

Report To: Safe Sustainable Communities Committee **Date: 27th October 2009**

**Report By: Corporate Director, Environment and
Community Protection** **Report No: ECP/Plann/CC/09/030**

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Subject: Wemyss Bay Woodland - Local Nature Reserve designation

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this Report is to request authority from Committee to formally designate the area known as Wemyss Bay Woodland as a Local Nature Reserve.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Local Nature Reserves (LNR) are local authority designated areas that can contribute to biodiversity, environmental education, awareness of the natural heritage and community involvement in the natural heritage. By making this designation, the local authority is offering status and protection to a site, and encouraging a partnership approach to the future management.
- 2.2 As Wemyss Bay Woodland has been the focus for biodiversity improvements, recreation improvements and community involvement over recent years, it is considered to be a fitting site for LNR declaration.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That authority be given to the Head of Planning and Housing to produce an appropriate Management Plan for the site, establish partnership working and to identify membership of an LNR Management Group, thereafter to return to Committee requesting formal approval of the Management Plan, and thereafter to legally designate the area known as Wemyss Bay Woods as a Local Nature Reserve.

Fraser K Williamson
Head of Planning and Housing

4.0 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Wemyss Bay Woodland is an 8 Hectare area of remnant estate policy woodland within the built up area of Wemyss Bay, bounded by Cliff Terrace Road to the north and Ardgowan Road to the east. It is within the ownership of Inverclyde Council. Committee approval was given in 2003 to work towards Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status for this site, and since that time much work has been undertaken to get the biodiversity value of the woodland to an appropriate standard.
- 4.2 A capital improvement scheme was carried out within the woodland across 2003/4, at a total cost of £72,000, which created a greatly improved network of paths and removed much of the highly invasive rhododendron from the woodland. External funding of 70% was achieved for these works, highlighting the partnership potential of LNR's.
- 4.3 In addition to this, significant volunteering input from the local community further aided the rhododendron removal. Community volunteers have also led educational activities and guided walks within the woodland. The steady level of community involvement and the fact that the rhododendron is now under control makes this an appropriate time to push forward with the LNR designation.
- 4.4 The LNR designation is the responsibility of the Local Authority, in consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage. It is designed to encourage participation of the local community in managing a site that is valuable for wildlife and public amenity, via a Management Group of interested locals and organisations. This group would oversee the implementation of an agreed Management Plan, which will suggest appropriate management measures to maintain the special nature conservation interest.
- 4.5 In taking a decision to designate Wemyss Bay Woodland as a Local Nature Reserve, Inverclyde Council will be delivering outcomes relating to several significant agendas/policies;

Single Outcome Agreement

Under National Outcome 12 relating to enhancing the built and natural environment, and also National Outcome 14 relating to environmental impact, a specified local outcome for Inverclyde Council is to increase the number of greenspaces managed for biodiversity.

The creation of the LNR will also help to deliver our Environment Outcome – 'Inverclyde is a sustainable and pleasant place where people want to live now whilst at the same time safeguarding the environment for future generations'.

It is important that any regeneration taking place in Inverclyde brings communities along with it, so that they have the capacity to look after their environment and to engage with processes and services to maintain the regeneration of the area. This is one of the principles that underpins our Social Regeneration Outcome in Inverclyde.

Green Charter

LNR designation supports the Key Principles of Green Charter. A Key Action within the Charter relates to the improvement and protection of the natural, built, physical and marine environment in which we live and work for the use and enjoyment of the community and to safeguard it for future generations.

Local Plan

Wemyss Bay Woodland is identified as an area of open space within a settlement, which the Council will support, safeguard and where practicable, enhance. In addition it is identified as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, where development that would adversely affect the area will not normally be permitted.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Inverclyde Council has adopted the joint Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Local Biodiversity Action Plan. This encourages the protection and

management of specific species and habitats through action plans. Broadleaved and Mixed Woodland is an identified priority habitat within this Plan, which in addition further encourages the protection of biodiverse areas within the built up areas. Wemyss Bay Woodland is a site which fits both of these habitat action plans.

Access

The path network within the woodland is identified as part of Inverclyde's adopted Core Path Plan

- 4.6 The LNR designation in itself carries no financial or maintenance obligations for Inverclyde Council. It does however encourage a partnership approach to maintenance, suitable for volunteer input or employability outcomes. Further, the formal designation is likely to improve potential access to specific external funding sources for any future capital improvements. Council funded maintenance within the woodland is currently restricted to occasional safety works, such as fencing improvements and tree surgery. As no physical works are necessary to create the LNR, the proposed designation in itself brings no further duty to the Council in terms of maintenance. Instead, it will encourage a partnership approach which, it is hoped, will identify and utilise a range of community, voluntary and employability resources which will enable ongoing maintenance to be carried out.
- 4.7 The potential of the woodland to deliver these varied outcomes relating to biodiversity, recreation and community involvement, enable it to closely meet the required nationally published criteria for LNR status.
- 4.8 Given the information above, this area is considered to offer an exemplar within Inverclyde for LNR status.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Financial Implications - One off Costs. None

Financial Implications - Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings); None

- 5.2 Personnel: This process will be absorbed into the work programme of Lower Clyde Greenspace. No additional staff resource will be required.
- 5.3 Legal: the basis for this designation is section 19 and 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Full consultation will be carried out with the Council's Legal Service.
- 5.4 Equalities; When delivering services to our customers, full cognisance is taken of equality and diversity processes and procedures.