

Report of Chief Officer Parks and Countryside

Report to Executive Board

Date: 19 June 2013

Subject: Deputation To Council – Wyke Beck Valley Community Forum Regarding The Post Of Wyke Beck Valley Ranger And 5 Local Nature Reserves In Wyke Beck Valley

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Roundhay Killingbeck and Seacroft Temple Newsam		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

Summary of main issues

1. This report considers the matters arising from the deputation to Council on the 8th May 2013 by the Wyke Beck Valley Community Forum to consider continuing the role of the Wyke Beck Valley Ranger and the potential to designate identified sites in the valley as Local Nature Reserves.
2. The Wyke Beck Valley Pride, is a 3 year project which ends in September 2013, funded by Natural England and includes a ranger post who has engaged people in the valley in a number of outdoor events, volunteering and education activities.
3. Parks and Countryside are currently working with partners on a £500k 'Reaching Communities' lottery funded bid which, if successful, would enable the continuation of the Wyke Beck Valley Ranger post for a further 3 years. There are other opportunities for funding the role that are also being considered, including a possible partnership project with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.
4. Local Nature Reserves are a statutory designation of sites with importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment by local authorities, who must consult Natural England in the process. Five sites have been identified in the delegation for potential designation, and the view in summary is as follows:

- **Wykebeck Woods, Killingbeck Fields, Primrose Valley (Halton Dene)** – the authority will work with Natural England to designate these sites as Local Nature Reserves.
- **Arthur's Rein, Halton Moor Beck Fields** – the authority will have an informal discussion with Natural England as to the potential to manage these sites at a Local Nature Reserve standard.

Recommendations

5. That Executive Board note the contents of the report in response to the deputation and support the view stated in paragraph 3.3.3 on Local Nature Reserve designation for the sites referred to in the delegation.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report considers the matters arising from the deputation to Council on the 8th May 2013 by the Wyke Beck Valley Community Forum. In particular it considers the role of the Wyke Beck Valley Ranger and the potential to designate identified sites in the valley as Local Nature Reserves.

2 Background information

2.1 The Wyke Beck Valley Pride Project

- 2.1.1 The Wyke Beck Valley is a green corridor following the course of the beck which runs all the way from Roundhay Park to Rothwell Country Park through Gipton, Seacroft, Killingbeck, Primrose Valley and Halton Moor. The Wyke Beck Valley Community Forum was established in 2005 to develop and improve the green spaces along the valley and has worked with many partners in those years to achieve this aim.
- 2.1.2 Wyke Beck Valley Pride, is a 3 year project, funded by Natural England under the 'Access to Nature' scheme and was established in 2010 and run by a partnership including Leeds City Council, Groundwork, The Conservation Volunteers, Leeds Ahead and the Wyke Beck Valley Community Forum. The project has been going for just over two and a half years and in that time has delivered improvements to the attractiveness, accessibility and wildlife value of the green spaces in the valley. There have also been a number of outdoor events, volunteering and education activities with thousands of local residents, to improve perceptions of the valley and encourage more people to visit. It has always been clear that project funding ends in September 2013.

2.2 Local Nature Reserve Designation

- 2.3 Local Nature Reserves are a statutory designation by local authorities who must consult Natural England in the process of selecting, acquiring, declaring and managing such designations. The local authority then needs to write formally to the Natural England regional team to the effect that it intends to make the Local Nature Reserve declaration.
- 2.4 If a local authority has, or knows of, any area of land which it thinks would make a good Local Nature Reserve, they should contact Natural England on an informal basis so that they can advise whether the land is suitable and if so, the sort of management it might require. The local authority should make it clear what the long term objectives are for the site along with outline management proposals.
- 2.5 To qualify for Local Nature Reserve status, a site must be of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment. Some are also nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Local Nature Reserves must be controlled by the local authority through ownership, lease or agreement with the owner. The main aim must be to care for the natural features which make the site special.

2.6 Leeds has eight Local Nature Reserves which are all owned by the Council as follows:

- Breary Marsh
- Fairburn Ings
- Farnley Fishpond
- Letchmire Pastures
- Middleton Woods
- The Chevin Forest Park
- The Meanwood Valley
- Townclose Hills

2.7 Fairburn Ings, whilst owned by the Council is managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). All other sites are managed by the Parks and Countryside service.

3 Main issues

3.1 The delegation speech makes reference to the following two key objectives as follows which are considered in turn:

- To continue funding for the post of Wyke Beck Valley Ranger from September 2013
- To designate 5 Local Nature Reserves in the valley at the following sites (north to south)
 - Wykebeck Woods
 - Arthur's Rein
 - Killingbeck Fields
 - Primrose Valley (also known as Halton Dene)
 - Halton Moor Beck Fields

3.2 To continue funding for the post of Wyke Beck Valley Ranger from September 2013

3.2.3 The Wyke Beck Valley Ranger has been successful in engaging with a wide range of people in the valley undertaking volunteer activities, events, guided walks and study. Activities have also been provided by Groundwork and Leeds Ahead. The following summarises work carried out by the Wyke Beck Valley Ranger since April 2011:

- 2,809 children receiving assemblies about the Wyke Beck Valley
- 40 secondary school students on wildlife and site management courses
- 1,004 primary school children on class field trips

- 199 children visiting the valley with out of school clubs (Scouts and Guides)
- 59 children visiting the site on play schemes
- 52 children taking part in 'junior ranger' activities
- 413 volunteers carrying out work on sites along the valley
- 234 people attending guided walks and slide talks about the valley
- 331 people attending family wildlife events
- 41 people taking part in wildlife surveys
- 11 local volunteers becoming health walk leaders
- 2 new 'friends of' groups in the valley as well as supported established groups

3.2.4 As indicated from the figures above, the ranger has been particularly successful in liaising with local schools. These include 11 primary schools in the Wyke Beck valley area who have had pupils undertake visits to green spaces in the local area, and for whom the ranger has taken assemblies. A further 3 primary schools have had workshops at the school facilitated by the ranger as well as assemblies. The children who have undertaken the Wildlife and Site Management Course attend the David Young Community Academy at Seacroft, and the ranger has also worked with 2 other secondary schools in the area.

3.2.5 It has always been clear that funding for the post is time limited and given the current budget pressures, it is not possible to allocate additional funds to create a new post from existing revenue budgets, so alternative ways of funding the post are being considered. Parks and Countryside are currently working with partners Groundwork and The Conservation Volunteers on a £500k 'Reaching Communities' lottery funded bid. The key aim of the bid is to improve the health of local people through engagement with parks and green space in the valley. If successful, this would enable the continuation of the Wyke Beck Valley Ranger post, plus funding for 2 other full time posts for 3 years.

3.2.6 The bid has already been successful through the first application stage (it is understood that only around 20% achieve this), and the stage 2 application bid is currently being prepared for submission before the end of May. It is hoped that the project can commence from the 1st October subject to the stage 2 bid being successful. There are other opportunities for funding the role that are also being considered, including a possible partnership project with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

3.3 To designate 5 Local Nature Reserves in the Wyke Beck Valley

3.3.1 There are benefits in designating sites in the Wyke Beck Valley as Local Nature Reserves for the following reasons:

- It demonstrates the importance of the valley as a green corridor for people and wildlife and a long term commitment to preserve these sites
- It presents an opportunity to raise the profile and appreciation of the sites amongst local people and visitors
- Designation in this way will open up opportunities for further funding

3.3.2 Designating sites as Local Nature Reserves also brings a responsibility to ensure that there is an appropriate management plan and that sites sustain the required standards. This clearly has resource implications and it is important that adequate resources are identified for maintaining sites at the required level before making a commitment to designate them.

3.3.3 In addition, whilst the leaflet indicates the location of each site in the valley, further work is required to clarify the exact boundary of each site and determine with certainty land ownership in each case. However, it is possible to state a view on each site with the indicative site localities provided, as follows:

- **Wykebeck Woods.** The authority will work with Natural England to designate this site as a Local Nature Reserve because it is of reasonable ecological interest and has good community support for maintenance and engagement.
- **Arthur's Rein.** This site is currently managed in a formal way for recreation and therefore has more limited ecological value suitable to designate it as a Local Nature Reserve. It is proposed that the authority has an informal discussion with Natural England as to the potential to manage this site at a Local Nature Reserve standard. If it is likely that designation is suitable, then assuming that level of resource requirement to achieve this standard is manageable, the authority will seek to achieve the required standard and designate the site.
- **Killingbeck Fields.** The authority will work with Natural England to designate this site as a Local Nature Reserve. This is due to the high ecological value that current maintenance schedules and community partnerships should be able to sustain.
- **Primrose Valley (Halton Dene).** This site has recently been formally nominated under the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Trust scheme following approval at Executive Board in December 2012. It is anticipated that this will be formally granted in the near future and on this assumption approval has been granted from Fields in Trust (the organising body of the scheme) to ensure that designation can also be made as a Local Nature Reserve. The authority will therefore work with Natural England to designate this site as a Local Nature Reserve.
- **Halton Moor Beck Fields.** The land surrounding this area of the beck is formally managed for recreation, and has limited ecological value in the area extending beyond the immediate vicinity of the beck. It is proposed that the authority clarifies the specific boundary of this land with the Wyke Beck Community Forum and has an informal discussion with Natural England as to the potential to manage this site at a Local Nature Reserve standard. If it is likely that designation is suitable, then assuming that level of resource requirement to achieve this standard is manageable, the authority will seek to achieve the required standard and designate the site.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.4 The Wyke Beck Valley Community Forum was established in 2005 to develop and improve the green spaces along the valley and has worked with many partners in

those years to achieve this aim. The Wyke Beck Valley Pride, is a 3 year project which ends in September 2013, funded by Natural England and includes a ranger post who has engaged people in the valley in a number of outdoor events, volunteering and education activities.

- 4.1.5 The report has highlighted the importance of partnership working in particular with Groundwork, The Conservation Volunteers and Leeds Ahead. A possible partnership project with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is also being considered. Further consultation will take place with the Wyke Beck Community Forum on issues arising out of the delegation, and Natural England are a statutory consultee with regard to designating Local Nature Reserves.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 A screening form has been completed that identifies potential impacts for which equality issues will be considered as and when a decision to designate Local Nature Reserves is taken or funding is successful in securing the continuation of the Wyke Beck Valley Ranger post. The EIA screening document is appended to the report.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The content of this report relates to the following priorities from the City Priority Plan:

- Best city for health and wellbeing, in particular *to make sure that people who are the poorest improve their health the fastest.*
- Best city for business, in particular *get more people involved in the city's cultural opportunities, improve the environment through reduced carbon emissions and create more jobs.*
- Best city for communities, in particular *ensure that local neighbourhoods are clean and increase a sense of belonging that builds cohesive and harmonious communities.*
- Best city to live, in particular *enable growth of the city whilst protecting the distinctive green character of the city.*

- 4.3.2 It also supports the priority in the Council Business Plan *to improve the quality of Leeds' parks.*

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The Wyke Beck Valley Pride, is a 3 year project, funded by Natural England under the 'Access to Nature' scheme and was established in 2010 and run by a partnership including Leeds City Council, Groundwork, The Conservation Volunteers, Leeds Ahead and the Wyke Beck Valley Community Forum. The project funding ends in September 2013. Any legal costs associated with designating sites as Local Nature Reserves would be met via the Access to Nature scheme funding.

4.4.2 Parks and Countryside are currently working with partners on a £500k 'Reaching Communities' lottery funded bid which, if successful, would enable the continuation of the Wyke Beck Valley Ranger post for a further 3 years. There are other opportunities for funding the role that are also being considered, including a possible partnership project with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 Local Nature Reserves are a statutory designation by local authorities who must consult Natural England in the process of selecting, acquiring, declaring and managing such designations. The local authority then needs to write formally to the Natural England regional team to the effect that it intends to make the Local Nature Reserve declaration. The local authority should make it clear what the long term objectives are for the site along with outline management proposals.

4.5.2 To qualify for Local Nature Reserve status, a site must be of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment. Some are also nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Local Nature Reserves must be controlled by the local authority through ownership, lease or agreement with the owner. The main aim must be to care for the natural features which make the site special.

4.5.3 There are no issues with access to information. The report is subject to call in.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 There are no significant risks associated with this report.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Alternative funding options are being considered with regard to continuing the post of Wyke Beck Valley Ranger from September 2013 as there is insufficient provision in existing revenue budgets.

5.2 It is proposed that the authority will work with Natural England to designate 3 sites that are considered appropriate for designation as Local Nature Reserves, namely Wykebeck Woods, Killingbeck Fields and Primrose Valley. With regard to the other 2 sites (Arthur's Rein and Halton Moor Beck Fields), the authority will have an informal discussion with Natural England as to the potential to manage these sites at a Local Nature Reserve standard.

6 Recommendations

6.1 That Executive Board note the contents of the report in response to the deputation.

- To support the view stated in paragraph 3.3.3 on Local Nature Reserve designation for the sites referred to in the delegation.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.