

North Dudley Area Committee – 30th January 2008

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2008-2012

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Committee support to publish the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2008-2012 Revision and to seek resources to assist with the implementation of its actions.

Background

2. Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve is a classic geological site of exceptional importance, being one of the most notable geological locations in the British Isles. It is famous globally for the large numbers of beautifully preserved Silurian fossils that the site has yielded, collections of which can be found in museums throughout the world. At least 600 fossil species are known from the limestone rocks at Wren's Nest, and Dudley is quoted as the type locality for many of these.
3. In recognition of its geological significance, Wren's Nest was declared as a National Nature Reserve in 1956 and re-notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1990. Certain adjacent areas were designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1994 on account of their associated nature conservation value.
4. Wren's Nest played an important part in the very development of the Black Country. The rocks had been exploited for centuries as a source of building stone and for agricultural fertiliser. However, up to 20,000 tons of limestone were removed annually during the height of the Industrial Revolution, to act as a flux in the many local blast furnaces. This activity ceased in 1924, leaving the hills honeycombed with great quarries and caverns. However, without such interference, the site would be poorly exposed and not so well known. Indeed, it was during this period that many of the best fossils were found, the most famous being the Trilobites, one of which became nicknamed the 'Dudley Bug' and once featured on the town's Coat of Arms.
5. Wren's Nest nature reserve now supports a diversity of rare flora and fauna as well as its features of geological and local archaeological interest. The occurrence of species-rich limestone grassland and Ash-Elm woodland communities are uncommon in the West Midlands region. Several county rarities are present, including Autumn Gentian, Small Scabious, Common Gromwell and Bee Orchid. The area is also important as a hibernation site for seven protected species of native bats, whilst a colony of the locally uncommon White-letter Hairstreak butterfly is also present.

6. A Warden Service has managed Wren's Nest since 1984. Much work has been undertaken on habitat management, access and boundary improvements, interpretation provision and raising awareness of the value of Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve. Effective management requires both planning and resources. Grants are available from a variety of sources, a condition for most applications being that a management plan is in place.

7. **The Management Plan**

Wren's Nest is managed through a Nature Reserve Agreement between the Council and English Nature (now Natural England). This agreement includes that a joint management plan be prepared; the first was produced in 1988, with subsequent revisions in 1995 and 2000. Council and English Nature / Natural England staff prepared the original plan and each subsequent revision.

8. The 2008 Revision lists nine Management Objectives:

- To maintain the features of geological interest on the NNR in favourable condition.
- To maintain the hibernation roosts in a condition that is suitable for wintering bats.
- To continue to manage and/or seek to reintroduce management that will maintain in favourable condition and further enhance limestone and neutral grasslands at Wren's Nest NNR and LNR.
- To maintain woodland communities and their associated flora and fauna in favourable condition.
- To maintain areas of open water, fishing pools and wildlife ponds, for the benefit of wildlife and people. To improve access to and promote responsible recreational use of pools, whilst maintaining exclusion zones for nesting waterfowl.
- To conserve the features of landscape and historical importance, including the Seven Sisters caverns, lime kilns, lime pyes and Step Shaft Cavern, all of which form part of the Scheduled Monument.
- To encourage local community interest in the reserve and facilitate community involvement in site management through the Friends group.
- To continue to provide and promote public access on the reserve, facilitate on-site research and further develop the educational service and on-site interpretation.
- To provide and maintain an on-site reserve base, including warden's office, mess room, workshop and vehicular/machinery storage and to maintain any other estate structures.

9. A project register identifies individual projects to meet each of the objectives, and a five year action plan timetables the various activities in priority order.

10. **Public Consultation**

Preparation of the Revised Management Plan included public consultation in the form of news releases and information sheets inviting input, with opportunities to view a draft at public libraries and Council offices. Copies were also circulated to a number of specialist organisations such as English Heritage.

Finance

11. The costs of publishing and implementing the management plan would be met through existing DUE budgets supported by external funding from relevant grant schemes as appropriate.

Law

12. Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, enables Natural England to designate any area of land as being of special scientific interest by reason of any of its flora, fauna or geological or physiological features.

Section 35 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, gives Natural England the power to declare National Nature Reserves on land that is of national importance.

Section 16 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, enables a local authority and Natural England to enter into an agreement to manage land as a nature reserve.

Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, enables a local authority to provide or secure the provision of nature reserves on any land in their area as to which it appears to the local authority expedient that it should be managed as a nature reserve.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006, requires every public authority, in exercising its functions, to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

Section 11 of the Countryside Act, 1968, requires that the Council in the exercise of its functions relating to land under any enactment must have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside; it extends to both urban and rural areas.

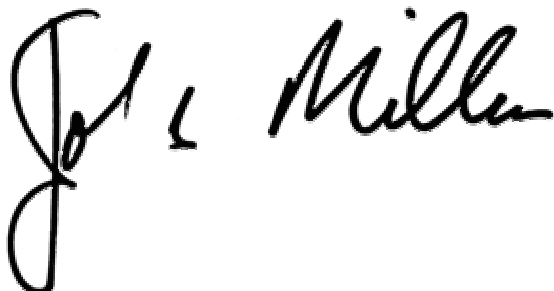
Section 111 of the Local Government Act, 1972, authorises the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive to, or incidental to the discharge of any of its functions.

Equality Impact

13. This report takes into account the Council's policy on Equal Opportunities. Opportunities will be created for local people and volunteers to actively participate in the reserve's management. Similarly, wherever possible access improvements will take into consideration the needs of disabled persons.

Recommendations

14.
 - That the Area Committee supports the publication of the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2008-2012 Revision and that the Cabinet Member for Leisure be requested to approve the plan.
 - That the Council seek appropriate funding sources to assist with the implementation of the Management Plan's actions.



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List of Background Papers

Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2008-2012 Revision