
**Meeting of Executive Member For Housing and
Advisory Panel**

15 January 2007

**Meeting of Executive Member For Leisure & Culture
and Advisory Panel**

16 January 2007

Report of the Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

**Proposal to Designate Acomb Wood & Acomb Meadow as a Statutory Local
Nature Reserve**

Summary

1. The paper proposes that Acomb Wood & Acomb Meadow be declared a Local Nature Reserve as part of the development of a city wide network of Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Acomb Wood & Meadow are situated in the Dringhouses & Woodthorpe Ward of the City, bordering Westfield Ward. Because parts of the site are in differing Executive portfolios the report is presented to both Executive members and advisory panels for approval.

Background

2. The City of York Council is the freeholder of both Acomb Wood and Acomb Meadow. Together they cover 4Ha (10 Acres) of land (3.1Ha woodland, 0.9 Ha Meadow). Acomb Wood is in the Leisure & Culture portfolio and Acomb Wood Meadow in the Housing Services portfolio.
3. LNRs are both for people and nature - they are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally. Through good management it is possible to give people special opportunities to study and learn about them or simply enjoy and have contact with nature. There are over 1000 LNRs in England today ranging from windswept coastal headlands, ancient woodlands and flower meadows to former inner city railways, long abandoned landfill sites and industrial areas. In total they cover over 40,000 hectares, forming an impressive natural resource which makes an important contribution to England's biodiversity. However LNRs are comparatively scarce in North Yorkshire – with only 15 recognised sites, 3 of which are within York. Clifton Backies LNR was the first within York (designated 2002), Hob Moor LNR the second (designated 2003) and St Nicholas Fields LNR the third (designated 2004).
4. LNR designation serves to:
 - increase people's awareness and enjoyment of their natural environment
 - provide an ideal environment for everyone to learn about and study nature
 - build relationships between local Authorities, national and local nature conservation organisations, and local people

- protect wildlife habitats and natural features
 - offer a positive use for land which local authorities would prefer to be left undeveloped
 - make it possible to apply by-laws which can help in managing and protecting the site
5. A Memo of Understanding is in place between the Friends of Acomb Wood (FoAW), the Dringhouses & Woodthorpe and Westfield Ward Committees, and the City of York Council Parks & Open Spaces Section. This agreement came into being as a part of the acquisition of the woodland in 2002.
 6. Current Conservation designations on the site are Statutory Local Nature Reserve (proposed) (full site), Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (City of York Council Local Plan) (Meadow only), and Tree Preservation Order (Woodland only & those trees behind Linnet Way.)
 7. Acomb Wood is an old plantation dating back over 200 years. It is a mature, even aged woodland dominated mainly by Oak with an under storey of hazel, bramble, and hazel. There are also abundant hornbeams and birch with occasional rowan, whitebeam, scots pine and black poplars. There are also remnants of old hedgerows showing evidence of once being laid using traditional techniques. This largely native woodland is home to numerous species of fungus, invertebrates, and mammals and supports bird species such as tree creeper, woodpecker, tawny owl and sparrow hawk. The woodland is a welcome refuge amongst a heavily urbanised area.
 8. The adjacent meadow complements the woodland and also accommodates a woodland edge habitat. These edge habitats and substantial hedgerows are an extremely important element of the woodland ecosystem. The meadow itself shows a ridge and furrow landscape demonstrating that it has been managed as grassland for the past 300 years. This small area of unimproved grassland is the last of its kind in this area of the City mainly due to development. This meadow is species rich and includes several species of fine grasses along with wildflowers such as birds foot trefoil, meadowsweet, knapweed, meadow Vetchling and tufted vetch. A herb rich meadow such as this supports a large diversity of invertebrates, which in turn support bird populations and small mammal such as wood mouse, field vole, bank vole, shrew and weasel.
 9. Community involvement in the Meadow and Wood is the primary responsibility of the Parks & Open Spaces Community Leisure Officer. At least 10 public activities are held annually, such as guided walks and practical tasks. Community and environmental groups such as the Friends of Acomb Wood, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Running Wild! group, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, University Conservation Volunteers, York Cares volunteers and Environmental Task Force and others have all helped out on site. Members of the wider public are also encouraged to participate. If the LNR designation is fulfilled, this community involvement will be carried out by the LNR Officer within the Parks and Open Spaces section.

Consultation

10. As part of the process of developing a Management Plan for Acomb Wood & Meadow the Friends of Acomb Wood have been consulted as to the designation of the site as an LNR and its future management. Management operations are overseen and administered by the Parks & Open Spaces section and are implemented primarily by Neighbourhood Services staff with smaller scale works undertaken by the Friends and other volunteer groups.
11. The Dringhouses & Woodthorpe, and Westfield Ward Committees have been consulted and have commented on the designation and future management of the wood. Other groups who have had the opportunity to have an input to the management plan are Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, York Natural Environment Trust, Natural England, Tree Wardens, members of the York Natural Environment Panel, members of the public and numerous council officers from the environment & conservation, parks & open spaces, and public rights of way sections.
12. In line with the protocol for designation of any site as an LNR, as stipulated in National Parks & Countryside Act 1949, Natural England (the Statutory Nature Conservation Body for England) have been consulted. Natural England support the designation of Acomb Wood & Meadow as an LNR.

Options

13. **Option 1:** Declare Acomb Wood & Acomb Meadow as a Local Nature Reserve.
14. **Option 2:** Do not declare Acomb Wood & Acomb Meadow as a Local Nature Reserve.

Analysis

15. The advantages of designating the site as a Local Nature Reserve are:
 - i) LNR designation is statutory, so that in planning terms protection of the site would be enhanced
 - ii) Additional advisory assistance would be available from Natural England. Financial assistance has been available in the past, and will continue to be available in the future as new grant schemes are developed and come under the administration of Natural England
 - iii) The designation may help to secure funding from other sources, for example landfill tax credits, and various arms of the Big Lottery Fund
16. If Acomb Wood and Meadow was not declared as a Local Nature Reserve, certain grant scheme options would be closed to application and expert advice and support from Natural England would not be accessible. In addition the extra protection from development and the benefits of a public designation would not be felt by the local community.

Corporate Priorities

17. The designation as an LNR helps to meet Corporate Aim 1, as stipulated in the Council Plan 2006/07, to take pride in the City by improving quality and sustainability, creating a clean and safe environment.

18. The knock-on effects and benefits of LNR designation will also help to meet Corporate Aims 2, 5 & 7 by improving opportunities for learning, improving health & well being, and developing opportunities for events & activities.
19. The designation of, and increase in the number of Local Nature Reserves within York are targets within the Parks & Open Spaces Service Plan for 2006/07. The designation of Acomb Wood & Meadow is stipulated within this plan – to increase the number for LNR sites from 3 to 4, along with aspirations to increase the overall area of land under LNR designation, from 52.5 hectares to 62.5 hectares.

Implications

20. This report has the following implications:
 - **Financial** The only cost to the Authority is the cost of advertising the designation status, which can be met within the existing Parks & Open Spaces budget. The designation in the long term is likely to bring significant investment in to the city as it opens up more funding opportunities for the Friends along with other community groups.
 - **Human Resources (HR)** There are no HR implications.
 - **Equalities** There are no Equalities implications.
 - **Legal** There are no legal implications. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 gives powers to Local Authorities to designate LNRs. The local authority must have legal interest in the land, for example by owning it, leasing it or having an agreement with the owner. The land must also be within the area of the local authority.
 - **Crime and Disorder** There are no Crime & Disorder implications.
 - **Information Technology (IT)** There are no IT implications.
 - **Property** There are no Property implications.
 - **Other** There are no other implications.

Risk Management

20. There are no known risks associated with the designation of Acomb Wood & Meadow as a Local Nature Reserve.

The Next Steps

21. Should the decision be made to designate Acomb Wood and Meadow as an LNR the Council would be required to notify the Public. This would take the form of an advert in the Press and copies of the declaration would be made available for public inspection at 18 Back Swinegate. Notices would also be placed on site, and publicity through the Press and Ward Committee Newsletters sought. Natural England would be informed to update the national database of LNRs and Ordnance Survey informed for updating the status on their maps.

Recommendations

22. The Executive Member is asked to agree that Acomb Wood & Acomb Meadow be designated as a Local Nature Reserve, per Option 1 above.

Reason: The designation as an LNR will bring positive benefits to the local community and to the site itself. It will help preserve & enhance the site for future years, send a positive message to the local community, and ensure good management practices are followed in consultation with Natural England.

Contact Details

Authors:

Stephen Whittaker
Community Leisure Officer
Parks & Open Spaces
01904 553423

Dave Meigh
Head of Parks & Open Spaces
Parks & Open Spaces
553386

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Charlie Croft
Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

Report Approved Date 02.01.2007

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Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning and Culture

Report Approved Date 02.01.2007

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Nil

Wards Affected: Dringhouses & Woodthorpe, Westfield

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes:

Annex 1: Area & Location of Proposed LNR Designation