

REPORT TO:		Cabinet	
DATE:		31 August 2016	
PORTFOLIO:		Cllr Ken Moss - Education, Leisure & Arts	
REPORT AUTHOR:		Anne Hourican - Snr Environmental Initiatives Officer	
TITLE OF REPORT:		Declaration of Local Nature Reserves - progress	
EXEMPT REPORT (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A)	No	Not applicable	
KEY DECISION:	No	If yes, date of publication:	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on progress with arrangements for the declaration and management of two significant new Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in Hyndburn. As shown in Appendix 1, the proposed new LNR sites are:-
- Peel Park and the Coppice, including Arden Hall and land at Plantation Road
 - Woodnook Vale, including land at King George V Playing Fields, some areas of Bullough Park and Rothwell Heights

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Note the progress and support arrangements for declaration of new LNRs at Peel Park and Woodnook Vale, Accrington, aiming for the timeline shown in Appendix 2
- 2.2 Invite all Members of the Council to participate in an organised visit to the LNR areas, which include striking features of natural beauty and to view the many recent improvements and activities.
- 2.3 Support continued joint working with Lancashire County Council to assist their consideration of a LNR declaration in respect of the land in LCC ownership in Woodnook Vale as referenced in para 6.5.
- 2.4 Support continued joint working with external parties, local organisations and community groups to maximise opportunities to bring in investment through various grant sources

3. Reasons for Recommendations and Background

- 3.1 Hyndburn has some spectacular natural greenspaces, which have significant habitat value, are highly valued by local people and are worthy of greater recognition.
- 3.2 The intention to declare new LNRs is a long standing aspiration of the Council, and has been reflected in the Corporate Strategy.
- 3.3 Hyndburn has the chance to be the first district in Lancashire to meet national targets for LNRs, if the proposed declarations are achieved. Peel and Woodnook LNRs would also be the largest in Lancashire. Appendix 3 shows an analysis of these statistics.

4. REFLECTIONS ON THE QUALITY OF THE LNRS

- 4.1 Only a short walk from the urban areas, both of these extensive LNR areas give local people the opportunity to become immersed in natural surroundings that arguably rival some of the most highly valued landscapes. Comparisons have been made with Ribble Valley, Lake District and the Scottish Glens.
- 4.2 The Lead Adviser from Natural England, the national agency with responsibility for the natural environment, habitats and landscapes has been on an extensive tour of the areas and has commented:-

“I was impressed by the quality of both sites as proposed Local Nature Reserves. They already have in place many of the key factors that make a successful and valuable local nature reserve: good access close to people’s homes; study opportunities; a range of habitats and natural interest; local heritage features; opportunities for use by local schools and groups and importantly, community involvement and support”.

“Both sites would be welcome additions to the Local Nature Reserves in England”.

- 4.3 This is something that Hyndburn can be rightly proud of, reflecting the many years of volunteering and effort already invested by local people who love and enjoy these natural greenspaces.

5. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN RECENT YEARS

- 5.1 Significant improvement in the site conditions, habitat management and community activities, as analysed against the LNR Visitor standards published by Natural England have been achieved. The following is a summary of some of these actions.

Collaborative working

5.2 Lancashire Wildlife Trust

- a) Successful community management arrangements for Foxhill Bank LNR in Oswaldtwistle are continuing with new lease arrangements being prepared
- b) South Pennines grasslands project provides specialist input to convert mown grass areas into low maintenance wildflower-rich meadows
- c) Biodiverse Society project is similarly providing survey and habitat management guidance for key habitat areas
- d) Several grant approvals and phases of volunteer activities at Hollins Wood in Baxenden

5.3 Prospects Foundation

- a) Secured a grant approval from Heritage Lottery Fund over the next 2.5 years, helping to fulfil many requirements of LNR declaration, including
 - Volunteering and educational activities
 - Habitat condition assessment and mini-management plans
 - Trialling a volunteer ranger team with training and support
- b) Volunteer group activities on Mondays and Tuesdays now focus on the 2 new LNR areas

5.4 River Ribble Trust

- a) As part of a programme of enhancement for the River Ribble Catchment, the Trust is assisting with new activities for Woodnook Water and Platts Lodge, beginning with three community activities in August and September 2016.

HBC actions (also including supportive collaborations with local groups)

- 5.5 Over £ ½ million investment into Peel Park, Coppice, Arden Hall areas since 2008 to improve entrances, footpaths and woodland habitats.
- 5.6 Grant funded improvements at Royds Street and King George woodland, Accrington, with support from local groups and Residents Associations
- 5.7 Grant funded access improvements completed at Hollins Woodland, Baxenden
- 5.8 Over £100,000 for major woodland and access improvements, nearing completion at Woodnook/Bullough Park
- 5.9 First phase of high quality directional waymarking has been completed and a second phase is currently being identified. They have been complimented by local people and by Disability First, a specialist advisor on accessibility for all.
- 5.10 Innovative approaches include training courses for dry stone walling, achieving good value for money in restoration of historic boundaries and giving volunteers proper skills to help with improvements ongoing.
- 5.11 Sure Start Forest School area established at Rothwell Heights with activities for families and primary schools in the Scaitcliffe, Springhill and Fern Gore areas.
- 5.12 Growing Wild area at Ley allotment in Baxenden bringing previously unused land back into use for community and children's activities
- 5.13 Disability audit recommendations have almost all been implemented at Woodnook Vale and audits are underway for Peel Park and Jackhouse.
- 5.14 Complementary improvement to play facilities at Peel Park and at Bullough Park have been completed by the Parks Service, again successfully bringing in external grant support.
- 5.15 Programmes of invasive species control well advanced – Japanese Knotweed nearly eradicated from Woodnook Vale, Himalayan Balsam coming under better control

6. REMAINING MATTERS TO BE ADDRESSED

Revenue budget

- 6.1 The designation of land as a Local Nature Reserve is a statutory declaration by a Local Authority, accepting a responsibility to ensure that the special interest of the area is maintained.
- 6.2 For the current financial year and also continuing into 2017/18, a modest revenue budget of £11,000 is available to cover HBC basic responsibilities. With the added investment from external grants and activities by others, this amount is being used effectively and goes a long way.

6.3 In the longer term, options for ongoing LNR management will need to be considered.

Lancashire County Council (LCC) land at Woodnook Vale

6.4 LCC own the central spine of land along the greenway of Woodnook Vale, providing the key public access route for the LNR and the linkages to Baxenden. It is understood that this is one of the Active Travel sites in the Countryside Services portfolio which is to be transferred to LCC Highways for ongoing public access. This is welcome news, as it makes it likely that existing management arrangements will broadly continue. LCC is also working on a major investment programme for the East Lancs Strategic cycleway.

6.5 Officers from HBC and LCC are engaged in joint working to assemble the necessary information for LCC to consider a LNR declaration in respect of their land.

7 Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

7.1 The decision could be taken not to create LNRs and simply allow these natural greenspaces to continue to support local recreation and enjoyment of nature without a formal declaration as Local Nature Reserves. This option is not recommended as this would fail to achieve the opportunity of a nationally recognised designation, reflecting the high quality and diversity of the spaces, especially following recent major improvement programmes. Also, since 2006 the Council has been committed to declaring new LNRs.

8. Consultations

8.1 Consultations have included community involvement in nomination of valuable sites, discussion with local people and groups, Parks, Legal and Property Services, partners including LCC, Prospects Foundation, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, and the national agency with responsibility for biodiversity, Natural England.

8.2 A supportive letter has been received from Mr Graham Jones MP

8.3 Further consultation activities will be organised, to include an interactive display on the LNR proposals at a Woodland Activity Day to be held at Bullough park on Sunday 25th September 2016. This will give local people an opportunity to offer ideas for ongoing improvements and to get involved in volunteering activities.

9. Implications

Financial implications (including any future financial commitments for the Council)	<p>A modest revenue budget is available for 2016/17 and 2017/18. Consideration of options for longer term will need to be considered.</p> <p>Large scale physical improvements achieved with external grant support, are expected to be an ongoing opportunity.</p> <p>Approx £800,000 has been invested from Forestry Commission and various landfill tax credits grants, for the major improvement schemes at Peel and at Woodnook.</p> <p>S106 contributions from Oswaldtwistle wind farm biodiversity clause (original approval) have supported work at Woodnook</p>
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	<p>(£10,000), Jackhouse (£10,000) and Foxhill Bank (£10,000) – see Appendix 1. A further £5,000 remains for commitment to ongoing projects.</p> <p>Other recent grant approvals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant approved through Prospects Foundation, including the volunteer ranger team proposal - 2 grants from Landfill Tax credits through local groups for site improvements - 10 Windfall grants of various amounts have supported community projects within the LNRs, including the Sure Start Forest School, Hollins Wood Baxenden, Jackhouse and Foxhill Bank. - Bruce Wake Trust - disability parking in Bullough Park
Legal and human rights implications	Local Authorities have powers to designate LNRs under the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949. And have a Biodiversity Duty under the Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.
Assessment of risk	Availability of ongoing modest resources to continue positive management is likely to be the greatest area of risk. Joint working with other organisations, brings benefits of enhanced capacity, expertise and increases the ability to secure external funding resources. Without this, the Council would be unable to fulfil its responsibilities for protection and enhancement of natural resources.
Equality and diversity implications <u>Customer First Analysis</u>	<p>Improvement of natural greenspaces should meet the needs of all, including those with health or mobility needs. Design and implementation of improvements has been based on specialist advice from Disability First who have carried out access audits including considerations such as vulnerability, mental health as well as physical access considerations. Enhanced LNR activities would bring in partner capacity to involve and respond to the needs of all in our communities.</p> <p>At a later stage, a formal declaration report will be prepared and this will be accompanied by a full Customer First Analysis.</p>

**10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985:
List of Background Papers**

10.1 'Local Nature Reserves in England: a guide to selection and declaration' Natural England
<http://www.guildford.gov.uk/media/16750/Item-09---BACKGROUND-PAPER-1---Natural-England-Guidepdf/pdf/pdf214.pdf>

Foxhill bank, Oswaldtwistle – the only existing LNR in Hyndburn

- Appreciation for Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) successfully managing the site for 25 years
- 5:1 gearing on funding and external investment
- A new lease arrangement with LWT is being prepared, £10,000 S106 contribution from Oswaldtwistle wind farm biodiversity clause will assist LWT to bring in new arrangements for ongoing management of the reserve, to increase the level of local involvement in the reserve, and to bring in additional external investment.
- Small revenue contributions from the revenue budget.

Woodnook Vale, Accrington to Baxenden – proposed for declaration during 2016/7

- Appreciation for local volunteers, LWT and Prospects for activities over many years
- Recent work on meadows is saving money on mowing, raising awareness and drawing in new people to activities
- Work is nearly complete on a programme of access and woodland improvements funded by Forestry Commission and S106 from Oswaldtwistle wind farm
- Forest School area at Rothwell Heights is now established
- LCC are continuing management of areas in their ownership and are developing proposals for enhancement of the greenway (National Cycle Network)
- Disability Audit – most recommendations have been implemented
- Modest revenue contributions from the revenue budget.

Peel Park, Accrington – proposed for declaration during 2016/7

- Appreciation for many partners who produced the Peel Park Master Plan
- Appreciation for Friends of Coppice, Arden, Peel and local volunteers, LWT and Prospects for activities over many years
- Work has been completed on a programme of access and woodland improvements funded by Forestry Commission and landfill tax
- Disability audit – to be commissioned imminently to identify further access enhancements
- An aspiration of the Master Plan to raise the profile of Peel Park even further was to seek a dual designation of Country Park, which would be timely if and when proposed visitor facilities are achieved.
- LNR activities would also support Green Flag status
- Modest revenue contributions from the revenue budget.

Jack House, Oswaldtwistle – would also be suitable for declaration

- Appreciation for Friends of Jackhouse – a large enthusiastic group of local people
- Work has been completed on Forestry Commission and landfill tax funded improvements together with a £10,000 S106 contribution from Oswaldtwistle wind farm
- Reconstruction of the spillway was completed 3 years ago from HBC resources.
- Small revenue contributions from the proposed revenue budget.

All of the above

– programmes of ongoing enhancement projects to continue to draw in external investment

Other sites

There could be scope for other sites to be assessed ongoing

ACTIONS COMPLETED OR WELL UNDERWAY

Complete the review of Natural England LNR visitor standards to identify what is already being achieved, any gaps in provision, and proposed new activities

Visits and discussions to draw in good practice from other areas including Wyre Borough Council, LCC Countryside Services

Public activities to seek more involvement in LNR declaration and ongoing management

Review of HBC land titles to refine the boundary details and other legal requirements relating to the areas of land for inclusion in the LNR declarations
Informal consultation with Natural England

Identify resourcing opportunities and make suitable grant and budget bids

Review and update habitat management plans

Review and update Peel Park master plan

Establish multi-partner LNR co-ordinating group(s) including representation from partner organisations, community and individuals

Finalise boundaries for the declarations

For information, some adjoining areas in private ownership have been identified, where habitat value and management would be complementary to the LNRs.

DECLARATION PHASE

Target timescale - Summer 2017

Complete procedural requirements for LNR declaration, including title checks

Formal consultation with Natural England

Cabinet resolutions for formal declaration and related details – aim for December 2016

Council resolutions – aim for spring 2017

Publicity, celebration and public involvement activities – aim for summer 2017

Implementation and management Ongoing

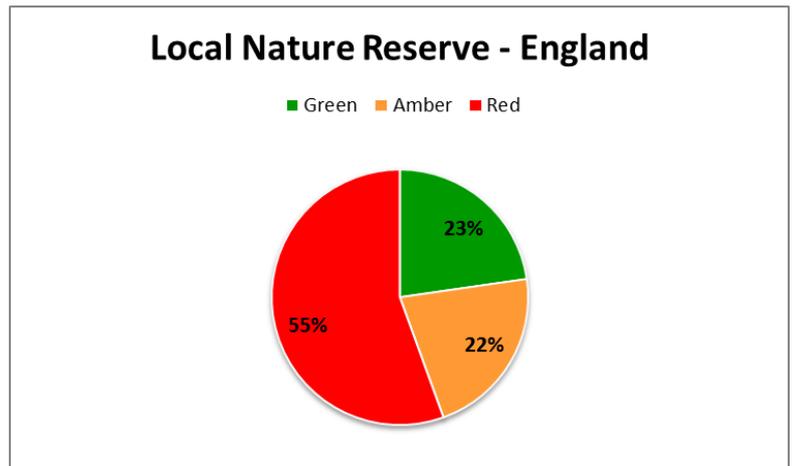
5 yearly review of management plans and implementation mechanisms

Local Nature Reserve Analysis:

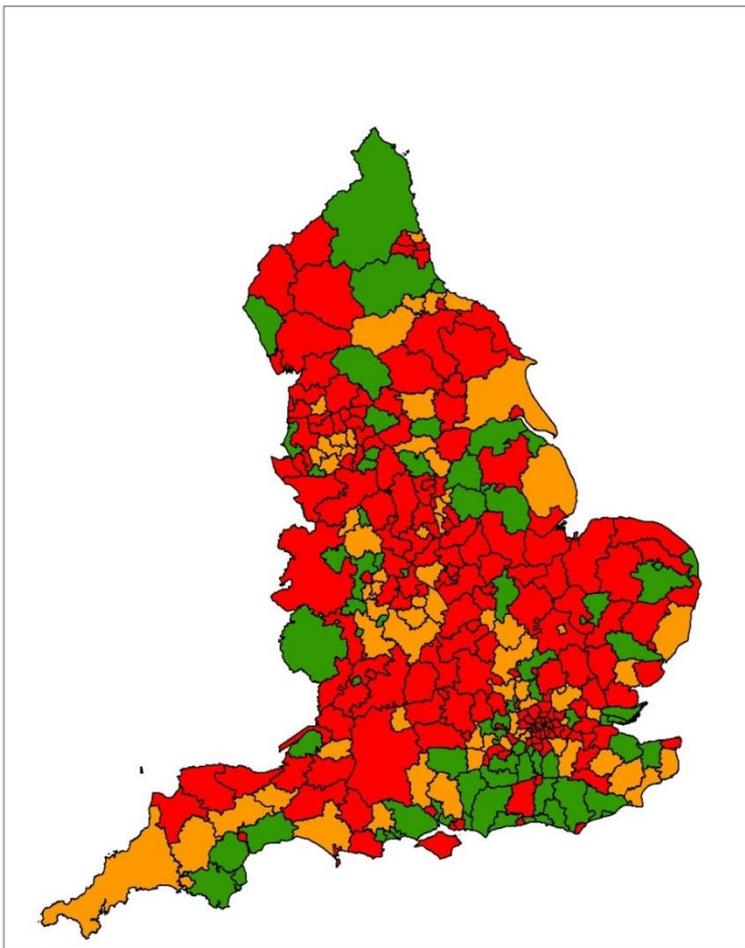
APPENDIX 3

Out of 326 Local Authorities across England 74 (23%) areas meet the Local Nature Reserve Standard (identified in green on the map below). To meet the standard declaration there needs to be 1 hectare of LNR per 1,000 of the population. Majority of the areas that meet the standard are those in the south with only five areas meeting the standard within the North West (Copeland, Halton, Stockport, Tameside and Sefton) whilst no areas highlighted in green across Lancashire.

71 (22%) Local Authorities across England are coloured in amber and they are defined as those areas that have between 0.6 and 0.99 LNR hectares per 1,000 of the population. The majority of areas (55%) are shaded in red and have below 0.6 hectares per 1,000 of the population. As indicated on the map below the more densely populated areas seem to be highlighted in red.



LOCAL AUTHORITY ACCESSIBLE GREENSPACE STANDARD FOR LNRs



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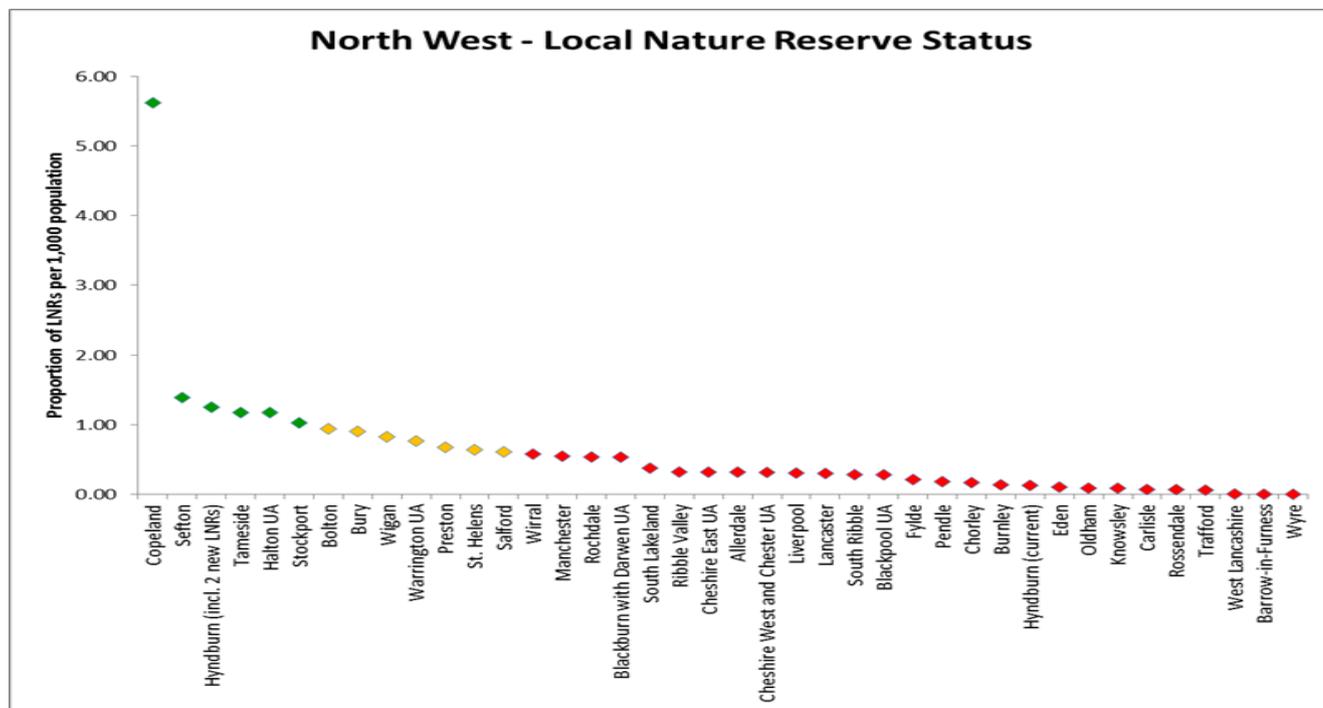
North West / Lancashire:

Hyndburn is currently positioned 30th out of 39 local authorities across the North West (where 1 represents the LA with highest amount of hectares per 1,000 of the population and 39th the lowest). Out of the 39 LAs five areas have a green status (above 1 hectare per 1,000 of the local population).

Local Authority	LNR status
Allerdale	Red
Barrow-in-Furness	Red
Blackburn with Darwen UA	Red
Blackpool UA	Red
Bolton	Amber
Burnley	Red
Bury	Amber
Carlisle	Red
Cheshire East UA	Red
Cheshire West and Chester UA	Red
Chorley	Red
Copeland	Green
Eden	Red
Fylde	Red
Halton UA	Green
Hyndburn	Red
Knowsley	Red
Lancaster	Red
Liverpool	Red
Manchester	Red
Oldham	Red
Pendle	Red
Preston	Amber
Ribble Valley	Red
Rochdale	Red
Rossendale	Red
Salford	Amber
Sefton	Green
South Lakeland	Red
South Ribble	Red
St. Helens	Amber
Stockport	Green
Tameside	Green
Trafford	Red
Warrington UA	Amber
West Lancashire	Red
Wigan	Amber
Wirral	Red
Wyre	Red

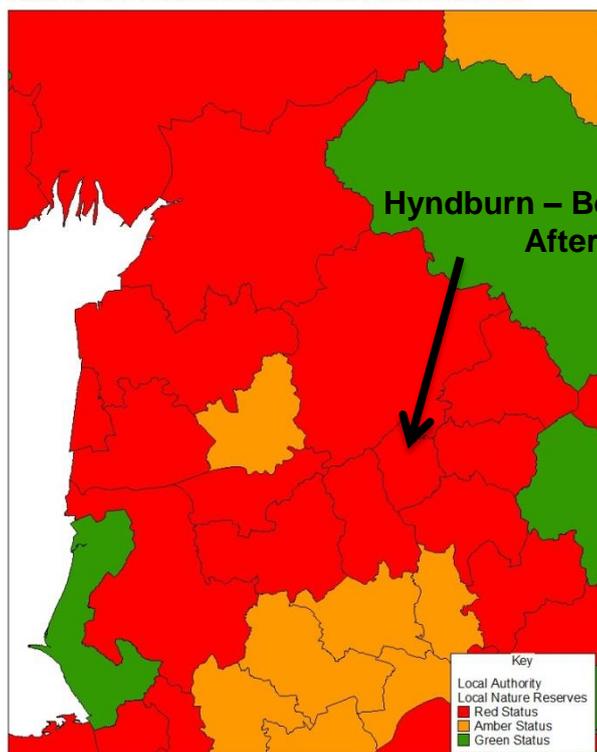
If Hyndburn achieve the declaration of Peel / Coppice (46.6 ha approx.) and Woodnook Vale / Priestley Clough (44 ha approx.) Hyndburn would achieve the 'Green' status of 1.25 hectares per 1,000 of the population. This would make Hyndburn achieve the highest rate in Lancashire and the third highest rate across the North West and this could potentially go higher if the Jackhouse site (16 ha approx.) is considered.

The chart below shows all North West Local Authorities ranked by proportion of hectares of Local Nature Reserves per 1,000 of the population. Out of the 39 areas 6 are green (5 plus Hyndburn if the new areas are designated), 7 amber areas and 27 red areas.



The maps below indicate before and after if the Peel and Woodnook areas are declared.

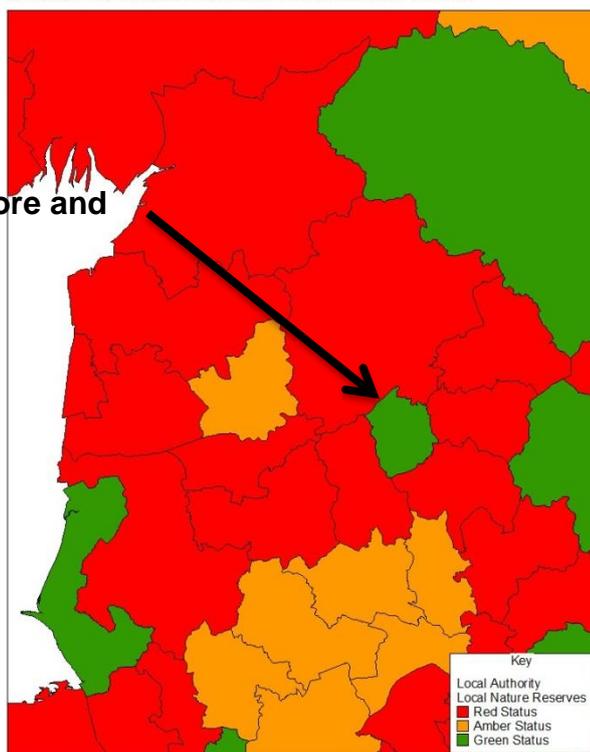
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