



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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| Name and date of Committee | <b>Cabinet: Wednesday 24 March 2021</b>  |
| Report Number              | <b>Agenda Item No. 6</b>   |
| Subject                    | <b>Local Nature Reserve: Woodstock Water Meadows</b>   |
| Wards affected             | Woodstock and Bladon   |
| Accountable member         | Councillor Jeff Haine, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning<br>Email: <a href="mailto:jeff.haine@westoxon.gov.uk">jeff.haine@westoxon.gov.uk</a>  |
| Accountable officer        | Melanie Dodd, Biodiversity Officer<br>Tel: 01285 623206; Email: <a href="mailto:melanie.dodd@publicagroup.uk">melanie.dodd@publicagroup.uk</a>   |
| Summary/Purpose            | To consider a request from Woodstock Town Council to delegate to them the power to declare a Local Nature Reserve at Woodstock Water Meadows.  |
| Annex                      | <a href="#">Annex A</a> – Undated letter from Woodstock Town Council received 18 December 2020<br><a href="#">Annex B</a> – Location Plan  |
| Recommendation             | That authority is delegated to Woodstock Town Council to declare Local Nature Reserves on their land within their ownership and management within their administrative boundaries only, including Woodstock Water Meadows.   |
| Corporate priorities       | Designating local nature reserves in West Oxfordshire will enable the council to implement their Climate Action and Biodiversity commitments in the Council Plan 2020 – 2024, including “ <i>work to enhance the natural environment and boost biodiversity</i> ” such as land management, restoration of priority habitats and continuing to support Oxfordshire’s Conservation Target Areas. |
| Key Decision               | No   |
| Exempt                     | No   |
| Consultees/ Consultation   | Giles Hughes, Chief Executive  |

## **I. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1. Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 gives District Councils the power to acquire, declare and manage Local Nature Reserves (LNR), as amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
- 1.2. The power under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to declare a LNR can be delegated (with the agreement of both parties) to a Parish, Town or Community Council pursuant to Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 1.3. Regulations 4 and 5 of the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012 enable appropriate delegation of function by the Executive.
- 1.4. A LNR is a protected area of land designated by a local authority because of its local special natural interest and, where possible, educational and community value. Natural England sees LNR as an important way to achieve its goal of maintaining England's rich natural heritage and giving people access to places where they can enjoy that heritage.
- 1.5. Local authorities can create local nature reserves (LNRs). Town and parish councils can create LNRs if the district council has given them the power to do this. The local authority must control the LNR land - either through ownership, a lease or an agreement with the owner. As a manager of an LNR you need to care for, and protect, its natural features. You must also make your land accessible for any visitors.
- 1.6. Further information on the process of designating LNR is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/create-and-manage-local-nature-reserves> and in the Natural England NE301 report *Local Nature Reserves in England: a Guide to their Selection and Declaration* available to view at: [https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/LNRs\\_in\\_England\\_A\\_guide\\_to\\_their\\_selection\\_and\\_declaration\\_2010.pdf](https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/LNRs_in_England_A_guide_to_their_selection_and_declaration_2010.pdf)

## **2. MAIN POINTS**

- 2.1. Local authorities can run LNR independently or can involve 'friends of' community groups, wildlife trusts, site-based rangers, local school children and Natural England (who can give advice).
- 2.2. There are over 1,000 LNR in England today ranging from windswept coastal headlands, ancient woodlands and wildflower meadows to former inner city railways, long abandoned landfill sites and industrial areas. In total they cover over 40,000 hectares, forming an impressive natural resource, which makes an important contribution to England's biodiversity. However, LNR are relatively scarce in the West Oxfordshire District with only two known sites; Crecy Hill, Tackley and Saltway, near Charlbury (information from <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>).
- 2.3. LNR designation serves to increase people's awareness and enjoyment of their natural environment, provide an ideal environment for everyone to learn about and study nature, build relationships between local authorities, national and local nature conservation organisations and local people, protect wildlife habitats and natural features, offer a positive use for land which local authorities would prefer to be left undeveloped, and make it possible to apply byelaws, which can help in managing and protecting the site.
- 2.4. At a Woodstock Town Council meeting on 13 October 2020, a motion to designate Woodstock Water Meadows as a LNR was approved.
- 2.5. Woodstock Water Meadows covers 5.5 hectares of land on the floodplain of the River Glyme and is easily accessible to the public. In summary, the site comprises lowland fen and wet woodland priority habitats that are moderately diverse in terms of botanical interest; it is

located within the Glyme and Dorn Conservation Target Area and has intrinsic appeal as an area of green space with wildlife interest due to its location adjacent to a residential area; it has good access and is well-used by local people.

- 2.6. The letter received from Woodstock Town Council (by email on 18 December 2020) (see [Annex A](#)) and the site management plan provide further details and background (see <http://www.wychwoodproject.org/cms/content/woodstock-water-meadows> ).
- 2.7. The management plan for the site was prepared by The Wychwood Project (published in May 2014) and since 1 June 2016, they have been managing the site on behalf of the Town Council (under contract). There is an annual budget set by the Town Council for management and active volunteer involvement from within the local community.
- 2.8. The Woodstock Town Council website provides some information about the site <https://woodstock-tc.gov.uk/natural-habitats/>
- 2.9. Woodstock Town Council does not have the power to declare a LNR unless such power is delegated to it by the District Council.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1. There are no financial implications.

### **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. There are no legal implications.

### **5. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1. There are no associated risks.

### **6. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 6.1. There are no associated impacts.

### **7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The protection and enhancement of the biodiversity and natural capital value of the Woodstock Water Meadows will contribute towards climate change mitigation and adaptation, for example, the site lies within the floodplain and has a major role in alleviating flooding, as well as acting as a carbon sink (wet grassland, scrub and trees).

### **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 8.1. The District Council could take forward the declaration, but it does not have responsibility over the land in question (ownership and/or management).

### **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1. Email from Woodstock Town Council Town Clerk dated 17 December 2020
- 9.2. Letter from Woodstock Town Council requesting delegation of authority (received by email on 18 December 2020) – [Annex A](#)
- 9.3. Location plan (from Google Maps) – [Annex B](#)

Woodstock Town Council

Town Clerk: Cherie Carruthers



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Mr Giles Hughes  
Chief Executive  
WODC  
Woodgreen Council Offices  
Witney  
Oxon OX28 1NB

Dear Mr Hughes,

**Re: Designation of the Woodstock Watermeadows as a Local Nature Reserve**

The Woodstock Watermeadows are a unique feature in the heart of the town providing a valuable habitat for birds, small mammals, and plants from small aquatic species to mature trees. It covers 5.5 hectares of land on the flood plain of the River Glyme and is easily accessible to the public as an area of quiet tranquillity.

The Watermeadows were granted to the town in a charter of King Henry VI dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 1453. Whilst the Town Council is committed to retaining the natural characteristics of the area there is a need for regular maintenance, particularly the requirement to keep to reasonable levels the amount of Himalayan Balsam which, if left unattended, would swamp other plant life in the meadow. The management policy for this unique habitat area is set out in the Watermeadows Management Plan (copy attached, including map boundaries), a comprehensive document drawn up in 2014 for the Town Council by the conservation group The Wychwood Project. From 1st June 2016 the Wychwood Project took over the management of many aspects of the Woodstock Watermeadows under a contract from the Town Council. There is an annual budget set by the Town Council to cover general maintenance and upkeep of the Watermeadows. Named volunteering groups have changed since the time the original plan was written, but there continues to be active volunteer involvement by the local community.

At a Woodstock Town Council meeting held on 13th October 2020, the following motion was approved by council members:

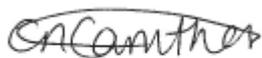
*"It is proposed that the Town Council formally recognises the Watermeadows as a Local Nature Reserve and to better facilitate its ongoing management, adhere to the following broad principles:*

- *The conservation and enhancement of all wildlife in the Watermeadows*
- *Help more people to experience, understand and value the Watermeadows as a natural resource and the opportunity it affords to re-connect with nature*
- *Preserve the Watermeadows as an easily accessible area of quiet tranquillity"*

Consequently, the Town Council hereby requests the delegation of authority from WODC to formally recognise the Watermeadows as a Local Nature Reserve i.e. the Woodstock Watermeadows Nature Reserve.

Can you please advise if any additional information is required, otherwise I would be grateful of your confirmation of the delegated authority at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Cherie Carruthers  
Woodstock Town Clerk

Cc Cllr Les Burnham

**Woodstock Water Meadows Location (link from Oxford Conservation Volunteers website:  
<https://www.ocv.org.uk/sites.php?id=175> )**

