

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

15 NOVEMBER 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

PROPOSED EXTENSION TO FROG POND WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to extend the Frog Pond Wood Local Nature Reserve.

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**:-

- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** – taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring 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.

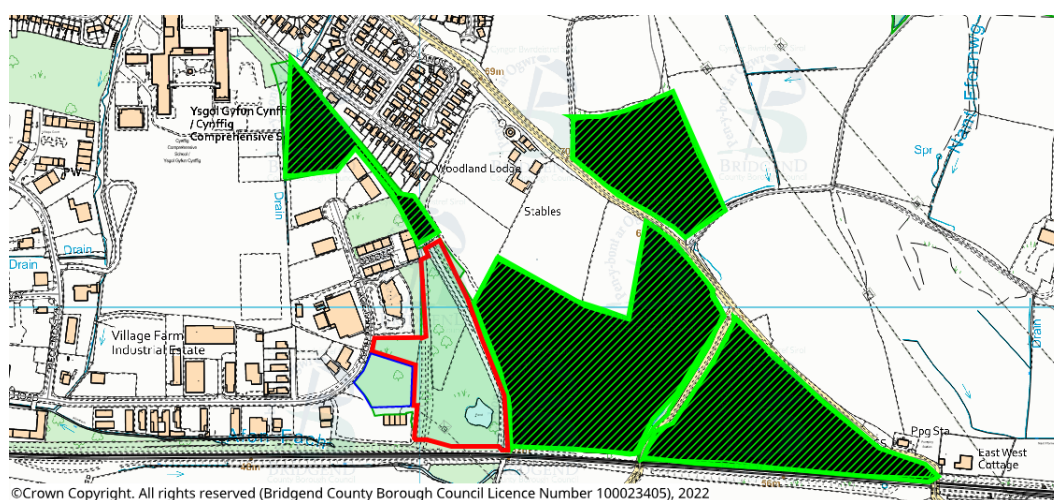
3. Background

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 Frog Pond Wood LNR is in Pyle near the Village Farm Industrial estate. Extending Frog Pond Wood LNR is something that Bridgend County Borough (BCBC) has the power to do and aligns with national and local policies.
- 3.3 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 and extend sites in their control as LNRs. In using these powers to extend Frog Pond Wood LNR, BCBC would be committing to manage these areas as nature reserves and to protect them from inappropriate uses or development.

- 3.4 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 consider the impact they could have on people living their lives in the future.
- 3.5 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.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 At the Cabinet meeting on 6 April 2021 Cabinet resolved to approve the extension of Frog Pond Wood LNR to incorporate an additional parcel of contiguous land known as Village Farm Meadow to within the LNR designation. Adjacent to Village Farm Meadow is another plot of land that has naturally colonised and is in the process of becoming a woodland. This recolonisation process has progressed over a period of in the region of 30 years. Through this natural colonisation, this plot of land has enhanced ecological value, connectivity and adds to the ecological resilience of Frog Pond Wood LNR within the surrounding landscape.
- 4.2 With regards enhanced ecological connectivity and resilience, these points are illustrated in the plan below, which shows the existing LNR boundary (red boundary), the proposed extension plot (blue boundary) and the wider ecological network comprising Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) (green hatched area). SINCs are sites of local and regional ecological importance that receive protection under Policy ENV 4 of the Adopted Bridgend County Borough Local Development Plan (LDP) 2006-2021 and reaffirmed in the emerging Bridgend County Borough LDP.



- 4.3 On the basis that this site has recolonised over a 30-year period, it would appear that this plot of land is no longer required for economic purposes. The freehold of the land belongs to BCBC. Therefore, the Natural Resources Team approached BCBC's Corporate Landlord as the holding department to determine if this land can be included within Frog Pond Wood LNR. In principle the Corporate Landlord has agreed that the land can be released from their portfolio subject to member

agreement and further consultation with Planning and Development Services. At the time of the April 2021 Cabinet report, it was not considered that this was an option. However, subsequent discussions have indicated that it is.

- 4.4 The proposed extension plot is within the site boundary of the Village Farm Industrial Estate, Pyle, and is approximately 0.5 hectares in area. This plot is identified in the Frog Pond Wood LNR Management Plan 1994 as a wooded area/screen, which would indicate that this plot has been wooded for more than 30 years. Besides not being within the Frog Pond Wood LNR boundary, this plot is physically separated from the LNR by means of a steep bank with no formal path access connecting both sites. Consequently, the woodland has been subject to natural succession, with grey willow *Salix cinerea* becoming dominant and locally invasive. Another invasive species noted within the woodland is Himalayan balsam which is included on the list of Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) Schedule 9 species that make it an offence for this species to grow in the wild.
- 4.5 Therefore, it is considered appropriate to include the extension plot within the Frog Pond Wood LNR designation as a means of physically linking both sites and to manage this woodland and invasive species for purposes of ecological diversity and climate change resilience.
- 4.6 As well as Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 giving Local Authorities, in consultation with the NRW, the power to designate and extend sites in their control as LNRs, the further extension of Frog Pond Wood LNR is justified on a number of grounds. Not least, current approaches to the management of green spaces seek to mutually promote the multiple benefits that they can provide such as ecology, landscape and well-being along with socio-economic benefits. The importance of the multiple benefits of green assets has been realised at national policy level such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 4.7 Frog Pond Wood LNR is managed by the Natural Resources Team, who undertake various management tasks including coppicing, meadow and pond management works. However, management is subject to resource availability.
- 4.8 With the support of the Green Links Project, Plantlife (a British Conservation Charity) are working with BCBC to promote the LNRs within the County Borough through initiatives such as citizen science, promoting volunteering and the development and support of groups to help manage the LNRs.
- 4.9 Furthermore, Frog Pond Wood LNR forms part of the Cwm Taf Nature Network (CTNN) suite of sites that is seeking to develop community support for managing sites such as Frog Pond Wood LNR. The aims of the CTNN include promoting green spaces to create a sense of place and up skilling e.g., through the training of volunteers in woodland management operations.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no effect upon the Council's policy framework or procedure rules as a result of this report. Under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 BCBC, in consultation with the NRW, has the power to designate and

extend sites in their control as LNRs. Additionally, the extension to Frog Pond Wood LNR is in accord with the emerging Local Development Plan as referred to above.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

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

- 7.1 BCBC is committed to promoting sustainable development and to discharge our duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. A summary of the implications relating to the five ways of working is outlined below:

- Long-term: By seeking to secure the future management of this site BCBC is seeking to improve these areas beyond their current conditions for use and access in the long-term.
- Prevention: Seeking approval to extend Frog Pond Wood LNR 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 more widely on Frog Pond Wood LNR.
- Collaboration: Future action at Frog Pond Wood LNR 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 Frog Pond Wood LNR 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 It is currently considered that there are no additional financial implications as a result of the proposed extension of Frog Pond Wood LNR and that its management will be met through existing budgets within the Economy, Natural Resources and Sustainability budgets.
- 8.2 The extension to Frog Pond Wood LNR comes within the ownership of the Council, so there are no land acquisition costs.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the extension of Frog Pond Wood Local Nature Reserve proposed in this report and authorise the Corporate Director Communities to take any action necessary to achieve the extension.

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Background documents

None