1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To complete the process for formal declaration of two significant Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in Hyndburn at :-

- Peel Park, including land at the Coppice, Arden Hall and Plantation Road (hereafter referred to as Peel Park for brevity)

- Woodnook Vale, including land at King George V Playing Fields, some areas of Bullough Park and Rothwell Heights (hereafter referred to as Woodnook Vale for brevity)

Please refer to Maps 1 and 2 for the boundaries of the LNR areas

2. **Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

2.1 formally declares Local Nature Reserve status (LNRs) for land in the ownership of Hyndburn Borough Council at Peel Park and Woodnook Vale, Accrington, pursuant to Part III, sections 19 & 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended).

2.2 gives delegated authority to the Chief Planning and Transportation Officer, in consultation with the Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services), for an adjacent area of woodland to be added to the Woodnook Vale LNR at a later date – see discussion in para 4.6.

2.3 supports continued joint working with Lancashire County Council to encourage them to bring forward complementary LNR declaration for the greenway and woodland in LCC ownership to be included within the Local Nature Reserve boundary for Woodnook Vale – see discussion in para 4.7 – 4.8
2.4 supports continued joint working with Globe Enterprises Limited, for consideration for Platts Lodge, Accrington to be included in the Local Nature Reserve boundary for Woodnook Vale – see discussion in para 4.9 – 4.10

2.5 gives delegated authority for the Chief Planning and Transportation Officer to complete the declaration processes including the outcomes of 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 above; advertise the declarations through public notices; and organise celebration activities.

2.6 celebrates that these will be the two largest LNRs in Lancashire; and that Hyndburn will be the first district in Lancashire to meet national targets for accessible natural greenspace\(^1\).

2.7 recognises that this achievement reflects the collaboration of many supportive organisations, groups and individuals, and that there is an enormous range of activities to encourage local people to get involved and enjoy the LNRs.

2.8 supports ongoing collaborative working to continue positive management and enhancement within the LNR areas; and also to explore opportunities for complementary enhancement in adjacent areas.

3. Reasons for Recommendations and Background

3.1 To bring due recognition of the significant habitat, heritage and community value of these spectacular natural greenspaces, as well as rewarding the efforts of those who have contributed to enhancement and positive management over many years.

3.2 Transformational improvements in site infrastructure, habitat management and range of community involvement activities, have been achieved particularly in the last 5 years. Also ongoing enhancements are intended through a continuing programme of mostly grant funded improvements and activities.

3.3 Hyndburn can be rightly proud of these achievements, reflecting the many years of volunteering and effort by local people who love and enjoy these natural greenspaces.

3.4 The intention to declare new LNRs is a long standing aspiration of the Council, as reflected in the Corporate Strategy.

4. DISCUSSION POINTS

Ongoing Commitment

4.1 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. Natural England (NE) guidance indicates that a commitment of 21 years is expected for an LNR. NE is a statutory consultee and the declaration must also be advertised by public notice.

4.2 Extensions or boundary changes to an LNR would follow the same procedure, including consultation with Natural England. NE guidance indicates that should any part of a LNR need to be de-declared in the future, this should be pursued only

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\(^1\) National target is 1 hectare (ha) of LNR per 1000 population, equivalent to approx 81 ha for Hyndburn. Currently Foxhill Bank, Oswaldtwistle is the only LNR in Hyndburn, significantly under the target at 9 ha. Peel Park would be approx 47 ha and Woodnook Vale approx 44 ha (52.5 ha if LCC included), exceeding the target by around 20%.
as a matter of necessity. The proposed boundaries therefore include land of importance for habitat and public recreation and exclude areas where there may be some consideration of development potential.

4.3 Currently the very high level of activity within the LNRs is achieved through effective collaboration arrangements between many organisations.

a) Habitat management is mostly achieved through the activities of several environmental and community organisations, in particular the Prospects Foundation, Lancashire Wildlife Trust and the River Ribble Trust.

b) Infrastructure improvements such as access and entrances, woodland management contracts and control of invasive species are achieved through joint working of the Planning Service and Parks Service of Hyndburn Borough Council.

c) Major improvements have also been achieved through collaboration with Lancashire County Council, for the Peel Park Master Plan, multi-user access improvements in Woodnook Vale, and the ongoing significant investment in the cycleway network being planned by LCC.

4.4 For the 2016/17 and 2017/18 financial years a modest revenue budget of £11,000 has been available to cover HBC basic responsibilities in the LNRs. With the added investment from external grants and activities by others, this amount is used very effectively and goes a long way, given the very extensive nature of the LNR areas.

4.5 In the longer term, options for continuing the availability of HBC revenue for LNR management will need to be considered.

Adjacent woodland

4.6 At a pedestrian entrance point from the Accrington direction into the proposed Woodnook Vale LNR, a further small area of woodland is also of value for habitat quality and public enjoyment. Consideration could be given for this woodland to be added into the LNR declaration, subject to further advice from Legal Services. It is proposed that delegated authority be granted for this woodland to be added to the LNR boundaries at a later date if appropriate. There is a formal Public Right of Way along the path and a history of improvements carried out by the Council directly and others with Council support. For information, the extent of this woodland is approx 0.3ha within the overall LNR of some 52.5 ha, so it represents approx 0.6% of the proposed area.

Lancashire County Council (LCC) land at Woodnook Vale

4.7 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 forms part of the review of the portfolio of some 90 Countryside Service sites, with the greenway being recognised as an Active Travel site and has transferred to LCC Highways for ongoing management of the cycleway/greenway surface. The wider margins of the route will remain to be managed under the Countryside Services portfolio, in some cases with support from volunteer activities. This is welcome news, as these ongoing management arrangements will be entirely satisfactory to meet the needs for LNR declaration to be considered. LCC is also working on a major investment programme for the East Lancs Strategic cycleway.
4.8 Formal requests for LCC to progress LNR declaration were submitted in March 2016 as part of the HBC response to changes in the Countryside Service and again in April 2017. Assistance has been offered to share information being assembled for the HBC declaration, in order to support the LCC declaration process. The County Council has given assurances that proactive and positive management will continue which will contribute to the aspirations of the LNR dedication. It is hoped that LCC will consider LNR declaration for their land later in 2017/early 2018.

**Globe Enterprises and land/water at Platts Lodge, Accrington**

4.9 Platts Lodge is a beautiful key gateway from the Town Centre into the natural greenspaces of Woodnook Vale. Several volunteering activities have been carried out each year supported by project officers from the Ribble Rivers Trust and Prospects Foundation. These have included clean-ups to remove litter and debris from the waters edge; a proposed family activity for August to include awareness raising about wild bird feeding, to reduce the amount of bread being thrown into the water; and removal of invasive Himalayan Balsam. A new initiative is being developed by Mid Pennine Arts for another nature inspired feature and hopefully refurbishment of the red railway piers.

4.10 It is hoped that Globe Enterprises will consider the LNR declaration later in 2017.

**Photo 1** Clean-up at Platts Lodge, June 2017

5. **REFLECTIONS ON THE QUALITY OF THE LNRS**

5.1 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. With some 10,000 properties within walking distance of each of the LNRs, they give ready access to nature and countryside on the doorstep.

5.2 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”.

5.3 The LNRs have a diversity of habitats and species, including extensive areas of importance at County level, and some which are of European significance.

5.4 A small selection of the important natural features of the LNRs are shown below:-

**Peel Park LNR**

5.5 Peel Park LNR has a rich mosaic of habitats including the heathland on the top of the Coppice, which is a habitat of European importance. The heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) has increased significantly on Peel Park since the site was first surveyed in 1988 and it was recognised as an addition to the list of Biological Heritage Sites (BHS) in Lancashire in 2012. It is also noted as one of the most accessible areas of heathland in the County due to the network of improved footpaths. One of the proposals in the ongoing improvement programme is to begin a heathland management programme to strengthen this habitat further.

**Photo 2** Pupils from Peel Park primary school replanting an old hedgerow in one of many activities for schools and young people to get involved.

Contd...
Photo 3  Wildflower rich meadow at Plantation Road, with some interesting species including Orchids, Birds Foot trefoil, Sneezewort and Woodrush

Photo 4  Volunteers on a vocational training course in dry stone walling, now continuing with the restoration of boundaries at Peel Park

Woodnook Vale LNR

5.6  Woodnook Vale LNR also has a range of habitats, including Ancient Woodland, wildflower meadows, various type of woodlands which are UK priority habitats and the beautiful valley of Woodnook Water, the largest visible stretch of river in Accrington.
Photo 5  Woodnook Water in spate

Photo 6  Baby roe deer in Woodnook Vale

Photo 7  Building a deadhedge boundary for the new Forest School area
6. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN RECENT YEARS

6.1 Transformational improvements in site infrastructure, 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 just some of these actions.

**Collaborative working**

6.2 Lancashire Wildlife Trust
   a) South Pennines grasslands project provides specialist input to convert mown grass areas into low maintenance wildflower-rich meadows
   b) Biodiverse Society project is similarly providing survey and habitat management guidance for key habitat areas and specialist training for volunteers and apprentices
   c) Several grant approvals and phases of volunteer activities at Hollins Wood in Baxenden
   d) Current initiative to set up a Wildlife Watch group to inspire children to enjoy nature

6.3 Prospects Foundation
   a) Secured a grant approval from Heritage Lottery Fund over 2.5 years, helping to fulfil many requirements of LNR declaration, including
      - Volunteering and educational activities
      - Extensive and varied range of seasonal activities and training sessions
      - Habitat condition assessment and mini-management plans
   b) Volunteer group activities on Mondays and Tuesdays in the 2 new LNR areas
   c) Children’s activities and support for special interest groups
   d) Grant funding through the Windfall Fund from Oswaldtwistle Windfarm

6.4 Volunteer Conservation Rangers
   a) A significant new initiative is being trialled under the auspices of the Prospects Foundation, to set up a team of volunteer Conservation Rangers. This will support local people who are keen to help look after the LNRs, share their knowledge with others, develop practical skills and a higher level of training, and run activities such as nature walks and habitat survey and conservation techniques.

6.5 River Ribble Trust
   a) The Trust is assisting with new activities for Woodnook Water and Platts Lodge as part of a programme of enhancement for the River Ribble Catchment, and a recent significant HLF approval ‘Ribble Life Together’.

6.6 Haworth Art Gallery
   a) The Haworth is keen to develop closer links with the natural interests of Woodnook Vale, reflecting the natural inspirations of the Arts and Crafts movement. A heritage trail linking the Gallery and Woodnook Vale is planned.

6.7 Mid Pennine Arts (MPA)
   a) MPA are engaged on a programme of improvements and community involvement, linked with the planned investment in the cycleway, focussing on the key entrance points at Platts Lodge and Nuttall Street.
6.8 Baxenden Community Forum

a) Local people who volunteer with Baxenden Community Forum deserve a special mention for their consistent and persistent efforts over many years in Woodnook Vale. They organise community events, nature walks and task days for habitat management, in particular helping to control the invasive weed Himalayan Balsam and to look after the lovely Hollins woodland.

6.9 Lancashire County Council (LCC)

a) LCC has secured Regional Growth Fund investment and is planning significant new investment in the Accrington to Baxenden greenway to create new cycleway links to the south. Ultimately linking through to Bury and Manchester this will be a major opportunity to attract visitors to enjoy the beauties of Woodnook Vale and other visitor attractions in Accrington.

Hyndburn Borough Council

6.10 As the lead Authority promoting the Local Nature Reserve initiative, the following actions reflect pro-active work of the Parks and Planning Services, often including supportive collaborations with local groups.

6.11 Over £½ million investment secured for Peel Park, Coppice, Arden Hall areas since 2008 to improve entrances, footpaths and woodland habitats.

6.12 Grant funded improvements at Royds Street and King George woodland, and Hollins Woodland, Accrington, with support from local groups and Residents Associations

6.13 Over £100,000 investment from the Forestry Commission, for major woodland and access improvements at Woodnook/Bullough Park

6.14 High quality directional waymarking to give consistency and encourage people to explore further around the areas. Other recommendations from accessibility audits advised by Disability First, have almost all been implemented at Woodnook Vale and are underway for Peel Park.

6.15 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.

6.16 New Forest School area established at Rothwell Heights with activities for families and primary schools in the Scaitcliffe, Springhill and Fern Gore areas.

6.17 Growing Wild area at Ley allotment in Baxenden bringing previously unused land back into use for community and children’s activities

6.18 Complementary improvement to play facilities at Peel Park and at Bullough Park have been completed by the Parks Service, again bringing in external grant support.

6.19 Programmes of invasive species control well advanced – Japanese Knotweed nearly eradicated from Woodnook Vale, Himalayan Balsam coming under better control
6.20 Ongoing improvement programme includes:–
- Entrance features and community planting at 3 pedestrian entrances around WNV
- Enhancement project for main northern entrance to Peel Park from Burnley Rd
- Progressive redesign of entrances and boundaries to deter motorbike nuisance
- Working with LCC to upgrade remaining barrier points in the access network

7 Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

7.1 The decision could be taken not to declare 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, as reflected in the Corporate Strategy.

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 Graham Jones MP

8.3 A ‘Tree of support’ has been taken to community events for people to add message leaves in support of the LNRs. Here is a small selection of the messages

“Stunning scenery and variety of birds and wildlife can be seen in Woodnook Vale”
“With initiatives like this, we may one day get rid of the national impression that the area is still blighted by smoke, chimneys and incessant rain”
“Fabulous spaces. So important for all of us to spend time outdoors and appreciate what’s here and make the most of it!.
“Bringing everyone together to enjoy nature. What it’s all about!”

9. Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial implications (including any future financial commitments for the Council)</th>
<th>A modest revenue budget was made available for 2016/17 and 2017/18. Consideration of options for longer term will need to be considered.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Larger scale physical improvements have been achieved with external grant support and it is expected that this can continue with ongoing project development and grant bidding opportunities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Council has secured approx £1million external grant investment from Forestry Commission and various landfill tax credits grants, for the major improvement schemes and ongoing improvement programme, at Peel and at Woodnook.</td>
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<td>S106 contributions from Oswaldtwistle wind farm biodiversity</td>
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clause (original approval) have supported work at Woodnook (£10,000), Jackhouse (£10,000) and Foxhill Bank (£10,000). A further £5,000 remains for commitment to ongoing projects.

Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF) grant for improving 3 entrances in Woodnook Vale during 2017/18

Project funding from Springhill and Huncoat Area Councils

Other recent grant approvals include:
- Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant approved through Prospects Foundation, including the volunteer ranger team initiative
- HLF approval also achieved by the Ribble Rivers Trust will bring complementary activities into the LNRs
- 2 grants from Landfill Tax credits thro LEF, for site improvements supported by local groups
- 13 Windfall grants of various amounts have supported community projects within the LNRs, including the Forest School areas, Hollins Wood Baxenden, community events and training programmes
- Bruce Wake Trust - disability parking in Bullough Park

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<tr>
<th>Legal and human rights implications</th>
<th>Local Authorities have powers to designate LNRs under the National Parks &amp; Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended). LAs also have a Biodiversity Duty under the Natural Environment &amp; Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.</th>
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<td>Assessment of risk</td>
<td>As shown in para 4.1 above, Natural England expects a commitment of 21 years for a Local Nature Reserve. The boundaries have been carefully refined to exclude areas which may be explored for development potential. Availability of ongoing modest resources to continue positive management is likely to be the greatest area of risk for the LNR initiative overall. To date, extensive joint working with other organisations has brought enhanced capacity, expertise wide ranging external funding resources. Without this, the Council would be unable to fulfil its responsibilities for protection and enhancement of natural resources. Co-ordinated action for the LNRs ongoing will include further grant bids, both practical projects and strategic programmes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equality and diversity implications</td>
<td>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 brings in partner capacity to involve and respond to the needs of all in our communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer First Analysis</td>
<td>A Customer First Analysis is attached to this report</td>
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Map 1 – Proposed boundary of Peel Park Local Nature Reserve

Map 2 – Proposed boundary of Woodnook Vale Local Nature Reserve
Customer First Analysis

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the report is to complete the process for formal declaration of two significant Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in Hyndburn.

1.2 A key purpose of LNRs is to encourage more people to enjoy our natural greenspaces. So the most significant considerations for equality are physical accessibility, encouraging everyone to feel welcome and content in the spaces and raising awareness.

1.3 Therefore, the most relevant equality characteristics in relation to the LNRs are:-
   - Age, with consideration of older age groups and younger people
   - Disability, including physical and also mental health considerations
   - Pregnancy and maternity, in relation to accessibility of site conditions
   - Race, in relation to encouraging under-represented groups

2. Evidence

2.1 Several public consultations have been carried out to gather local people’s input on the value of these spaces and some of the issues that needed to be resolved – see Section 8 of the main report. Frequent concerns at the outset included the poor condition of paths, being wet, muddy, slippery and sometimes unpassable. This has been one of the main actions resolved through extensive programmes of access network enhancement.

2.2 Specialist advice from Disability First who have carried out access audits including considerations such as vulnerability, mental health as well as physical accessibility.

2.3 Regular habitat volunteering activities organised by partner organisations, includes gathering some information on the people who get involved.

3. Impact

3.1 The LNR declarations follow on form many years of site enhancements, which have enabled previously inaccessible areas to be enjoyed by many more people – see section 6 of the main report.
3.2 Many measures have enabled more people to enjoy these natural spaces:
- additional entrances, which are well located to improve accessibility from adjacent residential areas and linkages to Town Centre and public transport
- surfaced paths following strong desire lines and rights of way
- appropriate gradients or appropriately designed steps to improve safety and attractiveness of the access paths
- signage and waymarkers to help guide people and encourage exploration
- circular routes

3.3 A number of entrance gateways have specifically been designed to enable ‘access for all’ including wheelchair users, mobility scooters and families with pushchairs.

3.4 Shorter circular routes, together with strategically placed benches, also enable those with lower mobility to enjoy the same experience as others, including the stunning landscape views from the top of the Coppice in Peel park and Rothwell Heights above Woodnook Vale.

3.5 Direct community involvement in the habitat management and other improvements on site will also raise awareness and provides opportunities for people to discuss ideas and concerns. The LNR declarations have brought a wider range of activities, including school children, young people and families as well as more general activities for everyone’s involvement.

4. Actions

4.1 This scheme is expressly designed to improve public greenspaces for the benefit of all.

4.2 There is intended to be an ongoing programme of site enhancements and community activities to continue to widen the number and range of people getting involved.

Name: A Hourican
Signed: Original signed by A Hourican