

## WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

**TO :** LEISURE COMMITTEE - 11<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2000

**SUBJECT :** LEAM VALLEY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE - PROPOSED  
WET LAND HABITAT CREATION PROJECT

**FROM :** HEAD OF LEISURE AND AMENITIES

### **1 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To seek Members' views about a proposed environmental enhancement scheme of part of the Leam Valley Local Nature Reserve, by creating a mosaic of wet land habitats, within the flood plain of the River Leam.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 A report was presented to the Recreation and Amenities Committee on 22nd November 1993 on the management of Local Nature Reserves. Three of the council's public open spaces are Local Nature Reserves and it was proposed to enter into partnership with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, whereby they would manage the sites in partnership with the district council. The sites at that time were Crackley Wood, Kenilworth, Kenilworth Common and Welches Meadow, Leamington Spa.
- 2.2 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are sites which are managed so people can enjoy and learn about wildlife. Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended) local authorities have the power to declare LNRs, usually on their own land, following consultation with English Nature (formally the Nature Conservancy Council). Over 200 LNRs have been declared in England. The Local Nature Reserve designation gives strong protection from built development, and may attract grants towards managing and promoting the site. These three sites were declared Local Nature Reserves in December 1991. The draft management plans followed some 12 months later.
- 2.3 The new partnership with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust was formed and part of that agreement was that your officers were keen to declare other sites as LNRs. Knowle Hill, Kenilworth was already being partly managed by volunteers as a butterfly reserve and the Trust at that point were looking at some proposals for the Leam Valley which has since become a LNR and was designated on the 10th August 1999. The site to which this Committee item refers is only a small portion of the whole Leam Valley LNR and Welches Meadow, being 4.5 hectares.

### **3. Current Situation**

- 3.1 The Leam Valley LNR has the active support of a voluntary warden and a group of dedicated volunteers giving many hours of their time to the reserve to undertake habitat management with the public's on-going appreciation and commitment.
- 3.2 In 1999 Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and Warwick District Council entered the woodland areas of the LNR into the Woodland Grant Scheme agreement with the Forestry Commission to enable the improved management of the woodlands. The area proposed for the new wetland was not included.
- 3.3 A feasibility study for this proposal had been done and was funded by the Heritage

Lottery Fund and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. The HLF grant was part of the a nature reserves enhancement package covering 28 of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's reserves. The study involved hydrological, geological and soil surveys, together with consulting statutory and non-statutory organisations. The proposed project was found to be feasible.

#### **4. Proposal**

- 4.1 The aim of the proposal is to create a mosaic of wet land habitats in 4 hectares (10 acres) of the flood plain at the eastern end of the nature reserve (see Appendix 1) attracting valuable wildlife and providing an educational resource for the local community.
- 4.2 The wetland habitat creation project will involve the creation of several UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats including reed bed and wet woodland. The habitat mosaic will be suitable for Biodiversity Action Plan priority species such as European otter, water vole, reed bunting and wide range of wild fowl.
- 4.3 The proposed project includes the provision of a bird hide, a first for Warwick district, to enhance public enjoyment. The project also includes the election of two interpretation boards.
- 4.4 The project is designed to minimise the need for excavation of material from the site although we are still talking of removing in the region of 30,000 cubic metres of material. This material would be used to regrade and reshape the aeroplane field along the southern and western boundary. The area represents 33% of the woodland cover which will be lost by this proposal.
- 4.5 The project will require the permissive footpath to be realigned to leave part of the riverbank undisturbed, although 90% of the river bank throughout the local nature reserve will remain accessible. Subject to approval and the necessary funding, it is proposed to undertake the earth works during August to October 2000 and all plantings and habitat creation works finished by the end of 2001.
- 4.6 Members need to be aware that the project would involve the removal of a number of trees which were planted in 1981 as part of a woodland grant scheme. The trees are now well established (approximately 6 metres) although they currently need some arboricultural thinning to allow the woodland to establish. Members will need to assess between the relative merits of allowing this woodland to develop against the benefits of creating a wetlands area, and they may wish to view the site for themselves prior to the Leisure Committee. Members may also wish to note that the Forestry Commission would be a consultee if it was decided to take this proposal further.

#### **5. Key Issues**

- 5.1 The decision taken will contribute to the Environmental Strategy EN3 step 10.

#### **6. Resources**

- 6.1 Warwickshire Wildlife Trust has a grant for 75% of £32,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for this project, including the feasibility study. The Environmental Agency has shown its support to the project and is to fund a detailed design for the proposals. Warwick District Council is being asked to make a contribution of £5,000 to support the project. Warwickshire Wildlife Trust would also apply for Land Tax credit monies to

support the project.

## **7. Recommendation**

- 7.1 Members' views are requested on whether to retain the existing woodland or proceed with the proposed wetlands scheme.
- 7.2 If the Committee feels there is some merit in looking at the proposals further, Members are asked to agree to a public consultation exercise with a report back to this Committee.

**Nigel Bishop**  
**Parks, Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager**

Background Papers : Previous committee reports, details of the Leam Valley Local Nature Reserve, agreements with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

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Areas Affected : all