

WARDS: UPPER GORNAL & WOODSETTON, CASTLE & PRIORY

AGENDA ITEM NO.

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE – 4th NOVEMBER 2004

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

**WREN'S NEST NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE AND BLUEBELL PARK
WOODLAND GRANT SCHEME**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. To welcome and support the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve and Bluebell Park Woodland Grant Scheme.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Wren's Nest is a classic geological site of exceptional importance, fossils from which can be found in museums throughout the world. It was the first ever National Nature Reserve to be declared on account of geology, in 1956, covering about 34 hectares. It is also re-notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its geology in 1990.
- 2.2. The Council declared about 17ha of adjacent land (including Bluebell Park) as a Local Nature Reserve in 1994 on account of its nature conservation and associated educational value.
- 2.3. Dudley MBC and the former Nature Conservancy Council, now English Nature, renewed a Nature Reserve Agreement on 1st April 1986, with a length of 21 years. It was agreed that a joint management plan would be prepared – the first version was produced in 1988 and the latest revision in 2000 was supported by the Area Committee at its meeting on 12th April 2001, when the Area Committee also supported investigations into relevant grant-aid schemes for assisting in implementing the management plan and that applications are submitted where appropriate.
- 2.4. An application for Woodland Grant Scheme funding was submitted to the Forestry Commission earlier this year. As a result, a contract has been awarded to the Council for the management of woodlands at Wren's Nest from 2004 to 2009. Specifically, Annual Management Grant is available towards footpath maintenance, litter clearance, public safety inspections, grassland management and visitor management. Also, Woodland Improvement Grant is available in the first two years towards specific operations relating to public access and safety,

prevention of tree damage to important geological features and improving neglected woodland areas. Opportunities exist to seek additional WIG funding in future years.

2.5. Management proposals include:

2.5.1. Felling or reducing (as appropriate) old trees terminally damaged by rot, storm or vandalism and where they pose a threat to people and property – felling will be restricted to individual trees and no areas are proposed for clearfelling and restocking. Since last year, a programme of tree safety monitoring and management has been implemented, in order to reduce the risks to people and property of falling trees and branches. However, total safety cannot be guaranteed within such a publicly accessible site.

2.5.2. Thinning of dense stands of trees for the benefit of individual specimens for landscape and/or wildlife reasons, though Sycamore will not be favoured.

2.5.3. Limited clearance of trees and shrubs from important geological features to prevent damage by roots.

2.5.4. Maintenance of several plantation areas adjacent to Bluebell Park.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1. That the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve and Bluebell Park Woodland Grant Scheme be welcomed and supported.

4. FINANCE

4.1. Grant aid is available through the Woodland Grant Scheme at a rate of 50% of total costs: Annual Management Grant £1,372.70/annum and Woodland Improvement Grant £4,345 in 2004/05 and £2,450 in 2005/06. The balance would be matched through officer time or through existing budgets of Culture and Community Services.

5. LAW

5.1. Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, enables English Nature 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.

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

- 5.3. Section 16 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, enables a local authority and English Nature to enter into an agreement to manage land as a nature reserve.
- 5.4. 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 Council expedient that it should be managed as a nature reserve.
- 5.5. 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.
- 5.6. 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.

6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- 6.1. This report takes into account the Council's policy on Equal Opportunities.

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1. That the proposal set out in paragraph 3.1 of this report be approved.

Signature.....
JOHN MILLAR DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Contact: K.M. Clements - Ext. 4189
 Countryside Manager

Background Papers:

Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan, 2000
Wren's Nest NNR and Bluebell Park Woodland Grant Scheme Contract