

## **Report to Cabinet**

**Subject:** Proposed declaration of Gedling Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

**Date:** 11 October 2018

**Author:** Service Manager – Parks and Street Care (PASC) Services

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### **1. Wards Affected**

Gedling

### **2. Purpose**

It is proposed that the Council seek Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status for Gedling Country Park and adopt and implement the 5 year landscape management plan 2017-2022 produced by EMEC Ecology, updated in April 2017 by Park Development Officers with assistance from the expert ecology trustee member of the Friends of Gedling Country Park.

### **3. Key Decision**

This is not a key decision.

### **4. Background**

A Nature Reserve is defined in Section 15 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (“the Act”), as:

“land managed solely for a conservation purpose, or land managed not only for a conservation purpose but also for a recreational purpose, if the management of the land for the recreational purpose does not compromise its management for the conservation purpose.”

Land is managed for a conservation purpose if it is managed for the purpose of-

‘providing, under suitable conditions and control, special opportunities for the study of, and research into, matters relating to the flora and fauna of Great Britain and the physical conditions in which they live, and for the study of geological and physiographical features of special interest in the area; or of preserving flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features of special

interest in the area; or for both these purposes.’

Land is managed for a recreational purpose if it is managed for the purpose of providing opportunities for the enjoyment of nature or for open-air recreation. S.21 of the Act provides that local authorities can provide, or secure the provision of nature reserves on any land in their area as to which it appears to the council expedient that it should be managed as a nature reserve. It is very clear in the legislation that sites selected for designation as LNRs must be of special interest. It is also clear that the words ‘in their area’ when applied to LNRs mean the area over which the local authority has responsibility.

Gedling Country Park contains a unique ecological mix of open grassland, marsh and wetland habitats and several water bodies all of which need managing and protecting as a matter of urgency if the council is to maintain the park's environment and enhance certain habitats which are suitable for the wildlife that is present.

The unique nature of these varied habitats creates special interest for the site as it contains key reed bed habitat for nesting birds and newts throughout the year.

LNRs have important parts to play in Local Biodiversity Action Plans and, in most cases have potential for community involvement. English Nature suggests that they can be used as indicators for sustainability and that a target of one hectare of LNR per 1,000 population is realistic. Particularly where LNRs are used to serve community needs, some meaningful input must be made by the community. This should include discussion of what the community wants as well as how it can make a direct contribution to management. Careful monitoring will be needed to see whether societal or ecological/geological objectives are being met and whether adjustments to projects or management plans need making.

The Council has previously agreed to Netherfield Lagoons, Gedling House Woods and Meadows and The Hobbucks as having LNR status.

Gedling Country Park is located off Arnold Lane in Nottingham, 5km north-east of the city; centred on grid reference SK 613 441. The location of the site is shown in figure 1 in Appendix 1.

The suburb of Carlton lies to the south of the site and Woodthorpe and Arnold lie to the west. Farmland comprising of arable land and grassland occurs to the north and east. The river Trent lies approximately 2.5km to the east.

Gedling Country Park covers an area of approximately 588 acres/238ha and comprises a variety of habitat types including large expanses of open natural grassland, woodland (including newly planted areas, areas of existing tree cover comprising dense scrub and small areas of semi-natural woodland) and several ponds.

The Country Park is located on the former Gedling Colliery Site, which was

founded in 1899 and was used for coal production until its closure in 1991. In 2006, extensive landscaping works took place, which involved re-profiling through the movement of previously bunded earth across the site, as well as the spreading of topsoil and seeding of large areas with grass seed mix. More recently, extensive tree planting has taken place.

Twenty five years since the pit closure, nature has taken over, notable species of fauna including Deer, Muntjac Deer, Badgers, Hares, Short Eared Owls, Skylarks, Lapwings and rare butterflies (Dingy Skipper) amongst others have inhabited the land making the site extremely important for wildlife.

Since February 2014 major developments works have taken place including the installation of new footpaths, making safe the old colliery drainage works and manholes, installation of boundary fencing and engineering works to the main header wall on the Ouse Dyke enabling efficient drainage of the site. A new access road and car park from Spring Lane complete the development for public access, this area is also ideal for visitors to take advantage of the open panoramic views to the west, south and east.

The land is owned and maintained by Gedling Borough Council, working in partnership with 'The Friends of Gedling Country Park'. The group are actively working to promote and protect the wildlife on site and promote the site's importance to the wider community. During 2017 they have provided over 900 volunteer hours, carrying out a range of tasks including thinning of woodland areas, removal of invasive scrub from grasslands, drainage improvement and species surveys/data collection.

The park is used extensively by local residents for rest; relaxation; exercise; social interaction; education; dog walking; quiet contemplation and other recreational pursuits. Local Nature Reserve status would raise public and national awareness of the importance to wildlife and nature conservation more generally.

The 'Friends of' group formed approximately 2 and a half years ago, they hold monthly committee meetings and organise regular volunteer working days. To date the group has:

- installed 8 beehives in the solar panel farm area
- planted 600 trees (as hedging) on the boundary south of the Spring Lane development
- woodland thinning adjacent to the Spring Lane boundary creating a footpath in the woodland and developed a butterfly walk
- developed a memorial garden for the miners
- provided a regular programme of family orienteering activities

- removed invasive scrub species from the grasslands
- planted new trees
- constructed a live willow bird watching hide at the central lagoons
- carried out butterfly, dragonfly and moths surveys with students from Nottingham Trent University
- Provided guided tours to local schools as part of their national curriculum studies on the Environment

The group have been instrumental in developing and carrying out the recommended actions required within the attached 5 year Management Plan (Appendix 2). They are encouraging local schools in the area, to use the site as an outdoor classroom for ecological studies.

Recognition as a Local Nature Reserve would be an appropriate reward for the hard work that has gone into the site by council members and staff, the friends of group and local volunteers and would also act as a valuable promotional tool to raise the site's profile within the Borough. It will help increase the motivation of volunteers for future planned works to further enhance the site.

Designation will increase the sites status and lead to greater awareness amongst local residents and visitors to take more interest in, and 'ownership' of, the open space. This will help to decrease acts of antisocial behaviour on the site.

Designation will also help to conserve and enhance the wildlife, biodiversity, landscape and amenity value of the country park under a wider policy of conservation and recreation management. This requirement is enshrined in the Borough's adopted Green Space Strategy in the need to designate more of the boroughs open spaces as LNR's.

The benefits of designating a Local Nature Reserve:

- providing a quality environment for local people
- community involvement in LNR management
- opportunities for education and research
- enhancing biodiversity and contributing towards national priority targets
- protection from inappropriate use and development.

By designating Local Nature Reserve status at Gedling Country Park, the Council will be contributing to aims within the Aligned Core Strategy and Green

Space Strategy as follows:

- health, recreation and well being
- urban and village extension eco-town requirements
- promoting district tourism
- biodiversity
- environmental quality.

Local authorities are now legally responsible for managing biodiversity in a positive way under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Therefore designation of Gedling Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve would be a logical progression in achieving this for Gedling Borough Council, its residents and visitors to the borough.

Gedling Borough Council has consulted with Natural England with regard to the proposal to designate the park as a Local Nature Reserve as is the recommendation by Natural England. Subsequently they have given their support to the Council in progressing the declaration and have approved the management plan for the park.

## **5. Proposal**

To seek approval for Gedling Country Park to be declared as a Local Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Under this act local authorities have the power to acquire, declare and manage nature reserves, in consultation with Natural England.

Natural England requires the endorsement of Cabinet before a formal declaration can be made. Therefore, the proposal is for Cabinet to endorse the awarding of Local Nature Reserve status for Gedling Country Park.

The 5 year Management Plan provides a summary of species of flora and fauna identified on the site. It is proposed that members approve the Management Plan. This plan provides a classification of the different habitats and identifies management objectives and related action plans. The plan will be updated at the end of 2022 with conservation continuing to be the ongoing priority.

The Management Plan has been with an application for LNR status in mind, to highlight the rarity of this type of landscape and its intrinsic value in the local area. It sets out the importance of habitat management and tackling detrimental human activities, in order to maximise the value of the site to wildlife diversity. Work has already begun to improve access, safety of users and biodiversity on site. The Management Plan will give the Council and the friends group a

structured plan to work from, for future improvements to the site.

## **6. Alternative Options**

To neither adopt the management plan nor declare Gedling Country Park site as a Local Nature Reserve. This course of action may result in the degradation of the landscape and loss of valuable wildlife habitat and limit the park's biodiversity value.

## **7. Financial Implications.**

The 5 year Management Plan has minimal financial implications for the council. The 'Friends of Gedling Country Park' have a good track record of attracting funding from a number of grant providers to assist with site improvement works. There is currently a limited budget for this area of development work, approval of LNR status will assist the 'Friends of' group attracting further 'grant aid' to support future projects. It will also provide encouragement to the local community and limit the revenue needed due to volunteering hours committed to work within the Country Park.

All financial implications will be managed within existing budget provision.

## **8. Appendices**

1. Gedling Country Park location plan, indicating the boundary of the designation (whole of park)
2. Gedling Country Park 5 year Management Plan (2017 - 2022)

## **9. Background Papers.**

Green Space Strategy 2012-2017

## **10. Recommendation(s)**

Cabinet members are recommended to:

- (a). Designate Gedling Country Park which is in council ownership as a Local Nature Reserve.
- (b). Authorise the Corporate Director and the Council's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, in conjunction with the Service Manager, Parks and Street Care Services to proceed with the publication and designation process.
- (c). Adopt the 5 year site Management plan produced by EMEC Ecology, updated by Parks Development Staff and the 'friends of group'.

## **11. Reasons for Recommendations**

To assist both Gedling Borough Council and the Friends of Gedling Country Park to have a sound management plan for the area with a priority to conserve the flora and fauna within the site and to meet national targets set by Natural England to have a corporate standard of one hectare of designated Local Nature Reserve (LNR) per 1000 population. Currently Gedling Borough Council's provision is 0.53 hectares per 1000. (as identified in GBC's Green Space Strategy 2012-2017) The current LNR's declared in Gedling Borough are the Netherfield Lagoons, Gedling House Woods and Meadow and the Hobbucks.

## STANDARD BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

### CONSULTATION

Finance

☒

Legal

☒

Personnel

☐

Planning

☒

Estates

☒

### CONSIDERATION

#### Equal Opportunities/Impact Assessment

The adoption of this action will ensure access for all continues and is actively promoted. (See impact assessment.)

#### Children

The LNR status will ensure that the area is preserved. The management plan includes proposals to provide for school visits and for the active promotion of the site for educational uses.

#### Crime and Disorder



The increased public involvement associated with these proposals is seen as a positive move to reducing crime and disorder

### **Risk Management**

**N/A**

## EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

<b>Policy/Service/Procedure to be assessed</b>	<b>Gedling Country Park – Management Plan and Local Nature Reserve Status</b>	
<b>Assessment completed by:</b>	<b>Jane Richardson</b>	<b>Date:</b> <b>17.1.17</b>
<b>Aims/objectives of the Event</b> Approval of Management Plan and to gain Local Nature Reserve Status		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<b>Current Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>
To complete the project on time and on budget	N/A	To be decided
To increase public awareness and accessibility of the site	N/A	On Designation
To designate more LNR's within the Borough	N/A	On Designation
<b>Who are the customers and stakeholders of this service?</b>  Local Community, Ward Members, Natural England, Volunteers e.g. Friends of Gedling Country Park		
<b>Detail below what information you already have about the impact this project has on the following groups including results from consultation, complaints, census:</b>  The Council operates a comments and complaints system which are analysed annually. There have been no complaints in relation to any of the equality strands in relation to parks and open spaces in Gedling.		
Black and minority ethnic people	The park is open access and free to all	91.8% white British – no other significant groups
Men/women and trans	The park is open access and free to all	

Disabled people	The park is open access and free to all	
Gay/Lesbian/bisexual People	The park is open access and free to all	
People from different faiths	The park is open access and free to all	71.8% Christian 18.7%No religion No other significant groups
People of different ages	The park is open access and free to all	

How will this event impact on the following groups:		
	Positive impact	Negative impact
Different racial groups	No evidence of a positive or negative impact	No evidence of a positive or negative impact
Men/women and transgender	The Management Plan and Local Nature Reserve status will help raise funding for the improvement of the site, for all the community to access	
Disabled people	The Management Plan and Local Nature Reserve status will help raise funding for the improvement of the site, for all the community, inclusive of DDA requirements	
Gay/Lesbian/bi-sexual people	No evidence of a positive or negative impact	No evidence of a positive or negative impact
People from different faiths	No evidence of a positive or negative impact	No evidence of a positive or negative impact
People of different ages	The park is used by schools for environmental studies. School visits have been included in the management plan. Benches have also been installed to improve the access for older	

	<p>people.</p> <p>Further funding could improve outreach to more schools in the area by providing transport to access the site and also supply further seating.</p>	
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**What changes could be made to the policy/service/procedure to address any negative impacts?**

No negative impact but the area would benefit from promotion of the facilities available on site

**What monitoring will be carried out to ensure this policy/service/procedure meets diverse needs**

Parks Development staff attend monthly meetings to give advice on the site and to see that the Friends of Gedling Country Park work within the management plan, constitution and the aspirations identified by all groups within the local community

**What actions will be included in your service plan arising from this assessment?**

Action	Outcome	Date?	Who?
Press releases	Increase awareness		Friends group to deliver
Monitor current use	Identify users and there needs		Friends group to deliver

Are you satisfied that all aspects of this policy/service/procedure have been thoroughly assessed for all the strands of diversity and that no further investigation is required? **Yes**

**If no then a fuller impact assessment is required.**