



Committee and Date

Cabinet- 5th October 2020

Item

Public

Declaration of Shropshire Council owned Country Parks as Local Nature Reserves.

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1. Summary

- 1.1 Shropshire Council owns and manages the following 4 sites:
- Nesscliffe Country Park
 - Llanymynech Heritage Area
 - Poles Coppice
 - Lyth Hill
- and cabinet approval is sought to dedicate them as Local Nature Reserves.
- 1.2 Shropshire Council has the power under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to dedicate land as a Local Nature Reserve. This is an executive function for the purposes of the Local Government Act 2000.
- 1.3 Dedicating the sites as Local Nature Reserves will offer an enhanced status for the land. This can help to raise awareness about the sites both within local communities and for attracting visitors to an area. It also has advantages when it comes to applying for external funding and can offer an increased level of protection against changes in land use that could negatively impact on the wildlife, geology and community value of these spaces.
- 1.4 Specifically, dedication of Local Nature Reserves can help Shropshire Council to achieve the following objectives;
- Access to high quality green space can help to improve quality of life, health and wellbeing for local people.
 - Creates opportunities for education, enjoyment and recreation and preserves links with the local community's past.
 - Local Nature Reserves can help to attract visitors into an area.
 - High quality green space can help to safeguard local ecosystem services – the benefits nature provides for people – such as reducing carbon in the atmosphere or absorbing surface water.
 - Protect and enhance the natural heritage as a key part of building sustainable communities.
 - Dedication of Local Nature Reserves can help to raise awareness and recognise the nature conservation status, community value and recreational potential of a site.
 - Dedication of sites as Local Nature Reserves can afford protection within the planning system from future development.

- 1.6 Outdoor Partnership officers have been working with Natural England in respect of these proposals to ensure nature conservation and ecosystem services are safeguarded and community interaction and involvement ensured. Natural England has agreed to these proposals (appendix 2).
- 1.7 The anticipated benefits of a Local Nature Reserve dedication in these locations lead to the conclusion that it would be appropriate to formally agree Local Nature Reserve dedications in respect of the land known as Nesscliffe Country Park, Llanymynech Heritage Area, Poles Coppice and Lyth Hill.

2. Recommendations

- A. That Cabinet agrees to the dedication of Nesscliffe Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve
- B. That Cabinet agrees to the dedication of Llanymynech Heritage Area as a Local Nature Reserve
- C. That Cabinet agrees to the dedication of Poles Coppice as a Local Nature Reserve
- D. That Cabinet agrees to the dedication of Lyth Hill as a Local Nature Reserve
- E. That Cabinet delegates to the Director of Place, the authority to agree any associated actions to ensure the successful dedication of Local Nature Reserve status for these sites.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 Along with the benefits identified above, LNR designation meets the Shropshire Council strategic outcomes set out in the following Strategies:
 - Shropshire's Great Outdoor Strategy 2018-2028
 - Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy- developing the visitor economy, agricultural support post- Brexit, developing skills, improving Quality of Life and ensuring attractive environments.
 - Shropshire's Local Plan- Better planning of meaningful greenspace and non-motorised access, new destination country parks, protecting environmentally-sensitive sites.
 - Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy- harnessing the power of the outdoors to increase physical activity, address mental health issues and help people stay independent for longer.
 - Local Transport Plan for Shropshire- encouraging walking and cycling.
 - Shropshire Council Corporate Plan- helping deliver the priorities; 'a healthy environment'; 'sustainable places and communities' and 'embrace our rurality'.
- 3.2 There are no discernible risks to Shropshire Council of making this delegation. The dedication of land as Local Nature Reserve does not carry with it any significant

responsibilities for land management above and beyond the normal management planning that the team currently carry out

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications of the delegation beyond staff time for undertaking all relevant procedures with Natural England etc to give effect to the dedication.

5. Background

- 54.1 There has been consultation with Natural England and a letter of support is shown in Appendix 2.
- 5.2 Recommendations have changed since the 2018 Briefing Paper (Appendix 1) when it was proposed that Eardington Quarry and Severn Valley Country Park were included. These are awaiting completed management plans before designation can be pursued. There was also mention of Copthorne Park and Monkmoor Meadows in Shrewsbury in the 2018 Briefing Paper. These sites are listed for transfer to Shrewsbury Town Council, so it is not proposed to take forward designation of them as LNRs at this stage. The Cliffe, which is managed by Shropshire Council but owned by Ruyton-XI Towns Parish Council may be dedicated once future plans have been agreed by the Parish Council.
- 5.3 Section 15 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended) (1949 Act), 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 The power to dedicate a Local Nature Reserve rests with Shropshire Council as the principal authority under the 1949 Act. However, under that 1949 Act, the local authority must first have or acquire a legal interest in the land in question through ownership, lease or an agreement with the owners and occupiers involved. Shropshire Council owns all 4 sites which are the subject of this report.

- 5.7 Declaration of a Local Nature Reserve is an executive function and Cabinet has the authority to make dedications on Shropshire Council owned.

6. Additional Information

6.1 Benefits of a Local Nature Reserve

- 6.1.1 A LNR is a protected area of land designated by a local authority because of its local special natural interest and, where possible, educational and community value. The Outdoor Partnership Service believes that having environmental designations on its sites raises their profile with the public and can increase visitor usage and the health and wellbeing benefits this provides. Environmental designations also provide some protection for the sites nature conservation and recreation interest, as well as specifying a positive use for land that might otherwise be perceived as available for development, thus safeguarding access to the sites for future generations. Declaring an LNR offers many benefits to the Council, such as:
- Access to high quality green space can help to improve quality of life, health and wellbeing for local people.
 - Creates opportunities for education, enjoyment and recreation and preserves links with the local community's past.
 - Local Nature Reserves can help to attract visitors into an area.
 - High quality green space can help to safeguard local ecosystem services – the benefits nature provides for people – such as reducing carbon in the atmosphere or absorbing surface water.
 - Protect and enhance the natural heritage as a key part of building sustainable communities.
 - Dedication of Local Nature Reserves can help to raise awareness and recognise the nature conservation status, community value and recreational potential of a site.
 - Dedication of sites as Local Nature Reserves can afford protection within the planning system from future development.
- 6.1.2 Along with the benefits identified above LNR Designation meets many strategic outcomes set out in the following:
- Shropshire Great Outdoor Strategy 2018-2028
 - Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy- developing the visitor economy, agricultural support post- Brexit, developing skills, improving Quality of Life and ensuring attractive environments.
 - Shropshire's Local Plan- Better planning of meaningful greenspace and non-motorised access, new destination country parks, protecting environmentally-sensitive sites.
 - Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy- harnessing the power of the outdoors to increase physical activity, address mental health issues and help people stay independent for longer.
 - Local Transport Plan for Shropshire- encouraging walking and cycling.
 - Shropshire Council Corporate Plan- helping deliver across the board: resilient communities, healthy people and prosperous economy.
 - Strategic Enterprise Plan, Marches LEP- promoting Shropshire as a business investment opportunity, building on individuals' quality of life, staff wellbeing and company reputation.

- The Governments 25 Year Environment Plan, - Better connecting people, health and the outdoors, especially for young people and to benefit those with mental health issues; improving the delivery of biodiversity and greenspace gains through the planning process and raising awareness of the economic benefits of the outdoors.
- Everyone Active Every Day, Public Health England- Encouraging regular physical activity.
- The Cultural White Paper, DCMS- Maximising the opportunities to transform communities through natural and cultural heritage.

The specific reasons for dedication and benefits for each of the sites are outlined below:

6.1 ***Llanymynech Heritage Area***

Llanymynech Heritage is 7.5 ha in size and is a mix of industrial heritage, woodland and wildflower meadows. The site represents a nationally significant 'industrial production line in the landscape' together with a rich history dating back to the Bronze Age. Having strong community ties, together with a local group The Llimeys who regularly help with site management and community participation. The site also offers a circular walk and is popular with locals. School parties regularly use the restored stable block buildings and local specialist groups are involved with natural history recording. The recreational elements do not compromise the conservation purposes of the site.

6.2 ***Nesscliffe Countryside Heritage Site***

This 53ha site is a popular destination for walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers. The site sits in a prominent position in the landscape above the village of Nesscliffe and is primarily a plantation on an ancient woodland site. Within the site can be found Nesscliffe hill fort, an iron age fortification, recently excavated by Oxford University as part of an ongoing investigation to understand, protect and interpret this nationally important heritage area. Community participation is strong with monthly work parties together with periodic meetings with the Nesscliffe Advisory Group, made up of representatives from stakeholder groups. The site is regularly used by local schools and the Field Studies Council at Preston Montford as part of their studies. The long term aim for this site is to restore the ancient woodland, continue to provide a place for quiet recreation and develop a state-of-the-art interpretation package revealing the iron age hillfort.

The part of the site called The Cliffe is owned by Ruyton XI Towns Parish Council and managed by Outdoor Partnerships. It is not included in the recommendation at this present time.

6.3 ***Poles Coppice Countryside Heritage Site:***

Poles Coppice is a countryside heritage site located in Pontesbury and Minsterley. It is managed by Outdoor Partnerships Team with support from Pontesbury Parish Council. The site is 30 ha in size and is predominantly oak woodland with some grassland and some scree habitat within quarries. There are close links with the local community. Many local people help to volunteer on site. Pontesbury parish councils contribute funding towards site management.

Semi-natural ancient woodland is an important habitat. Poles Coppice has a history as an oak coppice woodland. Local industry such as leather tanning would have

created a demand for timber. The ancient woodland is dominated by sessile and hybrid oak with occasional silver and downy birch and rowan. The understorey is mainly comprised of hazel, holly and rowan. In spring there is a wonderful display of bluebells and stitchwort. Quarrying has taken place in Poles Coppice since the early 18th century, only ceasing in 1971. The extracted stone was used for roadstone and local buildings. There are several quarries within the site. The open scree and grassland habitat within them is an important habitat. At one time, 5000 spikes of common spotted orchids were counted in the base of the main quarry.

The site is an important destination for local people to walk the dog and benefit from better health and well-being. Volunteer days also offer the opportunity for people to get physically active in the Shropshire countryside.

The local secondary school uses Poles Coppice for training students who show an interest in countryside management and conservation. Students work with a member of staff from Shropshire Council.

Through the Stiperstones and Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme, some excellent conservation work was undertaken. This included woodland management to create glades and rides and work to remove scrub from the quarries. Through the management plan, this work will be continued.

In terms of ecosystem services, the volunteers regularly plant trees on site. There is also lots of habitat for pollinating insects, which are a vital resource across the landscape, including amongst farm crops.

6.4 Lyth Hill Countryside Heritage Site

Lyth Hill is a countryside heritage site located in Bayston Hill and Longden on the edge of Shrewsbury. It is managed by Outdoor Partnerships Team in partnership with Longden and Bayston Hill Parish Councils. The site is 28 ha in size and is a mix of woodland, grassland and open hillside. There are close links with the local community. Many local people help to volunteer on site. Both parish councils contribute funding towards site management. Lyth Hill Advisory Group (with representation from both parish councils and the volunteer group) meets regularly to look at management tasks that need completing.

Ecologically the site is very important. Areas of the open hillside still have remnant acid grassland plant communities that are threatened with scrub and bracken encroachment. Grazing management and annual mowing and bracken treatment is helping the acid vegetation to spread. There are also areas of hay meadow and ancient oak woodland (Spring Coppice). The site is an ecological island amongst intensive agricultural land.

Historically the site has links with the rope-making industry and also Mary Webb once lived next to the site. Today the site is a popular recreational area for many visitors from Shrewsbury and further afield. Public footpaths and permissive paths allow ample opportunity for walking and running thereby helping with health and well-being targets. The views across the Shropshire landscape from the top of Lyth Hill are magnificent.

There is lots of potential for education work at Lyth Hill. Already the weekly volunteer days offer a great opportunity for people of all ages to learn new skills and gain experience. With the support of the local parish councils, huge progress has been made with conservation land management on site. A Countryside Stewardship Agreement has funded fencing that has allowed grazing with hardy cattle to be extended.

In terms of ecosystem services, the volunteers regularly plant trees on site. There is also lots of habitat for pollinating insects, which are a vital resource across the landscape, including amongst farm crops.

- 6.5 The LNR designation is vital to recognise the value of these sites for people and wildlife and offer a degree of protection.

7. Conclusion

- 6.1 The benefits of Local Nature reserve status for these sites are considered justification for their declaration as such.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

A briefing note was taken to informal Cabinet and Directors in July 2018 (appendix 1)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Lezley Picton

Local Members

Nesscliffe Country Park & The Cliffe – Cllr. Ed Potter

Llanymynech Heritage Area – Cllr. Matt Lee

Poles Coppice – Cllr. Nick Hignett

Lyth Hill – Cllr. Jane Mackenzie, Cllr Ted Clarke, Cllr Tony Parsons and Cllr Roger Evans

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Local Nature Reserves (LNR) Designation Briefing Paper - July 2018

Appendix 2 - Letters of support from Natural England

Appendix 3 - Map of Llanymynech Heritage Site

Appendix 4 - Map of Poles Coppice Countryside Heritage Site

Appendix 5 - Map of Lyth Hill Countryside Heritage Site

Appendix 6 - Map of Nesscliffe Country Park

Appendix 1- Local Nature Reserves (LNR) Designation Briefing Paper - July 2018

Introduction

This briefing paper outlines Outdoor Partnerships request for Shropshire Council to designate 8 of its countryside sites as Local Nature Reserves (LNR).

Background

The Shropshire Outdoor Partnerships Service priorities are to improve people's health and wellbeing and to support local communities, the local environment and tourism economy. We do this through the management and development of recreational access in Shropshire i.e. Public Rights of Way network, County Parks & Countryside Heritage Sites, Green Spaces and Open Access Land.

The Country Parks and Heritage Sites are those sites with specific natural and cultural heritage features and are major assets to the local community, with local people taking great pride in their parks, many of whom join our 'Friends of Park Groups' to volunteer their time to help look after the site and help raise funds and apply for small grants to develop projects. Many of the sites are also used by a wider audience, attracting visitors from across the county and beyond.

The 24 countryside sites that the Outdoor Partnerships Service manages, includes 2 major country parks (the Mere at Ellesmere & SVCP) having circa 387,000 visitors p.a., with a further 16 countryside heritage sites attracting 436,000+ visits p.a., and 6 smaller sites that have around 57,000 visits p.a. About half of the sites have some environmental designation, such as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Schedule Ancient Monument (SAM), QEII Fields in Trust or Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status. The full list is provided in Appendix 1 below.

Budget Implications

The sites being proposed for LNR designation already meet the requirements of being managed for conservation and recreational purpose and therefore there are no financial implications, other than officer time in consulting with Natural England and the local communities.

Benefits of a LNR

A LNR is a protected area of land designated by a local authority because of its local special natural interest and, where possible, educational and community value. The Outdoor Partnership Service believes that having environmental designations on its sites raises their profile with the public and can increase visitor usage and the health and wellbeing benefits this provides. Environmental designations also provide some protection for the sites nature conservation and recreation interest, as well as specifying a positive use for land that might otherwise be perceived as available for development, thus safeguarding access to the sites for future generations. Declaring an LNR offers many benefits to the Council, such as:

- Access to high quality green space can help to improve quality of life, health and wellbeing for local people.
- Creates opportunities for education, enjoyment and recreation and preserves links with the local community's past.

- Local Nature Reserves can help to attract visitors into an area.
- High quality green space can help to safeguard local ecosystem services – the benefits nature provides for people – such as reducing carbon in the atmosphere or absorbing surface water.
- Protect and enhance the natural heritage as a key part of building sustainable communities.
- Dedication of Local Nature Reserves can help to raise awareness and recognise the nature conservation status, community value and recreational potential of a site.
- Dedication of sites as Local Nature Reserves can afford protection within the planning system from future development.

Along with the benefits identified above LNR Designation meets many strategic outcomes set out in the following:

- Shropshire Great Outdoor Strategy 2018-2028
- Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy- developing the visitor economy, agricultural support post- Brexit, developing skills, improving Quality of Life and ensuring attractive environments.
- Shropshire's Local Plan- Better planning of meaningful greenspace and non-motorised access, new destination country parks, protecting environmentally-sensitive sites.
- Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy- harnessing the power of the outdoors to increase physical activity, address mental health issues and help people stay independent for longer.
- Local Transport Plan for Shropshire- encouraging walking and cycling.
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- The Governments 25 Year Environment Plan, - Better connecting people, health and the outdoors, especially for young people and to benefit those with mental health issues; improving the delivery of biodiversity and greenspace gains through the planning process and raising awareness of the economic benefits of the outdoors.
- Everyone Active Every Day, Public Health England- Encouraging regular physical activity.
- The Cultural White Paper, DCMS- Maximising the opportunities to transform communities through natural and cultural heritage.

The Outdoor Partnership Service believe that more of its countryside sites are worthy of having an environmental designation, and as Shropshire Council has the power under s21 National parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to designate LNR's. We are recommending the Council supports the list of sites below to become LNR's.

1. Severn Valley Country Park
2. Eardington Quarry
3. Lyth Hill
4. Nesscliffe Country Park
5. Poles Coppice
6. Llanymynech Heritage Area
7. Monkmoor Meadows, Shrewsbury
8. Copthorne Park, Shrewsbury

Although Shropshire Council has the power to designate an LNR, Natural England (NE) must be consulted to show that the sites meet the legislative requirements, in that:

- The land is managed solely for a conservation purpose, or
- land is 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.
- The land has an identified management plan in place.

Natural England Recommendations

Natural England believes LNRs should be:

- Of high value locally for environmental education and/or research.
- People are more likely to be aware of and value the natural environment when they can experience it at first hand in places such as LNRs.
- Of high natural interest locally.
- LNRs can help safeguard not just rare but also more common, locally valued species, habitats and geodiversity. They can play an important part in Local Biodiversity Action Plans and Local Geodiversity Action Plans.
- Of reasonable natural interest and of high value locally for enjoyment of nature by the public.
- Natural England recommends that everyone should have an accessible greenspace of 2 ha within 300 m of home; at least one accessible 20 ha site within 5 km of home; at least one accessible 100 ha site within 5 km of home; and at least one 500 ha site within 10 km of home. LNRs can contribute to these targets and the ANGSt standard of a minimum of 1 ha of LNR per 1000 head of population.
- They can also play an important part in sustainable development initiatives.

Process for LNR designation

It is proposed that following process be followed:

1. Briefing to Informal Cabinet to agree LNR site designation at 8 sites set out above.
2. Outdoor Partnerships will then undertake the consultation with NE and following their agreement
3. Report back to Cabinet for formal agreement
4. Arrange legal formalities for LNR designation
5. Provide public notices of LNR declaration

Appendix 1

Site	Current Site Designation	Proposed LNR designation 2018
The Mere at Ellesmere Country Park	Charitable Trust	
Severn Valley Country Park		LNR
Birchmeadow Park	Charitable Trust/FIT	
Brown Moss Countryside Heritage Site	SSSI/Common/LNR/SAC	
Colemere Countryside Heritage Site	SSSI/LNR	
Corbet Wood Countryside Heritage Site	SSSI/LNR	

Donnington & Albrighton LNR	LNR	
Eardington Quarry Nature Reserve		LNR
Ifton Meadows Local Nature Reserve	LNR	
Llanymynech Limeworks Heritage Area	SAM	LNR
Lyth Hill Countryside Site		LNR
Merrington Green	Common	
Nesscliffe	SAM	LNR
The Cliffe	Common	
New England		
Oswestry Racecourse	Common	
Poles Coppice		LNR
Snailbeach Lead Mine	SSSI/SAM	
Stanmore Park		
Steel Heath	Common	
Whitchurch Waterway Linear Park	LNR	
Hodnet Disused Railway		
Wollerton		
The Bog Mine		
Walkmill Meadows (leased)		

SSSI - Sites of Special Scientific Interest

LNR - Local Nature Reserve

Ramsar - International wetland designation

SAM - Scheduled Ancient Monument

SAC - Special Areas of Conservation

Common - Common land (open Access)

FIT - Field in Trust

Appendix 2- Example of letter of support from Natural England

Dear Mark,

PROPOSAL TO DECLARE NESSCLIFFE HILL COUNTRY PARK AS A LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

I am writing regarding the proposal to declare Nesscliffe Hill Country Park a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended).

Natural England's purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings. Nesscliffe Hill Country Park, managed according to the management plan is of value to both local wildlife and the local community. As such, Natural England is delighted to support the declaration of the site as a LNR. Protecting this site and its habitats will allow it to continue to be used and valued by local people for recreation and enjoyment of the natural environment.

Natural England confirms that it has been consulted on your proposal to declare Nesscliffe Hill Country Park a nature reserve under the provisions of Sections 19 and 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended). The requirements for consultation contained in Section 21(6) of that Act have therefore been met subject to following:

As a member of the Engagement Local Delivery Team, I would like to formally welcome these proposals on behalf of Natural England.

The next step is for Shropshire to make the necessary arrangements for the formal declaration of the reserve. This can be limited to the issuing of public notices or can be extended to include an event to celebrate the declaration.

Once the declaration is complete, we will need confirmation of the declaration date, and a copy of the declaration papers and a map showing the exact boundaries of the declared area. The site will also be promoted through Natural England's internet site finder. To ensure our records are up to date, I would be grateful if you could also complete and return to me the attached Local Nature Reserve Fact Sheet once the site has been declared.

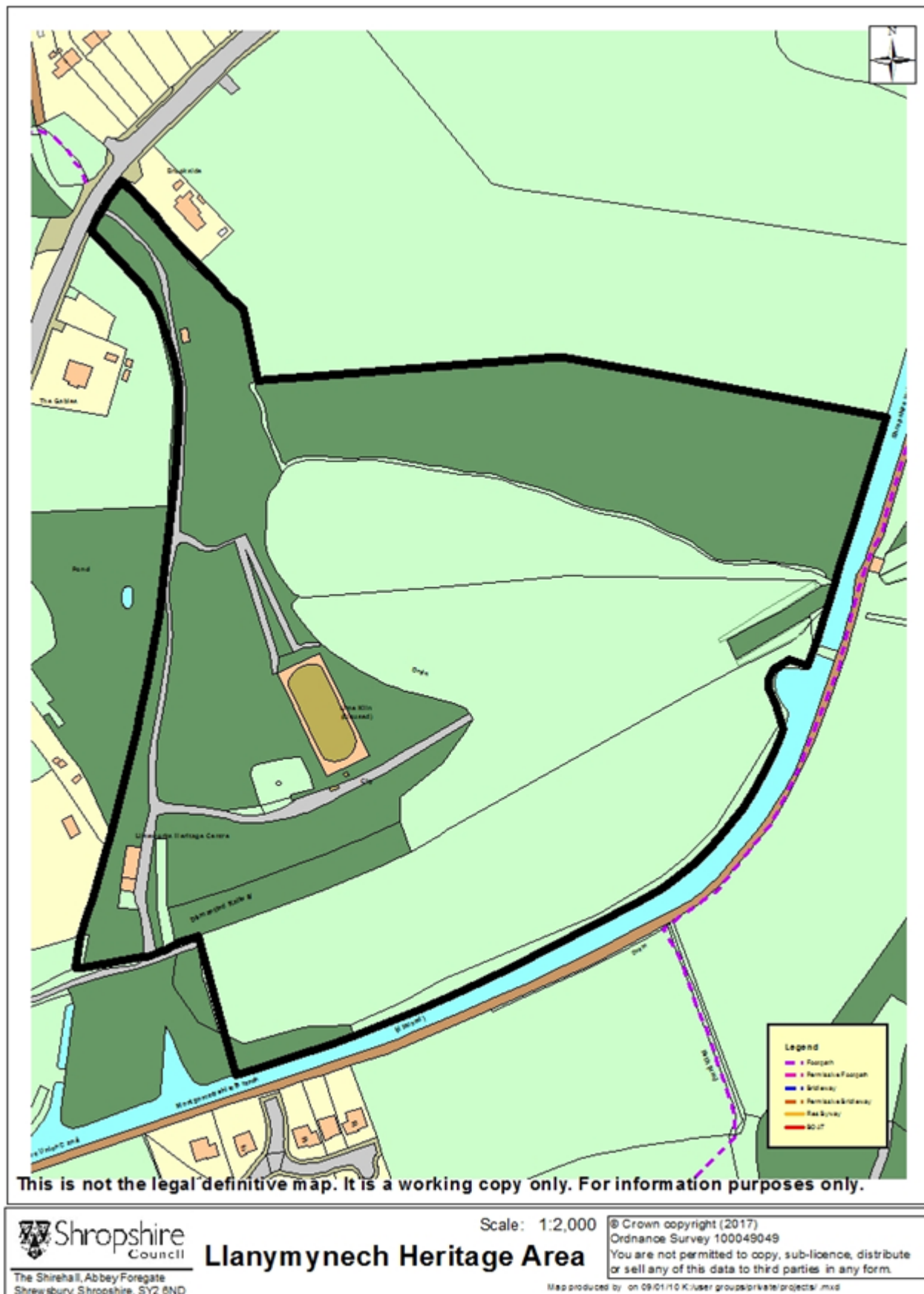
If you are unsure about any part of the declaration process, please refer to the guidance booklet from our website (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/31039?category=15005>) or contact me using the details below

Yours sincerely

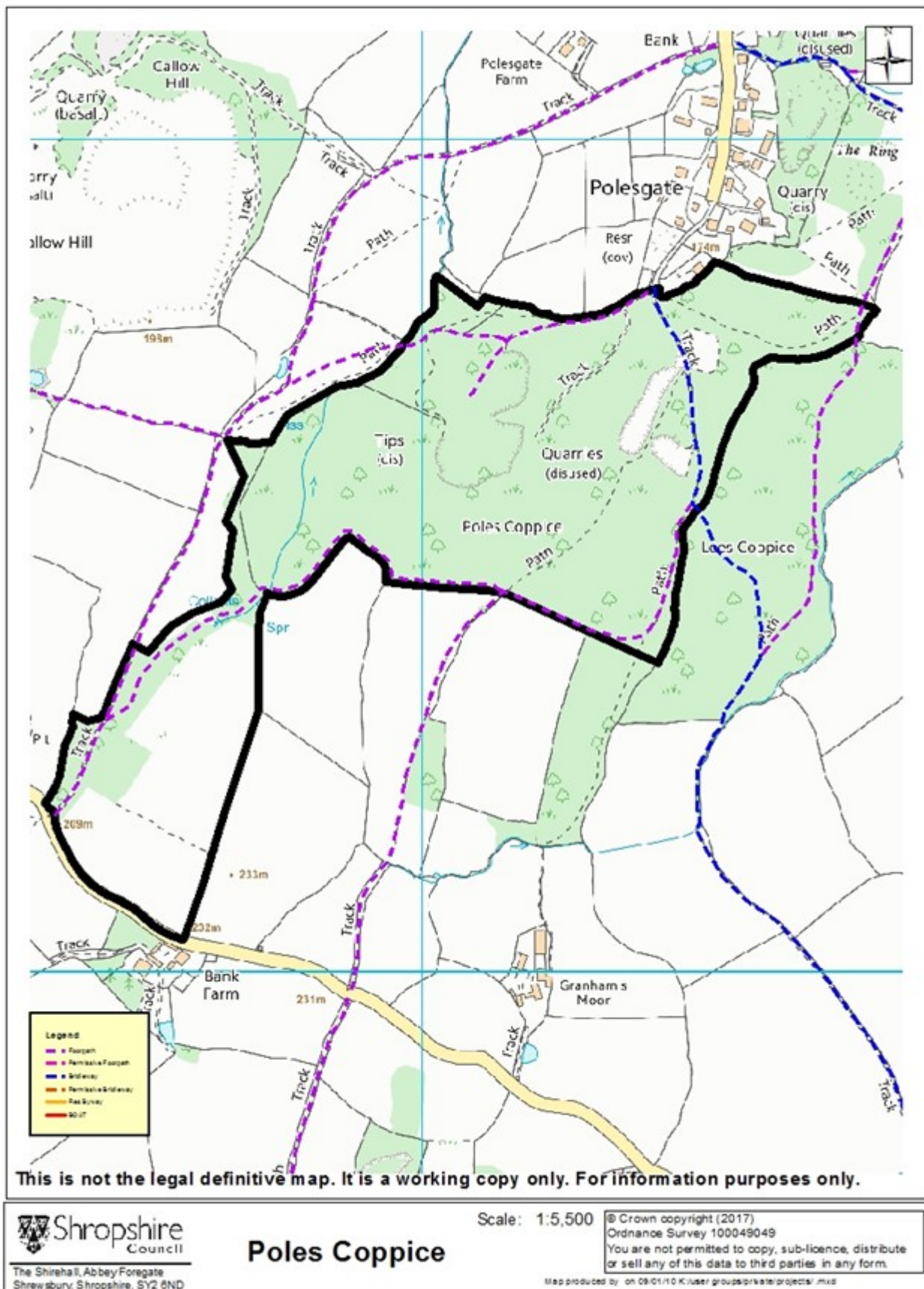


Peter Loat
West Midlands Area Team Lead Adviser – Local Nature Reserves
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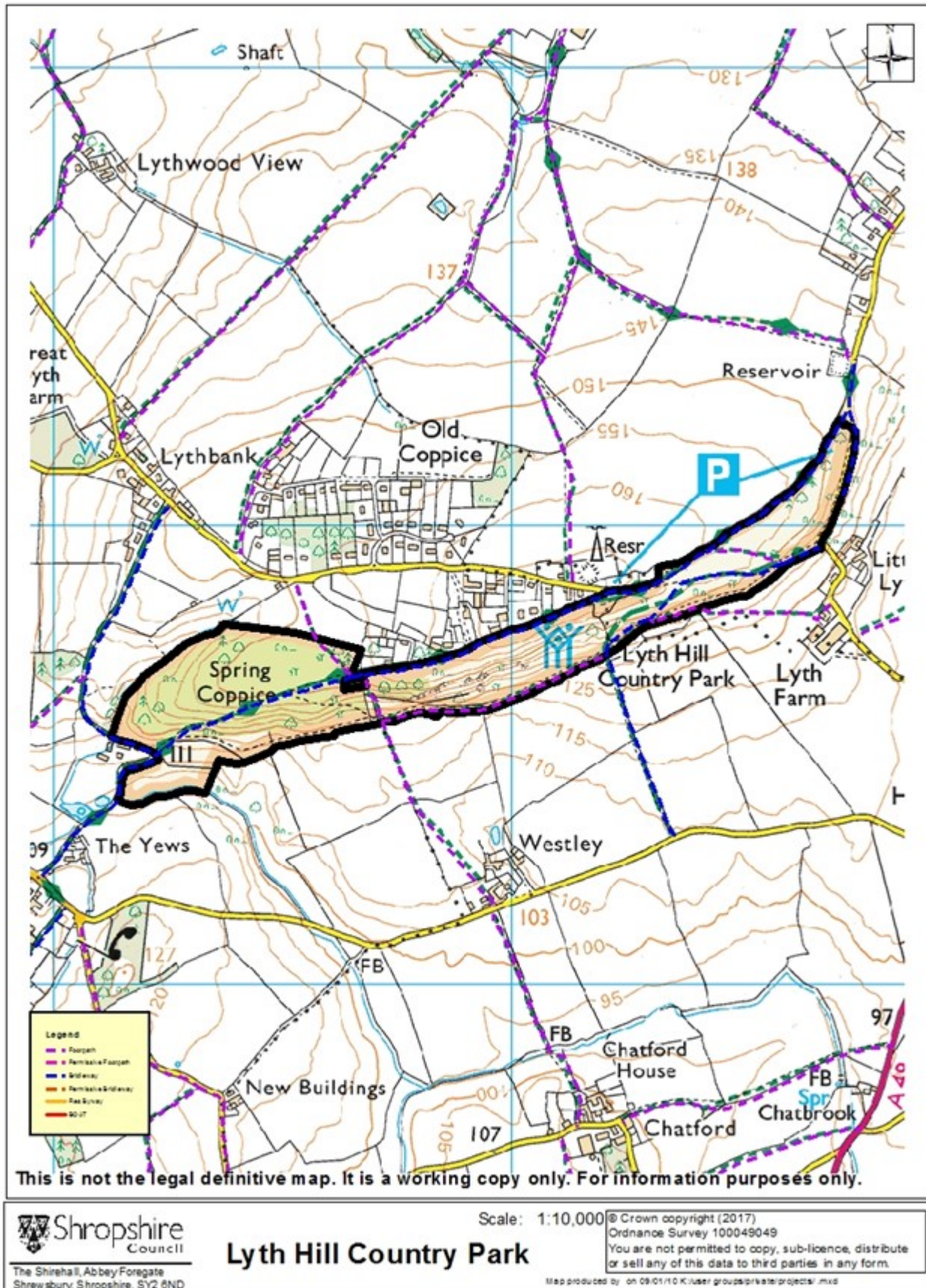
Appendix 3: Plan of Llanymynech Heritage Area



Appendix 4: Plan of Poles Coppice



Appendix 5: Plan of Lyth Hill



Appendix 6: Plan of Nesscliffe Country Park

