ **Events programme:** The establishment of a multifunctional showground has stimulated the showcase of a collection of events over the Summer months including the Bury Agricultural Show,

**FIGURE 3**  
**BURRS TODAY**



KEY	Description
1	Public Rights of Way / Footpaths
2	Canoe Slalom Start
3	Castlesteads
4	Picnic Benches
5	Showground Site
6	'Troll Trail' Sculpture
7	Trim Trail
8	Caravan Club
9	Brown Cow PH
10	Canoe Training Pond
11	'Stone Circle' Sculpture
12	Chimney
13	'Bench' Sculpture
14	Activity Centre / Cafe
15	'Picnic Area' Sculpture
16	Aqueduct
17	Canoe Slalom End
18	High Ropes Course
19	Fishing Area
20	Over Flow Car Parking
21	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal
22	Ranger Base
23	Barn
24	Wheel Pit
25	East Lancashire Railway
26	Gasometer
27	Higher Woodhill Viaduct
28	Former Higher Woodhill Mill
29	'Waterwheel' Sculpture
30	Play Area
31	The Garsdale PH



Family Fun Day/Car Boot Sale, Military Mayhem and the Forces and Forties Weekend.

## **5.0 KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

- 5.1 This section sets out the key issues and opportunities for Burrs Country Park going forward and refers to a number of development projects which are listed in the Action Plan at Section 7.

### **Burrs Halt and Caravan Club**

- 5.2 Burrs Country Park is a flagship park within the Borough and offers an array of leisure facilities locally. Both the well-established ELR and the successful Caravan Club site are considerable assets for the park and the Council believe that linking the two major features to create one cluster of attractions can increase the appeal of Burrs further to a much broader market. The projects listed in Phase 1 of the Action Plan will begin to lay the foundations for elevating Burrs as a tourist attraction within Greater Manchester and the North West.
- 5.3 To add to the many awards to-date, the ELR has recently won the 'Large Visitor Attraction' Award at the Lancashire Tourism Awards 2014. The railway's new strapline is "Every stop is a start" which refers to the continuing aspiration for the attraction to be more than just a journey on the railway but also a means of exploring the towns and villages of the Irwell and Roch valleys, their facilities and events, all of which offer something for every age and interest. In 2015, the ELR plan to develop local area initiatives to encourage people to visit the railway and local businesses to promote it; one such venture will be a walking and cycling guide showcasing routes which can involve a journey on the ELR. A halt at Burrs would provide an excellent focus for this work with its accessibility and network of footpaths and cycle routes towards the Irwell Valley, Kirklees Valley and Bury town centre.
- 5.4 The construction and opening of Burrs Halt is identified as a key project in the adopted ELR Locum Report for increasing the number of visitors per year to its target of 200,000 per year by 2020 (see Section 2) and in widening the appeal to the family sector on a year-round basis and not just for special events. A direct link between the heritage railway and the park will be established for the first time, offering mutual benefits for the two primary attractions in the Irwell Valley. The ELR envisage the project as being instrumental in enriching the overall visitor experience of the railway, particularly for families who can break their journeys to explore this part of the Irwell Valley and the expanding park facilities on offer. Through its timetable, the ELR already encourage visitors to break their journey at any station after having purchased a full line ticket.

- 5.5 Burrs Caravan Club site is the only Greater Manchester facility in the organisation's portfolio, offering 85 pitches; 64 of which are hardstandings and 21 are reinforced grass. Since its opening in July 2007, families and train spotters alike have been attracted to the site, some from overseas, using it as a base to explore Manchester and South Lancashire. Taking account of all ages, the Caravan Club estimate the touring park accounted for an estimated 45,000 visitor nights in 2014. The proximity of the planned halt to the expanded 107 pitch facility will allow its guests to board the train at Burrs instead of travelling into Bury by car.
- 5.6 Both projects 1A and 1B have the benefit of planning permission and initial issues with the diversion and closure of public rights of way have been rectified as of October 2014. The key obstacle remaining is the availability of grant funding to finance the building of the halt platform (**Project 1A**), which itself must be completed before the Caravan Club extension can start (**Project 1B**) as land and access for construction traffic is restricted.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The creation of enhanced linkages between the ELR and Burrs and the wider Irwell Valley through the implementation of the planning approval for Burrs Halt and the Caravan Club.</li></ul>



### **Events and Traffic Management**

- 5.7 The annual Bury Agricultural Show is a key event on the town's tourism calendar attracting record-breaking attendances each year and its stunning countryside setting on the large area of open land to the rear of the site often attracts large numbers of first time visitors to the park. The Council is keen to establish Burrs as a location for outdoor events in Bury with the implementation of a regular events programme. The Agricultural Show, Fun Day, Military Mayhem and Forces and Forties Weekend currently provide a busy period around May and September but there is still potential for other types of events of varying scale during the summer, possibly in connection with food, music or arts and crafts. 'The Lost Carnival' is a new theatre and circus family event planned for the May 2015 bank holiday weekend and is expected to attract 15,000 people over four days.
- 5.8 Surface car parking at Burrs is free and totals 66 permanent spaces (including 2 disabled). The car parks are situated at the main entrance, adjoining the activity centre, at Burrs Mill, and adjacent the Brown Cow pub. Such a limited provision is adequate for a local country park facility, although events add extra pressure on infrastructure. An additional 319 car parking spaces are available during events on the three sites highlighted at Figure 4 under **Project 1C**, one of which has a reinforced Fibra-sand surface adjacent Woodhill Road.

- 5.9 It is expected that the railway halt will help to alleviate the problem of on-site car parking during large events as joint marketing initiatives such as a combined train and admittance ticket could be introduced to allow visitors to park off-site and catch the train. The stone-sett access roads, paths, bridges and parking areas on the site are not equipped to accommodate large volumes of traffic or footfall, and therefore the proposals under Phase 1 in particular will require a review of the way different users move through the site e.g. general visitors to the park compared with Caravan Club customers. It will be important for local partners and organisations to work more closely together in planning for future events to avoid timetable clashes on popular holiday weekends and to reduce the stress on the ELR network which links all the attractions.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The potential to establish Burrs as a key location for outdoor events.</li> <li>▪ The need to enhance the park’s infrastructure to facilitate its anticipated increased use and to minimise conflict between different user groups.</li> </ul>



### **Caravan and Camping Facilities**

- 5.10 Burrs is currently home to an 85 pitch Caravan Club site and this is the only such site in the sub-region. The site is close to capacity on most weekends, particularly from March to November, where in 2014 the Caravan Club recorded pitch occupancy as being at 95% or more on 67 days. A total of 20,272 pitch nights were recorded for 2014 and as expected the highest monthly occupancy figures were in the spring and summer months, the highest being July at 86%. However, not all pitches are suitable for all-weather use and the number of pitches available can vary throughout the year, only reaching the capacity of 85 pitches between April and September.
- 5.11 At present, the Caravan Club site does not offer facilities for camping and there are no campsites elsewhere in the Borough. However, a high level of enquiries at Bury’s Tourist Information Centre and at the Caravan Club would suggest there is demand.
- 5.12 The three sites under **Project 1C** are linked by an access track and gate from Woodhill Road and offer adaptable space which can also be used for camping and to host events themselves. There is high demand for camping in the Borough, particularly owing to the success of the Caravan Club and the two sites immediately adjacent the railway to the south of the Irwell are suitable for this use. This area has been regularly used for major ELR events and Ramsbottom Festival used it as their official camping site for the first time in September 2014.

- 5.13 Planning permission is in place for an extension to the Caravan Club site to create an additional 20 caravan and 4 camping pitches.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The implementation of the planning approval for an extension to the Caravan Club site.</li><li>▪ The potential to create camping facilities within the park in order to cater for general demand and demand created during special events.</li></ul>



### **Visitor centre**

- 5.14 The implementation of the halt, extended Caravan Club site and a more comprehensive events programme will see Burrs raising its profile as a family attraction whilst adding to the ELR visitor experience. The opening of the halt will have stimulated flexible working arrangements between the Council, Burrs Activity Centre and the ELR in forming a joint promotional calendar of events. Visitors arriving by train will have a couple of hours to stay in the park and the increased number and range of events will have helped to satisfy some of this demand. However there will remain no dedicated facilities for visitors beyond the small cafe in the activity centre which has limited opening hours and there will still be no public toilets.
- 5.15 The Council has a long-term aim of establishing a visitor centre for Burrs (**Project 1D**), not least to ensure that the park becomes more of a destination for visitors. The preferred site for the centre is the barn and associated land on Stock Street shown at Figure 4. Acting as a visitor information hub, open for 7 days a week, and providing a recognisable headquarters for the park, the new facility will provide a base to explore Burrs, the wider Irwell Valley and find out more about the site's industrial past, things to do in the local area including attractions in Bury and information on the ELR. The new centre and subsequent improvement of facilities under Phase 2 will make the Burrs Halt significantly more viable, extend the visitor experience of Burrs Country Park and ultimately contribute to the ELR Trust's ambition to lift the number of visits to the railway to 200,000 per year.
- 5.16 In addition the Council views Burrs as a favoured location for creative independent 'green' businesses which can generate their own events and activities, attract visitors and provide a rent income. Starter units for such self-sustaining enterprises will be incorporated within the centre, offering a degree of flexibility to appeal to a range of operators and activities such as crafts, wood carving and local produce. Spend opportunities at the park are presently limited and a better quality offer is required to help capitalise on the expected rise in day and staying visitors at the



Caravan Club and the surrounding areas. Catering facilities at parks have improved locally, particularly at Heaton Park in Manchester, and the Council aspire to attract a business which could provide a family-focused offer in addition to the services offered by the Garsdale and Brown Cow public houses. Commercial operations such as bike hire could create further opportunities for spend.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The need to make provision for a dedicated visitor centre within the park.</li> <li>▪ The potential to create an independent 'green business' lodge.</li> </ul> |
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### **Marketing**

- 5.17 Tied to the projects of Phase 1 is a need for a new marketing push for Burrs to spread the news of its benefits and growing reputation to the wider public. Promotion of the park and its facilities is presently undertaken via the Council's web pages, the ELR website, the Burrs Activity Centre website, the Council-published 'What's On' Guide (circulated four times a year) and a quarterly newsletter from the Friends of Burrs community group. The Caravan Club site and Burrs Country Park as a whole are currently promoted via the official Greater Manchester tourism website 'Visit Manchester' and by the VisitBury website. The Caravan Club also promote their facility through their website.
- 5.18 The implementation of the projects under Phase 1 and Phase 2 will not be a success however without an agreed comprehensive marketing and destination strategy and programme to understand potential impact of the railway halt on the park and how various partners can work together to reap the benefits that come with an increase in visitor numbers.
- 5.19 Burrs can be a real asset to the Council, the ELR and the Borough as a whole if marketing is central to the ethos of what the park is trying to achieve. Through a joint marketing strategy, partners could investigate the potential for an increased online presence, particularly through social media and the inclusion of information on the VisitBury website, in helping to get the message across to a wider audience.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The need to increase the profile of Burrs through the development of an effective marketing and destination strategy and programme for Burrs.</li> </ul> |
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### **Sustainability and upkeep of the park**

- 5.20 Burrs is the flagship park for the Borough's entry in the Bury in Bloom campaign and for the Green Flag Award and owes its success to the Council's workforce as well as the volunteer sector, particularly the Activity Centre, Friends of Burrs and volunteer rangers who have contributed to Burrs having a strong track record for organising events, outdoor activities, self-promotion and ensuring the daily upkeep of the site.
- 5.21 Self-management will be key to the future of the park and a management plan should be formed between key partners involved to commit to maintaining standards and to exploring methods of conserving resources and generating secondary income in the long-term.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Secure the involvement of the voluntary sector and other key partners in Burrs' future.</li></ul>



### **Improvement of existing facilities (*Projects 2A, 2B & 2C*)**

- 5.22 Much work was undertaken in the late 1980s and early 1990s to uncover the most interesting industrial remains such as the mill chimney, mill floors and water wheel pits, and revitalise the unique still and moving watercourses through the site to make them suitable for canoeing and similar activities. The mill goit and canal feeder were cleaned and the Council formed a partnership with the Bury Canoe and Kayak Club to develop a canoe slalom in the river. Following the restoration of the former mill lodge at Burrs Mill and the rebuilding of the cottages, the club formed a not-for-profit company Burrs Activity Centre Ltd and have offered a range of leisure activities for a number of years on a shared management basis using a mixture of volunteer and paid staff employed by the company. Interpretation of the archaeological remains was introduced in 1995 and was refreshed in 2005.
- 5.23 However, the majority of these facilities are outdated and showing signs of wear and tear. The canoe slalom benefits from the gradient of the River Irwell but is often made less efficient by the build up of rocks brought down when the river is in annual spate. The canal feeder is prone to silting up and requires funding to dredge the channel, whilst the goit passing the rear of the activity centre is very slow-moving which may be due to algae growth. The water features need to be cleaned up and be subject to a regular monitoring programme to ensure they are fit for purpose in serving a regionally significant country park. Enhancement of the canal feeder may allow for new walking and cycle links beyond the park towards the Kirklees Trail.

- 5.24 The activity centre has a clear purpose of providing support and training to school groups and other visitors who wish to experience the range of leisure activities Burrs has to offer. The Visitor Centre (**Project 1D**) will allow the activity centre to focus on this sole purpose and will take away the pressure of welcoming visitors to the park and providing information and support of a wider remit, which it is difficult to offer on a part-time basis. The lease for the centre is to expire shortly and this should be extended on the basis that this continued role is recognised. The promotion of the park to higher and wider numbers of users would provide the scope for the activity centre to offer more flexible leisure activities on the day rather than the current requirement to pre-book courses.
- 5.25 The mill remains are annually inspected and a repair programme is undertaken to prevent deterioration but there is much more potential to add interest to the features, such as the rear walls of Burrs Mill at the site of the former water wheel and at the wheel pit of Higher Woodhill Mill which is in a poor state and needs substantial weed clearance. Many of the signs and panels are out-of-date and require an overhaul or replacement.
- 5.26 The Council are keen to raise the quality of facilities within the park to gradually elevate Burrs to a level in keeping with a regional attraction. Visual improvements will therefore be crucial in raising standards and will be reinforced by the agreed sustainability/management plan agreed in Phase 1. A key part of the Council's proposals in this regard is to substantially increase Burrs' contribution to the Irwell Sculpture Trail by adding to the five sculptures already installed within the park.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The need to upgrade and enhance outdated and 'tired' facilities within the park.</li> <li>▪ Improved pedestrian/cycle links alongside the canal feeder.</li> <li>▪ Increased number and range of sculptures.</li> </ul> |
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**Improved Links to Bury Town Centre**

- 5.27 A longer-term aspiration of the Council is to expand the boundaries of Burrs southwards alongside the River Irwell to take advantage of the open character of the river valley outside the entrance to the park. This would help to facilitate access to the riverside, forming a clear off-road route for pedestrians and cyclists who are currently steered away from the river along Woodhill Road. However, land ownership issues currently provide obstacles to this objective and so this is unlikely to move forward for another 10 years.
- 5.28 Chamberhall is a large site that sits between Burrs and Bury Town Centre and the Council has aspirations for this site to form a high-

quality business park. The proximity of Burrs to the Chamberhall site could help to attract prospective businesses to locate on the site given that the newly expanded facilities at Burrs would be readily accessible to employees. A riverside footpath and cycleway has recently been laid out alongside the river at Chamberhall connecting the NCN6 route to the highway network at Bury Bridge.

- 5.29 Burrs is only 1 mile from Bury Town Centre and its range of attractions. The proposed riverside path under **Project 3A** will aid in expanding the recreational benefits of this corridor and help to form a connection between key visitor attractions in this part of the Borough. In particular, the ELR's Bury Transport Museum opened in 2010 is a popular visitor attraction just off Castlecroft Road north of Chamberhall which is well signposted from the Bury Bolton Street station. The introduction of signage and enhanced public realm outside the museum could persuade visitors to walk up the valley towards Burrs where they could spend a couple of hours before catching a return train back to Bury Bolton Street. Currently on certain days in the year the Bury Transport Museum uses one of its historic buses to run a bus service to Burrs. The marketing and destination strategy under Phase 1 could play a key role in taking these ideas forward.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Potential to expand the park southwards and to provide a riverside footpath/cycleway in order to improve linkages to Bury Town Centre.</li> </ul> |
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### **Increased and Improved Recreation Provision**

- 5.30 The 7.4 hectare site between Woodhill Road and the river is in Council ownership but is currently leased on an agricultural tenancy. The size and layout of the site together with its ease of access allows for the provision of sports pitches which is one of the few elements of recreation that Burrs currently lacks. The 2015 Greenspace Audit and Strategy records a quantitative deficiency of 7.05 hectares for outdoor sports facilities in Bury West and in qualitative terms playing pitches are also below the required standard. With only 4 senior football pitches in this Township, Bury West is the most under-provided area in the Borough.
- 5.31 Opportunities to provide a major high quality play facility in keeping with the Burrs 'house-style' which is of a sufficient standard to add to the overall visitor attraction offer will also be explored in this area.
- 5.32 The Council is currently investigating the feasibility of securing and developing an additional showground on this site in order to relieve pressure on the main Burrs site and its infrastructure whilst minimising conflict with other users such as the Caravan Club. As

referred to previously, the Borough has a shortage of camping sites and should the sites under **Project 1C** be insufficient for needs, this site may provide an alternative to meet requirements.

<b>Key Issues/Opportunities</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To incorporate additional recreational facilities of higher quality within an extended park in order to address some of the current quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in provision.</li> </ul> |
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## **6.0 A VISION FOR BURRS**

- 6.1 After almost thirty years of continuous improvements aimed at transforming the site from a derelict and underused industrial space to a country park with an expanding tourism and leisure offer, the Council's vision for Burrs is:

<p><b><i>To embark on a programme of enhancements over a 15 year period to establish a 'destination park' which is both a regional attraction and forms a key element of the town's burgeoning tourism portfolio.</i></b></p>
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- 6.2 Underpinning this Vision are the following principles:
- To develop Burrs as the gateway to the upper Irwell Valley and West Pennine Moors, forming the visitor hub of an improved, planned and managed green infrastructure corridor of attractions from Bury town centre out towards the town of Ramsbottom and linked by the Irwell Sculpture Trail;
  - To establish the park as the new countryside heart of an expanded ELR network linking with the national rail and M62 to West Yorkshire in the east and with Lancashire to the north;
  - To expand and further strengthen Burrs' potential as a family destination through the implementation of a major events programme and close-working with the ELR to maximise the benefit of the station halt;
  - To strengthen the off-road links with Bury town centre and its attractions on foot, by cycle and by rail;
  - To support and improve the health and wellbeing of visitors to Burrs Country Park by providing accessible facilities for all users including the disabled and those with special needs;
  - To make Burrs the location of choice for caravan users and campers to the Manchester area who wish to use the park as a base to

explore the Irwell Valley, travel on the ELR and visit surrounding towns and Manchester City Centre;

- To launch a 'house style' for materials and features at Burrs to help improve the quality of the brand and the 'story' of the site's history, by retaining and enhancing the character and identity of previous development and ensuring a consistent approach towards new elements such as the Halt platform and Visitor Centre;
- To enhance the existing visitor facilities and the potential for commercial opportunities such as cafes and tours.

## **7.0 DELIVERING THE VISION – AN ACTION PLAN FOR BURRS**

- 7.1 The following Action Plan sets out the three phases required to deliver the Vision and principles for Burrs. **Figure 4 'Development Strategy 2015-2029'** illustrates this on plan marking out the key projects under each phase.
- 7.2 The Council will seek to work in partnership with relevant organisations and local volunteering groups in implementing the strategy whilst pursuing opportunities for capital investment, inward investment and access to external funding streams wherever possible to help deliver individual projects.

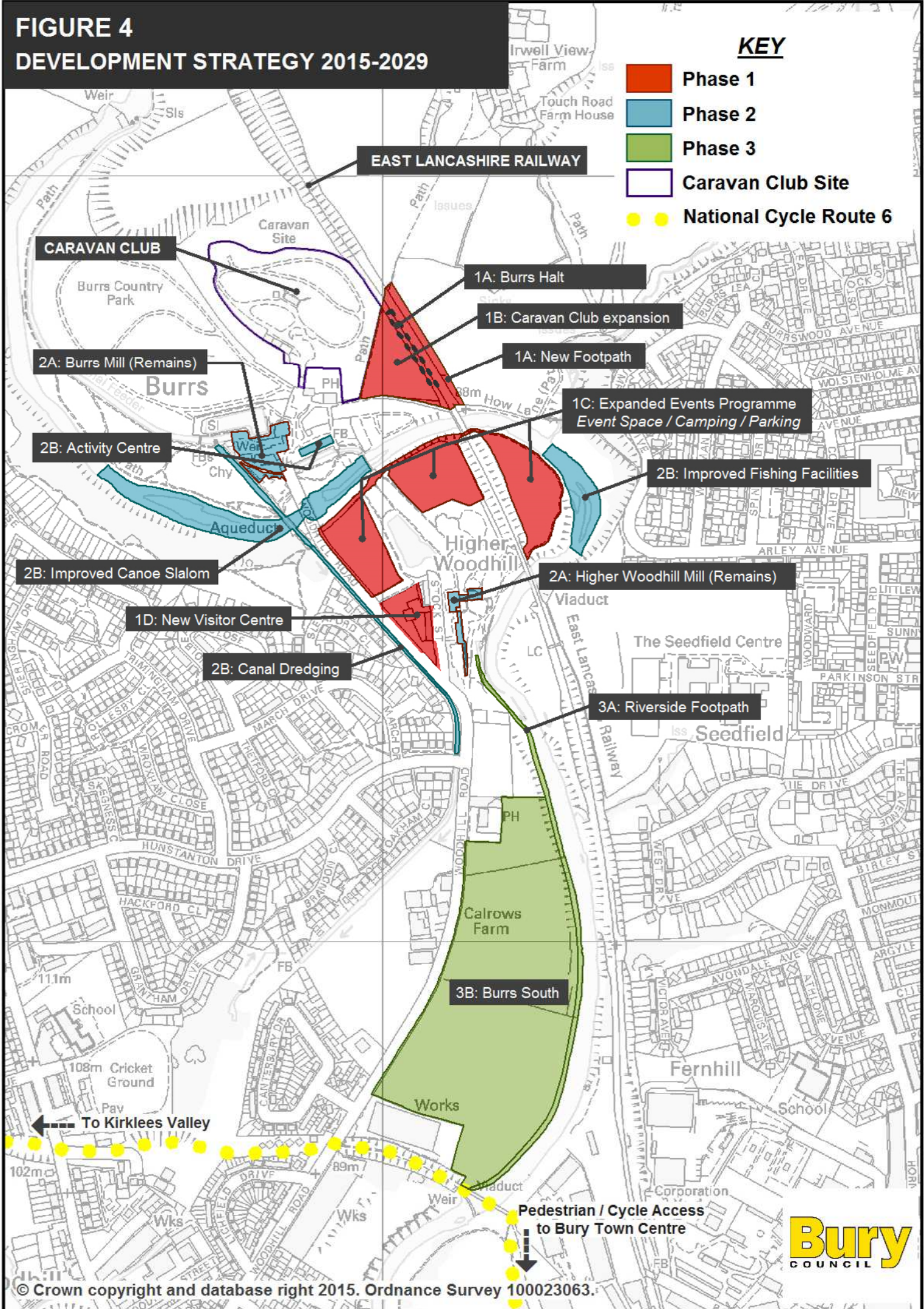
### **PHASE 1 (2015-2019)**

Project	Outline/Progress
<p><b>1A: Burrs Halt</b></p> <p><i>The establishment of a countryside railway station halt to stimulate mutual benefits for Burrs Country Park users and ELR visitors.</i></p>	<p>Planning permission was secured in September 2009 for the construction of the railway halt/access ramp, change of use of open land to caravan park with access road and the construction of a footpath diversion route.</p> <p>The halt scheme will consist of a platform, sheltered waiting area, lighting, seating, pedestrian and vehicular access. A material amendment application will be submitted in early 2015 to make minor alterations to the construction of the platform and the arrangements for emergency access.</p> <p>Project 1A is already underway. A material start was made on-site in September 2012. As of October 2014, the public right of way which previously bordered the Caravan Club and crossed the railway was diverted along a newly opened footpath to the east of the railway, offering a safer pedestrian route underneath the existing bridge.</p>

# FIGURE 4 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2015-2029

## KEY

- Phase 1
- Phase 2
- Phase 3
- Caravan Club Site
- National Cycle Route 6







<p><b>1B: Caravan Club expansion</b></p> <p><i>The addition of further pitches and camping facilities to the Caravan Club site adjacent to the new halt, helping to satisfy demand for a popular facility which is close to capacity on most weekends of the year.</i></p>	<p>Planning permission was secured in September 2009 for the construction of the railway halt/access ramp, change of use of open land to caravan park with access road and the construction of a footpath diversion route. A material start was made on-site in September 2012.</p> <p>The public right of way which previously bisected the site has been closed and diverted, therefore opening up the site for development.</p>
<p><b>1C: Expanded events programme</b></p> <p><i>Implementation and sustainment of an annual calendar of events agreed between Council and partners.</i></p>	<p>The Council is actively exploring opportunities to work with event organisers in broadening the number and range of events at the park to help establish an annual rolling programme on what is an under-used site at certain points of the year. The central band of the site (see plan) should be kept open to allow for flexibility in accommodating large events and will be suitable for camping and overspill car parking.</p>
<p><b>Traffic management</b></p> <p><i>Review of traffic flows through the site and position of car parks.</i></p>	<p>The hosting of regular events and an influx of additional visitors to the park in connection with the ELR halt and expanded Caravan Club site will put pressure on the infrastructure of Burrs. A review will ascertain whether existing car parking, roads and paths are fit for purpose and works will be implemented accordingly with the aim of relieving congestion and conflict between users.</p>
<p><b>1D: New visitor centre</b></p> <p><i>Forming an accessible 'hub' for visitors to the park, sustainable local businesses and as a permanent base for staff.</i></p>	<p>The park requires a dedicated building to welcome visitors to Burrs throughout the week as opposed to the Activity Centre which has a specialist role of providing opportunities for leisure and has restricted opening hours.</p> <p>The visitor centre should occupy a central location within the park (possibly the Stock Street barn with access from Woodhill Road) and include a reception, café, toilets, interpretation facilities, starter units for local businesses, meeting rooms, offices and storage depot. Other facilities could include cycle hire and short-stay parking.</p>

**Marketing and destination strategy**

*Establish a stronger brand image for the park which is up-to-date and capable of presenting the benefits of Burrs to a wider audience.*

This should be based on improved joint marketing opportunities in pursuing an improved working relationship as explored above with particular regard to the ELR, Caravan Site, Activity Centre and its attractive location central to the Irwell Valley.

**Sustainability/ Management Plan**

*Commitment to sound management, housekeeping and prudent use of resources.*

Burrs is a centre of excellence for volunteering and self-management. A management plan will be agreed between partners to ensure this work is sustained going forward, committing to maintaining the Green Flag/Bury in Bloom standard, embracing the voluntary sector and exploring opportunities for maximising secondary income and energy resources wherever possible.

**PHASE 2 (2020-2024)**

Project	Outline/Progress
<p><b>2A: Restoration and enhancement of archaeological features and refresh of interpretation boards</b></p> <p><i>The historic mill remains at Burrs and Higher Woodhill will be improved along with the corresponding information boards to sustain their appeal for increased visitors to the park.</i></p>	<p>With the aid of grant funding, the Council is keen to maintain the upkeep of Burrs’ industrial past and enhance features where possible to help tell the story, which may involve restoration of key elements and clearance of vegetation. In connection with the wider marketing push below, the existing notice boards will be replaced with new boards which provide up-to-date information, images and contact details.</p>
<p><b>2B: Enhance Burrs’ water elements and refresh the Activity Centre</b></p> <p><i>The Centre and the watersports activities it offers are the lifeblood of the park and this needs to be maintained and revamped to keep pace with the growth of the park as a major tourist attraction.</i></p>	<p>The key objectives underneath this project are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewal of Activity Centre lease;</li> <li>• Dredging of canal feeder;</li> <li>• Canoe slalom renovation;</li> <li>• Improvement of fishing facilities.</li> </ul> <p>Refurbishment of the canal feeder in particular will open up opportunities for the provision of walking and cycle links beyond Burrs.</p>
<p><b>Further visual improvements to raise standards of quality</b></p> <p><i>Improvements to wildlife, flora and fauna and the establishment of a recognised sculpture ‘cluster’.</i></p>	<p>In addition to Projects 2A and 2B above the emphasis will be on enhancing flora and fauna and wildlife areas on-site. The Irwell Sculpture Trail is a tremendous asset for Burrs and there are aspirations to form an ‘epicentre’ for the trail, helping to raise the profile by expanding the number and range of sculptures within the park.</p>

**PHASE 3: 2025-2029**

Project	Outline/Progress
<p><b>3A: Riverside Cycle/Footpath</b></p> <p><i>The establishing of a riverside greenway from Burrs, offering improved off-road connections into Chamberhall and Bury Town Centre.</i></p>	<p>After leaving the park in the Higher Woodhill Mill area close to the car park, the path will follow the river and link up with the Sustrans Cycle network, forming a direct connection with the Chamberhall Business Park and Bury town centre’s tourist attractions such as Bury Transport Museum, the ELR Bolton Street Station, The Fusilier Museum, Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre, Bury Market and The Met.</p>
<p><b>3B: Burrs South</b></p> <p><i>Expanding the park southwards towards the town centre to provide an increased range of facilities in an accessible and attractive riverside location.</i></p>	<p>To expand the park’s physical size by taking back into the Council’s direct management farm land that is currently on short tenancies. This will allow for the park’s growing pains to be eased with the introduction of improved park facilities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sporting facilities;</li> <li>• High quality play provision;</li> <li>• Events space;</li> <li>• Seating areas;</li> <li>• Camping.</li> </ul>

## **APPENDIX 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **National guidance**

#### Tourism

**A strategic framework for tourism 2010-2020** from Visit England has a vision of maximising tourism's contribution to the economy, employment and quality of life in England. The strategic framework aims to achieve four interdependent objectives which are designed to address the opportunities and challenges for England's visitor economy. Of particular relevance are the objectives 'to offer visitors compelling destinations of distinction' and 'facilitating greater engagement between the visitor and the experience'.

The success of the strategy is based on delivery by a range of strategic tourism partners and its adoption by the appropriate constituents in the public and private sectors. Tourism businesses, alongside destination management organisations, local government and relevant sectors, such as transport, must share responsibility for creating a successful destination experience.

#### Outdoor sport

Sport England is the strategic lead for delivering the Government's sporting objectives in England. The aim of the ***Sport England Strategy 2012-17*** is to have transformed sport in England by 2017, five years after the Olympic Games, so that sport becomes a habit for life for more people and a regular choice for the majority. It seeks a year-on-year rise in the proportion of people who play sport once a week for at least 30 minutes. In particular, the percentage of people in the 14 to 25-year olds age bracket that play sport once a week will have increased and the proportion of those dropping out of sport will have reduced.

In terms of planning, Sport England's objectives are to protect existing sports and recreational facilities and land including playing fields, enhance the quality, accessibility and management of existing facilities and to provide new facilities to meet demand.

#### Green Infrastructure

The 2011 Natural Environment White Paper, ***The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature***, pledged to put nature at the heart of our decision-making by facilitating greater local action to protect and improve nature, create a green economy, strengthen the connections between people and nature to the benefit of both and to protect and enhance natural assets globally. It is claimed that past action has been on too small a scale and that an integrated approach focused on securing net biodiversity gain and supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems will create a resilient ecological network across England. The White Paper endorses the approach in 'Making Space for Nature' of addressing the fragmentation of our natural environment by restoring ecological networks

at the 'landscape scale', taking account of the individual components and habitats in these networks.

Within their **Green Infrastructure Guidance**, Natural England defines GI as 'a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the broadest range of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering those ecological services and quality of life benefits required by the communities it serves and needed to underpin sustainability.' GI has the potential to offer a range of functions including access, leisure, recreation, habitat provision, energy production and flood attenuation. This 'multifunctionality' can apply to individual sites and routes, but it is when the sites and links are taken together that a fully multifunctional GI network is achieved.

The Town and Country Planning Association's **Good Practice Guidance for Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity** highlights the opportunities of GI in protecting and enhancing the value of the natural environment, particularly its essential 'ecosystem services' such as the recycling of air and water, and responding to the challenge of climate change. The guidance states that GI provision is as important as 'grey infrastructure' e.g. transport and waste management systems and includes a number of principles for its planning including the connection, improvement and restoration of existing assets and the maximisation of opportunities provided by other policy drivers and initiatives.

### **Regional/sub-regional guidance and strategies**

#### Economic growth and developing the visitor economy

The **Greater Manchester Strategy** vision is that 'By 2020 the Manchester city-region will have pioneered a new model for sustainable economic growth based around a more connected, talented and greener city region where all our residents are able to contribute to and benefit from sustained prosperity'.

The **Greater Manchester Strategy for the Visitor Economy 2014-2020** argues that the document will help to deliver the above aspirations for sustainable growth by creating a distinctive sense of place and raising the global profile of Manchester as a place to live, work and invest.

Manchester is the UK's second most visited destination after London (4.1 million in 2012) although the proportion of these staying for leisure purposes does not compare well with other UK cities such as Edinburgh and Liverpool. Total visits to top 10 attractions in Manchester also perform much lower than these cities. In terms of visitor perceptions of Manchester's strengths, attractions and quality of food and drink were rated 'below average'.

The strategy has an ambition of 'developing and promoting the Greater Manchester product offer for leisure and business visitors' by 2020, two aims which underpin this are to 'further develop Manchester as a leading

events destination' and to 'improve the quality and appeal of the product offer'. Key targets include the following through to 2020:

- To increase staying visitor numbers from 10.3 million to 13.7 million;
- To increase the number of day visitors from 95.2 million to 127 million.

Supporting the GM Strategy for the Visitor Economy is the **Greater Manchester Destination Management Plan: Visitor Economy Action Plan 2014-17**. Strategic Aim 3 'To improve the quality and appeal of the product offer' has the following actions of relevance:

- Ensure that Manchester's visitor experience exceeds expectations and delivers quality at all levels;
- Support projects and opportunities that will help develop a stronger sense of place;
- Improve the quality of the public realm, particularly greenspace and waterways.

### Restoring the river valleys

Burrs lies on the River Irwell, one of the principal river valleys in Greater Manchester which was once of significance to the sub-region in providing water power, as was the case at Burrs Mill. In the 1960s much of the river valleys de-industrialised and local authorities met to consider how the large derelict areas of land left in their wake could be improved.

Greater Manchester Council (GMC) formed in 1974 and later set about preparing a plan for the valleys of the Irwell and the River Croal, the latter of which originates in Bolton and meets the Irwell near Kearsley. The **Croal Irwell Valley Local Plan** was subject to a Surveys and Issues Report consultation in 1979 which highlighted that informal recreation provision was inadequate and that the Plan should be concerned with environmental improvement, improving public access and improving the scope for recreation. Later adopted in 1986, the Plan identified the land at Burrs as one of 186 site-specific proposals. Proposal no. 158 was a priority 1 proposal and required 'Reclamation for informal recreation including interpretation of historical features, recreational use of the lodge, car park and tree planting'. Part of the reasoning was 'to provide a focus for recreational use and trips in this part of the Valley by taking advantage of a derelict site with substantial historical importance'. Also a top priority was a proposal no. 140 to construct a footpath from Higher Woodhill to Bury Ground alongside the Irwell 'to improve pedestrian access within the Valley by filling the only gap in a chain of public paths linking Bury town centre and Ramsbottom'. However, of the two proposals, only Proposal no. 158 for Burrs was carried forward into the Bury Unitary Development Plan, along with 43 others for the Borough as a whole.

### Regional parks and developing green infrastructure

The former **North West Regional Spatial Strategy**, revoked by an order of parliament in April 2013, included a policy on GI at Policy EM3 and on Regional Parks at Policy EM4 which was complementary to GI

policy to the GI approach. Policy EM3 required plans, strategies, proposals and schemes to deliver wider spatial outcomes that incorporate environmental and socio-economic benefits by conserving and managing, GI, creating new assets and enhancing its functionality, quality, connectivity and accessibility. The identification, development and management of new sites should be complemented by the retention, enhancement and adaptation of existing sites. Policy EM4 earmarked three areas of search for Regional Parks, the Mersey Basin being the key area for Greater Manchester, and the Croal/Irwell Valley was listed as being a potential project within this area.

A definition of GI is offered in the **North West Green Infrastructure Guide** which was compiled by a large number of bodies including the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and the former North West Regional Assembly, citing the concept as forming 'the Region's life support system – the network of natural environment components and green and blue spaces that lies within and between the North West's cities, towns and villages which provides multiple social, economic and environmental benefits.' The guide was developed to support the former Regional Spatial Strategy Policy EM3 but is still relevant to planning for GI under the NPPF. It argues that the environment should be owed the same consideration as 'grey' infrastructure in allowing GI to be planned in advance as a system of interconnected parts, and that it is a 'core outcome of any regeneration programme involving land or water'.

**The Economic Value of Green Infrastructure** from Natural Economy Northwest considered how GI could help to achieve the region's priorities and objectives for economic growth in the region, highlighting that the North West's environment generates an estimated £2.6 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) and supports 109,000 jobs. It is argued that GI can improve the image of a place, help to attract investment and talent, improve property values and improve educational achievement. In terms of more tangible outputs, tourism is a key sector in the North West with visitors being worth £10.9 billion per year to the economy, health and wellbeing can benefit from increased leisure and exercise activities, whilst improved local leisure opportunities can protect the global environment and local economy by encouraging local residents not to travel long distances on holiday.

The most relevant benefit in terms of Burrs however is 'quality of place' in that green infrastructure plans and projects can help to arrest the decline of urban green spaces through creative approaches to land ownership and management such as community management which help to offer cost savings and encourage a local sense of community.

TEP Consultants prepared a report on behalf of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) and Natural England in 2008 entitled **Towards a Green Infrastructure Framework for Greater Manchester**. The report highlights that a healthy natural environment is a pre-requisite for supporting growth and development in terms of the social and economic benefits that can be derived from a high quality environment. It identifies priority areas for green infrastructure



investment and includes the Irwell and Roch Valleys within its suggested network.

TEP followed up this report in 2010 with advice on ***Bury's Green Infrastructure***. This outlined that, although flood risk arising from the River Irwell is a negative factor affecting property values, investor confidence and regeneration activity, the wider Irwell Valley is recognised as critical GI for the image of Greater Manchester which serves a 'green lung' for the city. Bury's countryside is seen as being 'essential to many tourism, leisure and pub/catering businesses...providing an attractive setting for the East Lancashire Heritage Railway, an important sub-regional tourism asset'. In reviewing the evidence base for the Borough, TEP outline under the theme of open space that the upper section of the Irwell Valley have little accessible Council-owned space other than Burrs, although the public footpaths in the area do provide some public access. The importance of the Irwell and tributaries to Bury is recognised by the report, citing that 'the physical layout of Bury's urban area is such that the countryside is never far away and the river valleys are ideal conduits for access to the open spaces'.

The report concludes with advice to support the Core Strategy policy on GI, sub-dividing the borough's resource into seven main areas, four of which form the suggested strategic GI network. The upper Irwell Valley is one of these areas and TEP advise policy direction on the 'conservation of the existing high quality of the river valleys (landscape, heritage and biodiversity), and promoting their role in access to the wider countryside, especially the West Pennine Moors' and that policy should 'promote facilities to enable increased access to the countryside'.

### **Local evidence and strategies**

The audit of the ***2015 Bury Greenspace Audit and Strategy*** records Burrs as a 'Large Urban and Country Park' in the 'Parks and Gardens' typology. The park has a site area of 26.17 hectares and received the minimum quality standard of 'Good' in the audit assessment. The strategy notes the good performance of parks and gardens across the Borough in terms of quality and references the strong year-on-year performance in the Green Flag Awards for 12 of its parks, one of which is Burrs. The commitment to a long-term development plan for Burrs Country Park is earmarked as Objective PG2 of the strategy.

Supporting the Greenspace Strategy is the Council's ***Rights of Way Improvement Plan*** which foresees the potential for parks and greenways to be utilised as gateways to the rights of way network and therefore to the countryside.

