

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

6 APRIL 2020

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to declare Bedford Park as a Local Nature Reserve and to extend the boundary of the existing Frog Pond Local Nature Reserve to include the area known as Village Farm Meadow. The report also seeks approval for future management approaches and resources for both sites.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 2.1 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) exist to protect habitats and species and provide opportunities to increase awareness about the natural environment within communities. LNRs are established and managed by local authorities, following consultation with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. For a site to become an LNR it must have natural features of special interest to the local area, and the authority must either have a legal interest in the land or have an agreement with the owner to manage the land as a reserve. In Wales LNRs have been designated over a number of years, from 1970 to the present day, and are on-going.
- 2.2 There are currently 5 LNRs in Bridgend County Borough. Kenfig LNR is also a National Nature Reserve which is no longer managed by BCBC. These areas are classed as LNRs due to the specific species and habitats that exist within them and they are:

- Locks Common, Porthcawl
- Craig Y Parcau, Bridgend
- Frog Pond Wood, Pyle
- Tremains Wood, Brackla
- Kenfig Nature Reserve, Kenfig

Bedford Park

- 2.3 Bedford Park is a long, narrow 18 hectare park and is not currently an LNR. The majority of the park is owned by Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) with the exception of two small areas of land which are under a lease/deed of dedication for 99 years from 09/06/1998 to the Millennium Commission for use as an informal recreation area.
- 2.4 The park is situated four miles north-west of the town of Bridgend in the broad east-west valley of the Nant lowerth Goch, close to the settlements of Kenfig Hill and Cefn Cribwr.
- 2.5 The habitats on this post-industrial site are mainly successional, for example thick scrub habitats which have invaded the grasslands due to a lack of management and young secondary woodlands. The ravine oak woodland and wet (rhos) pasture are UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and Bridgend Local Biodiversity Action Plan (BLBAP) habitats. These are likely to represent the oldest and most valuable habitats on site possibly because they have been subject to less disturbance through time.
- 2.6 Smaller amounts of semi-improved dry grassland, tall herb and fern communities, tree-lines and eutrophic standing water are also represented in the interesting habitat mosaic at this site. These features provided the basis for declaring Bedford Park a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) in 1995, which has been re-confirmed in subsequent SINC reviews.
- 2.7 Evidence of dormice was discovered at the site in the form of chewed hazelnuts in 2006. Continued survey effort is on-going at the park where 50 nest boxes have been installed and are subject to seasonal inspections.
- 2.8 The parkland and ironworks at Nant lowerth offer significant roosting and feeding opportunities for bats that are also UK and local BLBAP species.
- 2.9 A survey of butterflies and macro-moths carried out in 2006 highlighted good habitat for the UK BAP priority species the Double-line moth, and potential habitat for another UK BAP Priority Species, the Marsh Fritillary butterfly.

Frog Pond Wood

- 2.10 Whilst Frog Pond Wood is already an LNR, the area known as Village Farm Meadow, which is approximately 0.2 hectares and is next to Frog Pond Wood LNR, is not included within the LNR boundary. The freehold of the land belongs to BCBC.
- 2.11 Village Farm Meadow predominantly consists of purple moor grass that would benefit from enhanced management. Improved management of the grassland would provide an opportunity to make it far more species-rich. In its current state it will support small

mammals and some invertebrates but would benefit from reinstating grassland management.

3. Current situation/proposal

- 3.1 Designating Bedford Park as an LNR and extending Frog Pond Wood LNR to include Village Farm Meadow is something that BCBC has the power to do and aligns with national and local policies.
- 3.2 Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 gives Local Authorities, in consultation with the NRW, the power to designate sites in their control as LNRs. In using these powers to declare Bedford Park as an LNR and include Village Farm Meadow within the boundary of the Frog Pond Wood LNR, BCBC would be committing to manage these areas as nature reserves and to protect them from inappropriate uses or development.
- 3.3 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies to consider improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. This Act also means that, for the first time, public bodies must operate in a sustainable way. Public bodies need to make sure that when making their decisions they take into account the impact they could have on people living their lives in the future.
- 3.4 This is reinforced by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which seeks to reverse the decline and secure long-term resilience of biodiversity in Wales. Section 6 of this Act places a duty on public authorities to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, public authorities must also seek to promote the resilience of ecosystems.
- 3.5 In March 2018, BCBC adopted its Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Forward Plan 2018-22, which outlines how the Local Authority will comply with Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
- 3.6 Bedford Park and Village Farm Meadow are designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) under the provisions of Policy ENV4 of the adopted Bridgend Local Development Plan (LDP) 2013-2022. The basis for these designations is that both sites have habitats and species of local, regional and national significance that require protection under the Town and Country Planning System.
- 3.7 Furthermore, the LDP includes Policy ENV5, which promotes the concept of Green Infrastructure approach. Green Infrastructure is considered as a strategically planned and delivered network of natural and man-made green (land) and blue (water) spaces that sustain natural processes. It is designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for society. BCBC was the first council in Wales to incorporate such a policy in its LDP.
- 3.8 The designation of Bedford Park as an LNR would require the creation of an LNR Management Plan for the site as exists for all other LNRs. This would set out the priority areas for action and the resource requirements. It is proposed that this

management plan would be overseen by the Natural Resources Team and co-ordinate the action of other Council departments within specific responsibilities as well as identify opportunities to work in partnership with suitable organisations and enter into agreements for management. The resource and management of the Ironworks compound and Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) would still be the responsibility of the Conservation and Design Team, while the Community Route will also still be under the control of the Rights of Way Team.

- 3.9 The extension of Frog Pond Wood LNR to include Village Farm Meadow would require a revision to the current management plan. This would be undertaken by the Natural Resources Team.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 The Council will need to use its powers under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, in consultation with the NRW, to designate Bedford Park as a new LNR and extend the boundary of Frog Pond Wood LNR.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 An initial assessment has identified that there are no equality issues related to this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment Template has been completed and a summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is below:

- Long-term: By seeking to secure the future management of these sites BCBC is seeking to improve these areas beyond their current conditions for use and access in the long-term.
- Prevention: Seeking resources to undertake improvements to Bedford Park and Village Farm Meadow will ensure that the condition of the site does not deteriorate further and that the biodiversity that exists there can be enhanced.
- Integration: The proposal will achieve this way of working by recognising the approaches that are proposed for support are those that have been identified by internal and external stakeholders and the proposal itself will integrate with other existing activity in the area as well as aligning with management approaches adopted on other LNRs.
- Collaboration: Future action in relation to Bedford Park and Village Farm Meadow as outlined above will take place in collaboration with internal departments and external partners to ensure a co-ordinated approach.
- Involvement: Proposals relating to the future of Bedford Park and Village Farm Meadow will be developed and delivered in close partnership with key stakeholders. Discussions and development with key BCBC officers will be undertaken.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 A new annual resource of £15,000 is considered as required to undertake management actions arising as a result of the declaration of Bedford Park as and LNR and the extension of Frog Pond Wood LNR and the delivery of their respective LNR management plans.
- 8.2 This resource will be provided on a recurring basis through the Communities Directorate Public Realm Fund and relates to additional requirements over and above those currently undertaken in relation to SAMs and Rights of Way, for which resources already exist.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Cabinet is recommended to:-

- Formally declare Bedford Park as a new Local Nature Reserve and extend the boundary of Frog Pond Wood Local Nature Reserve to include Village Farm Meadow;
- Authorise the Corporate Director Communities, in consultation with the Chief Officer - Legal, HR & Regulatory Services, to establish a new management plan for Bedford Park and a revised management plan for Frog Pond Wood in line with the approach outlined in section 4 with the resources outlined in section 8.

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8 March 2021

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Background documents:

None