

LAND ADJACENT TO 21 LONDON HILL RAYLEIGH

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the designation and protection of land in Council ownership to the east of the Sensory Garden and adjacent to 21 London Hill, Rayleigh shown shaded on the attached plan.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This area of land was purchased in 1972 by the then Rayleigh Urban District Council. Since that date there have been various proposals for its use including outline permission for the erection of 2 semi-detached 4 bedroomed properties. On several occasions the Council has considered realising a capital receipt for the land but has always declined to dispose of the property. Most recently, the site was included with other land in a lease to Rayleigh Town Council for the creation of an Education and Environmental Centre. The project did not proceed and the land was returned to the Council. Since then the Council has completed renovation of the Windmill and created a sensory garden on adjoining land.

3 DESIGNATION

Local Nature Reserve

- 3.1 “Local Nature Reserve” (LNR) is a statutory designation made by the Council under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (the Act) with regard to land that it owns.
- 3.2 Natural England offer guidance in deciding on areas to be designated and will advise whether they consider the land to be suitable and, if so, the management it might require.
- 3.3 Before proceeding, there is a need to consult local communities and voluntary conservation bodies such as the Essex Wildlife Trust and put together outline management proposals for the site, making it clear what the long-term objectives are.
- 3.4 The land adjacent to 21 London Hill does not fit the Natural England criteria for a local nature reserve. They recommend that reserves should be over 2 hectares in size and for use by both people and wildlife. The land should be capable of being managed with the conservation of nature and/or the maintenance of special opportunities for study, research or enjoyment of nature as the priority concern. It should also be either:-
- of high natural interest in the local context or
 - of some reasonable natural interest and of high value in the local context for formal education or research or

- of some reasonable natural interest and of high value in the local context for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public

On that basis it is unlikely that Natural England would support a proposal for designation under the Act.

Alternative Designations

- 3.5 While not having the authority of a statutory designation, the Council could declare the area to be a natural wildlife haven or urban nature reserve or similar. It would still be advisable to develop a management plan for the site and consult on the proposal. The terminology for the designation is a matter for the Executive Board.
- 3.6 Designation other than under the Act would not preclude development at some point in the future. However, it would be a clear demonstration of the Council's intention with regard to a site that at present remains effectively vacant land periodically attracting the attention of developers. Establishment of a management programme would allow creation of a record of the diversity of existing species on the site. This in turn may be used to safe guard the area from development if that is the Council's desire.

Extension Of The Sensory Garden

- 3.7 A further alternative could be the extension of the sensory garden. However, this will introduce issues with regard to access, possibly requiring steps and/or a ramp down into the site. It would also change the character of the area, could raise objections from neighbouring properties and might interfere with existing wildlife.

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The purpose of designating and managing the area as a nature reserve is to preserve and increase the biodiversity of flora and fauna within the site.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council's Woodlands Team have carried out limited work on the site in the past, cutting back branches from trees overhanging neighbouring properties. It would be advisable to include the area within their annual work programme in accordance with any management plan. While this is likely to result in more frequent inspection it is not anticipated that there would be an onerous programme of work.
- 5.2 Designation as a wildlife reserve will preclude the Council from realising a capital receipt by disposal of this asset for development.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As set out at paragraph 3.6 above.

7 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The site is within Rayleigh Town Council's area.

8 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is proposed that the Executive Board **RESOLVES**

- (1) to instruct the Head of Environmental Services to prepare a management plan and consult with interested parties on the designation of land in its ownership adjacent to 21 London Hill Rayleigh on an informal basis as an urban nature reserve.
- (2) to receive a further report on the outcome of consultation in due course.

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Background Papers:-

None

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Land Adjacent to 21 London Hill, Rayleigh

Report to Executive Board - 26 September 2007



GIS by ESRI (UK)



Scale : 1:1000

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