

REPORT FROM: Planning, Economic Development & Regulatory Services
Manager

TO: Colne & District Committee

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Alkincoats Local Nature Reserve Extension

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the desire of the Friends of Alkincoats Local Nature Reserve (LNR) to further extend the LNR into fields owned by the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To refer the decision to Policy and Resources Committee.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The allocation of the land will result in the loss of income from an annual grazing tenancy.
2. The extension of the reserve will require allocation of increased budgets in order to facilitate the repair and maintenance of the site.

ISSUE

1. Alkincoats Local Nature Reserve (LNR) was designated in October 2006. The meetings of Colne and District Area Committee on 12th March 2015, 7th January 2016 and 9th August 2018 granted permissions to extend the LNR to its current boundaries (marked red on the map in appendix 1).
2. A great deal of work has been carried out by the Friends of Alkincoats LNR to improve all the footpaths through the site, creation of ponds and wetland areas and tree planting. This has been funded through a variety of streams including from the groups own money, grants and donations.
3. The group continues to be supported by the Council.

4. The group have approached the Council with a wish to extend the reserve further into the two fields to the south of the existing reserve (marked green on the map in appendix 1.
5. The fields are currently on a grazing licence to a local farmer. The extension would mean a potential loss of income from licence fees. Grazing licences run for a 360 day period and are generally renewed on an annual basis. However, it is advised by the Principal Environment Officer that should the extension be granted, that the area be retained and developed into species rich grassland which may facilitate winter grazing (approximately 5 months). This would be subject to finding an appropriate tenant should the current farmer not wish to continue to use the land.

DISCUSSION

6. In the past, the maintenance of the LNR was carried out the Environmental Action Group at no cost to the Council. The loss of this service has resulted in the maintenance of the site being outsourced to contractors with some assistance from the Council's Landscape Maintenance Team. This has meant that the cost of maintenance has increased greatly and maintenance standards are lower.
7. The annual repair and maintenance budget for the site is £1,000 per annum and essentially covers very basic maintenance. The extension of the LNR would require an uplift in the budget to around £5,000 per annum to cover the basics (ensuring paths are kept clear, removal of litter etc.) and ideally £10,000 per annum to ensure there is finance to carry out full and proper maintenance of the site (including tree work, maintenance of paths, gates, fences, walls etc.). There are no grants available to support long term maintenance of sites.
8. Capital funding of projects to create habitats etc. can be sourced through grant funding with the assistance of the LNR Group.
9. Pendle's officer resource to deal with parks, LNR's and other greenspaces has been greatly reduced over recent years.
10. It is with these points in mind that it can be seen that there is little Council resource for further extension to Alkincoats LNR.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy:

Approving the extension of the local nature reserve would be in accordance with the Replacement Pendle Local Plan and be supported by Policy ENV1 in the Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (December 2015) which seeks to protect biodiversity (paragraph 8.41); create and/or restore habitats(paragraph 8.39); and designate new areas for their conservation value (paragraph 8.42).

Financial:

As set out in the report.

Legal:

If an extension is granted, the area would need to be added to the rest of the nature reserve by agreement and formally designated as such through the local nature reserve process. A new agreement with the grazing licence holder will also be required should winter grazing be taken as a management option.

Risk Management:

None arising directly from the report.

Health and Safety:

None arising directly from the report.

Sustainability:

Improved sustainable management of Council-owned land.

Community Safety:

None arising directly from the report.

Equality and Diversity:

None arising directly from the report.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Alkincoats LNR Plan with proposed extension.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS