

COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE
155th MEETING
AFBI HILLSBOROUGH
23rd MARCH 2015

Present:

Dr H Kirkpatrick - Chair
Ms J Goldring – Deputy Chair
Dr A Cooper
Mrs P Davidson
Dr S McCabe
Mr O Murnion (Item 1-5.3 6 - 13)
Prof J Orford
Prof. H Platt

In Attendance:

Mrs H Anderson - NIEA
Ms H Thompson – NIEA (Item 3)
Mr M Turley – Carrickfergus Council (Item 3)
Ms A Diver – Carrickfergus Council (Item 3)
Mr P Rice Secretariat
Mr P Anketell Secretariat

1. APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

Apologies were received from Prof S Christie, Mrs E Smyth, and Mr S Kelly.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair asked members if they had any declarations of interests in relation to the agenda items. Mr Murnion declared a conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 9 CNCC Working Programme, as one of the members' reports was from the TB Strategic Partnership Group. Mr Murnion reported that he was the Chair of the National Beef Association and had served in that capacity on the DARD TB Stakeholder Group. No other conflicts of interest were declared.

3. LOCAL NATURE RESERVE CONSULTATION (Ms Thompson NIEA, Mr M Turley, and Ms A Diver – Carrickfergus Council)

3.1 The Chair welcomed Ms Thompson from NIEA along with Mr Turley and Ms Diver from Carrickfergus Council.

3.2 Ms Thompson delivered a PowerPoint presentation with hardcopy circulated for members. Additional information was provided by Mr Turley (Bio-diversity Officer). Ms Thompson reported that a proposal to declare the Amphitheatre Mill Ponds as an LNR had been agreed by Carrickfergus Borough Council's Parks, Countryside and Amenities Sub-Committee on 6th February 2015. The Council now wished to consult with CNCC to seek its endorsement of the proposal to declare the Amphitheatre Mill Ponds, Carrickfergus as a Local Nature Reserve.

3.3 The proposed LNR is a 3.7 hectare Council-owned site, adjacent to Carrickfergus Amphitheatre Wellbeing Centre (Leisure Centre) and Taylor's Avenue sports pitches, on the periphery of the town centre, Irish Grid Reference IJ415 879. The main features of the site were the two former mill ponds currently managed as a wildfowl refuge creating an oasis for wildlife in

the urban area. The Sullatober River flows through the site forming an important wildlife corridor. The site forms part of a significant green corridor within the urban area, linking the coast with the open countryside providing an attractive backdrop to the surrounding built up area, as well as being an important amenity and biodiversity resource.

3.4 The purpose of declaring the Amphitheatre Mill Ponds, Carrickfergus as a LNR is to highlight the primary land use as being biodiversity conservation, while encouraging the continued public access and appropriate use as a recreational and educational resource.

3.5 This proposal is in line with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Mid and East Antrim which was formally launched in December 2013. The three objectives to be actioned through this LBAP are to:

- Help conserve habitats and species;
- Raise awareness of local biodiversity; and
- Involve people in biodiversity projects and develop partnerships.

Carrickfergus Borough Council is of the opinion that LNR declaration will highlight the status of this site as an area of nature conservation importance locally while demonstrating Council's commitment to conserving and enhancing biodiversity throughout the District and to the protection of urban open space and access to outdoor recreation for the community.

3.6 Ms Thompson reported that details of the habitats, plant, bird and invertebrate species found on the site were listed in the Surveys attached to the back of the hardcopy report. In summary, the site includes the open water habitat of the ponds with their wetland fringe, open grassland, scrub, woodland and river habitats with a good range of flora and fauna species for the size of the area. Long established woodland on the site largely occurring along the Sullatober River comprises a canopy of Alder, Grey Willow, Hawthorn and Ash with a shrub layer of blackthorn, brambles, nettles and Ivy. The woodland floor includes typical woodland ground flora such as Wild Garlic and Fern. North Road Cemetery, bounding the site to the west has a perimeter of mature trees of mainly Beech with some Oak, Sycamore and Scots Pine and remnant hawthorn hedgerow. Scrub is largely found around the railway embankment. Recent plantings have occurred around the site over the last ten years including a stand of Lime, standard trees and native tree whips.

3.7 The grassland on the site is a mix of regularly mown grass particularly close to path edges and areas of rough grass of common grass species such as Yorkshire Fog and Meadow Foxtail with perennials such as Ribwort Plantain, Broad-leaved Dock, and Creeping Jenny.

3.8 The ponds are fringed with typical wetland species including Reed-mace, Great Willow-herb, and Yellow Flag Iris. An invertebrate survey of the ponds in 2013 identified largely common invertebrate species typical of marshy stream margins. Of particular note was the occurrence of the Lake Orb Mussel which is rare in Ireland.

3.9 The site is popular for birds with a total of 40 species recorded over the survey period. Wildfowl such as Mallard and Greylag Goose are breeding on the site. Feeding waders include Oystercatcher and Snipe. Swift, Swallow and House Martins are frequently seen feeding above the ponds. Kingfishers have been spotted feeding along the river. A wide variety of woodland and garden birds also occur.

3.10 Specific mammal and amphibian surveys have not been carried out however within a site such as this a variety of common mammal and amphibian species are likely to occur.

3.11 The proposed LNR is a very accessible site close to the town centre and linked to a wider network of open space. It is within easy walking distance of a number of residential neighbourhoods. It is positioned adjacent to the town's leisure centre and Taylors Avenue sports pitches and associated parking facilities. The surfaced paths are ideal for all users including people with disabilities. A number of schools and community groups are within easy walking distance from the Mill Ponds making it a valuable outdoor educational resource. Events have been organised by Council staff to raise environmental awareness and highlight the importance of biodiversity. Events have included a mini beast hunt as part of the national 'Love Parks' week, pond dipping, tree and hedgerow planting during National Tree Week and the Big Butterfly Hunt. (Appendix 3: Community Event Photos)

3.12 The Carrickfergus College team of the 'Economical Environmentalists' won the recent AES Eco-Challenge Competition. They prepared a project proposal and secured funding of £4000 to develop a project in partnership with the council to raise the profile of biodiversity in the Mill Pond area. A number of other community groups have also established partnerships with the council and other interested parties with the aim of regenerating the neighbourhood and improving connectivity and engagement in activities related to health, education and community cohesion. The Council is also committed to increasing opportunities for local community and wider volunteer involvement in management of their green spaces. LNR declaration will strengthen the hand of the biodiversity officer and park staff with their ongoing work to engage the local community in conservation & environmental initiatives.

3.13 The Council has carried out preliminary work to develop a management plan for the proposed LNR site with the objectives of safeguarding and enhancing the existing biodiversity value of the site. In preparation the Council commissioned two flora and fauna surveys. Ms Thompson suggested that she could send the full report to Secretariat for circulation to members.

Action: - Full report to be sent to Secretariat for circulation.

NIEA

3.14 Mr Turley reported that a problem with Japanese knotweed is being actioned.

3.15 Carrickfergus Borough Council, through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency sought the endorsement of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) for its proposal to declare The Mill Ponds, Carrickfergus as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), under Article 22 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

3.16 Members made a number of comments on the presentation. It was suggested that interpretive panels could be erected to tell the earth science story, the mowed area could be left unmown and that any management plan for the site should consider the woodland component as part of the general management plan. Members also suggested that an outline management plan should be included with the documentation submitted to CNCC and that it would be appropriate for the scientific names to be used in the documentation that CNCC received given the background of Members. It was noted that most LNRs, particularly in urban environments, do not easily fit into a standard category of habitat and therefore it is important to have an audit of what is present and the likely trajectory of change over the next decade or so. Site record keeping was vital so that information could be retained even if staff dealing with such sites moved on to other posts and were replaced. Members were in agreement that this site was suitable as a LNR.

3.17 The Chair noted that CNCC would be interested in seeing the management plan and would be willing to provide some feedback on it. The site clearly had a lot of potential and Council's comments were directed towards improving its value for wildlife and local people.

3.18 There was some discussion about the format of LNR documentation and while Ms. Thompson had made use of a previously employed format Members wondered if it would be useful to make some changes. It was suggested that future LNR presentations should include an outline management plan as the ASSI declarations do. The Chair suggested that bullet points could be used to highlight issues that may occur. It was agreed that Members should send any further ideas to the Chair to be collated.

Action: - Members to send any further suggestions to the Chair or to Secretariat so they can be collated for Ms. Thompson.

Members

3.19 CNCC endorsed the proposal to declare the Amphitheatre Mill Ponds as an LNR.

4. MOORSIDE NEW NUCLEAR BUILD: CONSULTATION PROCESS

4.1 The Chair reported that she had requested Secretariat to circulate the consultation to the Marine and Coastal Working Group and was seeking their initial views in relation to potential impacts, how serious these might be and what, in their opinion, CNCC could contribute or achieve by involvement in the process.

The Chair would then draft a reply to the consultant in the light of these.

4.2 It was agreed that Prof. Platt would take the lead on drafting a response, with contributions from identified Members. The Deputy Chair would check the form of words before the draft would be sent to the Chair.

Action: - Prof. Platt to take the lead and action comments from contributing Members. The Deputy Chair is to then look over the draft and Chair to then send to the consultants.

CNCC

5. MEMBERS' REPORTS

5.1 Hardcopy of the members' reports had been circulated to members.

5.2 Professor Orford reported on the Marine Conservation Zone workshop he attended for CNCC (MWG). CNCC will have to consider the designation of the final set of proposed MCZs at some point in late 2015/early 2016. Marine Division (MD) organised this day as their 3rd consultation on MCZ development. They have held 2 other meetings as part of their stakeholder consultation into the defining characteristics to be used in setting out proposed Marine Conservation Zones (pMCZ) within NI territorial waters. This meeting brought forward the initial 4 sites now selected (Rathlin; Red Bay; Outer Belfast Lough; and Carlingford Lough) based on the characteristic criteria selected (species; habitats; geol/geomorphology) as well as a preliminary outline of the management requirements. A number of other proposed sites have been held up by consideration of other issues, but may be brought into the list of pMCZ at a later stage (Foyle; Maidens; Outer Ards; Dundrum Bay). Further information (maps and details) of the 4 selected sites can be found at MD's website: <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/mcz-designation.htm> there. After considering the stakeholders comments arising from this 3rd meeting, MD anticipate a formal consultation starting in December 2015 with MD discussing the draft consultation documents with CNCC MCWG before that.

5.3 Mr O Murnion left the meeting at this point.

5.4 The Chair and Mr. Upton had met with the TB Strategic Partnership Group. CNCC were the last of a number of groups and organisations they met with that day. The group were clearly seeking to map out the framework of legal and other constraints within which they could propose solutions. The role of the Bern Convention was raised in the meeting. The Chair had also been asked whether Joint Committee of JNCC had received any paper on the topic. The Chair had pointed out to the group that a new Deputy Chair and Members were being appointed and therefore a) the new Council needed to be in place and b) it would need to consider the science behind any future proposals on how TB should be tackled before responding with a formal CNCC view to anything they proposed. However the Chair stressed CNCC wished to engage positively with the process and agreed to raise the issue at the first meeting of the new Council in late March. CNCC itself has a particular role as a Statutory Advisory

Council to DOE. There was also a need to distinguish between the science-based issues on tackling a disease and the implications of that for other species and the ethical questions surrounding animal welfare matters.

5.5 Ms Anderson reported that Dr. Michael Meharg and Declan Looney from NIEA are taking the lead on this issue and suggested a presentation from them could be given at a later meeting of CNCC.

Action: - Ms Anderson to contact Mr Looney and Mr Meharg for an update with a possible presentation for CNCC.

5.13 Mrs Davidson reported that David Bullock from the National Trust and their national representative on TB had been asked about all aspects of the evidence based/science based information.

5.14 The Chair stated that the CNCC response to the inquiry was required to be 500 words or less.

Mr O Murnion rejoined the meeting at this point.

6. MATTERS ARISING

5.1 Re – Wilding (5.5.18) July meeting Chair to circulate points to members for consideration. Chair met with Prof. Rotherham before JNCC meeting on 17th September. Chair circulated points to members for consideration. Chair suggested an ad hoc meeting to explore strategic issues further. This matter was ongoing.

4.6 Chair to write to Forest Service highlighting the need to continue to plant Ash (**para 7.4**) July meeting. Chair reported this item is ongoing. Deputy Chair suggested CNCC write to Malcolm Beattie Chief Executive. This matter was to be revisited after the presentation on tree disease scheduled for the May meeting.

4.8 Chair to write letter in relation to the coastline (**para 7.7.4**). This refers in fact to the proposed further publicity in relation to the presentations at the Shoreline Management conference. Prof. Christie has approached NIEL about this. Mrs Davidson reported that the National Trust is active in this area of work (Shifting Shores). This matter was ongoing.

7. MINUTES OF THE 154th MEETING

The Chair reported that the minutes from the previous meeting were still in draft form and this was due to working commitments. The minutes would be amended and signed at the May meeting.

8. CNCC WORKING PROGRAMME

8.1 Professor Platt reported he would be attending a JNCC MPA sub group meeting in London on the 22 April.

8.2 Dr Cooper kindly agreed to attend an Erne Landscape Partnership (ELP) meeting on behalf of CNCC.

Action: - Secretariat to send Dr Cooper details of the ELP meeting.

Secretariat

9. CNCC WORKING GROUP REPORTS:

None

10. GENERAL INFORMATION

- Events List
- Consultations Completed: All-Ireland Pollination Plan

11. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

13.1 CNCC has been consulted as part of the HRA process of the Moorside Nuclear New Build. The consultants appointed to undertake the process are looking for key issues in relation to the effects of the proposed development on European Sites. Ramsar sites are also included. The Chair has read the document and birds, marine mammals; migratory fish and the return of cooling water to the sea are highlighted matters. The deadline is 27th March 2015.

Action: It was agreed that Prof. Platt would take the lead on developing a response, drawing on expertise within the Marine Working Group.

13.2 The Chair participated in the JNCC Strategic sub-group meeting on 5th March by teleconference. A paper from this work was laid before the Joint Committee at its meeting on 19th March in Aberdeen.

13.3 The Chair attended the JNCC meeting in Aberdeen on 18th and 19th March. Items under consideration were Risk Management in JNCC and the business Plan for 2015-2016. Formal Ministerial sign-off on the Business plan will be after the election. The Joint Committee also considered a paper on strategic evidence requirements for the living environment, looking at how monitoring and provision of evidence on the living environment might be delivered in a more strategic and efficient manner in future.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

12.1 Professor Platt briefed members on the EU REFIT examination of the Nature Directives. The process involves a consultation process at the MS level ie DEFRA is leading, but given the upcoming public consultation he wondered if this should preclude CNCC making an input via the public consultation process if Council is minded to do so.

Action: - Professor Platt to send a link to Secretariat for circulation.

Secretariat

**13. Date of the next meeting – 8th May
Venue Crawfordsburn Country Park**