

Individual Decision

Title of Report:	Padworth Common Proposed Local Nature Reserve		
Report to be considered by:	Cllr Owen Jeffery	on:	01 July 2004
Forward Plan Ref:	ID0792		

Purpose of Report:

To seek approval to declare Padworth Common as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Recommended Action:

To make a declaration during Local Nature Reserve Week (July).

Reason for decision to be taken:

- To provide further protection for the Common through the statutory planning process. LNR status provides further opportunities for funding support from external agencies

List of other options considered:

- None

Key background documentation:

- Padworth Common Management Plan
- Local Nature Reserves in England (English Nature publication)

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Supporting Information

1. Background

1.1 Padworth Common is situated between Aldermaston and Burghfield Common and comprises about 30ha of heathland, woodland and wet alder gully. The site is owned and managed by West Berkshire Council for its nature conservation and recreational value and is enjoyed by many local people for walking, horseriding and other quiet pursuits. The Common is an important sanctuary for wildlife and several local wildlife groups regularly visit the site and take records. West Berkshire Council is assisted in the administration of the Common by the Padworth Common Advisory Committee who meet with the Council three times each year.

1.2 Padworth Common is currently managed under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This is a ten-year scheme which provides funding towards certain conservation objectives. Annually, Stewardship provides approximately £1500 towards the cost of the Commons management. The Scheme comes to an end in October 2007.

1.3 Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, gives local authorities the power to acquire, declare and manage nature reserves. Currently there are two Council owned and managed Local Nature Reserves at Thatcham Reedbeds and Hosehill Lake. English Nature (the Government's statutory advisory body on nature conservation) recognises the high conservation value of LNR's and actively encourages their establishment. Sites proposed for selection as LNR's should be;

- I. Of high natural interest in the local context (SSSI or near equivalent) or
- II. Of high value for educational reasons or research or
- III. Of high value for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public or
- IV. Any combination of the above
- V. They should be capable of being managed with the conservation of nature or the maintenance of special opportunities for study or research as the priority concern

1.4 There are a number of benefits of LNR status for site:

- Opens up funding opportunities for grant aid from external sources
- Gives recognition that the site is important to the local community
- It is acknowledged as an important site for local biodiversity and is recognised as such in the planning framework
- LNR status is an excellent indication that local authorities are serious about their commitment to the environment
- Provides for the introduction of bylaws

2. Local Nature Reserve Status for Padworth Common

2.1 Padworth Common meets all of the criteria for LNR status. The Common is valued by the local community and has a high enough conservation value to be worthy of the declaration. LNR status will confer no additional responsibilities on the Council over and above the current landowner responsibilities and those required under the Countryside Stewardship agreement. Currently officers are awaiting confirmation from the Secretary of State that a recent application to erect stock proof fencing has been successful. This will allow the reintroduction of grazing animals, a much more sustainable form of managing the conservation interest of the site.

2.2 By coincidence, English nature will be launching Local Nature Reserve Week in July this year in an effort to encourage local authorities to designate more LNR's in their area and to celebrate locally those which currently exist. This official week, between 14th and 25th July seems the ideal time to formally declare Padworth Common as a LNR as there will be ample opportunity for extensive publicity for the occasion. English Nature are very keen that we declare LNR status at this time and will assist with publicity on a mutually suitable date.

3. The Process

3.1 Much of the work has already been completed to date. The Common is subject to a management plan, this sets out current and future management prescriptions in line with the Stewardship Scheme. The Common's Advisory Committee are also supportive of our intentions. There has also been consultation with relevant groups including English Nature the Parish Council. The Theale Area Bird Group, who are involved in the management of Hosehill Lake LNR have also expressed their support. We have also informed the local population by way of an article in the Parish magazine. To date there has been an enthusiastic response to the proposal.

3.2 Should Council support this proposal, the next step is to advertise the declaration in the local press and to prepare an instrument of declaration to which the public will have access. The declaration date will be sometime during LNR week.

Appendices

None

Implications

Policy:	The designation would provide further protection for the Common through the statutory planning process. Declaration would also assist in improving the quality of life in West Berkshire (West Berkshire Community Plan QoL 29). Report is in line with the Community Plan objective - Protecting and enhancing the local environment.
Financial:	There are no financial implications. It is hoped that further external funding will be forthcoming as a result of this report.
Personnel:	There are no personnel implications
Legal:	The declaration will be made in accordance with the LNR framework
Environmental:	There will be considerable benefits for the Common and management of its conservation status. These are outlined in the report
Equalities:	Further investigation will be required by officers as to whether grant funding is available to help improve access to the Common for excluded groups, however currently the site is used for educational purposes and the Rangers currently work on the site with certain excluded groups
Partnering:	There are none
Property:	LNR status will increase the conservation value of the property
Risk Management:	There are no implications
Community Safety:	LNR status will provide for bylaws to deal with any undesirable activity

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council: Cllr Royce Longton supports the proposal

Select Committee Chairmen: Cllr Brian Bedwell supports the venture and recognises the benefits to all residents

P&L Committee Chairman : N/A

Ward Members: Cllr Sandra Harding wholeheartedly supports the proposal and welcomes any move to protect the site and attract additional funding.

Cllr Keith Lock was delighted with the decision to apply for LNR status, and hoped that the application would be successful.

Opposition Spokesperson: Geoff Findlay responded: "Given the present 'land grab' for housing in Berkshire, we must strengthen the designation of open spaces whenever possible so that such areas will be available for the recreational enjoyment of future generations. The designation of Padworth Common as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) fits in well"

Advisory Members: N/A

Local Stakeholders: Padworth Parish Council support the proposal for an LNR in their area. The Padworth Common Advisory Committee have also been similarly supportive

Officers Consulted: Paula Amorelli, Senior Planning Officer
Jeremy Davy, Ecologist
Bill Jennison, Head of Countryside and Environment
Simon Barnett, Countryside Manager
Adrian Wallington, Countryside Ranger

Trade Union: N/a