



Service Delivery Committee	Tuesday, 03 September 2019	Matter for Information and Decision
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Report Title: **Brocks Hill Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve**

Report Author(s): **Jamie Gould (Park Ranger)**

Purpose of Report:	To consider the declaration of Brocks Hill Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve.
Report Summary:	The report details the process of declaring Local Nature Reserves and discusses the reasons why Brocks Hill would qualify on the grounds of its importance for wildlife, enjoyment and education.
Recommendation(s):	<p>A. That Members provide their approval for the declaration of Brocks Hill Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).</p> <p>B. That following the required consultation, the Council's Legal Services team sign the declaration document as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.</p>
Senior Leadership, Head of Service, Manager, Officer and Other Contact(s):	<p>Anne Court (Chief Executive) (0116) 257 2602 anne.court1@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p> <p>Avril Lennox MBE (Head of Community & Wellbeing Services) (0116) 257 2673 avril.lennox@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p> <p>Brian Kew (Depot Manager) (0116) 257 2842 brian.kew@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p> <p>Jamie Gould (Park Ranger) (0116) 257 2861 jamie.gould@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p>
Corporate Objectives:	Building, Protecting and Empowering Communities (CO1) Providing Excellent Services (CO3)
Vision and Values:	"A Stronger Borough Together" (Vision) Accountability (V1) Respect (V2) Teamwork (V3) Innovation (V4) Customer Focus (V5)
Report Implications:-	
Legal:	The implications are as set out at Section 2 of this report.
Financial:	There are no implications arising from this report.

Corporate Risk Management:	No corporate risk(s) identified
Equalities and Equalities Assessment (EA):	There are no implications arising from this report. EA not applicable
Human Rights:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Health and Safety:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Statutory Officers' Comments:-	
Head of Paid Service:	The report is satisfactory.
Chief Finance Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Monitoring Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Consultees:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural England
Background Papers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance entitled 'Local Nature Reserves' by Natural England on 02/10/2014: Local nature reserves: setting up and management - GOV.UK • Report entitled 'Borough of Oadby and Wigston Local Plan 2019' by OWBC on 16/04/2019: New Local Plan - Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. LNR Declaration Document (Draft) 2. Map of Brocks Hill Country Park 3. Phase 1 Habitat Map of Brocks Hill Country Park 4. Lucas Marsh and LNRs in Leicester 5. Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

1. Brocks Hill as a Local Nature Reserve

- 1.1 **Introduction:** Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are sites that are important for wildlife, recreation and education and can be designated by the local authority in charge of them. A Country Park such as Brocks Hill would qualify to become a LNR due to its wildlife, habitats and the associated sensitive management of these features.
- 1.2 **About Local Nature Reserves:** LNR status is given to a site that is locally important for wildlife, geology, education and/or enjoyment (without disturbing wildlife). Many kinds of land can make suitable LNRs, but they are usually areas of natural green space.
- 1.3 LNRs should be publicly accessible where visitors would not damage or disturb wildlife. Access can be restricted in some areas if visitors could cause damage to the natural environment, unless the public have statutory access rights (Natural England, 2014).

2. Designating Local Nature Reserves

- 2.1 'Local Nature Reserve' is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, by principal local authorities.
- 2.2 Local authorities can create Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Primary local authorities including Borough Councils can declare LNRs, secondary local authorities (Town and Parish Councils) can seek permission from a primary local authority. Natural England has confirmed that Oadby and Wigston Borough Council have the power to designate Local Nature Reserves.
- 2.3 The local authority must control the LNR land - either through ownership, a lease or an agreement with the owner. Management of an LNR involves caring for and protecting its natural features, as well as making the land accessible for visitors.
- 2.4 The LNR must be formally declared by sending a draft declaration document (See **Appendix 1**). It must be signed by the relevant local authority Committees, have a map showing the boundary and a management plan detailing:
 - how long the site will remain a protected LNR – 21 years is the recommended minimum
 - ownership of the land
 - any agreements or partnerships
 - why the LNR site was chosen
 - aims and objectives

- biodiversity management and environmental education
 - community participation, access and visitor management
 - costs and funding arrangements
- 2.5 Following the consultation, the final declaration document can be sent to Natural England, signed by the relevant local authority Committees (Natural England, 2014).
- 2.6 Natural England has confirmed there are **no costs implications** for declaring an LNR. The routine maintenance of an LNR site carries on as usual and incurs no extra costs. Natural England further confirmed that the signing of the LNR declaration should be signed and sealed in-house by the Council's legal team, the same as any other official document.

3. De-declaring a Local Nature Reserve

- 3.1 If the land is to be reclaimed, the local authority must de-declare it as an LNR and will need to contact Natural England to consult with them. The local authority should only de-declare the LNR if it's absolutely necessary, for example if the land will be lost due to a road-widening scheme (Natural England, 2014).

4. Rationale for Brocks Hill LNR

- 4.1 Brocks Hill is locally important for wildlife, enjoyment and education. Brocks Hill provides vital habitats for a diversity of wildlife and is cherished by its many visitors (including school groups) as an enjoyable and accessible place to visit all year round (See map of Brocks Hill in **Appendix 2**).
- 4.2 Brocks Hill Country Park was awarded a Bee's Needs Award in 2018 for providing excellent habitats and management for bees and other pollinators by Keep Britain Tidy and DEFRA. There were only a selected number of other sites across the UK that received this award. Brocks Hill has also achieved a Green Flag Award for parks of excellence and a Natural England Country Parks accreditation.
- 4.3 LNR status would enhance Brocks Hill's value and ensure it maintains high standards now and into the future, in accordance with the management plan. Over 680 animal, plant and fungi species have been recorded at the country park.
- 4.4 Habitats such as woodland and species-rich meadows are reasonably rare across the Borough and county. Woodland covers 4% of Leicestershire and Rutland, with broadleaved woodland cover at only 1.8%. The Borough has a relatively small proportion of rural land, with tiny pockets of woodland; therefore the wooded areas of Brocks Hill contribute greatly to the overall woodland cover of the Borough and the wider county.

- 4.5 Species-rich neutral grassland covers just 1,165ha of Leicestershire and Rutland; a small area for a nationally important habitat. At Brocks Hill, there are over 7ha of wildflower meadows, providing a vital refuge for many species of butterfly, bee, bird and grasshopper. The medieval ridge and furrow field is a rare feature within the Borough and the county and should be conserved for future generations. Altogether, the countryside of Brocks Hill Country Park represents an important proportion of semi-natural habitats in the Borough (See Phase 1 Habitat Map in **Appendix 3**).
- 4.6 Being designated as a Local Nature Reserve would be very beneficial to Brocks Hill; proclaiming its importance for wildlife and people in the Borough. Lucas Marsh (adjacent to Brocks Hill) is managed by the Wildlife Trust and is already a LNR. Lucas Marsh was designated in 1996; recognised as a site with great ecological importance, the site was chosen to be a Nature Reserve to protect biodiversity and recognise the Council's commitment to nature conservation.
- 4.7 At only 1.46ha, Lucas Marsh is a tiny fragment of wildlife-rich green space that is protected around Leicester (**Appendix 4**). Adding Brocks Hill (27.40ha) to the list of LNRs would be quite significant for the Borough and the County, increasing and enhancing the network of sites protected for biodiversity.

5. Management

- 5.1 Local authorities can run LNRs independently or can involve:
- 'friends of' community groups
 - wildlife trusts and other recognised conservation bodies
 - site-based rangers
 - local school children
 - Natural England (who can give advice) (Natural England, 2014).
- 5.2 Brocks Hill has a full-time Park Ranger and a dedicated team of regular conservation volunteers, wildlife survey volunteers and occasional corporate volunteers who help with the management of the country park. Local school children also provide volunteering hours and the Friends of Brocks Hill contribute to walks, talks and features such as sculptures within the country park.
- 5.3 Brocks Hill has an up-to-date management plan detailing the site and its boundaries. The information required by Natural England for the declaration of an LNR is contained within the management plan and covers the following:
- Ownership of the land
 - Agreements and/or partnerships
 - Why the LNR site has been chosen
 - Aims and objectives
 - Biodiversity management and environmental education
 - Community participation, access and visitor management
 - Costs and funding arrangements

6. Benefits of Brocks Hill Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve

- 6.1 Demonstrates a sense of pride and custodianship of the natural green spaces owned by the Council.
- 6.2 Retains the countryside and natural open space of the Green Wedge, where Brocks Hill is an essential link (Appendix E):
- 6.3 Provides protection of the habitats and biodiversity at Brocks Hill Country Park.
- 6.4 Advertises Brocks Hill Country Park as a site of importance for wildlife conservation.
- 6.5 Promotes Brocks Hill as an area for recreation and enjoyment for local people and visitors from outside the Borough.
- 6.6 Preserves Brocks Hill as a site that is important for education. Numerous school groups visit the country park, benefitting from activities including pong dipping, mini beast hunts and learning about the life cycles of plants and animals.
- 6.7 Prevents the land being used for development purposes.

7. Financial Risk:

- 7.1 There is no financial risk to this proposal. There will be no extra resources required (this has been confirmed by Natural England), only the current input provided by having a full time Park Ranger with the help of volunteers, along with use of the current Brocks Hill Land Maintenance budget. The routine maintenance and seasonal tasks won't change and can continue to keep the park and its habitats in good condition.