

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report :

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Culture and Recreation
Date:	4 November 2010
Title:	The Declaration of four New Local Nature Reserves
Reference:	2190
Report From:	The Director of Culture, Communities and Rural Affairs

Contact name: Andy Davidson

Tel: 01962 845408

Email: andrew.davidson@hants.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. In 2009, 10 new Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) were created bringing the total managed by the Countryside Service to 27. Following this success the Countryside Service seeks support and approval for the declaration of four new LNRs; Danebury Hillfort, Shawford Down, Lepe Point and the Hayling Billy Line.

2. Issues Covered in Report

- 2.1. Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are a statutory designation which identifies land, normally managed by a Local Authority, which is of value to local people for accessing the natural environment.
- 2.2. A policy was created in 2009 by the Countryside Service for selecting sites where LNR status would be beneficial. It also details the steps to be taken to ensure that the local community are consulted and engaged in the process of designation, and in the future of the site, if LNR status is confirmed.
- 2.3. As part of the process within the policy, before any new LNRs are designated, approval is sought from the appropriate Executive Member. Four proposed LNRs are presented here for that purpose.

3. Contextual Information

- 3.1. Local Nature Reserve (or LNR) is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by principal Local Authorities. It should be seen as a permanent designation, de-designation is possible but is extremely rare.
- 3.2. LNRs are described by Natural England as for both people and wildlife. They are living green spaces in towns, cities, villages and countryside which are important to people, and support a rich and vibrant variety of wildlife. These areas give easy local access, allowing informal contact with the natural environment. They also provide a great opportunity for

people to become involved in the management of their local environment, for educational events and public open days.

- 3.3. In addition, because LNRs support habitats and species that are important within a local (and often national) context, they should form an integral part of Local Biodiversity Action Plans.
- 3.4. PPS9: *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation* lists local sites, including LNRs, as having a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets. It further recommends that criteria based policies should be established in local development documents, against which proposals for any development on, or affecting, such sites will be judged. Nature conservation is a material consideration within the planning process and the declaration of a site as a LNR will give extra emphasis for its conservation value.
- 3.5. The declaration of LNRs by an Authority is generally seen as a commitment by that Authority to manage the land as a nature reserve and protect it from inappropriate uses or developments.

4. Key Issues

- 4.1. Everyday contact with nature is important for people's wellbeing and quality of life. Current research has shown that access to green spaces can have a beneficial effect on both mental and physical health.
- 4.2. Whilst contact with nature in spectacular wilderness areas undoubtedly has its place, the value of access to the everyday, unspectacular natural environment that is near to your home is increasingly being recognised. People should have to make no special effort to access nature and easy, convenient access to nature enhances their quality of life.
- 4.3. Local green spaces can serve as a focus for local activity, act as a social facilitator and encourage community cohesion. The creation of LNRs at such sites can increase community engagement with the environment and a sense of ownership, and assist in building relationships between the local community and the managing authority.
- 4.4. Where such community links are forged and can be demonstrated, additional external funding may be gained.

5. Countryside Service Local Nature Reserves

- 5.1. The Countryside Service currently manages 27 LNRs, 10 of which were declared in 2009. Four more sites are now considered as being suitable for declaration.

6. Criteria for selecting Local Nature Reserves

- 6.1. Natural England recommend that LNRs should be;
 - normally greater than 2ha (4.9 acres) in size.
 - capable of being managed with the conservation of nature and/or the maintenance of special opportunities for study, research or enjoyment of nature as the priority concern.
- 6.2. Natural England also state that LNRs should also be either;

- of high natural interest in the local context.
 - of some reasonable natural interest and of high value in the local context for formal education or research.
 - of some reasonable natural interest and of high value in the local context for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public.
- 6.3. Alongside of these, the proposed Countryside Service criteria are that the potential LNR site;
- must be either owned or leased by the Countryside Service.
 - must have a long term future with the Countryside Service.
 - would normally be designated as of Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) level or greater.
 - have a local community interest, or potential for developing this interest.
 - have present or potential ready access, both within the site and the wider Rights of Way network.
 - have identified resources.
 - have an outline management plan or objectives.
- 6.4. The combined criteria will ensure that only those sites which are suitable for LNR status will be selected by Countryside Service.

7. Countryside Service process for declaration

- 7.1. As a principle Local Authority, Hampshire County Council is able to declare LNRs. Within the Countryside Service Policy on the declaration of LNRs, steps have been identified to ensure that stakeholders are informed and involved in the proposals. This will include consultation with site users, local interest groups, parish councils, district councils and most essentially, the local community. Where the site is a leasehold the landowner will also be consulted. Such consultation will occur at an early stage of the process of proposing a LNR, before the consultation period of the official declaration process.
- 7.2. For the Countryside Service the process for selecting and declaring a LNR are;
- Discuss the suitability of the site with appropriate managers, checking against the Natural England and Countryside Service Criteria.
 - Report and recommendation to go to CSMT for initial approval, via the Conservation Officer.
 - Consultation with site stakeholders.
 - Consultation with Natural England.
 - Report to go to the Executive Member for Culture and Recreation for support and approval.
 - Official declaration process to be carried out by the Access Team within the Countryside Service.
 - Local launch event.

8. Approval of several new LNRs

- 8.1. Four Countryside Service sites in the central southern area are currently proposed as new LNRs. These conform to the selection criteria set down by Natural England and the Countryside Service.
- 8.2. Consultation is currently underway with neighbours, appropriate local user groups and organisations. Letters of support are being collected along with any concerns individuals may have. These will be considered and addressed where appropriate and practicable.
- 8.3. Preliminary consultation has taken place with Natural England

9. Proposed New LNRs

- 9.1. The following sites are proposed as Local Nature Reserves.
- 9.2. **Danebury Hillfort** is a 38.9 hectare (96 acre) chalk grassland Site of Special Scientific Interests (SSSI) and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) containing an Iron Age hillfort. The hillfort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) and one of the most intensively studied Iron Age sites in Britain and has strong links with the Museum of the Iron Age in Andover. Innovative work has taken place in managing access by dog walkers to allow traditional sheep grazing. The site has gained a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) grant to assist with the conservation of this site.
- 9.3. **Shawford Down** lies between the village of Shawford and the M3. It comprises 19.6 hectares (48 acres) of chalk grassland and scrub SINC, currently grazed with Highland cattle. The site is highly valued by the local community and regularly used by walkers. It has HLS grant funding.
- 9.4. **Lepe Point** forms part of Lepe Country Park on the New Forest shoreline. Lepe Point is the site of a former private home purchased by Hampshire County Council in order to protect it from development. Now declared a SINC, extensive work has been carried out by site staff and the recently formed Friends of Lepe Country Park group, now with over 200 members. The Friends Group gained funding for and constructed a pond on the site. This has enhanced the conservation value of Lepe Point and is regularly used for education groups. They have also constructed a path and boardwalk, allowing access on this formerly closed area. Lepe Point now has classroom facilities and this is well used by schools and the Friends group. The site is due to enter a HLS agreement shortly.
- 9.5. **Hayling Billy Line** lies along the west side of Haying Island and the line itself is well used by locals as an informal access route. The LNR would include areas adjacent to the former rail line and includes areas of SSSI and SINC. The fields at the southern end of the line are managed by HCC Estates Practice. The area is due to go into HLS later this year.

10. Recommendations:

- 10.1. It is recommended that the declaration of new Local Nature Reserves at Danebury Hillfort, Shawford Down, Lepe Point and the Hayling Billy Line is approved

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to Corporate Strategy

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	No
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

OTHER SIGNIFICANT LINKS:

Links to Previous member decisions:		
Title	Ref	Date
Direct Links to Specific Legislation or Government Directives		
Title		Date
National Park & Access to the Countryside Act		1949

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- a) The policy and declaration of new Local Nature Reserves will not disadvantage any customer groups.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- a) N/A

3. Climate Change:

a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

- No significant impact on our carbon footprint or energy consumption. The promotion of nature reserves for local people should however encourage people to access their local countryside and reduce vehicle use.

b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

- N/A