Agenda Item 7
Planning Policy Committee –
18 June 2012
King’s Cliffe Meadow Proposed Local Nature Reserve

Purpose of report
To seek Member approval for consultation to commence on the proposed Local Nature Reserve and draft Management Plan

Attachment(s)
Appendix 1: Location Plans
Appendix 2: Draft Management Plan

1.0 Background

1.1 Local Nature Reserves (or LNRs) are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Local authorities have the power to declare LNRs if they have a legal interest in the land concerned i.e. they own or lease the site, or have a nature reserve agreement with the owner.

Across the country there are 1,500 Local Nature Reserves, which are a variety of sizes and have different characteristics and uses. Very briefly, to qualify for LNR status, a site must be of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment.

It should be emphasised that LNRs are not the same as Country Parks. The level of public access will be determined by the declaring authority and this will be dependent on the needs of the site itself i.e. the habitat, species and management arrangements.

It is a legal requirement for Natural England to be consulted as part of the declaration process, however they have no power over site selection or the decision to declare. Nevertheless, they do provide a useful advisory role.

It should also be noted that if the Local Authority wish to de-declare a LNR for any reason in the future, it may do so.

Members can find further background information about LNRs at http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designatedareas/lnr/default.aspx

2.0 Local Context and Information

2.1 There are currently 18 LNRs within Northamptonshire, with 2 of these in East Northamptonshire: Kinewell Lake and Titchmarsh.

The King’s Cliffe Meadow proposed Local Nature Reserve is 1 of 3 proposed LNRs identified for designation in the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (Adopted July 2011, Policy 10).

King’s Cliffe Meadow is a 1.94 ha site owned by East Northamptonshire Council. It lies
on the north-west edge of the village and is currently leased for cattle grazing. It is already designated as a Local Wildlife Site by the Wildlife Trust.

The site is a small species rich meadow (calcareous and neutral grassland), which is an excellent habitat for birds and butterflies. Of particular note here is the grizzled skipper butterfly, which is now a very uncommon species in central England and is identified as a UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species. In addition, the site lies adjacent to a disused railway line, which is a known local habitat for adders. Refer to Appendix 1 for location plans taken from Wildlife Trust documentation (note: a formal ENC location plan will be prepared prior to consultation commencing).

2.2 Some initial contact has already been made with Natural England, East Northamptonshire Council’s Amenities Team (who manage the site) and Community Partnership Team (who provide community support/advice), the Grazier (Lessee), the Parish Council and the Wildlife Trust. All of these key partners are supportive of the principal of designating the area as a LNR.

2.3 The site already benefits from:

- Appropriate management by the grazer, which is in line with the nature conservation objectives for the habitat.
- Informal public access - residents already walk through the site via an informal path.

2.4 Due to the small site size, habitat, species present and existing management/leasing arrangements, it is the intention that this LNR will be maintained as a low key site, with the emphasis being on nature conservation.

However, local people will still be able to continue to informally walk through the site and further managed access/education opportunities will also be investigated e.g. the potential for occasional guided visits for local school children and residents etc.

A draft Management Plan has been prepared (Appendix 2) to help consider how the site could be managed and improved. The Plan has taken on board recommendations highlighted for this site by the Wildlife Trust.

The Plan needs to be aspirational and set out what is envisaged. However, due to the current economic downturn, it also needs to be recognised that some of the desired objectives can only be achieved if resources are forthcoming.

If the site is declared, it would then be the intention to establish a King’s Cliffe Meadow LNR steering group. Their role would be to review and update the Management Plan (expected to be every 5 years) and to promote the implementation of the Plan.

3.0 Cost

3.1 It is worth highlighting that:

The proposed site meets all of the requirements for LNR designation and is already being managed appropriately. It is therefore capable of being designated now without the need for any financial outlay or alterations/improvements to the site.

As previously highlighted, some of the aspirations within the draft Management Plan for site improvements and/or community events etc will only be achieved if sources of funding are forthcoming. Those proposals are identified, in order to help enhance the existing site, habitat and community access/education opportunities.
The Plan identifies the need to investigate grant funding opportunities as a future action and does not make any financial commitments for East Northamptonshire Council.

4.0 Next Steps

4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Step 1 | Members approve consultation on the proposal to designate and on the draft Management Plan.  
Note: It is only a statutory requirement to consult Natural England. However, it is good practice to give any interested parties the chance to comment on the draft proposal to designate the site as a Local Nature Reserve. In addition, the opportunity to comment on the draft Management Plan is proposed |
| Step 2 | Consultation for 6 weeks |
| Step 3 | Report any consultation responses to September Planning Policy Committee (as no committee in August), along with a report requesting the formal LNR declaration be made. |
| Step 4 | Public Notice to announce the declaration has been made. Natural England formally notified of declaration. |

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The proposed site meets all of the requirements to be designated as a Local Nature Reserve. This will help to start implementing Policy 10 of the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan and will provide both biodiversity and community benefits. Members are therefore requested to give approval for consultation to commence on the proposed King’s Cliffe Meadow Local Nature Reserve.

6.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Legal Implications

7.1 LNRs are a statutory designation, which gives the site enhanced legal protection

8.0 Risk Management

8.1 None

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 None

10.0 Corporate Outcomes

10.1 The relevant Corporate Outcomes are:

- Sustainable: sustainable development and strong communities
- Effective partnership working: Strong strategic partnerships
- Strong community leadership: A proactive and listening Council

3
11.0 Recommendation

11.1 The Committee is recommended to approve the consultation *(Reason – to assist with implementing Policy 10 of the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan; contribute to local and national biodiversity targets and provide partnership working opportunities with key stakeholders and the local community)*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other considerations: None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Background Papers:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person Originating Report:</td>
<td>Karen Britton – Planning Policy and Conservation Manager Extn: 2142 <a href="mailto:kbritton@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk">kbritton@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>21 May 2012</td>
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(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)
King’s Cliffe Meadow

Proposed
Local Nature Reserve

Draft Management Plan 2012-2017

May 2012
Introduction

This document sets out the principal management objectives for the proposed King’s Cliffe Meadow Local Nature Reserve. The Meadow already benefits from Local Wildlife Site status, and this document will help to oversee the continued conservation and enhancement of the habitat and species of the site. It is proposed that this Management Plan will be reviewed every 5 years. However, it should be highlighted that if funds are not forthcoming, then the desired objectives and timescales may not occur.

Site Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name:</th>
<th>King’s Cliffe Meadow</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Planning Authority:</td>
<td>East Northamptonshire Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership:</td>
<td>Freehold owned by East Northamptonshire Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area:</td>
<td>1.94 Hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grid Reference:</td>
<td>TL001974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byelaws:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access:</td>
<td>Access to the site is provided by a wooden field gate in the southwest corner. A well established informal footpath originates at this point which follows the southern boundary to the meadow and exits through a gap in the western hedgerow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A site location plan can be found at Appendix 1 (note: plan to be inserted)
Site Description

Located to the north-west of the village of King’s Cliffe in East Northamptonshire, and to the south of the disused Nene Valley railway line, King’s Cliffe Meadow proposed LNR is a small species rich meadow which provides excellent habitat for birds and butterflies.

The meadow is bound to the west and north by thick scrub/developing woodland which is dominated by blackthorn (Prunus spinosa), hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna), elder (Sambucus nigra), and ash (Fraxinus excelsior). To the east, the boundary is formed by a hedge of hawthorn, and to the south by residential garden fences. There are also a number of patches of hawthorn across the site which provides good cover for birds and mammals.

The grassland has a neutral to calcareous flora which is dominated by lady’s bedstraw (Galium verum) and various grasses. Notable species present at the site include: agrimony (Agrimonia eupatoria), bulbous buttercup (Ranunculus bulbosus), common bird’s-foot-trefoil (Lotus corniculatus), common knapweed (Centaurea nigra), common restharrow (Ononis repens), common sorrel (Rumex acetosa), cowslip (Primula veris), early forget-me-not (Myosotis ramosissima), lesser stitchwort (Stellaria graminea), meadow vetchling (Lathyrus pratensis), oxeye daisy (Leucanthemum vulgare), parsley-piert (Aphanes arvensis), and wooly thistle (Cirsium eriophorum).

The King’s Cliffe Meadow site is also of importance and value for its invertebrate fauna. More specifically, the meadow is very well-used by a wide variety of butterfly species – the highlight amongst these being the grizzled skipper (Pyrgus malvae). This particular specimen has declined considerably over the last few decades due largely to the loss of favourable habitat. As a result, it is now a very uncommon species in central England and is listed within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as a Priority Species.

In 2004 a comprehensive survey of the meadow was carried out by the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, and during which many butterflies were observed to be using the site. Apart from the very important grizzled skipper, a species of high conservation concern as mentioned above, the species list for the site identified over a dozen different types of butterfly. This list includes small tortoiseshell (Aglais urticae), ringlet (Aphantopus hyperantus), small heath (Coenonympha pamphilus), brimstone (Gonepteryx rhamni), large skipper (Ochlodes venata) small skipper (Thymelicus sylvestris), comma (Polygonia c-album), peacock (Inachis io), speckled wood (Pararge aegeria), common blue (Polyommatus icarus), small copper (Lycaena phlaeas), meadow brown (Maniola jurtina), large white (Pieris brassicae) and small white (Pieris rapae).

Two species of day-flying moths were also identified during the survey; the cinnabar (Tyria jacobaeae) and the five-spot burnet (Zygaena trifolii).
Site Aim

To conserve existing and, where possible, enhance habitat and species typical of a lowland calcareous meadow.

Site Objectives

1) To maintain the current extent of at least Local Wildlife Site standard Neutral Grassland (Northamptonshire Biodiversity Action Plan target).

2) Reduce the frequency of coarse grasses.

3) Improve access opportunities and use of the site by local people.

4) Enhance the educational value of the site.

5) Investigate opportunities to increase the size of the LNR and enhance habitat and green infrastructure links: investigate opportunities to incorporate additional land to the north and east of the site, and improve connectivity through green corridors along the existing disused railway line/pocket park, extending east to the King’s Cliffe Banks SSSI.

Site Management

Species rich grassland is reliant upon appropriate management to stop it becoming overgrown with scrub or coarse grasses. There appears to have been little scrub encroachment at King’s Cliffe Meadow, although a build up of dead material and an increase of coarse grasses since previous surveys has been observed which will lead to a gradual decrease in flowering plants.

Ideally the site should be managed through a low intensity grazing regime by sheep or cattle in the spring and autumn. This would reduce the frequency of coarser grasses and prevent too much scrub encroachment. Grazing would be preferable to mowing as this would retain the structure of the grassland, and in particular the anthills, as well as having a lower disturbance impact on invertebrates. It is expected that the implementation of a suitable grazing regime would be sufficient to maintain the wildlife interest of the grassland aspects of the site.

The number of grazing animals would depend on the length of the grazing period. It is suggested that 2 or 3 young cows would be suitable. It may be necessary to reduce the grazing in the summer months i.e. May-July to allow wildflowers to flower and set seed. The impact of grazing on the site should be monitored and the levels and timings of grazing adjusted accordingly.

Some scrub clearance will be necessary where it has started to encroach upon the grassland. Scrub should also be cleared along the north, west and
east boundaries to create a scalloped boundary, therefore creating an increased scrub-grass boundary which is an important habitat to butterflies.

Some of the larger areas of scrub, particularly along the west boundary would benefit from rotational coppicing in order to create a differing age range and structure of scrub – younger scrub being of benefit to many nesting birds. This would also allow more light to reach the floor and improve the flora in this area.

Subject to resources, ongoing monitoring of the site should be undertaken on an annual basis to assess the impact of any management work and inform and update the management plan. This should ideally consist of a general habitat assessment and preferably also some quadrat surveys.

Management Operations

1) Investigate funding opportunities to facilitate the ongoing management and maintenance of the site.

2) Graze with cows or sheep in spring and autumn with reduced grazing during the summer months.

3) Cut back scrub where encroaching grassland.

4) Rotational coppicing of larger areas of scrub (western boundary).

5) Erect suitable signage providing details of the LNR and its management, and also to highlight the presence of electric cattle fencing.

6) Formalise the existing informal footpath running along the southern boundary.

7) Organise guided educational tours of the site for local school children and the wider community.

8) Commission a full site survey to determine species present, and to compare with the baseline survey undertaken during the summer of 2004.

9) Regularly review the condition of trees present within the site.

10) Maintain the site under Health & Safety regulations.
## Management Operations Delivery Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Operation</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
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<td>1) Investigate funding opportunities to facilitate the ongoing management and maintenance of the site.</td>
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<td>2) Graze with cows or sheep in spring and autumn with reduced grazing during the summer months.</td>
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<td>3) Cut back scrub where encroaching grassland.</td>
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<td>4) Rotational coppicing of larger areas of scrub (western boundary).</td>
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<td>5) Erect suitable signage to provide details of the LNR.</td>
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<td>6) Formalise the existing informal footpath running along the southern boundary.</td>
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<td>7) Organise guided educational tours of the site for local school children and the wider community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9) Regularly review the condition of trees present within the site.</td>
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<td>10) Maintain the site under Health &amp; Safety regulations.</td>
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