

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee Epping Forest and Commons Committee	For Decision 10 Dec 2018 14 Jan 2018
<b>Subject:</b> Proposed NNR status for the Coulsdon Commons and Happy Valley	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> The Superintendent of The Commons	<b>For Decision</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The Director of Open Spaces and Superintendent have attended meetings with Natural England and the London Borough of Croydon, to discuss the potential for the City's Coulsdon Commons and the London Borough's Happy Valley to be declared a National Nature Reserve.</p> <p>At the most recent meeting officers from all parties agreed to seek Member's opinion and potential to commence the formal 'declaration process'.</p> <p><b>Recommendation(s)</b></p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Authorise Officers to progress the matter with Natural England and The London Borough of Croydon so that a formal proposal can be developed and reported to this Committee by May 2019.</li> </ol>	

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are a Natural England designation that reflects the recreational and conservation value of important sites across England. NNRs are recognised as being 'the crown jewels of England's natural heritage'. There are currently 224 NNRs in England, covering 360 square miles (0.7% of England)
2. Two of the City's Open Spaces already have NNR status, both are within The Commons Division namely, Burnham Beeches NNR (declared 1992) and Ashted Common NNR (declared 1995).
3. Natural England produced a new NNR strategy in 2017 that encourages the consideration of additional NNR's across England that meet their strategic criteria i.e. **(Appendix 1)**

## Current Position

4. The Coulsdon Commons, consisting of Kenley Common, Coulsdon Common, Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown are high quality open spaces containing many nationally rare habitats and species. They border the Happy Valley and other land, owned and managed by the London Borough of Croydon, that are of similar high value.
5. To realise its new strategy Natural England is seeking to declare a host of new NNR's across England, a process that has been largely dormant since the mid 1990's. The City's Coulsdon Commons and Happy Valley are high on NE's list of potential NNRs.
6. A map of the potential NNR boundary is shown as **Map 1**. It consists of some 417 hectares of land of which approx. 36% is designated by Natural England as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There is potential to further enlarge the area covered by the NNR at a later date should that be required
7. Your Superintendent and Head Ranger met with Natural England in January 2018. It was agreed to consider the matter further with Officers of the London Borough of Croydon. London Borough of Croydon was consulting at the time on the future of Happy Valley and associated open spaces and the meeting explored if the Borough was sympathetic to the idea of closer working and enhanced designation.
8. A second meeting of officers took place in October 2018 with Natural England, The London Borough of Croydon and the City of London Director of Open Spaces, Superintendent and Head Ranger in attendance.
9. From that meeting it became clear that there was a synergy and willingness between Officers of all three organisations to manage the differing land ownerships under a single NNR title.
10. It was recognised that NNR status across ownership boundaries would present partnership opportunities that could bring benefit to the long-term management of the Coulsdon Commons and Happy Valley whilst providing a significant contribution to the Government's strategic desire to protect England's most precious natural assets.
11. The declaration of land as a NNR not only recognises the high recreation and conservation value of the site but the high standards of management expertise required to maintain that value. The NNR declaration would be a high profile opportunity to the City to celebrate the importance of the Commons to local people and the conservation work being undertaken.
12. Key strengths of NNR status include:
  - a. Increases collaboration between landowners.
  - b. Enhance profile of the owning bodies and managers.
  - c. Recognised as places of excellence where people can engage with nature.

- d. High standards of biodiversity and geodiversity where an abundance of variety of wildlife can be found.
- e. Extensive environmental monitoring and research opportunities.
- f. Enables the City and the London Borough of Croydon to demonstrate their support for the Government's strategic desire to use NNRs to galvanise landscape-scale conservation – the Lawton principle.
- g. Higher profile to attract environmental grants.

## Proposals

- 13. Discussions are at a very early stage so it is proposed that:
  - a. Officers continue to engage with Natural England and the London Borough of Croydon to further develop the NNR concept so that formal proposals can be brought to this committee for approval by May 2019.

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 14. The recommendations of this report supports the Corporate Plan with particular reference to the following aims:
  - a. Contribute to a flourishing society**
    - i. People enjoy good health and wellbeing
    - ii. Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need
  - b. Shape Outstanding Environments**
    - i. We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration.
    - ii. We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.
    - iii. Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained

And supports the Open Spaces Business Plan as follows:

- a. Open Spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible.**
  - i. Our open spaces, heritage and cultural assets are protected, conserved and enhanced
  - ii. London has clean air and mitigates flood risk and climate change
  - iii. Our spaces are accessible, inclusive and safe
  - iv. Our habitats are flourishing, biodiverse and resilient to change.
- b. Spaces enrich people's lives.**
  - i. People enjoy good health and well being
  - ii. Nature, heritage and place are valued and understood
  - iii. People feel welcome and included
  - iv. People discover, learn and develop
- c. Business practices are responsible and sustainable.**
  - i. Our practices are financially, socially and environmentally sustainable
  - ii. London's natural capital and heritage assets are enhanced through our leadership, influence, investment, collaboration and innovation

## **Implications**

15. Experience at Burnham Beeches and Ashted Common indicates that NNR status need not place an additional funding burden on the City. Indeed the status can very usefully attract additional funding, particularly towards the cost of research and monitoring. It can also raise the land's profile for grants to fund conservation and recreation objectives.
16. The proposal provides opportunities to build closer working partnerships with the London Borough of Croydon and perhaps other local landowners to develop shared management plans, objectives and projects with the prospect of making more efficient use of the resources available.
17. NNR status does not bring greater legal protection (or management obligation) to the land but it does accord high reputational value to NNR landowners and gives greater weight to environmental protection issues as part of the Local Authority's Local Plan.
18. Natural England indicate that the designation process if commenced in May 2019 could be completed by the end of that year.

## **Conclusion**

19. NNR status provides enhanced reputational value on the owners of the land and their management of the natural environment and would demonstrate the City's commitment to the Governments strategic aim to create landscape scale conservation projects.
20. Officers of the City of London, London Borough of Croydon and Natural England, recognise the value of designating the Coulsdon Commons and, Happy Valley as a National Nature Reserve and seek authority to develop proposals for approval by this committee that may lead to formal designation in 2019.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1.** Natural England's NNR Strategy

**Map 1.** Potential NNR boundary, SSSI status and ownership.

## **Background papers**

None

## **Andy Barnard**

Superintendent. The Commons

T: 07850 764592

E: [andy.barnard@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:andy.barnard@cityoflondon.gov.uk)