

Urban Greenspace (UG)

Habitat Action Plan

Doncaster Local Biodiversity Action Plan
January 2007



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1. Description

1.1 Urban Greenspace is a critical wildlife resource, and for many people such spaces present the most accessible and regular opportunities, near homes and places of work, to encounter and enjoy wildlife. The Urban Greenspace habitat resource includes all urban open space, although the audit data referred to within this Habitat Action Plan is taken primarily from a study of publicly accessible sites within Doncaster Borough, as collected, analysed and presented in the Local Authority's Greenspace Audit and Strategy. The Borough's Greenspace Strategy identifies how to sustain, enhance, improve, protect and market Doncaster's green spaces, through a variety of policies, measures and recommendations. The Local Authority adopted the document in 2002 following extensive consultation with partners and stakeholders.

1.2 In line with the Borough's Greenspace Strategy this habitat action plan relates to all managed green spaces, with the exception of woodland sites, which are addressed through the individual woodland Habitat Action Plans.

Allotments

1.3 Allotments are areas of land cultivated by the public in small plots. Statutory and non-statutory allotment sites, along with smallholdings, are included in the Greenspace Strategy, and all sites irrespective of ownership are included in this plan. Allotments are recognised in the Greenspace Strategy as offering opportunities to tackle issues such as increasing biodiversity and promoting sustainable development. Typical allotment dwellers include the rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), wood mouse (*Mus musculus*), bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*), brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), the **common frog** (*Rana temporaria*) and **common toad** (*Bufo bufo*). Typical allotment birds include the common garden species, which make use of scrubby edges for food and shelter, whilst old potting sheds present nesting opportunities for species such as the robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) or wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*).

Amenity Areas

1.4 Amenity areas are public open spaces that are provided to improve and enhance the use and appearance of the local environment. Generally they are unsuitable for recreational use or recreational use is prohibited, and as a result they are distinct from informal open spaces. Favourable wildlife habitat may be limited on amenity areas and any value on close-mown grassland sites is likely to be at the less intensively managed edges, where taller grassland and scrub may have been able to develop to the benefit of invertebrates and small foraging mammals. Some amenity areas may be less formal, or may have mature trees or village ponds, which significantly increase the value of the site for wildlife.

Formal Open Spaces

1.5 Formal open spaces are defined as those, which provide the space where individuals and groups can pursue (singly or collectively) a sport or formal recreational activity e.g. football, rugby, cricket. Biodiversity value is similar to that described for amenity areas, with any favourable habitat often being limited to the less frequently and intensively managed site periphery. Such amenity grassland does however provide the clear views and suitable lack of tall vegetation required by ground roosting birds, and Town Fields is a winter stop-off point for golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) on migratory passage.

Gardens

1.6 Gardens represent an important wildlife resource accessible to individuals, rather than the collective population of an area. Gardens are often quoted as being the nation's biggest nature reserve, and research has often proven the diversity of a private garden to be at least equal to that of public open spaces. Invertebrates particularly benefit from the range of habitats and food available, and garden bird campaigns have successfully encouraged many garden owners to regularly feed their bird visitors. As a consequence the diversity of bird species visiting gardens with feeders. It should be noted that gardens are currently officially classified as brownfield land.

Informal Open Spaces

1.7 The Doncaster Greenspace Strategy's definition of informal open space is adopted from the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standard. Informal open spaces are areas for unsupervised outdoor children's play. They include outdoor equipped play areas, casual or informal play space within housing estates, and also include safe hard space such as play streets. These sites are a requirement within new residential development and many are therefore planted-up to an agreed landscaping scheme. The Local Authority endeavours to ensure that a good range of species are included in landscaping schemes, with the use of native species encouraged wherever possible. The inclusion of nectar and berry-rich planting is often used to attract invertebrates and feeding birds. Even hard surfaced areas can provide water for birds in the small puddles formed by hollows in the asphalt. The pied wagtail (*Monacilla alba ssp yarellii*) is fondly referred to as the 'car park bird' because this species is often seen in some numbers roaming around areas of hard standing.

Public Parks

1.8 Within the Doncaster Greenspace Strategy public parks have been formally classified to account for their varying characteristics and importance. Three categories of parks are described:

- Heritage Parks – Parks with historical, archaeological and/ or biological features, or with a history of horticultural excellence.
- Conservation Parks – Parks with a strong ecological and nature conservation value and where the main activity is passive i.e. walking, bird watching so on.
- Recreation Parks – Parks which provide mainly formal or informal recreation. The main facilities are formal pitches and children's playgrounds.

Parks tend to have a good treescape with a range of mature native and non-native tree species. Mature trees encourage a range of bat species and tree-hole dwelling birds such as the green woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) or the tawny owl (*Strix aluco*).

Post Industrial and Brownfield Land

1.9 A Post Industrial and Brownfield Land Habitat Action Plan has been written for the Doncaster Borough. This Plan identifies specific sites and associated wildlife features and communities of biodiversity value, and discusses conservation issues and opportunities on previously developed land.

1.10 Buildings and structures within urban areas can also provide niche habitats for certain creatures, particularly those able to exploit the habitat opportunities presented. Where green corridors exist within urban areas opportunistic visitors such as the fox can be a common sight.

2. National status

2.1 There are no regular national surveys that monitor the quality of Urban Greenspace in the UK. This is further complicated as what work is undertaken tends to concentrate on specific types of public open space, such as parks and allotments. However, the 2001 Public Parks Assessment identified that nationally the majority of public parks and green spaces had suffered severe neglect, resulting in a poor and declining park stock. Based on 405 responding Authorities and nearly 3000 urban parks (accounting for approximately one-third of all urban Greenspace), only 18% of the parks were described as good, compared to 69% in fair condition and 13% in poor condition.

2.2 The Central Government Urban White Paper explained the need for focused action to improve urban green spaces. It challenged all involved to think more imaginatively to find ways to make green spaces cleaner, safer and more attractive places that people will want to use for play and rest, exercise and sport, or for entertainment and lifelong learning. It gave the Minister for Regeneration responsibility for developing proposals for improving the quality of urban parks and green spaces and announced the setting up of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce to advise on this process. The Taskforce was established in January 2001 and published its final report, [Green Spaces, Better Places](#) in May 2002.

2.3 Green Spaces, Better Places identified a need for strategic thinking and Central Government is now working with CABESpace, the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and Sport England to develop and broaden the scope of the Public Parks Assessment to cover a fuller range of green spaces.

2.4 Good quality, well-designed parks and green spaces make a critical contribution to our neighbourhoods, towns and cities and to people's quality of life and play an important role in creating a sense of place. The Government recognises the need for a diverse network of green spaces that meet a variety of needs and that such environments are fit-for-purpose: clean, safe, attractive and well-maintained. Urban Greenspace includes both remnants of former countryside that have escaped development and also purpose made open spaces designed specifically for local people to enjoy. Diverse networks of quality green spaces have been shown to:

- Protect biodiversity and enhance the environment
- Support the local economy, making neighbourhoods more desirable
- Enhance physical and mental health
- Benefit children and young people
- Reduce crime and fear of crime
- Support social cohesion
- Aid movement between other spaces

2.5 Central Governments vision is for a renaissance of England's green spaces, so that by 2008 the majority of local areas in England have at least one quality green space – with a Green Flag Award to prove it – and over 75% of people are satisfied with their green spaces.

3. Local status

3.1 The 2002 Greenspace Audit identified 968 green spaces, covering 7375 acres of land throughout Doncaster Borough. These have been mapped and categorised as follows:

Category	No. of sites	Area in acres
Allotments	77	355
Amenity in Housing	309	269
Private (amenity)	5	29
Road Verges (amenity)	119	85
Formal	102	887
Informal	235	528
Nature Conservation	32	3329
Public Parks	23	493
TOTAL	968	7375

3.2 Areas such as formal open spaces and informal children's play space have little conservation value, however the Greenspace Audit Site Quality Assessment¹ identifies sites of low, medium and high biodiversity value, and also potential value. Public parks, local nature reserves and allotments contribute substantially to Urban Greenspace in terms of area and increased scope for biodiversity improvement and enhancement opportunities within the Borough. There is also a potential for managing amenity areas for wildflower banks and beetle / bug banks.

¹ Carried out by Scott Wilson Associates

3.3 Hexthorpe Ings SSI 2.16 (Site of Scientific Interest) is an excellent example of an open space that serves a variety of functions. It includes formal recreation areas with facilities such as a running track and a cricket pitch, but then also includes natural areas of river floodplain with significant local biodiversity value. The site also benefits from the addition of a postindustrial site that has SSI status.

3.4 The Doncaster Borough has three 'district parks' that are larger than 20 ha in size; Cusworth Hall (SSI 3.10), Cantley Hall Park (SSI 4.39a) and Campsall Country Park (SSI 7.8). Each of these sites is also of significant importance for wildlife. A number of open spaces in the east of the borough represent part of the former Hatfield Chase, which was a Norman hunting chase.

3.5 Within the Doncaster Borough, 62 of the nearly 400 designated SSIs² are publicly accessible, including St Catherine's Railway Embankments, Delves and Cuttings (SSI 2.24), Roman Ridge, North and South (SSI 3.4a+b), Nursery Lane Quarry (SSI 6.61), St Catherine's Lily Pond (SSI 2.22) and Fenwick Churchyard (SSI 7.21).

3.6 A distinctive feature of the Doncaster area is the number of parks that have been developed in former quarries. These locally characteristic sites include Hexthorpe, Warmsworth, Sandall Park, Dunsville Park and Scawthorpe's park within the old Long Edge Quarry. Such parks are generally of high biodiversity value because they are sheltered and support the specialist habitats associated with the quarry sides, which can become thickly vegetated.

² DMBC, Re-survey of Sites of Scientific Interest in the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough 1996/97, Volumes 1-9

4. Legal status

Amenity Areas, Formal Open Space, Informal Open Space, Public Parks

4.1 Section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875 authorises a Local Authority to support or contribute to the provision of public walks or pleasure grounds provided by any person whatsoever. Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 states that a Local Authority may provide such recreational facilities as it thinks fit.

Allotments

4.2. All statutory allotments are covered by legislation and by definition an "allotment garden" is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of fruit and vegetables for consumption by himself and his family. Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925 provides that the Secretary of State's consent is required for the disposal of land by a Local Authority, which they have purchased or appropriated for use as allotments. If there is a proposal to sell the land or appropriate it for another use, the legislation does not allow for consent for disposal to be granted unless adequate provision is made for any displaced plot holders, except where such provision is not necessary or impracticable.

Local Nature Reserves

4.3 Local Nature Reserves are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Local Development Plans afford a degree of protection to designated sites, from inappropriate development.

5. Links to associated habitats & species

5.1 The Urban Greenspace Habitat Action Plan is linked to the following Habitat Action Plans:

- Ancient and Species Rich Hedgerows (ASH)
- Neutral and Wet Grassland (NWG)
- Limestone Grassland (LG)
- Lowland Heathland / Acid Grassland Mosaic (HAG)
- Wet Woodland (WW)
- Lowland Heathy Oak Woodland (LHW)
- Limestone Woodland (LW)
- Greenways (GW)
- Parkland, Wood Pasture and Veteran Trees (PWV)
- Post Industrial and Brownfield Land (PIB)
- Rivers, Canals, Oxbows, Major Streams and Subsidence Flashes (RCF)

5.2 **‘A Species Audit of Doncaster Borough’** has been produced as part of the Doncaster Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Species highlighted in bold within the Habitat Action Plans are identified within Doncaster’s Species Audit and are conservation priorities. The Audit identifies **38** species associated with Urban Greenspace.

6. Current factors causing loss or decline

6.1 Conflicting management needs within the site, i.e. biodiversity verses public amenity. Issues include; recreational pressure and litter problems, removal of scrub because of anti-social behaviour issues, pond infilling because of safety fears and general lack of understanding of wildlife habitats.

6.2 Use of Urban Greenspace for housing development, or open space sites being labelled as 'brownfield' and then becoming a preferential site for development. Infill development is also significantly reducing the area of gardens in the borough. Allotment areas of noted under-use are being lost because of the demand for development land.

6.3 Increased isolation of green spaces from other habitats.

6.4 Difficulties in reaching agreements on site management policies, due to a number of different organisations managing green spaces.

6.5 The inappropriate use of non-native species in new planting schemes and the failure to prevent the spread of invasive non-native species (the appropriate use of some non-natives can be beneficial and are valued for cultural, biodiversity and aesthetic reasons, e.g. the use of heritage trees such as plane (*Platanus spp.*) and horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) in public parks).

7. Current local action

Research & Monitoring

7.1 Funding from the Big Lottery's Transforming Your Space initiative has enabled the further development of the Biological Records Centre at Doncaster Museum. The biological data collected as part of the project, particularly botanical information for local sites, species and habitats has enhanced the modern dataset. Historical biological information has also been transferred to the database.

7.2 Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council has recently commissioned a 'quality' resurvey of the Borough's Greenspace sites. The purpose of the survey was to assess the quality of sites against a set of standard criteria to measure and monitor condition, identify potential Greenflag candidate sites and inform appropriate site management.

Safeguarding & Management

7.3 Greenspaces owned and managed by Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council are promoted by the Neighbourhood Communities and Children's Services Directorate, and in particular the Countryside Interpretation Team. New public open space is provided within any new major residential development, and should be designed to meet the necessary play and recreation needs of the local residents, as well as providing new habitat areas for urban wildlife.

7.4 Funding from the Big Lottery's Transforming Your Space initiative has enabled the development of a range of biodiversity initiatives, including the resurvey of the Borough's SSI's, research projects, production of site management plans and the provision of resources (equipment, educational, activity and promotional materials) to help raise awareness and encourage participation in the management and enhancement of local biodiversity. A number of management plans have also been produced.

Habitat Creation & Restoration

7.5 Doncaster Borough has three green roofs; one on the Earth Centre conference facilities at Conisbrough, one on the Potteric Carr visitor centre and one being added to an extension of the DARTS centre, in Doncaster Town Centre.

Advisory

7.6 The DEFRA Horticulture Code of Best Practice is used within the Local Authority's Environmental Planning Team, to ensure that inappropriate species are not introduced to landscaping schemes on development sites.

7.7 DMBC has introduced a programme of continuous professional development based on planning related issues, including 'Protected species' and 'Trees and Hedgerows'. The Environmental Planning Team has produced a suite of Supplementary Planning Documents, providing guidance on: Planning for Trees and Hedgerows, Nature, Sustainable Construction and Landscape Planning on Development Sites in Doncaster.

8. Objectives, targets & proposed actions

Please refer also to the Generic Actions in the LBAP Introduction & Overview document.

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
1) To ensure the protection and maintenance of existing urban greenspace.	Continuous.	1.1	<p>Prevent depletion of Urban Greenspace resulting from development and/ or the delivery of statutory functions by:</p> <p>1) Having regard to the protection and enhancement of habitats when considering the allocation of sites, in line with the approach set out in PPS9 and the priorities set out in the LBAP.</p> <p>2) Having regard to the assessment, retention and enhancement of habitat types when formulating and making Development Control Policies and decisions, in line with the approach set out in PPS9 and the priorities set out in the LBAP.</p>	DMBC, Natural England (NE)	Staff costs	Advisory/ Safeguarding & Management

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
			<p>3) Providing advice to Development Control and Developers on appropriate types of survey i.e. ecological and/or hydrological, the interpretation of survey results and methods of incorporating habitat retention and enhancement into development proposals (for both designated sites and non-designated features of biodiversity value, as identified in the LBAP.</p> <p>4) Having regard to the priorities set out in the BAP in the interpretation of UDP/LDF policies (and any supporting SPGs/SPDs).</p> <p>5) Providing technical advice on the severity, implications and nature of suspected breaches in planning control (either conditions or unauthorised development).</p>			

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
			<p>6) Awarding appropriate site protection through designation, based upon routine environmental monitoring and assessment.</p> <p>7) Ensuring that all Partners and relevant landowners, service providers and operational contractors are informed of the existence and importance of Urban Greenspace (both designated and non-designated sites).</p>			
	Continuous.	1.2	Continue to collect and maintain up-to-date, standardised, biological data using the Museum's Local Record Centre. Promote and initiate appropriate management, monitoring and the exchange of environmental data, to ensure the maximum level of site protection is awarded and habitat condition is maintained.	DMBC, NE, Doncaster Naturalists' Society (DNS), Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT)	Staff costs and volunteer time. Other costs to be evaluated	Future Research & Monitoring
	By 2008.	1.3	Expand DMBC's Environmental Planning protected species protocol to include LBAP habitats and species.	DMBC	Staff costs	Advisory
	Continuous.	1.4	Manage Local Authority owned green spaces for the benefit of local wildlife.	DMBC	To be evaluated	Safeguarding & Management

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
	Continuous.	1.5	Encourage and support the development of organic food initiatives in gardens and on allotments.	DMBC	£3780	Safeguarding & Management
	Reduce number of unused plots by 10% by 2008.	1.6	Optimise allotment use to ensure all plots are let. Where this is not possible retain land for another Greenspace use.	DMBC	Staff costs	Safeguarding & Management
	Continuous.	1.7	Encourage appropriately timed grounds maintenance – e.g. avoiding bird-breeding season.	DMBC	Staff costs	Species Management & Protection
	Continuous.	1.8	Carry out a green space resurvey every 5 years to assess status and protection of priority species.	DMBC	£25,000	Future Research & Monitoring
2) To restore degraded sites and ensure the appropriate management of urban greenspace.	Continuous.	2.1	Raise awareness of the nature conservation value of allotments and gardens and encourage wildlife friendly gardening and horticultural and arboriculture techniques.	DMBC	Staff costs	Species Management & Protection/ Advisory
	By 2008.	2.2	Produce/review strategy for allotment management to take account of allotments and nature conservation issues and LBAP priorities.	DMBC	£1280	Policy & Legislation
	A further 8 sites with management plans by 2010.	2.3	Develop management plans / management statements for sites currently without plans.	DMBC	£1000 per plan = £8000	Safeguarding & Management

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
	5 new sites identified and managed appropriately by 2010.	2.4	Identify existing green spaces suitable for management as wildlife / biodiversity sites and implement appropriate management.	DMBC, DNS, YWT	To be evaluated	Safeguarding & Management
	By 2010.	2.5	Pursue Greenflag status for a greenspace site (possibly a woodland site).	DMBC	£26,000 per annum staff costs plus a considerable external funding bid	Safeguarding & Management
	5 sites by 2010.	2.6	Identify all urban greenspace sites where Priority Species are known to be present and implement appropriate specialist management schemes to benefit these species.	DMBC, NE	To be evaluated	Species Management & Protection

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
3) To create at least 150 ha of new urban greenspace by 2010.	Continuous.	3.1	Ensure Doncaster's greenspace provision meets national standards: 2 ha of accessible natural greenspace per 1000 population, no person living more than 300m from their nearest accessible natural greenspace, At least one 20 ha site within 2km of everyone's home, At least one 100 ha site within 5km of everyone's home and At least one 500 ha site within 10km of everyone's home.	DMBC	To be evaluated	Policy and legislation
	Continuous.	3.2	Encourage imaginative design and the use of local provenance species in new landscaping schemes.	DMBC	Staff costs	Advisory
	Continuous.	3.3	Use the greenspace audit to identify locations for creating new urban greenspace that provides linkages between existing sites.	DMBC	Staff costs	Future Research & Monitoring
	6 'linkage' sites by 2010.	3.4	Create new urban greenspace sites in locations identified, without loss of existing urban biodiversity.	DMBC	To be evaluated	Habitat Creation & Restoration

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
4) Raise public awareness of the importance and special characteristics of urban greenspace.	5 sites by 2009.	4.1	Encourage the creation of wildflower, beetle and bug banks on appropriate amenity areas.	DMBC, YWT	£3750	Habitat Creation & Restoration
	Continuous.	4.2	Provide advice on best practice for managing urban habitats for wildlife, including guidance for planners / developers on design and management of green space to improve biodiversity value. Ensure all new greenspace sites have a net gain for biodiversity.	DMBC	Staff costs	Advisory
	Continuous. 1 walk and talk by 2008.	4.3	Provide informative interpretation materials and planned activities to develop community knowledge and appreciation of wildlife and biodiversity.	DMBC, DNS	£500	Communications & Publicity
	2 sites adopted by schools by 2010.	4.4	Encourage development of "Friends Of" groups, and school adoption of local wildlife sites.	DMBC	To be evaluated	Safeguarding & Management
	Continuous.	4.5	Encourage appreciation of wildlife as part of health walks / green gym initiatives.	DMBC, PCT	Staff costs and volunteer time	Communications & Publicity
	Continuous.2 new schools with conservation areas in school grounds by 2008.	4.6	Promote sustainable conservation areas in school grounds.	DMBC	Staff costs	Advisory

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead Partners	Costs	Category
	By 2010.	4.7	Continue the LNR programme with the designation of Campsall Country Park and Howell Wood.	DMBC, NE	£60,000 plus £32,600 p/a for both sites	Safeguarding & Management

9. Indicative Habitat distribution & Opportunities map

The map for Urban Greenspace shows the location of greenspace within the Borough, as highlighted by the 2001 Greenspace Audit. This shows all areas for the following types of greenspace:

-  Formal
-  Informal
-  Park
-  Amenity
-  Allotment

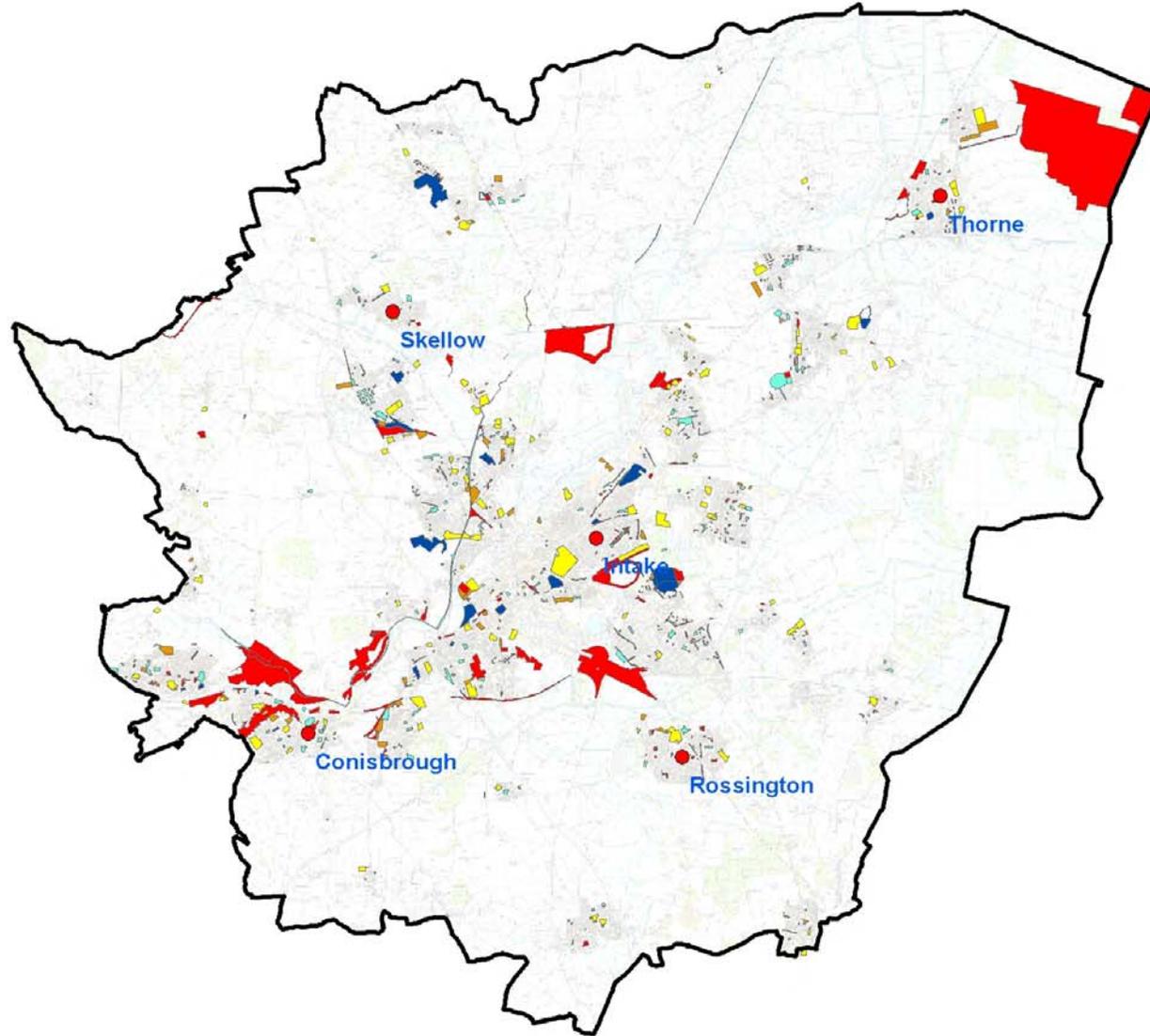
Urban Greenspace

DATE: January 2007
 SCALE: 1:160,000
 DRAWING NO: HAP/1UG



LEGEND

-  Doncaster Borough Boundary
-  Village
-  Formal
-  Informal
-  Park
-  Amenity
-  Allotment



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