



**Cabinet 11 February
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Cabinet

Public



Dedication of a Local Nature Reserve at Eardington

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):		James Owen	

1. Synopsis

It is proposed that Shropshire Council designate land at Eardington Nature Reserve as a Local Nature Reserve. This is a requirement set out in Section 21(6) of the 1949 National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act where a local authority shall exercise their functions in consultation with Natural England. The land is managed by the Council under a 99 lease from Tarmac. The hope is that the declaration will help to raise the profile of the site and increase public usage (with all the health benefits that brings). There is no cost associated with the designation and the consultation report that has been compiled for approval by Natural England was compiled by a skilled volunteer with the support of the Friends Group (reducing officer time needed).

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Eardington Nature Reserve (6.73 ha) lies close to Bridgnorth and the Severn Valley Country Park with the River Severn nearby to the east. The nature reserve supports a superb range of habitats including ponds, open mosaic habitat (bare ground, moss and lichen areas), species-rich grassland and secondary woodland that have all developed on what was a sand and gravel quarry that ceased operations in 1994, although the site contained a ready-mix concrete plant until 2010. There is also a small area of semi-natural deciduous woodland, unaffected by the quarrying operations, that is part of the extensive wooded corridor along the Mor Brook. Eardington Nature Reserve has been designated as a Local Wildlife Site. The nature

reserve is managed by the Friends of Eardington Nature Reserve, who commit a large amount of voluntary time every year, together with expert technical input from Shropshire Council staff based at the Severn Valley Country Park. There is a small car park adjacent to the main road that is linked to surfaced paths and a section of Public Footpath together with very useful information boards. The Friends group maintains an excellent website with a range of up-to-date information including many records of animals, plants and fungi. Two detailed information leaflets on the website are available to be downloaded. Designation as a Local Nature Reserve is a significant step-up in terms of recognising the value of the site.

- 2.2. By protecting an important public open space, there will be improvements to the local quality of life with health and wellbeing benefits. It will also create opportunities for education, enjoyment, exercise and recreation, helping attract visitors and preserve links with the local community and its past.
- 2.3. There will be positive impacts on the local ecosystem and its biodiversity, as well as the benefits that preserving the natural landscape can have on storage/reduction of carbon and surface water absorption, which will tie into the objectives of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 2.4. Empowering the Friends of Eardington Nature Reserve further will bring benefits to the management of the site, as well as further promoting the group's important role for this area.
- 2.5. This proposal has been pushed forwards by John Box, who is a skilled and knowledgeable volunteer, with the support of the Friends of Eardington Nature Reserve. John has spent a long time compiling the consultation report for Natural England which has reduced the need for officer time on this project. Volunteers are also heavily involved with managing the site, offering a considerable saving to Shropshire Council for all the value that the reserve brings.
- 2.6. This is a positive example of Shropshire Council's important role in protecting our natural environment and enabling others to do so.
- 2.7. There are letters of support received from Tarmac, who own the land, (Appendix 2) and Natural England (Appendix 3).

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Approve the declaration of Eardington Local Nature Reserve
- Offer thanks to the work of John Box, the Friends of Eardington Nature Reserve and all other volunteers for their work on the consultation report and for managing this important site.

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. This proposal offers a great opportunity to formalise a very effective working relationship with the Friends of Eardington Nature Reserve and other volunteers to promote, protect and manage the site as a key part of conservation efforts and is in line with the direction of the new administration's prevention focused agenda.

4.2. Risk table

Risk	
Officer time uses resources needed elsewhere in the Council to meet statutory duties.	Skilled volunteers have been used to compile the report for consultation with Natural England
Needed legal advice on whether lease permitted Shropshire Council to declare the LNR	Legal Services confirmed that the lease permits this.

5. Financial Implications

5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):

- scaling down initiatives,
- changing the scope of activities,
- delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
- extending delivery timescales.

5.2. There is no cost to designate a Local Nature Reserve, apart from some officer time in the Legal team who will need to make the formal declaration. By utilising the skills and experience of a local volunteer to prepare the consultation report, this proposal is of great benefit to Shropshire and its residents, without a direct revenue pressure on the Council's budget.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 The nature reserve offers a valuable natural way of capturing and storing carbon (wetlands and woodlands) which will mitigate the impacts of climate change, aided by tree planting on the reserve in the form of new hedgerows.

7. Background

7.1. Eardington Nature Reserve is almost wholly within the Eardington Nature Reserve Local Wildlife Site (Appendix E), one of around 700 in Shropshire. Part of the woodland at the southwestern end of the nature reserve as far as the Mor Brook is within the Cleedsmore Local Wildlife Site which includes Cleedsmore Coppice, part of Factory Coppice and the Mor Brook down to Upper Forge.

7.2. Eardington Nature Reserve is a very significant environmental resource in the Bridgnorth area. It is a former sand and gravel quarry that ceased operations in the

mid-1990s. The site was then used as a ready-mixed concrete plant until 2010 when the site was finally closed.

- 7.3. The sand and gravel habitats that are undergoing natural colonisation and succession are a rare habitat in the modern countryside, particularly the areas of bare sand and the extensive area of open mosaic habitat of mosses and lichens. Ten species of solitary bee have been recorded, mainly in the specially constructed “Bee Village” where mason and miner bees dominate. There are particularly large populations of vernal colletes (or early colletes or spring mining-bee) that appear in April and the ivy bee that appear in September/October. Winter stalkball fungus is present on the sandy habitats; rarely found inland in the UK, this species is usually found among moss or short grass mainly on sandy, alkaline soil in dune slacks just behind the first stable sand dune ridges.
- 7.4. Eardington Nature Reserve is a superb accessible natural greenspace and recreational site for people from the local area and from Bridgnorth that is nearby. The nature reserve is located adjacent to the B4555 about 450 m south of Eardington and 3 km south of Bridgnorth. There is open access for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy the great outdoors. The nature reserve is readily accessible to local residents living nearby being on the bus route from Bridgnorth to Highley and just a short drive from Bridgnorth. Wildlife groups from further afield have previously visited the reserve where Friends of Eardington Nature Reserve volunteers have acted as guides upon request.
- 7.5. Shropshire Council has an open access policy for all its countryside sites. The Eardington Nature Reserve is open every day of the year for pedestrians. There are brown tourist signs for the nature reserve at the entrance to the car park from the main road and on the main road itself. There is a bus service between Bridgnorth to Stourbridge via Highley that stops at Eardington with a request stop at Eardington Nature Reserve. Eardington Halt on the nearby Severn Valley Railway from Bridgnorth to Kidderminster is not normally open to passengers and there is no direct footpath link from the platform to the nature reserve. The free car park off the B4555 is available all year round and the gate to the car park is opened at 9 am and locked at 6 pm in summer and 4 pm in winter. The car park is well serviced with information boards, holders for paper copies of the two nature reserve leaflets, and two rubbish bins.
- 7.6. Pedestrian access to the reserve is through wheelchair-friendly kissing gates. A RADAR key is required to open the larger inner gate for easier access for users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters. These are readily available online and from a wide range of shops and other businesses. However, these kissing gates are not big enough to accept the latest large mobility scooters. There are surfaced paths and tracks within the nature reserve, and a wheelchair-friendly bird hide in the secondary woodland. There are no toilets on the site, but many facilities are available in Bridgnorth which is 3 km away by road or at the visitor centre at the [Severn Valley Country Park](#) which is 12 km by road. Visitors are encouraged to take litter home with them and two litter bins are provided on the nature reserve. No dogs are allowed on the nature reserve between 1st March and 31st August to prevent disturbance to wildlife including ground-nesting birds; at all other times, dogs should be on leads.

- 7.3 There is a walkway and viewing platform on the original pond. The bird hide is in the secondary woodland with an open clearing, a small pond that is connected by a pipe to the roof gutter, and bird feeders that are regularly checked. There are several information boards on the nature reserve and six more will be installed in 2025 that are linked to the industrial heritage trail.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1 In addition, LNR designation meets the following Shropshire Council strategic outcomes set out in the following Strategies:
- Shropshire's Great Outdoors 2018-2028
 - <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/10853/go-strategy-oct18-final2.pdf>
 - Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2027. Developing the visitor economy, agricultural support post- Brexit, developing skills, improving Quality of Life and ensuring attractive environments. [Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2027 | Shropshire Council](#)
 - Shropshire's Local Plan 2016-2038. Better planning of meaningful greenspace and non-motorised access, new destination country parks, protecting environmentally-sensitive sites. [Regulation 19: Pre-Submission Draft of the Shropshire Local Plan 2016 to 2038](#)
 - Shropshire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027. Harnessing the power of the outdoors to increase physical activity, address mental health issues and help people stay independent for longer. [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy | Shropshire Council](#)
 - Shropshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026. Encouraging walking and cycling. [Local Transport Plan | Shropshire Council](#)
 - The Shropshire Plan 2022-2025. This sets the context of delivering Healthy People, Healthy Environment, Healthy Economy and Healthy Organisation. [The Shropshire Plan 2022-2025 | Shropshire Council](#)
 - Shropshire Destination Management Plan 2023-2025 [Shropshire DMP 2022-25 FINAL DRAFT - Aug 2023.pdf](#)
 - Shropshire Council's A New Direction for Shropshire report September 2025 [A New Direction for Shropshire September 2025](#)

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. Declaration of a Local Nature Reserve at Eardington demonstrate a commitment by Shropshire Council to work with partners to secure our county's natural landscapes and environment.
- 9.2. There is an invitation for any councillors to be shown around the Reserve with officers and the Friends Group.

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

Local Member: *Councillor George Hollyhead (who supports the proposal)*

Appendices:

Appendix 1; Proposed Eardington LNR Natural England Consultation Report

Appendix 2; Letter of support (Tarmac)

Appendix 3; Letter of support (Natural England)
