

Report to Rochdale South Township Committee



Date of Meeting	4 th November 2020
Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Planning, Development & Housing
Report Author	Anouska Shepherd-Smith
Public/Private Document	Public

Sites of Biological Importance Update

Executive Summary

- 1.1 Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) are local planning designations covering areas of nature conservation importance in Greater Manchester which contain locally valuable habitats, plants and animals. Whilst they are not statutory designations like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or Conservation Areas, and therefore do not provide legal protection, they can be taken into consideration when determining planning applications which may affect the site and its nature conservation interest.
- 1.2 New SBIs and changes to existing SBIs are recommended on an annual basis by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) and are reported to the relevant Township(s) in order that they may be adopted for planning purposes.
- 1.3 The latest review which GMEU have undertaken has recommended that the existing Naden Brook SBI is extended to include 1.1 hectares of additional woodland habitat in the north of the site. Naden Brook lost 0.1ha for technical reasons. Overall therefore the site gained 1ha.
- 1.4 The existing Stanney Brook SBI gained 0.1ha of additional grassland habitat due to resurvey.

Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee approve the extensions to the SBIs so that the nature conservation interests of the new areas can be taken into account when planning applications which may affect those interests are being considered.

Reason for Recommendation

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, protecting and enhancing valued sites of biodiversity value. The areas in question have been identified by experts as being of local biodiversity value and we should thus try and protect this value by taking it into account in planning decisions.

Key Points for Consideration

- 4.1 The planning system has a hierarchy of designations relating to sites and features of biodiversity importance. European level sites are those of the greatest international value and have high levels of protection, as do areas of national importance such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There are other areas which are considered to be more of local value, i.e. containing wildlife and habitats which are rare locally or regionally rather than nationally; in Greater Manchester these areas are designated as SBIs on the recommendation of the GMEU. SBIs are graded either grade 'A' (sites of county and regional importance), 'B' (sites of district importance) and 'C' (sites of more than local importance).
- 4.2 SBIs are not statutorily protected and landowners are not required to take any measures to protect them, but if an SBI could be negatively affected by a planning proposal, its existence can justify refusal of the planning application or requirements for measures to be taken to compensate for the harm caused. In addition, the presence of SBIs can be advantageous when bids are being made for funding to improve wildlife habitat in the vicinity.
- 4.3 Naden Brook SBI is a steep sided clough woodland with exposures of sandstone/shale cliffs. There are areas of both wet woodland and upland oak wood, both of which are UK Biodiversity Priority Habitats. Additional habitats include acid grassland, wet flushes and the unmodified river corridor. Cow-wheat is also recorded, the only Rochdale record of this species. Parts of the site are well served by public footpaths and these areas are extremely well used by walkers and some bridleways are also present. It is proposed, as shown on the map in figure 1, to include additional woodland habitat.
- 4.4 Stanney Brook supports a number of habitats including marsh, acid grassland and flush communities. A number of species are characteristic of the whole length of the watercourse and bankside vegetation through the site. The northern end of Stanney Brook has had a number of additional ditches and channels created as mitigation for habitats lost within the adjacent development site. These have been planted with locally native species such as yellow flag iris, branched bur-reed and bulrush. These habitats have been added to the SBI boundary. This area supports a high number of breeding reed bunting, a UK Biodiversity Priority Species. The boundary of the SBI is shown in figure 2.

Alternatives Considered

The alternative would be to not support the proposed changes to the SBIs, which would leave some important areas of habitat more vulnerable to damage from development in the area or nearby.

Costs and Budget Summary

- 5.1 There would be no costs to the Council or others from the adoption of the proposed SBI extensions.

Risk and Policy Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific risk or policy issues for Members to consider arising from this report.

Consultation

- 7.1 There is no specific consultation to be carried out by the Council apart from this report to Committee.

Background Papers	Place of Inspection
8. The full site description, and list of habitats / species present, are available.	Please contact report author.

For Further Information Contact:	Anouska Shepherd-Smith, , anouska.shepherd-smith@rochdale.gov.uk
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Fig 1. Naden Brook

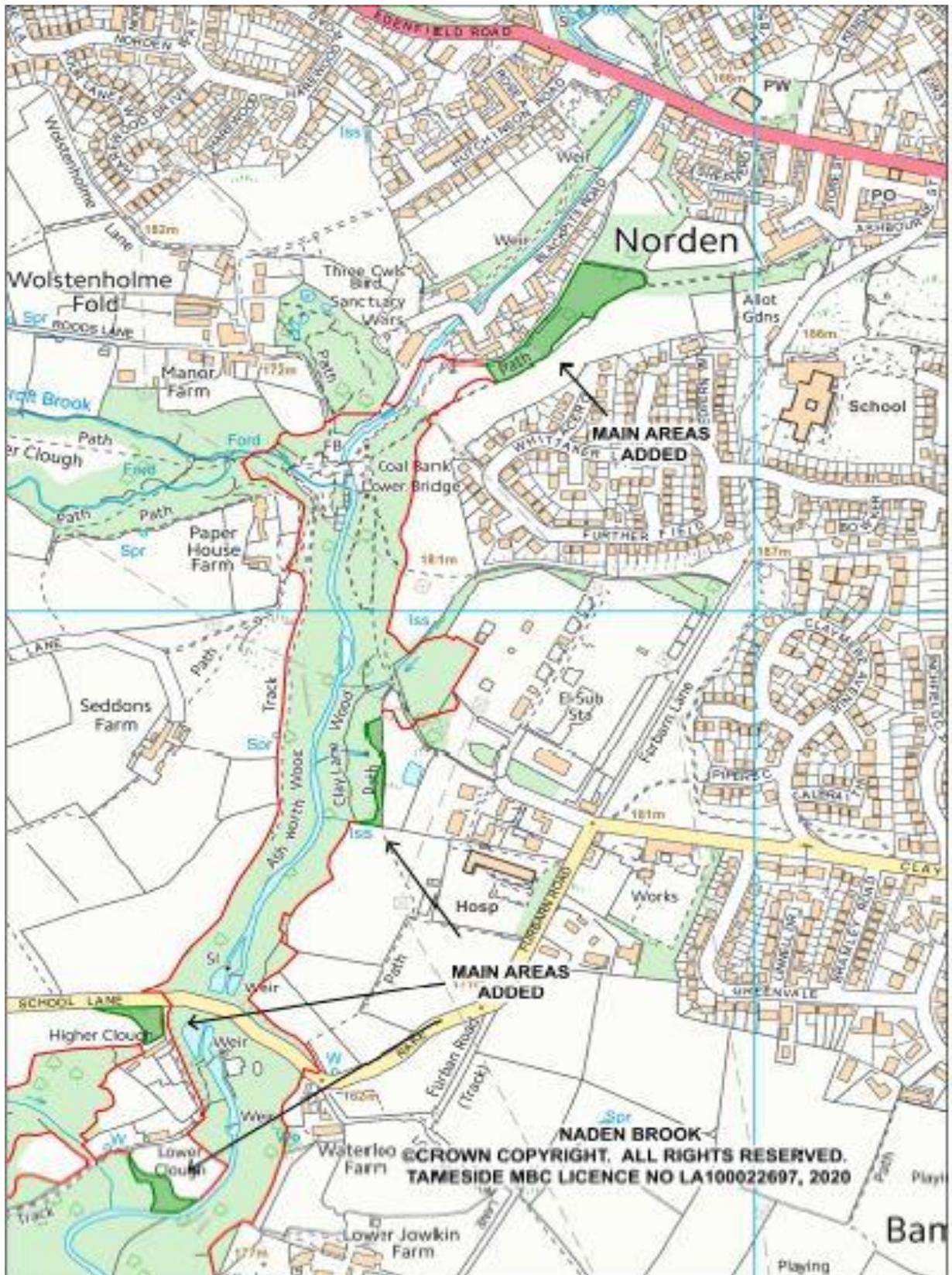


Fig 2. Stanney Brook

