

Natural England briefing on National Nature Reserve expansion proposal April 2023

Early conversations over expanding Ashted NNR to include bordering Epsom Common aligned with a change in aspirations to strive for bigger and better connected super NNRs. As a result, we have increased our scope and are looking at the wider areas for partners to join the expansion. At present, we are in the very early stages of speaking to potential stakeholders and understanding the potential focus area. This information pack is to summarise our focus area, key messages and our timeline.

“Super-NNR” is not a formal status, rather it describes extensive National Nature Reserves NNRs, usually managed in partnership across a landscape, and which contribute to the ambitions of the Strategy. They can be created as wholly new NNRs, by extending or joining up existing NNR/s, and by extending NNRs to include other land (in accordance with the NNR Selection Principles). This project will be focusing on extending Ashted NNR to include other land.

National Nature Reserves are exemplary, nationally important nature reserves, where nature conservation is the primary land use. NNRs must be of national importance and further the core purposes of NNRs:

Nature:

- Make a significant contribution to nature recovery in the locality
- And/or safeguard or recover nationally important biodiversity and geodiversity.

Science:

- Provide opportunities for conservation and environmental science

People:

- Encourage people to experience, engage with and enjoy nature in a variety of ways

Selection requirements:

- The site's purpose is to be a nature reserve and the primary land use is nature conservation.
- The site is declared NNR in perpetuity or for the long term (>30 years).
- The site will be managed to exemplary standards
- Each managing body has the capability and the control of land use to meet these requirements over the long term.

Our focus area follows the Thames2Downs path which connects the River Thames with the North Downs Way. Please see attached maps which show roughly our focus area.

Key messages:

- NNR's are a voluntary declaration not a designation which means they are not required to be consulted in planning proposals.
- NNR's do not receive direct funding, instead they provide the partnerships and forums that make it possible to apply for large-scale funding.
- To become part of the NNR, you must be an approved body. However, there can be affiliated

partners that do not meet the eligibility requirements.

- Each site's individuality will be maintained but a wider NNR management plan will provide guidance and set landscape level targets and projects.

- Outputs for the declaration process require collectively completing a 'Acquisition Proposal Form' where each party will need to justify their eligibility and reason for inclusion.

This expansion has been added to our 2024-25 business year, which provides a year to gather interested parties and begin discussions.

Next steps:

- A face-to-face meeting to have a forum to discuss the potential vision and mission of the new NNR.

- Go through declaration process and NNR partner responsibilities.

- Discuss level of commitment of each stakeholder.