

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Community Development Portfolio Holder	23 November 2006
AUTHOR/S:	Head of Community Services / Senior Ranger	

APPLICATION FOR MILTON COUNTRY PARK TO BE DECLARED A LOCAL NATURE RESERVE.

Purpose

1. To provide the portfolio holder with information about a proposed application to Natural England for Milton Country Park to be declared a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Background

2. The rangers together with the council's ecology officer have been working on a management plan for the park for some time. This has been driven by a number of factors, the need for a formal plan to aid future management, the need for such a document to enable applications for various designations and awards, an example of which are Green Flag award and Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status.
3. The principle has been discussed informally with the previous portfolio holder in January 2006 who agreed that we should proceed with the LNR application.
4. Since that time we have written to all the other landowners and leaseholders informing them of our wish to apply for LNR designation. With the exception of the Stokes family from whom we lease almost the entire southern section of the park, they were supportive of an application. As a result the proposed LNR application will be for all the land north of the 13th public drain.

Considerations

5. There are a number of reasons why we believe it would be beneficial for the park to be declared an LNR as follows:
 - i) It would provide a level of legal protection for the site.
 - ii) It would acknowledge the park's status as a site with wildlife interest as well as community and educational usage.
 - iii) It may enable us to apply for funding for work and projects either directly or through a group such as the friends of Milton Country Park.
6. Milton Country Park currently has no formal designations despite its importance locally as an area of informal countryside access and its intrinsic value for biodiversity.
7. The designation of LNR is supported by local plan policies. In addition the draft SCDC Conservation Continuous Improvement Plan identifies the designation of LNR's across the district as an issue to be taken forward. If the park were declared an LNR

it would be a significant increase in the amount of land designated as LNR's in the district and be in-line with the relevant Best Value Performance Indicators.

8. Given the reduction in park funding due to take place in the financial year 2007/08 the involvement of the community in the management of the park will become more important. LNR status and the associated management plan will provide details of a minimum standard of work required to maintain it in a favourable condition.

Options

9. The portfolio holder has two options with regard to applying for LNR status for the park.
 - a) To recommend that council officers complete the application process and apply for the park to be declared a Local Nature Reserve.
 - b) Not to recommend the above action.

Implications

10.	Financial	Management of the LNR would be the responsibility of SCDC as part of its ongoing funding of the park as a whole. The cost implications would form part of any specified future management regime required for the park if transferred to another managing organisation (i.e. any body taking over the park would have to deliver established management regimes).
	Legal	<p>The declaration of the park would be undertaken by SCDC under powers as afforded by Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. This section of the Act gives local authorities the power to acquire, declare and manage nature reserves.</p> <p>Particular protocols have to be followed regarding the designation process including the advertisement of the intention within the local press. The process recently taken by the County Council should be followed.</p>
	Staffing	The day-to-day running and management of the site would be the responsibility of SCDC (unless delegated to another body). The management regimes proposed would not lead to an increase in staffing levels.
	Risk Management	The park does not currently have a comprehensive management plan. The adoption of the MCP management plan provides an excellent opportunity to get the site formally recognised as a locally important site for people and wildlife.
	Equal Opportunities	None specific. All abilities of people are welcome at the park.

Consultations

11. The preparation has been carried out with the council's ecologist. A discussion has also been held with an officer from English Nature, (since that meeting the name of the organisation concerned has changed to Natural England).
12. Positive responses have been received from Milton Parish Council and Cambridgeshire County Council as landowners of specific sections of the park area

concerned and from Histon and District Angling Society who lease part of the land included in the application. As mentioned earlier the Stokes family from whom we lease the majority of the land south of the 13 th Public Drain did not support the proposed application, their land is not therefore being included in the proposed application.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

13.	Affordable Homes	None specific
	Customer Service	The adoption of a MCP management plan will add clarity to the core tasks expected by MCP staff in providing for visitors.
	Northstowe and other growth areas	The park provides a locally important green space for South Cambs and City residents. The usage of the park can only be expected to increase in the future, thus a clear direction and status for the park is needed.
	Quality, Accessible Services	The designation of the site would provide additional opportunities to promote the park as an accessible site accessible easily within the district with an environment managed to improve physical and emotional wellbeing
	Village Life	The designation would help promote the park locally as a site to be enjoyed, where opportunities to work and learn occur for people of all ages and abilities.
	Sustainability	The designation of these sites as LNR's and their subsequent promotion will provide opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside. It may be possible for the City Council to produce guided walk leaflets to minimise people travelling to the sites by car.
	Partnership	None specific. However, the identification of particular tasks within the management plan may help to draw in future partnerships.

Conclusions/Summary

14. The total number of LNR's within the district would be increased without any further financial implications to the District Council other than those currently included within the park's maintenance budget. This would be a positive move forward to achieving Best Value Performance Indicators.
15. Local Plan policy EN10 objectives would be supported by the proposal.
16. A locally important site for people and wildlife would receive a greater level of protection from encroachment by development.

Recommendations

17. It is recommended that the portfolio holder supports an application for the designation of Milton Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Report to Community Development Portfolio Holder in January 2006

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