

THE HOGSMILL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017-2117

<u>Report of the:</u>	Head of Place Development
<u>Contact:</u>	Sarah Clift
<u>Urgent Decision?(yes/no)</u>	No
<u>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</u>	
<u>Annexes/Appendices (attached):</u>	<u>Annexe 1</u> - Executive summary - Draft Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve Management Plan 2017-2117 <u>Annexe 2</u> - Draft Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve Management Plan 2017-2117
<u>Other available papers (not attached):</u>	Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve Management Plan 2006-16

REPORT SUMMARY

This report asks the Community and Wellbeing Committee to approve and adopt as policy an updated management plan 2017-2117 for the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve.

RECOMMENDATION (S)

- (1) That the Committee adopts the updated 2017-2117 the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve Management Plan as Council policy.**
- (2) That the Committee receives an Annual Review of costs and funding associated with the Plan.**

Notes

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 The adoption of an updated management plan for the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve (LNR) will make a long term positive contribution to all four of the Council's Key Priorities and the Community Strategy by guiding the management of one of the Borough's key areas of countryside in line with this Council's objective of committing to the principles of sustainability.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Hogsmill LNR is a vital green corridor within what is quite an urbanised area of Epsom and Ewell and is managed by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) in partnership with the Environment Agency, the South East Rivers Trust, The Hogsmill Catchment Partnership and the Lower Mole Partnership. The proposed management plan covers the whole nature reserve which is comprised by the Hogsmill and Bonesgate Open Spaces covering approximately 40ha.
- 2.2 The 2017-2117 management plan is intended to succeed the 2006-2016 plan and aims to update and build on the progress made during the implementation of the previous plan, which was the first to be agreed as council policy and implemented by EEBC. During the lifetime of the last management plan significant improvements have been achieved on the ground to improve the site for both public access and wildlife. This has included: the creation of 5km/3 miles of surfaced paths; 3 new bridges installed over the water courses and 1 restored bridge; many new benches; artificial channelisation and concrete weirs removed; meanders and riffles created along the water courses; improved biological monitoring including a butterfly transect and of water quality indicator species; hedgerows planted; species-rich grassland, scrub and woodland being actively managed and the installation of information boards at all main entrances. The previous plan also secured the substantial external funding required to achieve some of the above improvements.
- 2.3 Being surrounded by residential housing, the site represents a valuable resource to the local community. The site is popular for a variety of uses that include walking, picnicking, nature watching, exercising of dogs, and cycling. During 2013 the borough's Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) were re-surveyed and the entire Local Nature Reserve has been designated SNCI. The Hogsmill LNR is also designated as a River Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA), a county designation recognised in the Epsom & Ewell Local Plan aimed at recognising and enhancing biodiversity on a landscape scale. In addition, the whole area of the Hogsmill LNR is designated as Metropolitan Green Belt. Within the new planning policies of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, a greater importance is being given towards green infrastructure and the protection of habitat links. The Hogsmill LNR is a vital green corridor within the Borough and so will be protected by the planning policies.

- 2.4 Successfully managing the Hogsmill LNR involves actively managing public access and nature conservation. With 5km of surfaced paths and tracks there is a constant need to manage inappropriate access, encroaching vegetation and to maintain the infrastructure of the tracks, accompanying signs, seats and gates. The nature conservation value of the Hogsmill LNR's river corridor, made up of the watercourses, surrounding woodland, scrub, hedgerows, and meadows, is very high. Of special note are the provision of habitat for species, such as the extremely rare ladybird 'Clitosthetus arcuatus', two butterfly species of conservation concern in Surrey, the Brown hairstreak and White Letter Hairstreak, foraging and roosting bats such as the Soprano and Noctule, which are species of principal importance under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC), and a number of bird species on the RSPB 'Red List' and 'Amber List'.
- 2.5 An agreed management plan is a requirement if we are to secure external funding to assist with the management of the Hogsmill LNR. The previous plan helped to secure the funding required for the installation of the new paths, the vital works to the river channel carried out by the Environment Agency and South East Rivers Trust and helped to build the reputation of EEBC as a successful land manager to our external partners.
- 2.6 The draft 2017-2117 plan has been produced following a number of additional site surveys carried out during the lifetime of the previous plan with consequent re-appraisal, a review of available historical data and liaison with a number of individuals and representatives of relevant organisations (e.g. EEBC, Environment Agency and South East Rivers Trust). This has resulted in the objectives and outline prescriptions set out in the plan.
- 2.7 The experience of implementing the 2006-2016 plan and the need to continually make management decisions with a very long term view, such as those affecting veteran trees, has resulted in a plan that aims to provide a consistent and stable approach to the management of the Hogsmill LNR over the next one hundred years. The plan will be reviewed every ten years during its lifetime.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The Community and Wellbeing Committee is asked to consider adopting as policy the 2017-2117 Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve Management Plan. Subject to ten year reviews the plan sets out an agreed approach for the continued management of the site to benefit both the people and wildlife of Epsom & Ewell for the next one hundred years. Implementing the plan enables the Council to demonstrate that it is proactively fulfilling its 'Biodiversity Duty' (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) and actively encouraging access to and protecting, the Borough's natural heritage. An executive summary of the Plan is attached at Annexe 1. The full Plan is attached at Annexe 2.

- 3.2 Below is a summary of the key management proposals within the draft management plan that are thought unlikely to change in the next one hundred years:
- 3.2.1 Ensuring the protection, maintenance, monitoring and enhancement of biodiversity and cultural heritage of the Hogsmill LNR
 - 3.2.2 Assisting the Environment Agency in the management and maintenance of the important features of the river channel
 - 3.2.3 Ensuring good public access via a network of well-maintained and signed paths
 - 3.2.4 Encouraging and supporting the work of volunteers
 - 3.2.5 Interpreting the Hogsmill LNR to the public
 - 3.2.6 Maintaining a close working relationship with the owners of the Hogsmill River and banks (Environment Agency) and other partners such as the South East Rivers Trust (SERT)

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 Successful management of a Nature Reserve and designated Site of Nature Conservation Importance requires the informed, consistent, systematic and long term approach to habitat management and public access that a management plan provides.
- 4.2 Stage three of the draft management plan provides a guide to delivering the plan up to the first ten year review in 2027. The plan is aspirational and for guidance purposes only, estimated costs are given and as in the case of the previous plan 2006-16, implementation of the new plan is not dependent upon increased spending by the Council. During the previous plan substantial external funding was successfully secured. It should be noted that, without a management plan there is very little chance of securing funds from other sources.
- 4.3 There is no significant impact on current or future staffing levels. However, the Hogsmill LNR is unusual in being a site of national/regional importance for nature conservation but without dedicated staff. Whilst no increase in staff is proposed by the adoption of the new management plan, it should be noted that the plan does include the aspiration if resources ever permit for dedicated staff which would improve both this Council's ability to manage habitats, public access and interpretation.

- 4.4 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** The Plan assumes that revenue budgets for staffing, grounds and tree maintenance and small incidental expenses will be maintained in future years. Agreed financial implications arising from the annual review of the Plan will be reflected in annual service estimates. No additional internal funding is available for any items included in the management plan. External funding contributions have been secured previously and we will seek further funding for future years.

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 impose a duty on "public bodies" including local authorities to have regard to biodiversity, conservation and to maintaining lists of species and habitats for which conservation steps should be taken or promoted.
- 5.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** There are no legal issues arising from this report.

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 The adoption of an updated Hogsmill LNR Management Plan will help ensure that a significant area of countryside with the Borough of Epsom and Ewell is protected and enhanced in terms of nature conservation and well managed in terms of public access for a period of one hundred years.
- 6.2 Access to countryside is recognised nationally as a key to social wellbeing, indeed countryside walks are the nation's most popular recreational pursuit. The adoption of the updated management plan will play a vital role in ensuring the proper management of the Hogsmill LNR with regard to public access.
- 6.3 The presence of accessible well-managed countryside can powerfully affect perceptions and can be a key factor with both individuals and businesses in their decision to locate and stay in an area.
- 6.4 The updated plan does offer community safety benefits by interpreting the site to visitors and encouraging local residents to get more involved in helping to manage the site, which by default helps increase an informed on site presence that can report issues to Council staff.

7 Partnerships

- 7.1 The current management of the Hogsmill LNR relies heavily on a range of partnerships both internal and external. For example, the Countryside Team works closely with the Ranger Service to maximise the effectiveness of the available Council presence. Volunteers have helped with practical tasks, interpretation and biological monitoring and the Lower Mole Partnership have provided essential support for over thirty years, carrying out practical nature conservation and access improvement tasks. Over the lifetime of the previous plan, EEBC has built up a strong partnership with the Environment Agency, South East Rivers Trust, the Hogsmill Catchment Partnership and Zoological Society London. Through working on the Bonesgate Stream our relationship with Royal Borough of Kingston has been cemented. Continuing these partnerships and in particular with our volunteers is an aim of the management plan and will be crucial to its successful implementation.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 Financially it has become increasingly challenging for local authorities to manage large areas of countryside, both maintaining good public access and fulfilling duties regarding biodiversity. Continuing to secure external funding to help meet the financial challenge requires a Management Plan.
- 8.2 The national trend in recent decades has been towards the statutory implementation of measures to maintain and enhance biodiversity as has been seen with protected species legislation and the 'Biodiversity Duty' for all public bodies. This would imply that the greatest financial risk to the Council would be the failure to address the management of biodiversity on the Hogsmill LNR today leading to greater costs in the future, trying to regain what will have been lost.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 In conclusion, the adoption of the new management plan would significantly assist this Council in meeting its responsibilities and contributes to a broad range of Council priorities and strategies. The management plan highlights the special nature of the Hogsmill LNR, and demonstrates this Council's ability to manage its countryside to a high standard.
- 9.2 Much has been achieved by Council staff and volunteers in protecting valuable habitats, improving access and interpreting the Hogsmill LNR under the guidance of the 2006-2016 Management Plan. The progress of recent years can be maintained and built upon by the adoption of a successor management plan 2017-2117 to guide this Council's role in managing the site for good public access and nature conservation over the next century.

WARD(S) AFFECTED: Ewell Court Ward; Ewell Ward; Ruxley Ward; West Ewell Ward;