

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 26 January 2021

Declaration of Wester Craiglockhart Hill and Little France Park as Local Nature Reserves

Executive/routine Wards	Executive 9 Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart 17 Portobello/Craigmillar
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Culture and Communities Committee approves:
 - 1.1.1 progression of matters to declare Wester Craiglockhart Hill as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) under the provisions of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949; and
 - 1.1.2 progression of matters to declare Little France Park as a LNR under the provisions of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: David Jamieson, Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries

E-mail: David.jamieson@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 7055

Declaration of Wester Craiglockhart Hill and Little France Park as Local Nature Reserves

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report outlines the Council's legislative power to declare Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and seeks the Committee's approval to progress the declaration of both Wester Craiglockhart Hill and Little France Park as protected nature reserves.
- 2.2 A LNR is an area of land declared under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by a local authority because of its special nature interest and/or educational value.

3. Background

- 3.1 Local authorities possess statutory powers to set up and manage LNRs under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. It is a statutory designation that is important for the conservation of biodiversity and geological features at a local level. LNRs are best seen as critical nature nodes in the urban green-blue space network because this sets them in an ecological coherence context; values them as part of the environmental resources of a local authority area; and draws attention to their excellence as sites of nature conservation value. Reference to specific LNRs in development plans provides protection from non-beneficial development; a positive land use for each site; and demonstrates to everyone that the primary land use is nature conservation. The production of a management plan for each Local Nature Reserve also strengthens land use purpose and provides the basis for coherent site maintenance and investment decisions.
- 3.2 To date the City of Edinburgh has declared and manages seven LNRs: Burdiehouse Burn Valley Park, Cammo Estate, Corstorphine Hill, Easter Craiglockhart Hill, Hermitage of Braid-Blackford Hill, Meadows Yard and Ravelston Wood. The former Edinburgh District Council also declared Straiton Pond as an LNR. The responsibility for this site transferred to Midlothian Council in 1996 as part of local government reform.

- 3.3 The selection and designation of LNRs is in accordance with the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan. The Scottish Biodiversity Duty section of the Plan contains an action to 'Continue a programme of developing and designating Local Sites'.
- 3.4 Wester Craiglockhart Hill is situated within the South West of the city. It is 10.3 hectares in extent and comprises unimproved acidic and calcareous grassland, broadleaved woodland, and recreational amenity grassland. Part of the site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 3.5 Little France Park lies within the North East of the city. It is 45 hectares in size and comprises a mosaic of reclaimed farmland, semi-improved grassland, newly planted woodland specimen trees, wetland and open still water areas, a naturalised section of the Niddrie Burn, species rich grassland, and scrub.
- 3.6 Both sites are owned by the Council and managed by the Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Service in partnership with Friends of Parks groups and other partner organisations. Part of Wester Craiglockhart Hill is leased to Merchants of Edinburgh Golf Club.

4. Main report

- 4.1 LNRs are areas of high natural heritage interest within the local context, which are not just protected but are managed and improved with the conservation of nature as a priority concern. Community participation, education and informal recreation are also desirable objectives.
- 4.2 In order to meet the legislative requirements of the 1949 Act it is essential that a proposed LNR meets these requirements:
 - 4.2.1 **Consists of land:** Wester Craiglockhart Hill is an area of open public space consisting of a SSSI, unimproved acidic and calcareous grassland, and broadleaved woodland. Little France Park is a naturalised site with locally rare and desirable habitats comprising reclaimed farmland, semi-improved grassland, newly planted woodland and specimen trees, wetland and open still water areas, a burn with riparian habitat, species rich grassland and scrub.
 - 4.2.2 **Is managed:** Wester Craiglockhart Hill is partly managed by the Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries service via a management group comprising Council officers and representatives from Merchants of Edinburgh Golf Club and the Friends of Wester Greenbank. The golf course sections are managed by the golf club, under lease arrangements. Little France Park is managed by the Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries service via a management group comprising Council officers, Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Enterprise, and the Friends of Little France Park.

- 4.2.3 **Provides special opportunities for study and research of British flora and fauna and the conditions in which they live, and for study of earth sciences of special interest in the area; and/or preserves the special natural or earth science interest in the area:** Given its SSSI status Wester Craiglockhart Hill has significant educational potential, particularly as it is adjacent to Edinburgh Napier University and within walking distance of two local high schools. Biodiversity and conservation interest in Little France Park is also high with a number of organisations currently using it for species recording and habitat survey, notably Butterfly Conservation Scotland, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh, Woodland Trust Scotland, Forestry Land Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, British Trust for Ornithology, and the Botanical Society Scotland. The site is also regularly used by health and wellbeing groups, for school engagement and conservation volunteer activities.
- 4.2.4 **Consists predominately of British flora or fauna:** Wester Craiglockhart Hill has three main British habitat types, each with a diversity of species and healthy ecosystems. Recent surveys identified the presence of national and locally important plant species, such as walted thistle and common rock-rose, as well as three protected terrestrial mammal species (common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and Eurasian badger), bird species of conservation concern (e.g. swift and sparrowhawk) and seven species of bumblebee, including the scarce buff-tailed bumblebee. Little France Park contains a significant number of locally significant bird species (skylark, buzzard, kestrel and yellowhammer) reliant on its mosaic of habitats, as well as being particularly rich for locally rare butterflies and other invertebrates, such as small skipper and speckled wood.
- 4.2.5 **Have the study and research into, or preservation of, nature or the earth sciences as a priority objective and not as an incidental land management consideration:** Environmental education, conservation, surveying, promotion for research and species and habitat monitoring and the preservation of habitat all feature in the management objectives of both Wester Craiglockhart Hill and Little France Park.
- 4.2.6 **Lie within the jurisdiction of the local authority concerned:** Both Wester Craiglockhart Hill and Little France Park lie wholly within the administrative boundary of City of Edinburgh Council.
- 4.2.7 **Be owned or leased by the local authority, or under an agreement from the owner or tenant:** Wester Craiglockhart Hill is owned by the City of Edinburgh Council and partly leased to the Merchants of Edinburgh Golf Club. Little France Park is owned by the City of Edinburgh Council.

4.3 NatureScot (Scotland's Nature Agency) also recommends that sites should be selected which provide accessible, positive, current (or potential) informal opportunities for raising people's awareness, understanding and enjoyment of, and involvement with, their local natural heritage; and be (or have the potential to be) of special natural heritage interest in the area, through good management and

safeguarding of the site. Both Wester Craiglockhart Hill and Little France Park are managed by the Council as publicly accessible natural green spaces. Site management plans encourage responsible use, and awareness, understanding and enjoyment of nature.

- 4.4 As both Wester Craiglockhart Hill and Little France Park fully meet the legislative requirements of the 1949 Act, have stakeholder support, have management plans in place, and their management as nature reserves can be contained within existing service budgets, they are deemed appropriate and welcome additions to the Council's suite of Local Nature Reserves.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Under Section 21(6) of the 1949 Act, a local authority may only declare a LNR after consultation with the Government's nature agency. Any comments made by NatureScot are simply advice, it has no mandatory powers regarding site selection and management. However, its support is considered to be significant in that it is able to offer management advice.
- 5.2 Similarly, community support for the LNR declaration is considered beneficial if long-term protection and management is to be successful. In order to gain the views of the wider community a formal consultation exercise will be undertaken via the Council's Consultation Hub.
- 5.3 Following consultation with NatureScot and Edinburgh residents, a notice of declaration must be published 'in a manner which appears best suited to informing the persons concerned'. In this instance it will involve placement of electronic copies of the declarations on the Council website.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Any legal costs associated with these declarations will be met from the Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries service revenue budget.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Both LNR proposals have been received positively by the Wester Craiglockhart Hill Management Group and Little France Park Management Group respectively.
- 7.2 The Merchants of Edinburgh Golf Club have confirmed their support for the declaration of Wester Craiglockhart Hill.
- 7.3 There are no equalities, health and safety, governance, compliance or regulatory implications that elected members need to take account of when reaching their decision.

- 7.4 There are no negative impacts relating to carbon impacts, adaptation to climate change and sustainable development. Rather, LNR declaration will increase the city's resilience to climate change impacts because it will increase protection of the city's semi-natural green space and the habitats and species that make up the green space. It will also help achieve a sustainable Edinburgh as LNRs provide people opportunity to enjoy their local natural environment, delivering benefits to health, education and wellbeing.

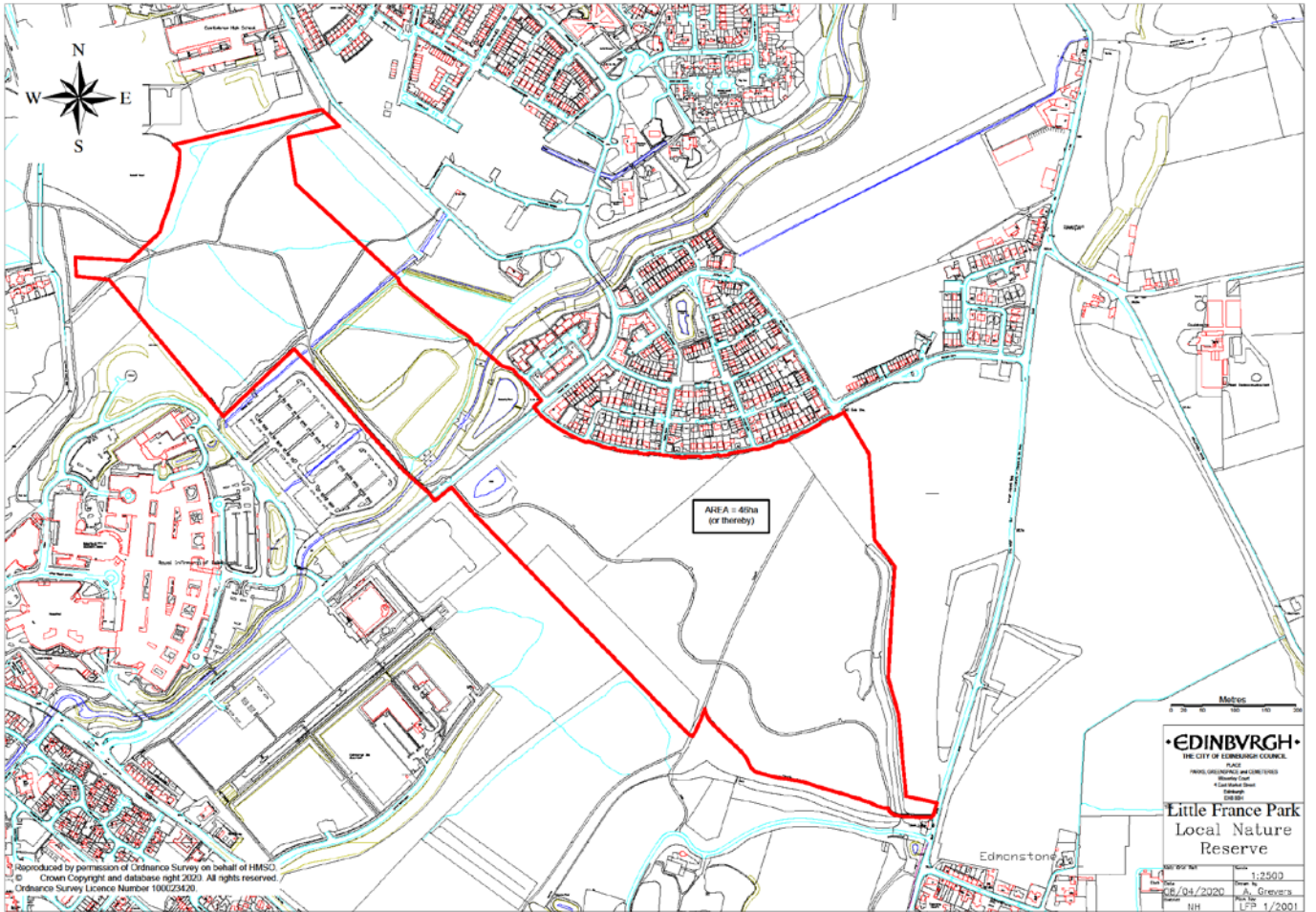
8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 <https://www.nature.scot/local-nature-reserves-scotland-guide-their-selection-and-declaration>
- 8.2 <https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/wester-craiglockhart-hill-mgt-plan/>
<https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/little-france-park-plan/>

9. Appendices

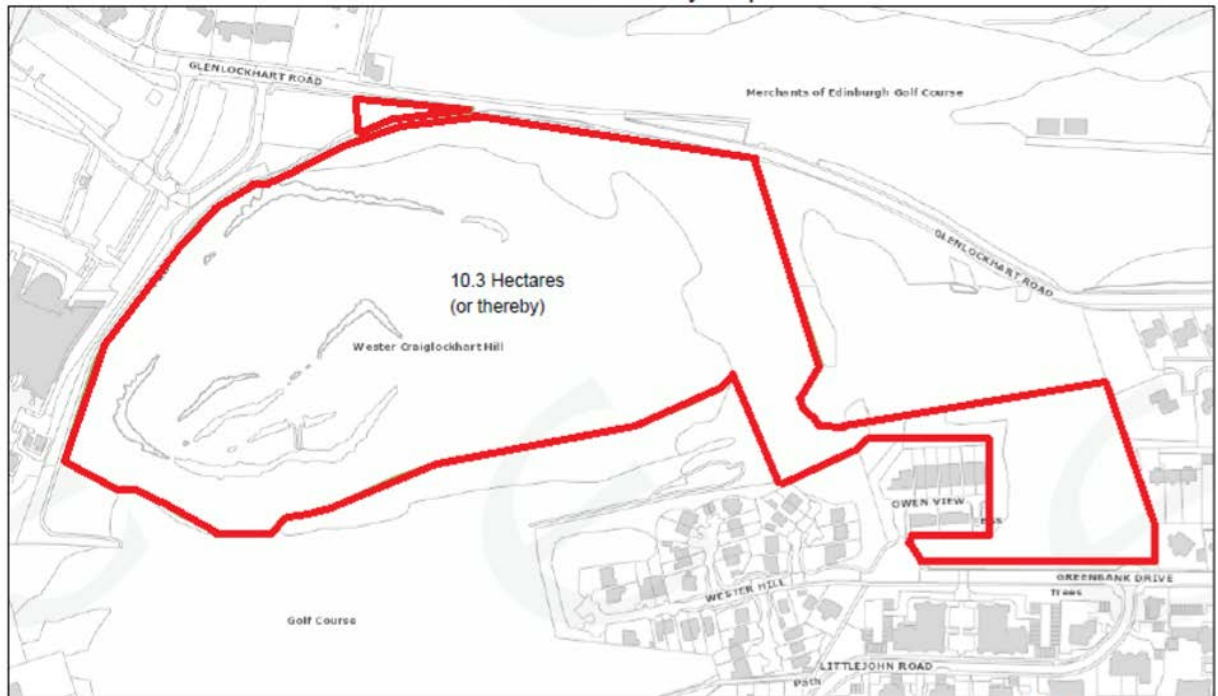
- 9.1 Little France LNR Boundary Map.
- 9.2 Wester Craiglockhart Hill LNR Boundary Map.

Appendix 1 - Little France LNR Boundary Map



Appendix 2 - Wester Craiglockhart Hill LNR Boundary Map

WCH LNR Boundary Map



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