

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Subject: Extended designation of Bircham Valley Local Nature Reserve

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 19/01/2010

Cabinet Member: Councillor Fry

CMT Member: Director of Development

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Part: I

Executive Summary:

The report proposes an extension of the designation of Bircham Valley Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Bircham Valley is currently a 14 hectare green space in the north of Plymouth, immediately south of Derriford Hospital, which is owned and managed by Plymouth City Council. All areas of the LNR are open and accessible to the public and it is primarily used by walkers whether they be local residents or staff and visitors to Derriford Hospital.

The Council has the power to designate sites as LNRs under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. To declare a site as a LNR the land should have good natural interest and provide an area for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public. The proposed 8 hectare extension at Bircham Valley meets both of these criteria.

A management plan has been produced for the current site and the proposed extension land in consultation with the NHS (owners and managers of most of the extension land), PCC Parks Services and Natural England. PCC Parks Services, the NHS and Natural England fully endorse the extension of Bircham Valley Local Nature Reserve.

To complete the process Cabinet must approve the designation of the extension of Bircham Valley and instruct the Head of Legal Services to draw up and sign the legal documents that complete the formal designation.

Corporate Plan 2009-12:

The report supports Corporate Plan Improvement Priority 12: 'Delivering Sustainable Growth'.

The effective conservation and enhancement of the city's green space is considered to play an important part in ensuring that economic and housing growth is sustainable by providing areas of recreation for the existing and future residents.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Including finance, human, IT and land

It is not anticipated that the designation of the land as a Local Nature Reserve will generate any additional revenue costs for Plymouth City Council. Plymouth NHS Trust are the owners of the majority of the proposed extension land which they manage for public access at the present time and will continue to manage. A balancing pond owned by PCC to the south of the NHS land is also proposed for inclusion within the LNR. This pond provides a good habitat for wildlife and is currently managed by PCC to collect run-off from the adjacent Tamar Science Park. Designation as an LNR will not alter the management of the balancing pond.

North Plymouth Community Park

Bircham Valley Local Nature Reserve and its proposed extension fall within the area proposed as the future North Plymouth Community Park which has been extensively consulted on in the Derriford and Seaton AAP (Issues and Preferred Options). The extension of Bircham Valley will go some way towards safeguarding the aspirations expressed in this document.

Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management, Equalities Impact Assessment, etc.

The formal designation of the land in itself has no implications in terms of Section 17 and Health & Safety as both the current LNR and the NHS extension land are currently accessible to the public. The proposed extension simply formalises the situation on the ground, however, the implementation of specific projects arising from the management plan could have implications for Health and Safety. These will be considered as part of the design of these projects. There is no current public access to the balancing pond and public access will not be created as a result of this designation.

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

It is recommended that the Cabinet endorses the designation of the extension of Bircham Valley Local Nature Reserve, and that the Head of Legal Services is instructed to draw up and sign the legal documents that complete the formal designation.

Reason: To extend statutory protection for key area of green space, and to raise the profile of the Council's work to provide spaces for people and wildlife. It will ensure that a valuable resource is maintained for the community's enjoyment and for the benefit the City's wildlife.

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

The alternative option of not designating the extension land as part of the Local Nature Reserve has a number of implications:

- It would result in a lower level of legal protection for this green space
- The opportunity to raise the profile of the Council's Partnership work with the NHS is forgone.
- The opportunity to secure external funding to promote healthy lifestyles, community engagement and wildlife management will be diminished.

- Not designating this site will mean the Council may not achieve Plymouth's Local Development Framework Core Strategy target for designating 100ha of new Local Nature Reserve by 2016.

Background papers:

Bircham Valley Management Plan 2009

Derriford and Seaton AAP, Issues and Preferred Options, 2009

Sign off: *comment must be sought from those whose area of responsibility may be affected by the decision, as follows (insert initials of Finance and Legal reps, and of Heads of HR, AM, IT and Strat. Proc.):*

<i>Head of Fin</i>	<i>DevF9 10005 8</i>	<i>Head of Leg</i>	<i>JAR/ 09/11 3</i>	<i>Head of HR</i>	<i>N/ A</i>	<i>Head of AM</i>	<i>N/ A</i>	<i>Head of IT</i>	<i>N/ A</i>	<i>Head of Strat Proc</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Originating CMF Member Paul Barnard, Assistant Director of Development (Planning Services)</i>											

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Bircham Valley is located in the north of Plymouth immediately south of Derriford Hospital (see attached map). This 14 ha site is owned and managed by PCC and was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1990. Significant improvement works to the access infrastructure were carried out in winter 2008/09. The NHS own land immediately adjacent to the existing reserve and have been managing this land for public access and wildlife. It is now proposed that this situation be formalised by extending the designation of Bircham Valley Local Nature Reserve on to NHS land (a further 8 hectares) and the inclusion of a balancing pond owned by PCC.

2. LOCAL NATURE RESERVE DESIGNATION

2.1. The Council has the power to designate sites as Local Nature Reserves (LNR) under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. To declare a site as a LNR the land should have good natural interest and provide an area for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public, the proposed extension land meets both of these criteria.

2.2. Before a site can be designated a management plan has to be produced that details how the nature and access interests on the site will be maintained in the future. Natural England is then consulted and must approve the management plan and proposed designation/extension before it can be taken forward. This consultation has been undertaken and Natural England fully endorses the extension of Bircham Valley.

2.3. To complete the process Cabinet must approve the extension of Bircham Valley Local Nature Reserve. The Head of Legal Services is then instructed to draw up and sign the legal documents that complete the formal designation. The designation will then be advertised to inform the public.

3. IMPLICATION OF THE EXTENDED DESIGNATION

3.1. Extending the designation of the site as a LNR places a statutory duty on the Land Owners (PCC and NHS) to maintain the natural interests, and access provision, in the same condition as when the site was designated. It also results in a restriction on the future use of the land as it can only be used as a nature reserve, unless the site is de-designated.

3.2. The extension of the designation of the Reserve will ensure that a valuable resource is maintained for the community's enjoyment and for the benefit of the City's wildlife. It will also help meet the LDF Core Strategy target and Plymouth Green Space strategy target of designating 100ha of LNR by 2016.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. The NHS have improved the path network within the extension area and will continue to manage the land in their ownership for public access and nature conservation. There are no additional revenue costs for PCC arising from the act of designation.

5. EXTRACT FROM BIRCHAM VALLEY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Summary Sheet

Site Name: Bircham Valley
Area: 29.04 Hectares

Vision Statement:

Bircham Valley is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) that will be managed for the benefit of people and wildlife. The ambition is to enhance the potential of the area as a high quality accessible natural green space for those working, and living within the surrounding neighbourhoods. A policy of open access for quiet enjoyment will be pursued, whilst maintaining and enhancing a diverse mosaic of native broad-leaved woodland, species-rich grassland and wetland.

Wildlife and Management Summary:

Bircham Valley LNR is located in the northeast of Plymouth, within a number of steep and narrow valleys and Forder Valley LNR is situated to the southeast of the site. Bircham Valley is an important green expanse within the local landscape, which holds significant wildlife and landscape value.

Bircham Valley supports a mosaic of habitats including Broad-leaved woodland, semi-improved grassland, hedgerows, scrub, wetland features.

The management objectives for the Nature Reserve are as follows:

- To maintain the current extent of native broad-leaved woodland. To seek opportunities to enhance the structural and species diversity of the woodlands
- To maintain or restore a total of 4.4ha of species rich grassland
- To maintain and enhance existing hedgerows and extend hedgerow habitat
- To promote an 'access for all' approach towards encouraging the communities use and enjoyment of the Reserve and to deliver a high quality accessible green space that is a valued community asset, providing opportunities for quiet recreational activities and access to nature.

Future management of the reserve will be integrated into the proposed wider Derriford Community Park. Proactive measures will be needed to ensure increased recreational pressure arising from levels of development planned for the Derriford and Seaton areas do not detract from the areas biodiversity interest.

This management plan runs for a period of ten years but will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The table below gives a brief overview of the biodiversity recorded at Bircham Valley LNR.

Species and Habitats	National status	UK BAP	Devon BAP
Native Broad-leaved woodland		Yes	Yes
Neutral Grassland		Yes	Yes
Badger	WCA Schedule 6; Bern III		
Bluebell	WCA Schedule 8		
Bullfinch	Red List	UK BAP	
Grey Tooth Fungus		UK BAP	
House Sparrow	Red List	UK BAP	

Table 1: Illustrates the rarity status of species and habitats recorded on the site

6. BIRCHAM VALLEY PROPOSED EXTENSION TO LOCAL NATURE RESERVE SITE MAP

