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REPORT

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Cllr Brown: Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport

Information report:

Update on the designation of Bemerton Heath and Barnard's Folly Local Nature Reserve, and the Avon Valley Local Nature Reserve.

I. Report Summary:

This report is intended to update Members on progress made with the designation of Bemerton and Barnard's Folly Woodland Local Nature Reserve (LNR), following Cabinet approval to designate the site on 23.04.03. It also contains information on the Avon Valley LNR and the proposed extension. This information has been contributed by John Meeker, Forward Planning.

The requirements for designating the Bemerton site as an LNR have been met. Salisbury District Council (SDC) must sign a formal declaration over the site for the process to be completed. Certified copies of the declaration must be kept for public inspection free of charge by SDC, and notification of the declaration publicized (e.g. through placing an advert in the local paper).

The declaration contains a statement that SDC will manage the site as a nature reserve, and as part of this responsibility a management plan has been produced. Staff from both Community Initiatives and the Parks Department are currently involved in managing the site [as set out in the management plan]. Key projects for 2004/2005 can be met from within existing budgets, but some fundraising may be needed for projects in future years, as there is no core budget for this site.

The designation and management of the Bemerton LNR meets several of SDCs core values, and will help SDC to meet commitments under the Environmental Policy, Environmental Sustainability Action Plan and Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The signing of the declaration will coincide with a new Local Nature Reserve week that is being promoted nationally by English Nature, from 14th-25th July 2004. Officers from Community Initiatives Parks and Forward Planning will work together to ensure that the maximum positive publicity will be generated for the Salisbury sites during this week.

2. Background Information

Bemerton and Barnard's Folly proposed Local Nature Reserve comprises two linked woodland sites with a combined area of 12.10ha. The site is located in a largely residential area of the Bemerton Ward. Maps of the site are available on request along with the costed management plan.

Approval for the designation of the 'Bemerton and Barnard's Folly Woodland' as a Local Nature Reserve was sought in 2003 from the City Area Committee (06.03.03) and Cabinet (23.04.03). Approval was granted by both.

Cabinet members requested that an information report on "progress with this project and all the Salisbury District Council designated Local Nature Reserves" be brought to Cabinet prior to the formal opening of Bemerton and Barnard's Folly Local Nature Reserve. This report fulfills this request.

3. Site designation – background and progress

Following Cabinet approval to designate Bemerton and Barnard's Folly Woodland, formal designation was delayed following the departure of the previous Environment Community Development Officer. English Nature also had to be consulted on an additional piece of land donated to the proposed Nature Reserve (the Rawlence Road Garage Site, also agreed by Cabinet on 23.04.03).

The requirements for designating Bemerton Heath as a local nature reserve have now been met (see Appendix I). To formally and legally designate the site, the council must sign a declaration over the land.

Certified copies of the declaration must be kept for public inspection free of charge by SDC, and notification of the declaration publicized through placing an advert in the local paper (similar to a planning application).

4. Implications of designation:

Legal: The declaration over the nature reserve contains a brief statement that the land is being managed as a Nature Reserve. Responsibility for managing the site in line with this statement therefore lies with Salisbury District Council. To this end, a costed management plan was produced and agreed by Cabinet on 23.04.03, available on request.

Personnel: Two main SDC departments are involved in the management of Bemerton and Barnard's Folly at present. As outlined in the agreed management plan, the Parks Department has a remit to undertake woodland management, essential maintenance such as keeping paths cleared, and keeping the wood clear of litter and fly-tipping. The Environment Community Development Officer has a remit to work with local residents to get more people involved with the management of the site and help implement the management plan. SDC also contributes £15,000p.a. to the Salisbury Wildlife Project (SWP), which is run by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The SWP officer has a remit to deliver practical and community based projects outlined in the management plan. Personnel arrangements are sufficient at present to ensure the site is maintained to an adequate standard.

Financial: The management plan contains a list of costed projects that should be undertaken to improve the amenity and wildlife value of the woodland. The total cost of projects is £5,500 over 5 years. Key projects for 2004-05 can be met from within the existing revenue budget for 'Environmental Projects' - there is no capital budget for such work. To fulfill projects in future years it may be

necessary to seek external grant aid, depending on the pressures from other sites and projects on the existing environment budgets. Additional funding will be needed to secure the Rawlence Road Garage Site from fly tipping (e.g. through erecting the discrete barrier between the garage site and the Folly suggested by Cabinet on 23.04.03). The designation of the site as an LNR is likely to help with fundraising.

5. Formal launch of Bemerton and Barnard's Folly Woodland LNR and the Avon Valley extension

Consultation on the site designation and launch date has been undertaken within SDC (e.g. Parks Department and Forward Planning), and with statutory bodies such as English Nature. The formal launch of the Local Nature Reserve has been scheduled to coincide with a new Local Nature Reserves week (14th-25th July). This week will be publicized nationally by English Nature, so presents a good opportunity to gain positive publicity for Salisbury's Local Nature Reserves.

6. Update on the Avon Valley Local Nature Reserve

There is currently only one other Local Nature Reserve within Salisbury District - the Avon Valley LNR. This site which incorporates a section of the River Avon north of the city, was designated as an LNR in 1993 and has been the subject of 2 management plans running from 1992-1997 and then from 1999-2003. During those management plan periods the aim of work was to maintain the wildness of the river's setting and, following the designation of the river as an SSSI in 1996, to safeguard the biodiversity and water quality of the channel. In 1998, the relative importance of the LNR was enhanced further by the designation of the River Avon as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) under European Legislation.

An important aspect of the Avon Valley Project (AVP) is the use of the reserve as a recreational and educational resource for the community. The proximity of the reserve to large parts of Salisbury's population makes it an attraction for casual walking. The boardwalk on the site allows for people to follow the river and gives a real feeling of closeness to the habitat without significant damage to the bankside ecology. In terms of the cultural benefits of the LNR, funding secured through the Salisbury Wildlife Project has enabled a Community Wildlife Officer to be employed. This human resource has enabled the access and interpretation functions of the project to be greatly enhanced through, for example, guided tours and education sessions for local schools. The Officer has also enabled the valuable volunteer work of the Friends of the AVP to be coordinated.

In 2001/02 additional land was identified as a possible extension to the AVP. Following survey and assessment, the extension area was proposed for formal designation and the Cabinet approved, in principle, in September 2002. Since that time the formal designation has been awaiting the wider consideration of the LNR extension in a revised management plan for the period 2004-2009 and this is due to be completed by the early July 2004. Following consultation with English Nature on the management plan, it is envisaged that the designation of the extension area will be finalised in a formal declaration which needs to be supported by public notices. All of this work has been timed, in part, to put the designation in place by mid July – just ahead of National LNR week, during which the Council is promoting events to increase awareness of the importance of local wildlife resources.

NB: In terms of the potential for other LNR's, there are several sites within the Salisbury Area that are owned by SDC and managed by Parks with wildlife in mind. SDC could therefore pursue the

designation of further LNRs in the future should local communities and/or site managers feel sites are suitable [and relevant SDC departments agree that designation is an appropriate goal].

7. How will designating Bemerton Heath and the Avon Valley extension as Local Nature reserves help to achieve the Council's Core Values?

The designation and management of Local Nature Reserves fit in well with the council's core values:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing excellent service & supporting the disadvantaged • Being environmentally conscientious • Communicating with the public • Promoting a thriving local economy • Wanting to be an open, learning council and a willing partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguard and manage an important open space amenity in an area of high deprivation • Improve the management of Bemerton Heath for biodiversity and for people • Set up 'work-days', consultation days, and other events with local people and local schools • Improving the look and feel of amenity areas can help the area become a more desirable living space • Working in partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to manage the site, and building up a partnership with the local community
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The designation of the site will help Salisbury District Council to meet commitments under the *Environment Policy* and *Environmental Sustainability Action Plan*:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Increase the understanding of, and involvement in environmental issues, by the public and our employees through education, information and consultation.' • 'Protect and enhance the variety of wildlife in South Wiltshire.' • Work towards English Nature's targets for Nature Reserve and Natural Greenspace.

It will also contribute towards meeting targets for urban habitats under the Local Biodiversity Action Plan such as:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure sympathetic management for wildlife on ten open spaces per district, involving local communities wherever possible • Bring 50% of Wildlife Sites in urban areas under sympathetic management, involving local communities wherever possible • 75% of schools in urban areas to have wildlife areas in their grounds, or be involved in/have access to a wildlife site nearby • Support local communities in the establishment of at least 100ha of community nature reserves (e.g. Local Nature Reserves) in Wiltshire, so that there are 3 new reserves in each district

Appendix I

Process	Year achieved	Notes
1 Identify the site	2000	Local residents approached SDC regarding the neglected state of the site. The Environment Community Development Officer began to work with residents.
2 Evaluate the site	2001-2002	Vegetation, bird, bat and beetle surveys were conducted on the site, plus local people consulted regarding management options.
3 Consult informally with English Nature	2001	Site visits conducted
4 Produce costed Management Plan	2002	Produced by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in partnership with SDC. Revised in 2003, and 2004.
5 Obtain Cabinet Approval	2003	Obtained 26.04.03.
6 Formal consultation with English Nature	2003-2004	Management plan re-submitted in 2004 incorporating mapping information on the new piece of land, the 'Rawlence garage site'.
8 Make formal declaration of Local Nature Reserve, inform English Nature and Public	Not yet achieved	SDC need to prepare and sign a formal statement of declaration, publicise this in the local newspaper, and make it available to the public at SDC council offices.
9 Set up a management and monitoring group	Not yet achieved	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, SDC parks department and the Environment Community Development Officer currently liaise on an informal basis.
Other Requirements		
The site must meet English Nature Criteria	Achieved	English Nature have agreed that the site is of 'reasonable natural interest', and of high value within the local context for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public and for environmental education opportunities.
SDC must have or acquire a legal interest in the land, and have jurisdiction over the area in which the proposed reserve lies	Achieved	Bemerton Folly and Barnard's Folly proposed Local Nature Reserve has been wholly owned by Salisbury District Council since 1973.