

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET 18th MARCH 2021

DECLARATION OF THE COCKSHUTT LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

REPORT OF DIRECTOR: PROSPERITY AND INVESTMENT

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – CLLR CAROLYN HEALY

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals for Cabinet to approve the declaration of The Cockshutt Local Nature Reserve (LNR) under Sections 19 and 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- 1.2 The declaration of The Cockshutt forms part of a wider program of works being delivered by the Council to protect, care and invest in the boroughs natural environment. To date this program has protected over 1000ha of locally important green spaces valued by our local communities, protecting 200 Green Guarantee sites and 16 LNRs.
- 1.3 The declaration of The Cockshutt will bring the number of LNRs in the Borough to 17 and completes the Cabinet process for those LNRs identified within the adopted Telford and Wrekin Local Plan (2011- 2031). The Local Plan is currently under review, and the recent Issues and Options consultation has identified the designation of further LNRs as a key driver in the delivery of an enhanced and better protected natural environment within the borough and therefore it is envisaged that further sites will come forward for declaration in due course.
- 1.4 Visitor modelling in 2020 identified that Telfords 17 Local Nature Reserves receive approximately 3.5 million visits a year. The derived welfare value provided by those visits can be valued at approximately £12.5 million/yr. Of the 3.5 million visits per year approximately 2.5 million visits are made via active travel and 1.1 million visits are made by individuals who have never visited the LNRs before.
- 1.5 Modelling specifically for The Cockshutt indicates that the site receives approximately 252,500 visits a year generating a welfare value of approximately £865,000 a year.
- 1.6 The Cockshutt is a large 33ha site comprising a habitat mosaic of heathland, scrub, neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland situated between Oakengates, Wrockwardine Wood and St Georges. The sites importance for nature conservation was recognised by the Telford Development Corporation in their 1979 'Open Space and Landscape Structure Review' with the site

mapped as one of 42 key areas of ecological interest. The site then featured in the councils 1986 'Nature Conservation Strategy for Telford' as a 'Prime Site' of ecological interest. Further ecological surveys in 1989 led to the sites inclusion in the councils pioneering 'Green Network' approach to spatial planning - protecting the site from development through planning policy, a protection that was further strengthened by the protection of Local Wildlife Sites in planning policy guidance published in 2005. The proposals to declare the site as a Local Nature Reserve will recognise the sites local importance for people and wildlife nationally. These proposals are strongly supported by ward members, three local parish councils and a number of local groups, in particular the Friends of the Cockshutt, part of the Telford Green Space Partnership.

- 1.7 A Map showing the proposed LNR is presented in Appendix 1. Photographs are presented in Appendix 2.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that cabinet:

- 2.1 Approves the declaration of the Cockshutt Local Nature Reserve; and
- 2.2 Delegates authority to complete the declaration process to the Director of Prosperity and Investment and Associate Director of Policy and Governance in consultation with the Cabinet member for Visitor Economy, Historic & Natural Environment and Climate Change.

3. **SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-operative Council priorities?	
	Yes	The designation of the LNR contributes to several priorities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that neighbourhoods are safe, clean and well maintained • improving the health and wellbeing of our communities and • addressing health inequalities
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	The proposed LNR is a beneficial resource to people who live and visit the area.
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	Agreement at Cabinet – March 2021	

FINANCIAL/ VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	<p>The Geotechnical risk assessment for this area has been completed and funded from within current resources. Budget has been allocated to implement the reports recommendations, which will be in place before the declaration is legally sealed.</p> <p>The Council will continue to manage and maintain the site at its current budget levels no additional proportionate steps have been identified with this declaration.</p> <p>The Council, in partnership adjacent Parish Councils, will support the existing 'Friends group'.</p> <p>A draft Management Plan will be developed with input and consultation from Natural England. Resources from within the Councils current budgets will be provided to support the development of this plan.</p>
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<p>The Council has power under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to establish nature reserves by way of a declaration. The declaration will stand as evidence that the land is a LNR and will be managed as such. LNR status is a statutory designation which reflects an owner's commitment to managing the site for conservation purposes or for a combination of conservation and recreational purposes.</p> <p>There is a making and publication procedure that needs to be followed regarding the declaration which includes prior consultation with Natural England. Legal Services will assist the Director of Prosperity and Investment as required regarding the process. Declaring a site as a LNR provides opportunity for the Council to make byelaws for the protection of the reserve. (Other legal points are set out elsewhere in this report)</p>
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	<p>The provision of accessible greenspaces contributes to supporting the delivery of the Borough's public health priorities encouraging people of all ages to remain active.</p> <p>LNR status will assist in the application for external funding.</p> <p>LNR's provide opportunities for volunteering which increases physical and social interaction and encourages lifelong learning of new skills as well as supporting mental wellbeing.</p>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	<p>The designation of the area as an LNR will deliver borough wide benefits.</p>

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. INFORMATION

- 4.1 This report sets out a proposal for the Council to agree to declare the statutory Local Nature Reserve known as 'The Cockshutt'. This is in accordance with the provisions of Sections 19 and 21 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Local Nature Reserves provide opportunities for volunteering in the natural environment which increases physical activity, social interaction, encourages the lifelong learning of new skills and allows individuals to give back to their local community which leads to increases in physical and mental wellbeing.
- 4.2 The site meets the necessary criteria for declaration and has a draft management plan. Informal engagement with Natural England has been undertaken along with the appropriate level of geotechnical assessment. As part of the declaration process and following Cabinet approval, a series of legal checks will be undertaken including reports on title, coal and drainage searches following which a consultation document will be issued to Natural England to seek their formal 'Welcome' prior to completion of the declaration and the associated legal seal.
- 4.3 Our population continues to see growth with a population that is younger than average. It is therefore important that the places where we live, work and spend our leisure time supports our physical and mental wellbeing.
- 4.4 The response to the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the need for our communities to have access to local green space and has shown that there are inequalities in the levels of local green space provision and accessibility. At the height of the pandemic in 2020 the UK's People and Nature survey found that nearly 50% of adults surveyed had spent more time in the natural environment than before the pandemic. However, it was also found that people's ability to access local green space was strongly linked to their socio-economic status. People living in areas of high deprivation, on low incomes or without a current job were less likely to be visiting local green spaces. Similar trends were also found for older people, minority ethnic groups and those with long term illness. The Council, working with parish and town councils, friends groups and local environmental organisations have made a commitment to address the inequalities in physical, cultural and social access to the natural environment and this reflects even more positively given the changes seen through the pandemic.

The Cockshutt

- 4.5 The Cockshutt is a large post-industrial site featuring a habitat mosaic comprising heathland, scrub, neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland.
- 4.6 The site comprises a large area of heathland scrub surrounded by woodland and amenity grassland. The woodland is typically oak and birch but has been extensively planted in the past with beech, ash and sycamore. A number of the trees are sufficiently mature to provide rot holes which bats have been recorded using and a reasonable proportion of deadwood habitat. The Gorse dominated heathland in the centre of the site is especially valuable for birds such as Whitethroat, Garden warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Linnet.

The presence of priority species such as Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak butterflies plus Kestrel, Bullfinch and Song Thrush indicates that the combination of habitats is of high enough quality to support uncommon species and be worthy of designation as a Local Nature Reserve.

5 STRATEGIC PLANNING

- 5.1 Following declaration the land shown in Appendix 1 will be managed as a Local Nature Reserve
- 5.2 The selection and declaration of Local Nature Reserves play an important role in maintaining a healthy balance in spatial planning between the built environment and green infrastructure. The Telford & Wrekin Local Plan Policies Map shows the site as a 'Proposed Local Nature Reserve' (pLNR). A full list of Local Nature Reserves is provided in Table 1. The Local Plan commits to completing the declaration of the proposed Local Nature Reserves during the life time of the Local Plan - 2031.

Table 1: Local Nature Reserves in Telford

Site	Size
Dothill	41.3
Limekiln Wood	24
Lodge Field	3
Madebrook and Stirchley Dingle	5.4
Madeley Pit Mounds	42.68
Telford Town Park	92.32
The Beeches	3.88
The Ercall and St Lawrence's Hill	66.7
The Granville	61.5
Apley Woods	22.9
Lillishall Hill	4.6
Ketley Paddock Mound	4.9
Randlay Valley (in process)	44.5
Rough Park (in process)	42.3
Lightmoor (in process)	24.4
Dawley Pools and Pit Mounds (in process)	38
Proposed Local Nature Reserves	
The Cockshutt	32.8

6 NATURAL CAPITAL ASSESSMENT

Natural Capital

- 6.1 This year a government review collated and assessed our current understanding of the economics of biodiversity. The study sets out how we rely on the natural environment to provide us with food, water and shelter and how the natural systems we are part of regulate our climate, maintain nutrient cycles and oxygen production. The review sets out how, as individuals or as communities, the natural environment can enhance our physical health and mental wellbeing providing us with opportunities for spiritual fulfilment, recreation and recuperation. The study highlighted how the natural systems we are part of also absorb the waste products we produce including carbon dioxide, plastics and other forms of waste that, in some instances, can be polluting or disruptive to the way the natural systems we are part of work.

- 6.2 The natural environment has an intrinsic worth. However, our natural environment can also be viewed as an asset in the same way that roads, buildings and factories or health, knowledge and skills are assets. The natural environment has ‘value’ and delivers ‘economic good’.

Outdoor Recreational Value (ORVal Assessment)

- 6.3 ORVal is an online tool that spatially models the number of visits made to sites and calculates the welfare value of these visits. Calculations are based on findings from the ‘Monitor of Engagement in Natural Environment’ (MENE) surveys and a variety of economic valuation literature. In 2020 Telford and Wrekin Council modelled the outdoor recreational value of the councils LNR series. This high level assessment based on broad habitat types and the presence of outdoor facilities indicated that:

- Telfords 17 Local Nature Reserves receive approximately 3.5 million visits a year.
- Those visits to Telfords 17 Local Nature Reserves can be valued at approximately £12.5 million/yr
- Of the 3.5 million visits per year to our Local Nature Reserves approximately 2.5 million visits are made via active travel, and
- Of the 3.5 million visits per year 1.1 million visits are made by individuals who have never visited the LNRs before.

- 6.4 The ORVal modelling specifically for The Cockshutt indicates that the site:

- Receives approximately 252,500 visits a year
- Generating a welfare value of approximately £865,000 a year

Accessible Natural Green Space ANGst

- 6.5 In 2010 Natural England published ‘Nature Nearby’ setting out the recommended standards for Accessible Natural Greenspace¹:

“Everyone, wherever they live, should have accessible natural greenspace:

- *Of at least 2 ha in size, no more than 300 metres from home;*
- *At least one accessible 20 ha site within 2 km of home; and*
- *One accessible 500 ha site within 10km of home; plus*
- *A minimum of one hectare of Local Nature Reserve per 1000 population”*

- 6.6 At the time of Telford’s inception it was intended that every 1000 of the population would have access to four hectares of green space. This standard was achieved by the 1980s.

- 6.7 In 2016 the Marches Ecosystem Assessment revealed that 89% of households within Telford and Wrekin are within 300m of accessible natural greenspace of at least 2ha in size.

¹ The ANGst guidance is currently being reviewed by Natural England revisions are due to be published in the spring of 2021. Reassessments of all the boroughs green spaces will be undertaken once the new guidance has been published.

- 6.8 The borough of Telford and Wrekin has an estimated population of 177,450 people (Office of National Statistics, 2019). The Cabinet approval of The Cockshutt Local Nature Reserve will increase the spatial coverage of Cabinet approved and formally declared LNR's in the borough by 32.8 hectares to 555.16 hectares. The declaration of all the cabinet approved Local Nature Reserves will result in approximately 3.12ha of LNR per 1000 of the population, triple the minimum recommended standard.

Accessible Woodland Standard

- 6.9 The UK has one of the lowest levels of woodland cover in Europe². In March 2020 it was estimated that there was 3.2 million hectares of woodland in the UK³ representing 13% of the total UK land area (10% England, 15% Wales, 19% Scotland and 9% Northern Ireland)⁴ compared to 38% for Europe as a whole and 31% worldwide⁵.
- 6.10 Telford and Wrekin covers approximately 29030ha. Using canopy cover measurements based on National Tree Map data (2019) the canopy cover of the borough of Telford and Wrekin is estimated to be 15%.
- 6.11 Taking a similar approach to Natural England's accessible greenspace standards The Woodland Trust have set a series of standards for accessible woodland.
- 6.12 The Woodland Trust have estimated that 70% of residents within Telford and 20% of residents within The Wrekin constituencies are within 500m of accessible woodland. In house modelling has calculated that 77% of households in Telford and Wrekin are within 500m of a woodland that's been protected by the Council either via its LNR or Green Guarantee programs.

Canopy Cover

- 6.13 The borough of Telford and Wrekin comprises 30 Wards. Data provided by the National Tree Map (2019) was used to calculate the percentage canopy cover per political ward. Tree canopy cover was measured in sqm and trees intersecting Ward boundaries were shared across Wards. The average canopy cover for Telford and Wrekin Wards is 22.37% ranging from 7.78% in Edgmond and Ercall Magna Ward to 54.99% in Ironbridge Gorge Ward.
- 6.14 The Cockshutt is located in St Georges Ward. The ward has a canopy cover of 30.5%. The Cockshutt contributes to 15% of the Wards canopy cover.

Carbon Sequestration

- 6.15 Based on a carbon sequestration rate of 9.14 t/Co2e/ha/yr. The Cockshutt woodlands can be estimated to sequester 265 tonnes of Co2e per year.
- 6.16 The BEIS (2019) provides guidance on valuing energy use and greenhouse gas emissions and projects carbon prices between 2010-2100. Taking a central

² Woodland Trust (2019) Woodland Indicators by Parliamentary Constituenc

³ ONS (2020) Woodland Natural Capital Accounts, UK: 2020

⁴ Forest Research (2020) Forestry Statistics 2020

⁵ Forest Research (2020) Forest Cover: International Comparisons

figure for 'non-traded carbon' of £66 per tonne of co2e. It can be estimated that the cost of carbon sequestration generated by the Cockshutt can be estimated at £17,490 of non-traded carbon per year.

Health and Mental Wellbeing

- 6.17 Health inequalities are often linked to individuals' access to nature. It has been shown that living close to accessible green spaces can promote public health and reduce levels of obesity, heart disease, reduce stress and levels of depression.
- 6.18 Access to high quality green space is important to health and wellbeing at all stages in life. Learning through natural play is a key part of developing imagination, physical fine motor skills and improves a child's ability to deal with stress and adversity in life. Activities in nature can have a significant impact on reducing social isolation and symptoms anxiety and depression in adults.

Conclusion

- 6.19 It is increasingly recognised that we are facing three challenges linked to the natural environment.
- The impacts of a changing climate,
 - The impacts of current declines in biodiversity, and
 - The increasing need to strengthen the connections between people and the natural world

The protection of The Cockshutt, as part of a wider suite of sites across the borough, will help to address these challenges at a local level.

- 6.20 LNR status for The Cockshutt recognises the role the site plays in increasing local resilience to a changing climate whilst as a core site within the boroughs wider green network the designation provides recognition of the sites wider ecological value. The designation ensures residents will have continued access to accessible green space on their doorstep allowing them to create meaningful connections to the natural environment. The Council is not simply providing these spaces but working actively to ensure they are participatory. Telford's green spaces are cared for by a combination of Council services and just under 30 individual 'friends of' groups, many of which are affiliated with The Telford Green Space Partnership.

7 IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 7.1 Internal and external consultation with relevant stakeholders has taken place.
- Internal consultations with Engineering Officers confirmed the need for geotechnical risk assessments on this site which has mining legacy. The geotechnical risk assessment is complete and funding has been secured to implement the recommendations prior to formal declaration.
 - Internal consultations with officers including development management, estates, environmental maintenance and healthy spaces have not identified any potential issues with the declaration of this site.

8 NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 In the case that Cabinet approves the principle of declaration of the proposed Local Nature Reserve and the recommended delegation, then the required next steps include the following:
- A) A formal consultation process with Natural England will be undertaken in 2021 which includes the submission of a formal consultation document and a site visit following which Natural England will write to formally 'Welcome' the site
 - B) All necessary property/title enquiries and searches being undertaken regarding land in the Council's ownership.
 - C) The Director of Prosperity and Investment making or authorising the making of the formal declaration

9. PREVIOUS MINUTES

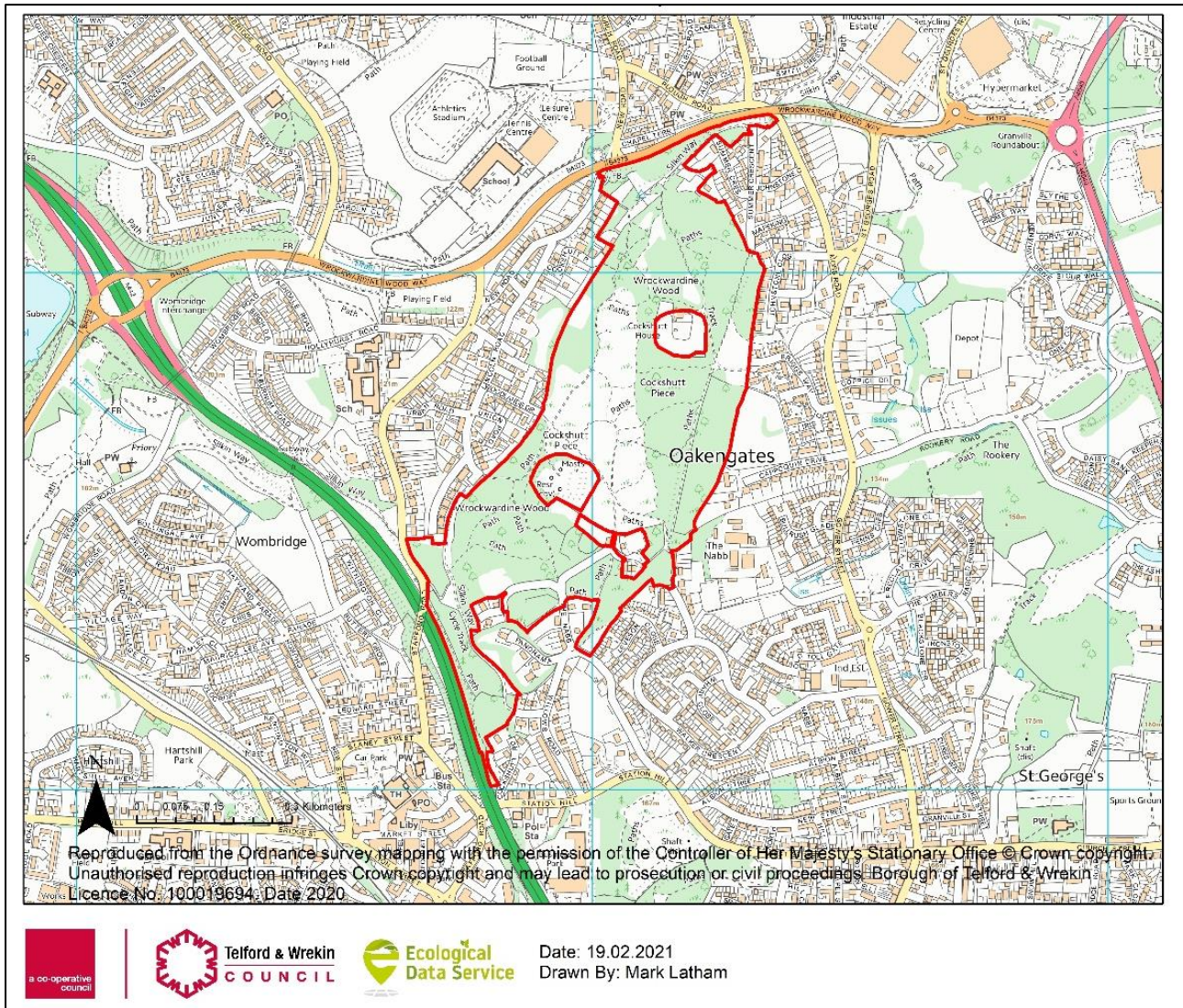
- 9.1 None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Geotechnical Assessment Summary

Report prepared by Mark Latham Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist.

Appendix 1: The Cockshutt Proposed Local Nature Reserve Boundary



Appendix 2: Aerial Photograph



Appendix 3: Site Photographs





The Friends of The Cockshutt (Photograph Alec Connah)