

**Report To:** Safe, Sustainable Communities Committee      **Date:** 30 August 2011  
**Report By:** Corporate Director, Regeneration and Environment      **Report No:** R&E/R&P/SSC/08/11/CC002  
**Contact Officer:** Stuart W. Jamieson      **Contact No:** 2402 or 5555  
**Subject:** Coves Local Nature Reserve – application for improvement funding from The Forestry Commission

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## 1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform Committee of proposed improvements within the Coves Local Nature Reserve; to seek approval to apply for funding from The Forestry Commission to cover the costs of the work; and to seek approval to investigate future management options for the site through discussions with The Forestry Commission.

## 2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 Coves Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a 48 hectare area of mixed habitat that is extensively used by local communities for informal recreation. It is within the ownership of Inverclyde Council, and was formally declared a Local Nature Reserve on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1998. The area represents a significant local resource for both natural and cultural heritage. However, the condition of some key parts of the site currently inhibits the site's potential being met due to poor first impressions and a perception of possible anti-social behaviour.

2.2 It has been indicated to Officers that works to remediate this situation are likely to be eligible for funding from The Forestry Commission, specifically by targeting their Woodland In and Around Towns (WIAT) grant, which forms part of the wider Scottish Rural Development Programme.

2.3 It has been further indicated by The Forestry Commission that they may be open to accepting a role in the ongoing management and maintenance of Coves LNR. The site currently has no dedicated funding for maintenance, with any such needs to date being met from the small resources held by Lower Clyde Greenspace, or through the work programmes of other Council initiatives, for example Environmental Wardens and the Inverclyde Green Gym.

## 3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 That Committee:

- a) delegate authority to the Head of Regeneration and Planning to proceed with an application to the WIAT fund for the proposed works at Coves LNR; and
- b) remit responsibility to the Head of Regeneration and Planning and the Head of Environmental and Community Services, to explore future management options for the site, initially through dialogue with The Forestry Commission, and to report back to Committee with recommendations.

**Aubrey Fawcett**  
Corporate Director, Regeneration and Environment

## 4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Coves Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in west Greenock, designated some 13 years ago, is used extensively by local communities for a range of informal recreation activities, such as walking, jogging, dog walking and a general interest in wildlife. There is a substantial footpath network within the site, and informal routes developed as desire lines linking to various designated, and informal, entrance points. In addition there is a significant natural and cultural heritage element within the site:

Natural – A range of habitat types including woodland, grassland, wetland, open water and rocky outcrops. Of particular note is the presence of Greater Butterfly Orchids and wintering wildfowl.

Cultural – Sites of former copper mines and a very well preserved World War II Anti-Aircraft gun site. The gun site is now a scheduled ancient monument.

- 4.2 The entrance points to the site are in a poor and unwelcoming condition which reduces the community value of the area. In addition, the gun site area is unkempt, with several of the buildings being open to anti-social use. This has resulted in a local perception of risk at this particular location.

## 5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 It is proposed to carry out physical works to remediate this situation through improving the entrance points to encourage responsible use of the site, and to improve the fabric of the gun site buildings and remove overgrown vegetation and improve sight lines. At the same time, an education pack will be created to encourage school use, and also make use of the Inverclyde Green Gym programme to remove invasive rhododendron and gorse. It is estimated that this work will cost in the region of £80,000.
- 5.2 The Forestry Commission have suggested that this work is likely to be eligible for grant funding through their Woodland In and Around Towns (WIAT) programme, which has a funding level of 90% of all costs.
- 5.3 There is currently no dedicated financial resource to enable a defined maintenance programme at Coves, and as a result any maintenance work carried out has been limited and reactive. The Forestry Commission are keen to increase their involvement in urban greenspace and have expressed an interest in discussing a role for themselves in managing Coves in the longer term, in a similar manner to their involvement in other sites throughout Central Scotland, where their input has ranged from providing management grants through lease arrangements to, in the extreme, the purchasing of land. It should be noted that they are not proposing a role which would result in Coves being planted with trees, rather they are keen to manage habitat mosaics which have a woodland element within them.

### Financial Information

- 5.4 The estimated cost of the proposals is £80,000. If successful, the WIAT funding will provide £72,000 towards this.
- 5.5 The remaining £8,000 will be found from existing resources. The education pack will be developed as part of the work programme of the Lower Clyde Greenspace Team, and the Green Gym programme will enable the gorse and rhododendron removal. The estimated value of these elements is £4,000, and such resources are eligible to be used as match funding for WIAT. The remaining £4,000 will come from Inverclyde Council capital funding currently under the heading of Access and Greenspace.
- 5.6 The nature of the works is expected to offer limited maintenance liability, and it is considered that this will provide a fitting task for the continuing Inverclyde Green Gym programme.

## 6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 **Legal:** the discussions with The Forestry Commission will require future input from Legal and Democratic Services.

6.2 **Finance:**

Financial implications – one-off costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Year	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
81829	Capital Programme Access/Greenspace	2011/12	£4,000	n/a	Subject to match funding bid for £72,000

Financial implications – annually recurring costs/(savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Year	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
02370	Contribution of staff time	2011/12	£4,000		Staff time is eligible for grant aid as an in-kind contribution.

6.3 **Personnel:** none.

6.4 **Equalities:** the report has no impact on the Council's Equalities policy.

## 7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 **Chief Financial Officer:** the £4,000 proposed spend is currently held within the Capital Programme under the heading of Access/Greenspace. All works will be competitively tendered.

7.2 **Head of Legal and Democratic Services:** as above.

7.3 **Head of Organisational Development, HR and Performance:** no requirement to comment.

7.4 **External Funding Group:** the chair of the group has been informed of this proposal and has confirmed, in principle, it fits with the criteria for external funding.

## 8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Coves LNR Management Report March 2011 is available in hard copy from the Regeneration and Planning Service (contact Charlie Cairns, Lower Clyde Greenspace Manager).

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16<sup>th</sup> August 2011

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