

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

12 MAY 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

KENFIG NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on progress in relation to recommendations of a previous report, dated 11 November 2014, and to update Cabinet of the new 5 year management plan.

2 Connection to Corporate improvement Plan

- 2.1 This proposal will contribute to protecting and promoting wildlife, landscapes and the general environment and enabling visitors to enjoy the area's wildlife, landscapes and natural assets.

3. Background

- 3.1 Kenfig National Nature Reserve (KNNR) comprises approximately 1300 acres of managed coastal sand dunes and wetlands on the Bridgend coastline between Porthcawl and Port Talbot and is regarded as one of the finest examples of a sand dune habitat in Europe.
- 3.2 Kenfig Pool and Dunes was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1953, a Local Nature Reserve in 1978 and a National Nature Reserve (NNR) in 1989. Furthermore, in 2006 the majority of Kenfig dunes were designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), under the EC Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna), giving the site both national and international protection.
- 3.3 The SAC was designated specifically for six features which are important in the European context: four habitat features and two species features. The four habitat features are humid dune slacks; dunes with creeping willow; fixed dune grassland and a type of lake which is represented by Kenfig Pool. The two species features are Fen Orchid and Petalwort, both strongly associated with early successional stages of the humid dune slacks. Additional species and species assemblages are features of the SSSI because of their importance in the national context. The management required by the SAC and SSSI features broadly coincides.

- 3.4 KNNR is owned by the Kenfig Corporation Trust, and BCBC currently has a lease to manage the site, scheduled to expire in 2020. BCBC also currently manages the areas under the SSSI and SAC designations (other than land at Sker Farm which is privately owned) and has a management agreement with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) with a focus on managing the SAC and SSSI features.
- 3.5 The UK government has an obligation to report on the status of the SAC features and they are monitored by NRW on a six-year cycle. The former Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) prepared a management plan for the SAC features in 2008 and this is due to be reviewed by NRW.

4. Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 A recommendation of a report to Cabinet of 11 November 2014 was to authorise the Head of Regeneration and Development to cease the process of investigating alternative options for the management of KNNR and to operate in line with current agreements, prioritising the Council's statutory obligations to protect the Reserve's ecological features, until current agreements expire.
- 4.2 Since this time, officers have been developing a 5 year management plan for the site, 2015-2020.

Kenfig 5 year Management Plan, 2015-2020

- 4.4 The 5 year management plan has been developed through extensive ecological and site management expertise, is based on widely researched and accepted best practice in nature conservation and has been agreed by NRW. It is a plan that provides detail of where human and financial resources will be deployed over the period. It is a plan that outlines priority actions and acts as an exit strategy for the Council's management of the site. When the current agreement with Kenfig Corporation Trust ends, the Council will no longer manage the site and all responsibilities connected to it will be handed back to Kenfig Corporation Trust.
- 4.5 The key priority for the period 2015-2020 will be to work towards controlling and reversing the rate of loss of key habitats and species. As this plan nears its end work will focus in its final years on hand over arrangements to Kenfig Corporation Trust. The actions contained within the plan are deliverable with the current resource allocation.
- 4.6 The priority actions during this period to work towards controlling and reversing the rate of loss of key habitats and species are, in order of priority:

Table 1. Kenfig Management Plan priorities

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mowing Dune Slacks. (To maintain SAC features) 2. Scrub Control. (In part to maintain SAC features). Ranking of areas to be cleared will be used based on the importance of habitat being restored and how achievable it is. 3. Mowing Dune Grassland. (In part to maintain a SAC feature) 4. Kenfig Pool. (In part to maintain a SAC feature). These activities will be in addition to those undertaken by Kenfig Hill and District Angling Association as |
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outlined in the Counterpart lease, August 2001, with the Trustees of Kenfig Corporation Trust.

5. **Sea Buckthorn Control.** As far as is reasonably practicable, control Sea Buckthorn on the dune system with focus on the two small copses 'Southern Buckthorn' and 'Northern Buckthorn'.

6. **Himalayan Balsam Control.** As far as is reasonably practicable, control Himalayan Balsam on the dune system. Liaise with Pyle and Kenfig Golf Club on the removal of Himalayan Balsam on the northern margin of the golf course and next to the entrance drive to Kenfig Pool Caravan Park.

7. **Monitoring.** Key species and habitats. Activities with research institutions will where possible be supported.

8. **Amenity maintenance.** Liaise with the Council's Rights of Way team to maintain way-marked paths in an appropriate condition of openness and cleanliness. Car parks to be checked periodically. Litter bins emptied and dropped litter picked a minimum of once a week. Maintain an inventory of existing bird hides, boardwalks, bridges, signs and seats and repair or remove if considered necessary and resources are available. Checks to be carried out monthly. Interpretation will be maintained and enhanced if additional external resources are available.

9. **Patrol.** Patrol the site and deal with incidents to ensure protection of key species and habitats.

4.7 Work priorities change according to the time of year.

- Scrub clearance takes place during winter months avoiding the bird breeding season.
- Scraping of humid dune slacks and dune rejuvenation work also takes place during the winter, subject to additional resources being identified by partners. Work priorities shift towards public recreation as weather warms up in the spring and visitor numbers increase.
- Amenity maintenance work around the car parks, in picnic areas along paths and other popular areas takes precedence in warmer months. Other work still takes place, such as invasive species control and species monitoring.
- Mowing is left as late in the summer as possible to allow plants to finish flowering and set seed.
- Some grassland mowing usually begins in July.
- Late summer and autumn are the most important periods for mowing of the grasslands and humid dune slacks. Other tasks are put to one side during this critical time.
- During October, water levels on Kenfig Pool are usually lowest and reedbed management tasks are possible, though mowing work still takes precedence.
- Scrub clearance resumes in late October and continues into the winter. November and December tend to be the best months for scrub work in the slacks before they become too flooded.

Staff and volunteer resources as well as weather conditions vary from year to year and determine what will be achieved. A wet autumn may prevent any slacks being mown and a wet winter can stop scrub clearance in low-lying areas.

4.8 Partnership working is an important aspect of the 5 year management plan. The priority areas of activity relating to this are:

Grazing. A key challenge for all parties involved with the Reserve is to appreciate the importance of conservation grazing across the whole site and to work together to make it effective and properly understood.

Kenfig Pool. A counterpart lease agreement is in place between Kenfig Hill and District Angling Association and the Trustees of Kenfig Corporation Trust that grants fishing rights and ancillary rights relating to the use and maintenance of Kenfig Pool. These ancillary rights are not those covered above in 4.7 that relate to the maintenance of the SAC features of Kenfig Pool.

Dune rejuvenation. Any work in relation to this will require resources over and above those available from the Council. NRW is keen to continue the rejuvenation work in earnest over the term of this plan as funding permits.

Turf stripping to create pioneer slack habitat. Any work in relation to this will require resources over and above those available from BCBC. NRW is keen to continue the turf stripping work in earnest over the term of this plan as funding permits.

- 4.9 KNNR has a strong history of working with volunteers and a skilled and committed group currently works in partnership with the Council. Any individual wishing to volunteer will be considered based on their willingness and ability to support the delivery of the priorities for site management. Lower priority work within easy walking distance from a car park may have to be chosen where this is not possible. It is important that volunteers have a rewarding experience but their support must be focused towards delivering the priorities for the site and cannot distract staff from that purpose. KNNR volunteer days currently take place on a Wednesday and all individuals wishing to volunteer should complete a volunteer assessment process, starting with an initial discussion with Council staff.
- 4.10 The Council is keen to work with partners in managing the site but, as lease holders for the site, the Council remains responsible. Any groups or organisations wishing to undertake organised and/or management activity on the site will need to formally request permission and provide documentation as appropriate to their proposed activity. Priority will be given to those proposals that align with priorities for site management. Those which do not, or fail to provide required documentation, may be refused. When considered appropriate, the Council will liaise with NRW over SSSI and protected species consents where licences may be required and the Kenfig Corporation Trust if tasks are outside agreed management works.
- 4.11 As outlined in the Cabinet report of 11 November 2014, the main Centre building and shop is closed to members of the public. Staffing at the Reserve has been reduced from 5 posts in 2009 to 1 post currently, to meet the requirements of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. In this context, it has been necessary to prioritise the activities which are necessary to protect the ecological features of the Reserve, for which the Council has a statutory obligation. The education room will operate on a booking basis and be hosted as resources allow. Council staff will utilise and maintain the building - the office space, garages and workshop - in line with policies and procedures. Facilities for KNNR volunteers will remain.
- 4.12 The development of the 5 year management plan has been discussed with the Kenfig Consultative Committee, which includes representatives of the Trust, Kenfig Anglers, Natural Resources Wales and Council staff.

- 4.13 The 5 year Management Plan has been presented to the Kenfig Corporation Trust and separately to a land agent acting on behalf of the Kenfig Corporation Trust.

5. Effect Upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 None

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.1 The Reserve itself will remain open to the public and the features which enable and facilitate public access will continue to be maintained. Closure of the Reserve Centre will not impact on the exercise of the Authority's equality duties.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 Delivery will be met using existing budgets for the remainder of existing agreements.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- 8.1.1 note the development of a 5 year Management Plan as a positive step in prioritising the resources the Council has available for the management of KNNR for the period 2015-2020; and
- 8.1.2 note the actions of officers to develop opportunities for partnership that support the delivery of the priorities for management of KNNR as outlined in paragraphs 4.9 and 4.10.

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Background Documents: Kenfig Nature Reserve Management Plan