

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: The Executive – 14 December 2022

Subject: Local Nature Reserve Declaration: Kenworthy Woods

Report of: Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing

Summary

To seek the approval of the Executive Committee to declare one site in Manchester, Kenworthy Woods, as a Local Nature Reserve.

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended: -

- (1) To declare the area shown outlined on the “Location map of Kenworthy Woods” (Appendix 1) as the Kenworthy Woods Local Nature Reserve.
 - (2) Note officers are to consult formally with Natural England on the declaration.
 - (3) To instruct the City Solicitor (subject to the above) to prepare the formal declaration document as necessary.
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Wards Affected: Northenden

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Ecosystems, such as Manchester’s woodlands, help to capture and store carbon, as do effectively managed meadows, while rivers and canals provide a cooling effect during times of heat stress. Access to nature encourages walking and cycling and improves health and wellbeing, reducing reliance on cars with a consequent reduction in carbon emissions.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments

The creation of Local Nature Reserves in the city allows for greater environmental equity for Manchester’s residents, protecting their ability to access these green spaces. The proposed LNR has designated accessible routes incorporated within it.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Thriving green spaces increase the attractiveness of Manchester as a place in which to work and invest. Jobs are created in the environmental sector through the need to plant and manage the local green and blue infrastructure resource. Specialist jobs are also created such as Forest Schools leaders, ecologists and wildlife related engagement officer roles.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Manchester competes on a world stage to attract skilled people. A high quality, attractive natural environment makes an important contribution to this.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Local Nature Reserves should be accessible to all communities within Manchester, offering the potential to gain health benefits through improved access to nature for relaxation and exercise and learning new skills through volunteering opportunities.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	The city's natural environment, its woodlands, rivers and meadows play a valuable role in storing carbon and creating a liveable city.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Improved connectivity between green spaces improves local public access to nature, reducing the need to travel.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

None

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy, please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Manchester Biodiversity Strategy – 2022-2030
- Manchester’s Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester: July 2015
- Manchester’s Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Implementation Plan Refresh – March 2022
- Our Manchester Strategy - Forward to 2025
- Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Manchester City Council has a new Biodiversity Strategy which was endorsed at the Scrutiny and Executive Committees in October 2022. Objective 2 within the strategy states that 'Land managers and practitioners in the city must be provided with the necessary knowledge and skills to protect and recover biodiversity'. One of the key ways to achieve this objective is to increase the number of Local Nature Reserves in Manchester. The strategy proposes that further sites will be designated as Local Nature Reserves on an annual review basis.
- 1.2 There are currently eight Local Nature Reserves in Manchester – Chorlton Water Park, Blackley Forest, Clayton Vale, Chorlton Ees & Ivy Green, Highfield Country Park, Boggart Hole Clough, Wythenshawe Park, and Stenner Woods & Millgate Fields. All the sites have benefitted from the designation through increased public usage by local and regional visitors. These sites are nationally recognised by Natural England and other nature conservation organisations such as Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are protected areas of land designated by local authorities due to their wildlife and/or geological features that are of special interest locally. They provide opportunities for people to become involved in the management of their local environment as well as giving people special opportunities to study, learn or simply enjoy and connect with nature.
- 2.2 Declaring sites as LNRs plays an important role in biodiversity conservation. LNRs will offer many benefits not only to wildlife but also to the quality of life for the people of Manchester. The benefits of LNRs can be summarised as: -
 - Protection of wildlife habitats and natural features
 - Increased community awareness and enjoyment of the natural environment through greater involvement
 - Provision of an environment in which people can learn about and study nature
 - Building relationships between local authorities, national and local conservation bodies, and local people
- 2.3 Local authorities have the power to acquire, declare and manage LNRs. To establish an LNR, the local authority must have or must acquire a legal interest in the land. The sites selected so far for designation have been chosen due to their rich flora and fauna and strong "Friends of..." groups. The guidance to declare LNRs is that they should generally be greater than 2ha in size and capable of being managed primarily for nature conservation so that there are special opportunities for study, research, or enjoyment of nature. They should also meet one of the following:
 - of high natural interest locally

- of some reasonable natural interest and of high value locally for formal education or research
 - of some reasonable natural interest and of high value locally for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public
- 2.4 Local authorities are advised to consult with Natural England informally at an early stage and must consult formally when Council approval has been granted. Natural England is the Government agency that supports and advises on the conservation of wildlife and geology. They are key in the process of designating LNRs.
- 2.5 LNRs are protected from unsuitable development through the planning system. Policy EN15 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation) of Manchester's Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (Habitats and Biodiversity), set out how the City Council as Local Planning Authority should consider planning applications which affect an LNR.
- 2.6 Natural England states that LNRs are an essential part of the country's green infrastructure. They are an important way to enhance and conserve nature and ecosystem services - the services nature provides to benefit people - against threats like climate change, declining biodiversity and lack of access.
- 2.7 Natural England recommends that everyone should have an accessible greenspace of 2 ha within 300m of home; at least one accessible 20 ha site within 5km of home; and at least one 500 ha site within 10km of home. LNRs can contribute to these targets and the ANGSt (Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards) standard of a minimum of 1 ha of LNR per 1000 of population. The reason for this is to try to ensure that all communities have reasonable access to natural environments near to where they live. With a population estimate of 550,000 at present Manchester's target is approximately 550 ha. If Kenworthy Woods is designated as an LNR then Manchester will increase its coverage from 391.8 ha to 427.8 ha.
- 2.8 It is important to have a productive and useful environment to support our existing and future residents. As ecological assets, Local Nature Reserves provide many co-benefits to both people and wildlife as key parts of the City's wider green and blue infrastructure network.
- 2.9 The designation also increases the opportunity to bid for additional sources of funding. For example, in 2022 the Parks team and Friends of Highfield Community Group helped secure £41,000 through Natural England and a range of other sources to develop wildlife friendly management approaches on Highfield LNR in Levenshulme.
- 2.10 The Council can declare land which it holds for recreation purposes (such as under section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875) provided the management of the proposed LNR will not restrict the public's statutory right of access and such use does not compromise the conservation aims of the LNR designation.

3.0 Kenworthy Woods

- 3.1 Kenworthy Woods is situated to the south of Chorlton Water Park, separated by the River Mersey. The site is a key link within the Mersey Valley network of sites of high conservation value. Kenworthy Woods is located within the Northenden Ward and covers 36 hectares. The site is managed by the Parks Department under the guidance of their departmental River Valley Lead Officer.
- 3.2 Kenworthy Woods is a former tip site, with large scale environmental improvements undertaken in the 1990s, including large scale tree planting as part of the Co-operative Bank Community Woodland programme overseen by Red Rose Forest (now City of Trees). The site comprises of distinct areas of habitat including broadleaved woodland, native hedge row, neutral grassland, marshy grassland, scrub land and an orchard.
- 3.3 Kenworthy Woods offers a rich assortment of fungi species, flora and fauna. Furthermore, it is believed that Kenworthy Woods would be a suitable habitat for priority species identified in the new Biodiversity Strategy, including the Willow Tit. There is also a network of formal paths and desire lines across the site.
- 3.4 There are dedicated community and “Friends of...” groups working on the site and holding events and activities such as wassailing in the orchard, and nature walks around the site. These events are open to all and are advertised on social media.
- 3.5 Greater Manchester Orienteering also run a course with markers across the site.
- 3.6 Kenworthy Woods is held by the Council under section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875 and as such, the public have a statutory right of access. The proposed management of the land as an LNR will not restrict the public’s statutory right of access for recreation purposes or compromise the conservation aims of the proposed LNR designation.

4.0 The Future

- 4.1 The designation of LNR status for Kenworthy Woods would help to establish the long-term maintenance and raise the profile of the site. The designation will also offer opportunities for funding as it reinforces Manchester’s commitment to nature conservation and recreation. The location of the proposed LNR within the Mersey Valley means that the designation also supports the ambition set out across a range of objectives in the City’s Our River Our City Strategy, providing increased opportunity for increased practical action, community engagement and awareness raising.
- 4.2 Natural England has confirmed their informal support for the declaration of LNR status for the site. If the Executive approves the declaration, the management plan will be referred to Natural England for formal consultation.

Subject to the outcome of the formal consultation, the site will be formally declared by the preparation of a formal declaration document. Once formally declared, the site will, at the earliest opportunity, be marked as an LNR on the upcoming Local Plan for the City of Manchester.

- 4.3 As mentioned in 2.7, we aim to ensure that in future, as many people across Manchester as possible have easy access to natural environment sites. This is part of an ongoing programme, with further sites under consideration for Local Nature Reserves declaration in order to represent an even spread across the city.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To declare the area shown outlined on the “Location map of Kenworthy Woods” (Appendix 1) as the Kenworthy Woods Local Nature Reserve.
- (2) To note officers are to consult formally with Natural England on the declaration.
- (3) To instruct the City Solicitor (subject to the above) to prepare the formal declaration document as necessary.

6 Legal Considerations

6.1 Under section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, a local authority can designate a site as an LNR provided:

- i) The site is controlled by the local authority, e.g. through ownership.
- ii) It appears expedient to the local authority it should be managed as a nature reserve; and
- iii) The local authority has consulted with Natural England.

6.2 An LNR is defined as including land managed for a conservation purpose and for a recreational purpose (provided the management of the land for the recreational purpose does not compromise its management for the conservation purpose)

6.3 Section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875 provides that any urban authority may purchase, lease, plant, improve and maintain lands for use as public walks or pleasure grounds.