

# REPORT TO PROVIDE INFORMATION IN RELATION TO SCRAPTOFT LNR

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**CONTENTS**

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- 1. **SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF REPORT .....2**
- 2. **LEGAL AND PLANNING STATUS OF LOCAL NATURE RESERVES.....3**
- 3. **LEGAL AND PLANNING STATUS OF SCRAPTOFT LNR .....4**
- 4. **SUMMARY OF ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS AT SCRAPTOFT LNR .....6**
- 5. **DE-DECLARING SCRAPTOFT LNR .....9**
- 6. **REFERENCES.....10**
- 7. **APPENDIX 1: EDITED VERSION OF THE MINUTES - 9TH OCTOBER 2002 .....11**
- 8. **APPENDIX 2: EDITED VERSION OF THE MINUTES - 2002 13TH NOVEMBER 2002 .....12**
- 9. **APPENDIX 3: COPY OF PAPER NOS 3 (TO INFORM MEETING ON 9TH OCTOBER 2002.....13**

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## 1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

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- 1.1. This report reviews the existing ecological evidence to inform the de-declaring process of Scraptoft Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- 1.2. This review only considers 'material' matters associated with declaration and/or de-declaration of LNRs. Therefore, any matters that are not directly associated with LNRs are not considered. This includes any matter in relation to the Scraptoft Green Wedge, landscape character and amenity value of the land in Scraptoft LNR. The reasons for this are detailed in this report.
- 1.3. This report provides a summary of:
  - The legal and planning status associated with LNRs (in England);
  - The legal and planning status of Scraptoft LNR;
  - The ecological importance of Scraptoft LNR and how this may have changed since it was declared a LNR; and
  - The factors that should be consideration in the de-declaring process of Scraptoft LNR.

## 2. LEGAL AND PLANNING STATUS OF LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

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- 2.1. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended) gives local authorities the power to acquire, declare and manage nature reserves. The term 'Local Nature Reserve' (LNR) is not used in the Act but this has become the term in common usage for nature reserves managed by local authorities in accordance with the Act (Natural England, 2010).
- 2.2. Schedule 11 (12) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended), which replaced Section 15 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (Natural England, 2010), describes a 'nature reserve' as:
- Land managed solely for a conservation purpose; or
  - Land managed not only for a conservation purpose but also for a recreational purpose, if the management of the land for the recreational purpose does not compromise its management for the conservation purpose.
- 2.3. Land is managed for a conservation purpose if it is managed for:
- Providing, under suitable conditions and control, special opportunities for the study of, and research into, matters relating to the fauna and flora of Great Britain and the physical conditions in which they live, and for the study of geological and physiographical features of special interest in the area; or
  - Preserving flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features of special interest in the area or for both these purposes.
- 2.4. Land is managed for a recreational purpose if it is managed for the purpose of providing opportunities for the enjoyment of nature or for open-air recreation (Natural England, 2010).
- 2.5. Subsection 2A of Section 15 of The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended), states '*in subsection (2)(b) of the reference to preserving flora or fauna includes enabling or facilitating its recovery or increase.*' This indicates ecological potential of a site should also be considered when considering what the meaning of a 'nature reserve' is.
- 2.6. In a response by Natural England (NE) to Harborough District Council (HDC) on 14th February 2017 (NE ref: 206842), NE stated '*ultimately decisions regarding Local Nature Reserves rest with the Local Authority.*'
- 2.7. In general terms, unlike Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves (NNR), LNRs are only afforded protection via national and local planning policies.

### 3. LEGAL AND PLANNING STATUS OF SCRAPTOFT LNR

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#### *Declaration of Scraftoft LNR*

- 3.1. On the 9th October 2002, the minutes of HDC (an edited version of the minutes is provided in Appendix 1) considered the declaration of Scraftoft LNR (see discussion item 411). Specifically, the discussion point related to land at Beeby Road, Scraftoft. This discussion item was supported by Paper Nos 3 (provided in full in Appendix 3).
- 3.2. The site (i.e. land at Beeby Road) was recommended for LNR status because *'the site fulfils the requirement to become a Local Nature Reserve.'* The paper also states... *'its designation would also achieve on the key actions set out in the Scraftoft Green Wedge Management Plan.'*
- 3.3. Given that LNRs can only be designated for conservation and/or recreational purposes, the contribution this land parcel makes towards the 'Green Wedge' is not considered further in this report. Unfortunately, within the 'Key Facts' part of Briefing Note 3, most of the content relates to the Scraftoft Green Wedge and the landscape character of the site. Landscape character is also not a factor when considering the declaration of a LNR.
- 3.4. Paragraph 5.2 of Briefing Note 3 states, *'for a site to be designated as a LNR, the local authority must consider the site to be of special interest or value in their area and be certain that the site will be appropriately managed as a LNR.'* Paragraph 5.3 then states, *'it is considered that the proposed site is of special value due to the biodiversity potential of the land.'* The use of the term 'potential' in the report indicates the land at Beeby Road may not have been of 'special value' at the time of the LNR designation.
- 3.5. Paragraph 1.7 of Appendix B (of Briefing Note 3) is more explicit and states the purpose of formal declaration of Scraftoft LNR... *'is to establish... land managed for the purpose...of preserving flora, fauna or geological or physiological features of special interest in the area.'*
- 3.6. During the public consultation process, at the time of declaration, Paper Nos 3 reveals that residents expressed concern about the formal use of the land by the public. Paragraph 7.2 of Paper Nos 3 indicates these concerns were resolved by, *'revising the proposals to no longer provide for formal access onto this land.'* Whilst it was recognised the site was used for the *'quiet enjoyment and appreciation of nature,'* the lack of formal access is partially contrary to 'recreational purposes' and is contrary to many of the objectives set out in 'Local Nature Reserves in England: A guide to their selection and declaration (Natural England, 2010).'
- 3.7. A management plan for Scraftoft LNR was provided in Paper Nos 3.
- 3.8. The minutes of the council meeting of HDC (on the 13th November 2002) reports that the motion to formally declare 'land at Beeby Road, Scraftoft' as a LNR was carried. (An edited version of the minutes is provided in Appendix 2).
- 3.9. The land at Scraftoft LNR is owned by Leicester City Council (LCC) and NE indicate the land is managed by their Parks and Greenspace Department (Natural England, 2003).

#### *Planning Status of Scraftoft LNR*

- 3.10. In an e-mail response from NE to HDC dated 14th February 2017 (NE ref: 206842), NE summarised how the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises LNRs in national planning policy. Of relevance is paragraph 113, which states... *'local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geo-*

*diversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.'* In this context, an LNR is a locally designated site.

- 3.11. The Harborough District Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2006-2028 identifies Scraftoft LNR in paragraph 2.30. The policies of most relevance to Scraftoft LNR are:
- Policy CS1: Spatial Strategy for Harborough; and
  - Policy CS8: Protecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure;
- 3.12. Whilst the Harborough District Local Development Framework Core Strategy makes several references to the 'Green Wedge' and landscape character, these are beyond the scope of this document and are not of relevance to the declaration or de-declaration of Scraftoft LNR.
- 3.13. Scraftoft LNR is recognised in the Scraftoft Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2028 (Scraftoft Parish Council, undated), and specific reference is provided by Policy S11: Biodiversity.
- 3.14. The Scraftoft Neighbourhood Development Plan - Final Decision Statement was published by HDC on 11th March 2016. This confirms *'that planning applications in the Parish must be considered against the Scraftoft Neighbourhood Development Plan, as well as existing planning policy, such as the Harborough District Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance.'*

#### 4. SUMMARY OF ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS AT SCRAPTOFT LNR

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##### *Summary of Ecological Conditions in 2002*

- 4.1. Section 2 of Appendix B of Paper Nos 3 has been used as the main evidence source to establish the ecological importance / value of the site in 2002. However, some of the initial evidence base is potentially contradictory.
- 4.2. Appendix B indicates that Scraptoft LNR was predominately unimproved neutral grassland, which was managed by cattle grazing. The sward is described as '*not particularly species-rich...variable in quality due to past grazing regimes*'... and that ...'*some areas have been damaged by overgrazing and poaching.*'
- 4.3. Whilst Appendix B also states the site...'*does not appear to have experienced agricultural improvement,*'... that it '*supports many species that are characteristic of unimproved neutral grassland in lowland areas*' and that there were still '*...areas of herb-rich grassland*' – it still describes the diversity of (plant) species as being '*...fairly low.*' The plant species listed in Appendix B of Paper Nos 3 are not solely indicators of unimproved grassland, and they can also occur on semi-improved grass swards.
- 4.4. JNCC (2010) states:
- 'Most grasslands have been subjected to some degree of agricultural improvement by repeated grazing, mowing, fertilising, drainage or herbicide treatment. It is important to try to distinguish unimproved and semi-improved from improved grasslands. However, these grassland types form a continuum, so that it is not possible to define each with precision, especially as species critical for their definition are often only observable for a short season in the year. Agricultural improvement usually results in a decrease in the floristic diversity of the sward and dominance.'*
- ...and it also states:
- 'Unimproved grasslands are likely to be rare, especially in the lowlands. They may be rank and neglected, mown or grazed. They may have been treated with low levels of farmyard manure, but should not have had sufficient applications of fertiliser or herbicide, or have been so intensively grazed or drained, as to alter the sward composition significantly. Species diversity is often high, with species characteristic of the area and the soils and with a very low percentage of agricultural species. In cases of doubt, map as semi-improved and target note the need for further information.'*
- 4.5. Given the low species richness of the sward in 2002, given the apparent impacts of over-grazing and given the guidance detailed above provided by JNCC (2010), it is questionable whether the sward in 2002 should have been recorded as unimproved grassland. Instead it might have been more appropriate to map it as semi-improved grassland because of grazing impacts and low species diversity. However, given the lack of available and detailed notes relating to the sward composition in 2002, it is not possible to definitely state what the sward type was in 2002.
- 4.6. The initial report provided in Appendix B of Paper Nos 3 indicates the site supported broad leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), curled dock (*R. crispus*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), spear thistle (*C. vulgare*) and ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*). These plant species are listed on the Weeds Act 1959 (as amended) and ragwort is also addressed by the Ragwort Control Act 2003 (as amended). The grazing licence and associated land management is cited as the way these 'pernicious weeds' would be controlled. Without management, these plant species could detrimentally impact on the ecological value of the LNR.

- 4.7. Appendix B of Paper Nos 3 provides additional information about other on-site habitats, including information relating to scrub, hedges, pond, marsh and ditch habitats.

*Summary of Ecological Conditions in 2008*

- 4.8. WYG conducted a Phase 1 Habitat Survey on behalf of HDC in 2008 (WYG, 2008). This assessment supported the preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF), which replaced the existing Harborough Local Plan. This assessment examined habitats within Scraftoft LNR.
- 4.9. Section 7.4 of the WYG assessment identified areas of trees, scrub, mature hedgerow, improved grassland (not in section 7.4, but see page 67 and habitat plan), a pond and a ditch known as Scraftoft Brook. Scraftoft Brook was of 'Parish Importance' and was identified as a 'wildlife corridor.'

*Summary of Ecological Conditions in 2016*

- 4.10. DF Clark Bionomique Ltd conducted a site assessment on the 30th and 31st March 2016 (DF Clark, 2016a). An additional great crested newt survey of off-site ponds was conducted in spring/summer 2016 (DF Clark, 2016b).
- 4.11. The site assessment (DF Clark, 2016a) described the ecological value of the site as being '*primarily poor*.' The site was dominated by short, intensively grazed semi-improved grassland, with patches of dense scrub. This description is supported by the description of habitats provided by NE, which describes the areas of '*semi-improved grassland and mature hawthorn scrub*' (Natural England, 2013). Natural England also indicate that a pond had been created to increase the habitat diversity.
- 4.12. The great crested newt survey in 2016 recorded a breeding population of great crested newts in a pond more than 250m from the LNR. Therefore, any newts within this population are unlikely to occur on-site (English Nature 2001; English Nature, 2004). The survey also recorded one adult newt in a pond c.103m from the LNR.
- 4.13. Whilst the great crested newt survey was conducted in the recommended period (English Nature, 2001), no March or April survey visits were conducted (the first visit was on 2nd May 2016). Therefore, it is possible an early peak of animals may have been missed. Despite this, there is evidence that the risks of great crested newt presence in land 100m or more from a pond is less compared to distances less than 100m from ponds (English Nature, 2004). The presence of sticklebacks in the pond c.103m from the LNR is likely to reduce the long-term probability of population persistence in this pond (Oldham *et al.*, 2000).
- 4.14. Given the evidence above, it would indicate that the ecological value of the land has deteriorated over the past c.15 years because of over-grazing and a lack of sympathetic management. Alternatively, it could also indicate that the initial assessment incorrectly identified unimproved grassland.
- 4.15. Some ecological information relating to the LNR is also provided in the Scraftoft Neighbourhood Plan (Scraftoft Parish Council, undated). However, having reviewed some of the ecological information provided within the plan, less weight should be placed on it compared to the assessment conducted by WYG (2003) and DF Clark Bionomique (2016a; 2016b).
- 4.16. Correspondence with Tess Nelson and Matt Bills of HDC indicates that some of the actions detailed in the management plan (provided in Appendix C of Paper Nos 3) may not have been implemented. For example, £7,050 (see monies allocated for B1, B2, C1 and E1) was identified to fund hedge planting and information signs, which includes actions B1 and B2 to infill gaps in the hedgerows adjacent to the sports pitch and Beeby Road. However, on-line tool indicate that these boundaries are still gappy and suggests that these actions were not implemented.



- 4.17. Furthermore, there is evidence to indicate that HDC have not undertaken maintenance on Scraptoft LNR since 2002. It is unclear whether LCC or the party responsible for grazing the land have undertaken any land management on the LNR, other than the activities associated with grazing.

*Potential Ecological Value*

- 4.18. DF Clark Bionomique (2016a) indicate that the ecological value of Scraptoft LNR could be enhanced through sympathetic management and habitat creation. However, given the lack of sensitive conservation management to date, and the general funding constraints on local authorities in the existing fiscal environment, there is no reason to consider that either HDC or LCC are likely to be able to fund or implement sensitive conservation management in the future.
- 4.19. The land in and adjacent to Scraptoft LNR is being put forward as a strategic housing site by LCC (the existing landowner) and other site promoters (information taken from an e-mail from HDC to NE dated 24th January 2017). Residential housing could provide an opportunity, which would not otherwise be available, to fund sensitive conservation management to improve the ecological value of habitats within the existing site. It could also provide an opportunity to provide public access and an opportunity to manage the land for 'recreational purposes.'
- 4.20. Whilst consideration of opportunities associated with residential housing is beyond the scope of this document, it would be possible to use planning policy and the planning process to secure measures that would improve the ecological (and recreational) importance of the site.

## 5. DE-DECLARING SCRAPTOFT LNR

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- 5.1. Natural England (2010) indicates that if any part of an LNR needs to be de-declared, Natural England must be consulted. Section 19 (3) of the 1949 Act (as amended) specifically provides for this contingency. The document indicates that de-declaring *'should be pursued only as a matter of necessity.'*
- 5.2. HDC e-mailed NE on the 25th January 2017 and NE replied on 14th February 2017 (NE ref: 206842). The response to HDC made it clear that *'ultimately decisions regarding Local Nature Reserves rest with the Local Authority.'* Furthermore, the Natural England response clarified that...*'the key questions to address regarding de-declaration are the necessity and reasons for the de-declaration.'*
- 5.3. Natural England (2010) states:
- '... the 1949 Act sets out the procedures for declaration (and de-declaration) of nature reserves. Declaration establishes formal proof of the LNR and informs the public of the LNR's existence. The local authority makes a declaration that:*
- the land is subject to an agreement entered into with them or has been acquired and is held by the authority; and*
  - the land is being managed as a nature reserve.*
- If the agreement should end or the land to which the declaration relates ceases to be held by the local authority, it should make a declaration of this.'*
- 5.4. The evidence base indicates that the land within Scraftoft LNR is not being managed sensitively because it is being heavily overgrazed. Therefore, it is questionable whether the land is (or can be in the future) 'managed as a nature reserve.'
- 5.5. Furthermore, the evidence base indicates the ecological value of the site has deteriorated and that without a significant change in funding and/or management the land's ecological potential is unlikely to be realised.
- 5.6. The land owner (LCC) is currently promoting the site for housing.
- 5.7. Given that:
- The flora and fauna interests of the site have deteriorated since 2002, and it is questionable whether the site does support *'flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features of special interest in the area;'*
  - There is no formal access and consequently there are no *'special opportunities for the study of, and research into, matters relating to the fauna and flora of Great Britain;'*
  - The opportunities to realise the potential ecological value of the site are likely to be negligible;
  - The land is not managed for recreational purposes;
  - The existing landowner is promoting the land for housing; and
  - The land is not being managed as nature reserve.
- ... there are several factors / reasons for the de-declaration of Scraftoft LNR. HDC is responsible for making decisions relating to Scraftoft LNR.

## 6. REFERENCES

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- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2012). *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*.
- DF Clark Bionomique (2016a). Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of Scraftoft North, Leicestershire on behalf of Parker of Leicester Developments Limited. Reference DFCP 3788 DRAFT issued on 17th May 2016.
- DF Clark Bionomique (2016b). Great crested newt survey report of Scraftoft North, Leicestershire on behalf of Parker of Leicester Developments Limited. DFCP 3788 issued on 30th June 2016.
- English Nature (2001). *Great crested newt mitigation guidelines*.
- English Nature (2004). *An assessment of the efficiency of capture techniques and the value of different habitats for the great crested newt Triturus cristatus*. Research report no. 576.
- Harborough District Council (HDC)(2011). Harborough District Local Development Framework. Core Strategy 2006-2028.
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey - a Technique for Environmental Audit*. Revised print, JNCC, Peterborough.
- Natural England (2010). Local Nature Reserves in England: A guide to their selection and declaration.
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- Oldham, R.S., Keeble, J., Swan, M.J.S and Jeffcote, M (2000). *Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the great crested newt (Triturus cristatus)*. *Herpetological Journal*, **10**, 143-155.
- Scraftoft Parish Council (undated). Scraftoft Neighbourhood Plan: 2015-2028.
- WYG (2008). Harborough District Council: Phase 1 Habitat Survey. Issued on 19th December 2008.

## 7. APPENDIX 1: EDITED VERSION OF THE MINUTES - 9TH OCTOBER 2002

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### HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL: MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

held at the Coplow Centre, Billesdon, Leicestershire

9th October 2002: commencing at 4.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor Fort (Leader)

#### **411- DESIGNATION OF LOCAL NATURE RESERVE, SCRAPTOFT**

A request was made of the Executive to recommend to Council a proposal for land at Beeby Road, Scraptoft to be designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

The site fulfilled the necessary requirements to become a Local Nature Reserve. Its designation also achieved one of the key actions set out in the Scraptoft Green Wedge Management Plan.

The Management Plan set out a series of action points which sought to preserve and enhance the open character of the Green Wedge and to increase access opportunities from Scraptoft and Leicester City out into the surrounding countryside.

One of the proposed actions set out in the Management Plan related to the designation of land at Beeby Road, Scraptoft as a Local Nature Reserve. The landowners, Leicester City Council, had previously given agreement for the process to begin for designating the Local Nature Reserve status for this field.

Local Authorities may declare LNRs on land that is owned or leased by them or on land over which they have a formal nature reserve agreement.

A notice would be placed in the local press advising of the declaration of land at Scraptoft as an LNR, the funding for this could be met from existing budgets and a contribution from the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project.

Members welcomed this report and thanked the Principal Planning Officer for all the work that had been carried out in establishing this Local Nature Reserve.

**RECOMMENDED: that the Executive recommend to Council that land at Beeby Road, Scraptoft be formally designated as a Local Nature Reserve and that a declaration to this effect be executed under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.**

Reason:

In designating this land as a LNR it will preserve and enhance the appearance and biodiversity of the area.

## 8. APPENDIX 2: EDITED VERSION OF THE MINUTES - 2002 13TH NOVEMBER 2002

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HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL: MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING  
held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough

13th November 2002: commencing at 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor Mrs Jones (Chairman)

### **Minute 411 – Designation of Local Nature Reserve Scraptoft**

*“that land at Beeby Road, Scraptoft be formally designated as a Local Nature Reserve and that a declaration to this effect be executed under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949”*

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

**9. APPENDIX 3: COPY OF PAPER NOS 3 (TO INFORM MEETING ON 9TH OCTOBER 2002)**

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(see overleaf)

**PAPER NO.3**

**REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEETING OF 9<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2002**

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**Status:**            **Decision**  
**Title:**             **Designation of Local Nature Reserve, Scraptoft**  
**Originator:**      **Sarah Hunt – Principal Planning Officer**  
**Where from:**     **Not Applicable**  
**Where to next:**   **Full Council**

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1.     Purpose of the Report

1.1    To consider the proposal for land at Beeby Road, Scraptoft to be designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

**R 2     Recommendations:**

**2.1    To recommend to Council that land at Beeby Road, Scraptoft (as identified at Appendix B) be formally designated as a Local Nature Reserve and that a declaration to this effect be executed under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.**

3     Reasons for Recommendation

3.1    The site fulfils the necessary requirement to become a Local Nature Reserve. Its designation would also achieve one of the key actions set out in the Scraptoft Green Wedge Management Plan.

4     Key Facts

4.1    A Management Plan for land contained within the Scraptoft Green Wedge was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the Council on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2001, following a four-week period of public consultation.

4.2    The Management Plan sets out a series of action points which seek to preserve and enhance the open character of the Green Wedge and to increase access opportunities from Scraptoft and Leicester City out into the surrounding countryside. A summary of the Management Plan is attached at Appendix A ([and Map](#)).

4.3    One of the proposed actions set out in the Management Plan relates to the designation of land at Beeby Road, Scraptoft as a Local Nature Reserve. The landowners, Leicester City Council, have previously given agreement for the process to begin for designating Local Nature Reserve status for this field.

4.4 This land falls within Harborough District, but is owned by Leicester City Council (Property Department). The location of the site is shown hatched on the plan attached at Appendix B ([and Map](#)) together with background information on the site.

## 5 Local Nature Reserves (LNR's)

5.1 Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 gives local authorities the power to acquire, declare and manage local nature reserves. Unlike National Nature Reserves and SSSI's, the selection, declaration and management of Local Nature Reserves is a function of local authorities rather than of English Nature.

5.2 The purpose of designating the site as a LNR is to give a commitment to managing the land for the purpose of preserving the flora and fauna and features of special interest on this land. Designation of the land as a LNR will have an important part to play in biodiversity conservation and in improving the quality of the environment for local people. For a site to be designated as a LNR, the local authority must consider the site to be of special interest or value in their area and be certain that the site will be appropriately managed as a LNR.

5.3 Your officers have worked closely with officers from Leicester City Council and the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project in considering this site for LNR status. It is considered that the proposed site is of special value due to the biodiversity potential of the land. A Management Plan for the future management of the site has been agreed by the officers involved. A copy of the proposed Management Plan is attached at Appendix C.

## 6 LNR's in the Planning Framework

6.1 The proposed LNR falls within land defined as a Green Wedge under Policy EV/2 of the Local Plan. This Policy seeks to protect the open and undeveloped character of the green wedges and to refuse planning permission for development which would adversely affect that character.

6.2 Declaring a LNR gives a positive use to land and draws attention to the nature conservation interest of the land and to its amenity value.

6.3 The designation of land as a LNR demonstrates the Council's commitment to nature conservation and is an important contribution to achieving the goals of environmental sustainability and biodiversity.

## 7. Consultation

7.1 Consultation on the proposal to declare a LNR at Beeby Road, Scraftoft formed part of the public consultation exercise on the Scraftoft Green Wedge Management Plan which was carried out between 6<sup>th</sup> November – 4<sup>th</sup> December 2000.

7.2 The proposal for the designation of a LNR at Scraftoft was, in principle, strongly supported. A number of respondents expressed concern that existing wildlife would be disturbed by encouraging people onto this land. Others commented that they would prefer the land to be kept as it is at present. These concerns were resolved by revising the proposals to no longer provide for formal access onto this land. This revision was communicated to the respondents by the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project Officer. It is due to the existing



quality and special interest of the site and the fact that the site is used for the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of nature that it is considered suitable for such a designation. The designation does not imply any need to dramatically change the landscape, but will give effect to proposals to manage and enhance the landscape and wildlife habitat that already exist.

- 7.3 Prior to designation, under Section 21 of the 1949 Act, local authorities are required to formally consult with English Nature on the proposal. English Nature has recently confirmed that they fully support the proposal. A copy of the response from English Nature is available at [Appendix D](#).
- 7.4 A Public Notice, advising of the declaration of a LNR at Scraftoft will be placed in the Leicester Mercury and will state where copies of the Declaration and associated Plans are available for inspection.
- 7.5 Scraftoft Parish Council have also been advised of this Council's intention to proceed with designating the site a LNR.

## 8. Legal Issues

- 8.1 Local Authorities may declare LNRs on land which is owned or leased by them, or on land over which they have a formal nature reserve agreement.
- 8.2 The proposed LNR at Scraftoft lies within the jurisdiction of Harborough District Council but is owned by Leicester City Council. As such a formal nature reserve agreement will be drawn up between the two parties, although the formal declaration will be made by Harborough District Council.
- 8.3 The agreement will state: "that the land will be managed in accordance with an agreed Management Plan (Appendix C) jointly reviewed every 5 years from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2002".

## 9. Resource Issues

- 9.1 A notice will need to be placed in the local press advising of the declaration of land at Scraftoft as a LNR. This can be met from existing budgets and a contribution from the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project.
- 9.2 In making the declaration, HDC and Leicester City Council will seek to implement the actions set out in the Management Plan. It is considered that the actions to be implemented can be met from joint contributions from Leicester City Council, Harborough District Council, the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project and external funding agencies.

## 10 Corporate Implications

- 10.1 The designation of the land as a LNR will seek to preserve and enhance the appearance and biodiversity of the area.
- 10.2 The joint declaration of the LNR is an excellent example of partnership working both with other local authorities and the local community towards a common purpose.

10.3 Upon declaration, the Scraftoft LNR will be the first LNR in Harborough District. The District Council will actively encourage other LNR's to be designated in the interests of environmental sustainability and biodiversity.

11. Sensitive Issues Procedure

11.1 The Ward Member and Member representatives on the Members Steering Group of the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project for Harborough District have been made aware of this report.

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**Previous report(s): Scraftoft Green Wedge Management Plan, Planning (Policy) Committee  
14<sup>th</sup> December 1999.**

**Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: Yes/No**

## APPENDIX A

### Scraptoft Green Wedge Action Plan

#### Access

- A1 A decision is to be made by Green Wedge Action Group in partnership with the Golf Club and the Parish Council to down grade this Unclassified Road to a Bridle way.  
Time scale: 2-3 year process from date of application.
- A2 Limit access for motorbikes and cycles to the Golf Club Green from the above mentioned unclassified road, (proposed bridle way) by erecting kissing gates or other restrictive gates.  
Time scale: Short-term.
- A3 Improve signage on existing Right of Way through Scraptoft.
- A4 An obstruction to existing right of way. Way marker signs to be erected showing alternative route. Stiles to be erected at the Scraptoft Lane and an application to be made by Leicester City Council to Leicestershire County Council's Right of Way section for public diversion order.  
Time scale: Process takes up to 12 months from application stage.

#### Recreation

- R1 Leicester City Council to approach lease holders to encourage them to plant a hedge around the field boundary.

#### Conservation

- C1 Unimproved grassland. Leicester City Council Arts and Leisure Services have given agreement for the process to begin for designating Local Nature Reserve status for this field from English Nature.
- C2 Potential for the enhancement of the brook and pond for wildlife to be explored and potential funding for the works to be pursued.
- C3 Encourage landowners to leave areas of long grass for nature conservation particularly along hedges.
- C4 Encourage landowners and leaseholders across the whole Green Wedge area to have hedges laid where appropriate. Grants to be sought from organisations such as the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project.
- C5 Area of scrub to be kept under close control and where necessary scrub clearance to take place with volunteer assistance.

#### Public Awareness

- PA1 Interpretation on the site to be provided where necessary. This could include information on grassland management and possible interpretation of the buried medieval village at PA1.
- PA2 A walks leaflet to be produced by the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project to promote access from Hamilton to Keyham and include access through Scraptoft Parish along designated Rights of Way.

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## 1. **Background Information**

- 1.1 **Site Name** - Scraftoft Local Nature Reserve
  - 1.2 **District and County** - Harborough District, Leicestershire
  - 1.3 **Declaring authority** - Harborough District Council (in consultation with Leicester City Council).
  - 1.4 **Area** - 16.79 hectares
  - 1.5 **Ownership** - Leicester City Council (Property Services). Let on an annual grazing licence.
  - 1.6 **Site location** - The site is within the urban fringe on the eastern edge of Leicester, within the Parish of Scraftoft. It is bounded by housing in Scraftoft village to the south, by a golf course and sports pitch to north and west, and by Beeby Lane and arable farmland to the east.
  - 1.7 **Purpose of formal declaration as an LNR** - In accordance with section 15 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the purpose of declaring Scraftoft as a Local Nature reserve is to establish ' . . . *land managed for the purpose . . . of preserving flora, fauna or geological or physiological features of special interest in the area . . .* '.
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## 2. **Nature conservation value and current management**

### 2.1 **Main habitat types**

Scraftoft proposed LNR is predominantly unimproved neutral grassland, presently managed by cattle grazing. It is partly surrounded by unmanaged hedgerows and there are clumps of mature Hawthorn scrub scattered throughout the field.

### 2.2 **Grassland**

Although the grassland habitat is not particularly species-rich it does not appear to have experienced agricultural improvement in the past, and supports many species that are characteristic of unimproved neutral grassland in lowland areas. The grassland habitat itself is variable in quality due to past grazing regimes. Some areas have been damaged by overgrazing and poaching, and are now dominated by tall herbs. However, there are still areas of herb-rich grassland, although the actual diversity of species is fairly low.

Typical grasses are crested dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), sweet vernal (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), meadow barley (*Hordeum secalinum*) and red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), with herbs such as meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), lady's bedstraw (*Galium verum*), red clover (*Trifolium pratensis*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*),

knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*). Hay rattle (*Rhinanthus minor* agg.) is rare. In the damper areas, tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*), hard rush (*Juncus inflexus*) and hairy sedge (*Carex hirta*) are present.

'Ridge and furrow' is present in the northern part of the 'L'-shaped field. The remains of various structures towards Beeby Road and the evidence of ground disturbance in this area are associated with its former use for military purposes.

The field has experienced an irregular grazing pattern in the last few years, due to the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease. In 1999 it was somewhat undergrazed with a small suckler herd of cattle (about 10 beasts). In 2001 it was overgrazed, with up to 30 cattle.

### **2.3 Tall herbs**

A pattern of under and overgrazing may have happened in the past. Parts of the field, particularly towards Beeby Road, are invaded by thistles (*Cirsium arvense* and *C. vulgare*), docks (*Rumex obtusifolius* and *R. crispus*) and ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*). Whilst a certain amount of these tall herbs are beneficial for wildlife, providing a good nectar and pollen source for invertebrates and food for seed-eating birds later on, uncontrolled growth will bring about the loss of the more valuable unimproved grassland in parts of the site. The grazing licensee is responsible for controlling these species, by hand-pulling and cutting.

### **2.4 Scrub**

Scattered bramble and hawthorn scrub is also present over the whole field, and is an important habitat as long as it does not colonise any further. Islands of scrub add structural diversity to the grassland by breaking up the field into smaller units or glades, which are grazed at different rates. Structural diversity in the sward is an important factor in increasing invertebrate diversity, and the scrub itself is also a valuable invertebrate habitat, as well as providing nest-sites and feeding areas for birds and small mammals. The blackberries are also very popular with local residents! The scrub should not be allowed to encroach any more than at present. A limited amount of scrub removal would be desirable in places where the islands of scrub are joining up, creating areas which are not grazed at all. If this scrub growth is unchecked, it would be detrimental in the long term because it will cause the loss of unimproved grassland.

### **2.5 Ponds, marsh and ditch**

The grassland also has a number of marshy hollows, and drains towards a ditch in the south-west corner. There is a silted up field pond in the extreme south-west corner, colonised by large stands of greater willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*). These features may be relics of the drainage systems associated with the former prisoner of war camp, and it is probably best not to disturb them. Several of the former drains have caved in and have been infilled.

### **2.6 Hedges**

There are hedges around the field except along the sports pitch boundary, which is separated from the field by a very intrusive chain-link fence. Most of the hedges are very overgrown and have developed into lines of trees and mature scrub of considerable ecological value; it would not be appropriate to lay these. New hedges need to be planted, and existing ones

gapped up, along Beeby Lane and the sports pitch boundary which could be considered for laying in the future.

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### **3. Use by local community and volunteer groups**

#### **3.1 Local people**

Scraptoft proposed Local Nature Reserve is used by local people for a variety of activities, including dog walking, blackberrying and children's play. There is informal access off Beeby Road and from some houses off Hall Road/Keays Way.

#### **3.2 Links with voluntary organisations and nature conservation bodies**

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) has been, and will be involved in practical work on site.

#### **3.3 Constraints on public use**

Because it is grazed by a suckler herd of cattle, including a bull, increased or formalised public access is not appropriate. Consultation of local residents carried out in 2000 revealed that, although the majority of residents were supportive of the Local Nature Reserve designation, there was strong opposition to the creation of formal access into the site. This was due to fears about the security of the properties backing on to the nature reserve.

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## **4. The local context**

### **4.1 Unimproved grasslands in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland**

The most important habitats on the proposed LNR are the grasslands. Species-rich neutral grasslands are believed to be suffering the highest rate of decline of any habitat within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The current rate of loss is estimated to be 5% per year. This very much reflects the national state of this habitat, which has decreased in England and Wales by an estimated 97% between 1930 and 1984 (reference: *Biodiversity Challenge: an Action Plan for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (1998)*). Many of the surviving areas of grassland within our area are reduced to small fragments of their former extent, so the large size of Beeby Lane field is of significance.

### **4.2 Scraptoft Green Wedge Action Plan**

The proposed Local Nature Reserve lies within the Scraptoft Green Wedge, as designated in Harborough District Local Plan (April 2001), for which the County Council's 'Stepping Stones' Project has drawn up an Action Plan. The purpose of the Action Plan is to bring

about improvements to biodiversity, landscape and public use and access into the Green Wedge, which is within Leicester's urban fringe.

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## **5. Past uses**

**5.1 Prisoner of war camp** - further research needs to be done on this interesting aspect of the site. The only evidence we have is an undated aerial photograph estimated to be from the 1940s/50s. The use does not appear on any ordnance survey maps from the period.

### **5.2 Recent history.**

Since the 1950s it is believed to have been grazed by cattle.

At one time it was proposed as a new cemetery for the City of Leicester - a proposal now withdrawn because of the ground conditions on site.

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## SCRAPTOFT LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

## MANAGEMENT PLAN - 2002 to 2006

**A: Maintain quality and increase extent of species-rich grassland**

	<i>Action</i>	<i>Implemented by:</i>	<i>cost</i>
A1	Graze at circa 15 cattle or horse per year.	LCC: grazing licence	N/A
A2	Restrict supplementary feeding to winter months and in eastern corner near gate and water trough	LCC: grazing licence	N/A
A3	Cut tall herbs annually before seeding (June/July)	LCC: Grazing tenant	N/A
A4	Pull Ragwort and remove from field	LCC: Grazing tenant	N/A
A5	Selectively cut back circa 20 mature Hawthorns to ground level per year and allow to re-grow; target scrub near best grassland. Allocate area to burn arising OR remove from site	BTCV/ Volunteers	2 days @ £150/day
A6	Do not undertake agricultural improvements – application of pesticides, herbicides, inorganic fertilisers, ploughing ,re-seeding and drainage improvements	LCC: Grazing licence	N/A

*B: Improve appearance and biodiversity value of boundaries*

	<b>Action</b>	<i>Implemented by</i>	<i>cost</i>
B1	Find funding for and plant new hedge of Hawthorn:Hazel:Field Maple (ratio 4:1:1) along sports pitch boundary and protect with single strand barbed wire fence until established (planting @ £3.50/m; fence @ £3.50/m)	HDC/LCC	£3150
B2	Find funding for and plant/gap up new hedge of Hawthorn:Hazel:Field Maple (ratio 4:1:1) along Beeby Road boundary and protect with 3 strand barbed wire fence until established (planting c. £2000, fence @ £4.00/m)	HDC/LCC	£3000

**C: Inform public**

C1	Find funding for and install information sign at safe place along Beeby Road	HDC/LCC	c. £500
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**D: Protect site from adverse development and damage**

D1	Prepare information needed to consult English Nature	LCC	N/A
D2	Declare as LNR	HDC	N/A



**E: Ensure safety of people and grazing stock**

E1	Fill in holes in field	LCC/BTCV	£400
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