

**Woodnook Vale Local Nature Reserve  
including land at Bullough Park,  
Rothwell Heights and  
King George V playing fields**



Baby roe deer in Woodnook Vale

**Formal consultation with Natural England**

**Submitted by  
Hyndburn Borough Council  
May 2018**



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## Checklist of information for consultation with Natural England

- 1 Site name.  
Woodnook Vale Local Nature Reserve, Accrington including land at Bullough Park, Rothwell Heights and King George V playing fields
- 2 District and County.  
Hyndburn, Lancashire
- 3 Proposed declaring authority.  
Hyndburn Borough Council
- 4 Area in hectares.  
Total anticipated area of the LNR could reach some 53.1 hectares.  
  
Hyndburn Borough Council – 42.5 ha (confirmed for inclusion)  
(including woodland at Bath street, recently acquired)  
  
Lancashire County Council – 9.0 ha (potential for inclusion)  
  
Globe Enterprises Ltd – 1.6 ha (potential for inclusion)
- 5 Map on A4 sheet showing site location.  
Attached
- 6 Map on A4 sheet showing site boundary (1:10,000 scale as well as larger scales if necessary). Also an electronic version if possible.  
Attached
- 7 Site ownership.

This document is intended to cover the formal consultation requirement on behalf of both Hyndburn Borough Council (HBC) and Lancashire County Council (LCC).

Attached - Map showing the different ownership areas

Hyndburn Borough Council is the freehold owner of the majority of the land in the proposed LNR, with landholdings on both valley sides of Woodnook Vale Land Registry title numbers:-

LA 809983  
LAN 107738  
LAN 129274  
LAN 93148  
LAN 93320  
LAN 129256

A small area of woodland, at a key entrance point from Bath Street, is to be included in the Hyndburn Borough Council LNR Declaration. It was not previously registered with the Land Registry. There is a formal Public Right of Way and a history of

improvements carried out by Hyndburn Borough Council directly and others with Council support. The Council has successfully claimed possessory title for this woodland, following submission to the Land Registry of an evidence pack showing direct management activities over a period of 20 years.

Land Registry title number LAN 195235

Hyndburn Borough Council has an interest in the waterbody known as Platts Lodge, which is a key gateway from the town centre into the natural greenspaces of Woodnook Vale. The lodge is owned by Globe Enterprises Ltd, on which the Council has a 1/3 representation. The Board of Globe Enterprises may consider a formal resolution to include the lodge in the LNR.

Land Registry title numbers are:-

LA 809983

LAN 44302

Lancashire County Council is the freehold owner of the central spine of public access along the greenway (National Cycle Network route 6) and part of an adjacent woodland. This landholding is complementary to the LNR. It provides a fully accessible and attractive route for all users to quickly get into the heart of the LNR, with many access linkages to surrounding areas. The option for LCC to include the greenway and woodland in the LNR will continue to be explored.

Land Registry title number is LA 548549



- 8 Description of the habitats and species of interest based on a full survey of habitat types. The description should include a map showing the distribution of the main habitat types mentioned. Information about uncommon species should be included.

Woodnook Vale has a range of habitats, including Ancient Woodland, wildflower meadows, various ages of planted woodlands, the beautiful valley of Woodnook Water, the largest visible stretch of river in Accrington and a former mill lodge at the key gateway from the town centre.



Woodnook Water in spate

#### Habitats

Sixteen different types of habitat have been recorded on the site, including broadleaved and coniferous plantation, semi-natural woodland including oak woodland, dense and scattered scrub, acidic, neutral and marshy grasslands, flushes, standing and running water, heathland and bare ground.

Heathland and upland oak woodland are habitats of European importance. Areas of woodland alongside Woodnook Water, including Priestley Clough, have been identified as being Ancient Woodland, i.e. having been woodland since AD1600. However, some will be descended from the original woodland that recolonised the land after the retreat of the ice age some 10,000 years ago!

Priestley Clough is designated as a biological Heritage Site (BHS) indicating habitat value of County level significance.

Attached – map showing the BHS area plus site description

## Habitat target areas

The LNR is very extensive and therefore 7 target areas have been identified, covering a range of habitat types. These are intended to focus habitat management activity, make the management activities more understandable and help to encourage even more local involvement. Condition assessments together with brief management guidelines have been prepared for:-

- Grassland - Growing Wild
- Grassland - Bullough Park
- Grassland - King George V playing field
- Ancient woodland - Priestley Clough
- Woodland (semi-mature planted) - Hollins Wood
- Woodland (semi-mature planted) - Rothwell Heights
- Water body - Platts Lodge

Attached – condition assessments

Attached – map showing the locations of the habitat target areas

### 9 Description of the value of the site's main natural and physical features.

Starting close to the heart of the urban area near Accrington town centre Woodnook Vale is an extensive LNR of some 3.5 km in overall length and 1km across the valley as the crow flies. Moderate gradients along the greenway are counter-balanced by steep valley sides rising to high ground with extensive landscape views. Woodnook Water flows through the valley.



The uppermost part of the LNR at Rothwell Heights on the western side of the valley is prominent in the landscape and offers panoramic views taking in the whole of the LNR. The highest altitude near the new Forest School and viewpoint at Rothwell Heights is 250m above sea level, on a par with the Coppice at Peel Park. The terrain spans a steep sided valley, down to Woodnook Water and Platts Lodge at 150m and up the eastern valley side to 220m. The hilltops of Woodnook Vale and Peel Park LNRs are inter-visible across the lower lying land of Accrington town centre.

As well as the habitat features and wildlife value, there are significant features of archaeological and historical interest within the site, see section 14 below.

- 10 In the case of sites where geological features are the primary interest, or an important part of the interest, a description with maps/diagrams.

A key feature is the valley of Woodnook Water, the largest stretch of open watercourse in this district, in the upper reaches of the Ribble catchment. The river has many varied features, with wide meanders, steep exposed rock faces, stone culverts and weirs, expressing the great variations that exist in this area.

The underlying geology of the site is barren coal measures of the Carboniferous era, formed around 345 million years ago. These coal measures were a major contribution to the early industrial exploitation of the area.

- 11 Description of the value of the site to schools and the type and scale of current use.

There are 6 Primary Schools, 2 Secondary Schools and a Further Education college within 1 mile of Woodnook Vale LNR.

Attached - list of schools within 1 mile

Activities for schools involvement have been organised over many years and there has been a significant increase in level of involvement, in large part through the activities of the Prospects Foundation, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, River Ribble Trust, Adventure Hyndburn (SureStart), Growing Wild (Baxenden) and more recently, Mid Pennine Arts.

Local schools are actively involved in habitat improvements and are encouraged to explore further around the natural areas, as well as using the natural spaces for their own curriculum and Forest School activities.

Two spaces for Forest School activities have been created, at Growing Wild near Baxenden allotment on the east side of the valley and at Rothwell Heights on the west side.



Children planting trees at the Forest School space at Rothwell Heights  
Organised by Adventure Hyndburn, Prospects Foundation and HBC

12 Description of the value of the site as a place in which local people can enjoy contact with wildlife.

The site is a haven for wildlife and can offer the visitor a wilderness experience just a few minutes away from the edge of town.

Only a short walk from the urban area, this extensive LNR area gives 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.

There are at least 10,000 properties within walking distance, including dense areas of terraced housing and social housing all around the northern and along the eastern areas of the LNR.

The LNR runs right into the heart of Accrington Town Centre, with the key gateway point at the northern end at Platts Lodge. Public Transport nodes of the bus and train stations are also within walking distance.

The National Cycle Network runs through the central spine of the reserve offering full accessibility for people of all abilities. Significant improvements to the access network, with kilometers of paths surfaced, multi-user gateways and extensive waymarking, have been carried out in recent years to ensure that access throughout the LNR is also available.

Key priorities have been to create linkages between the two sides of the valley, improve entrances, address multi-user and mobility needs and encourage people to explore further.



Walk organised by Prospects Foundation with Tramper all terrain scooter

## **Volunteering and training activities**

The majority of habitat management within Woodnook Vale is achieved through regular programmes of volunteering and community activities. There is such an extensive range and depth of activities organised by many organisations, always changing and evolving, so this can only give a brief flavour.

The Prospects Foundation is the local environmental charity for Hyndburn which has been organising community involvement activities in Woodnook Vale for many years. A current programme has 2 dedicated volunteer groups working on Mondays and Tuesdays, funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, who carry out habitat management and practical improvement tasks.

On Fridays a woodland management volunteer group known as 'Woody' carries out woodland management, including several phases of work within Hollins woodland. This has also included innovative techniques to process woodland products on site for features as bird, bat and owl boxes, benches and waymarkers.

Attached – example of monthly activity programme.



Community Clean-up at Platts Lodge organised by Prospects and River Ribble Trust



Building a deadhedge boundary for the Forest School area at Rothwell Heights  
Organised by Prospects Foundation, Adventure Hyndburn and HBC

Lancashire Wildlife Trust has involvement at the strategic level, with habitat assessments and management guidance, together with organising programmes of practical action with local involvement. Activities have been organised for many years throughout the LNR, with some examples being Coal and Cloth, reflecting the industrial as well as natural heritage, Hollins woodland and hedgerow projects, meadow enhancements through the South Pennines grasslands programme, BHS assessment work through the Bio-diverse Society programme, and educational and awareness features at Platts Lodge. And most recently a programme called Myspace which will give people skills and support into employment through the medium of natural environmental action.



Newt sculpture on railway pillar in Platts Lodge.

The idea came from pupils at Woodnook Primary School. The sculpture was designed and installed by Clare Bigger, commissioned by the Wildlife Trust and funded by Globe Enterprises alongside the Waterside development.



Meadow at King George V converted from mown grass  
Lancashire Wildlife Trust guidance and HBC management activity

Several meadows within Woodnook Vale, at Bullough Park and King George V playing field, are included in the South Pennines grassland programme run by the Wildlife Trust. Numerous volunteer activities have contributed to the enhancement of these meadows, including wildflower ID, plug planting, seeding and grassland management.

Specialist training for volunteers and apprentices who want to gain a more in depth knowledge of ecological surveying and recording techniques is being provided through the Biodiverse Society initiative run by the Wildlife Trust. Priestley Clough Biological Heritage site is included.

Mid Pennine Arts has been engaged by Lancashire County Council to develop a programme of community engagement activities and creative features for the central spine of the greenway/cycleway.

Further specialist knowledge opportunities are being developed through the involvement of the River Ribble Trust, linking the Local Nature Reserve to it's wider context of the Ribble Catchment.

Numerous nature walks are organised throughout the year, including the Jubilee Trail, foraging, photographic, sketching, bat walks, riverside and woodland walks, and a Heritage Trail created by Haworth Art Gallery linking with the nature inspirations of the Arts and Crafts movement.



Baxenden Forum have been long term supporters of the efforts to enhance habitats and community features in the Woodnook Vale area. They organise their own activities such as nature and heritage walks, balsam bashing days and supporting grant bids for access improvements. Another local group which actively supports the LNR is Ferngore Residents Association, while Bullough Park and Woodnook Residents Associations help with discussions and consultation activities.

Hyndburn Borough Council has been actively managing and supporting activities in Woodnook Vale for at least 20 years. This involvement began with taking the lead on a partnership programme for Woodnook Vale Country Park, which has evolved through several stages to the current Local Nature Reserve initiative.

Attached – summary of HBC actions

One example is a programme of training days in the heritage skill of dry stone walling organised by the Council with the support of a professional walling tutor. They are very popular and have resulted in a regular programme of Walling Wednesdays to continue with the restoration of historic boundaries ongoing.

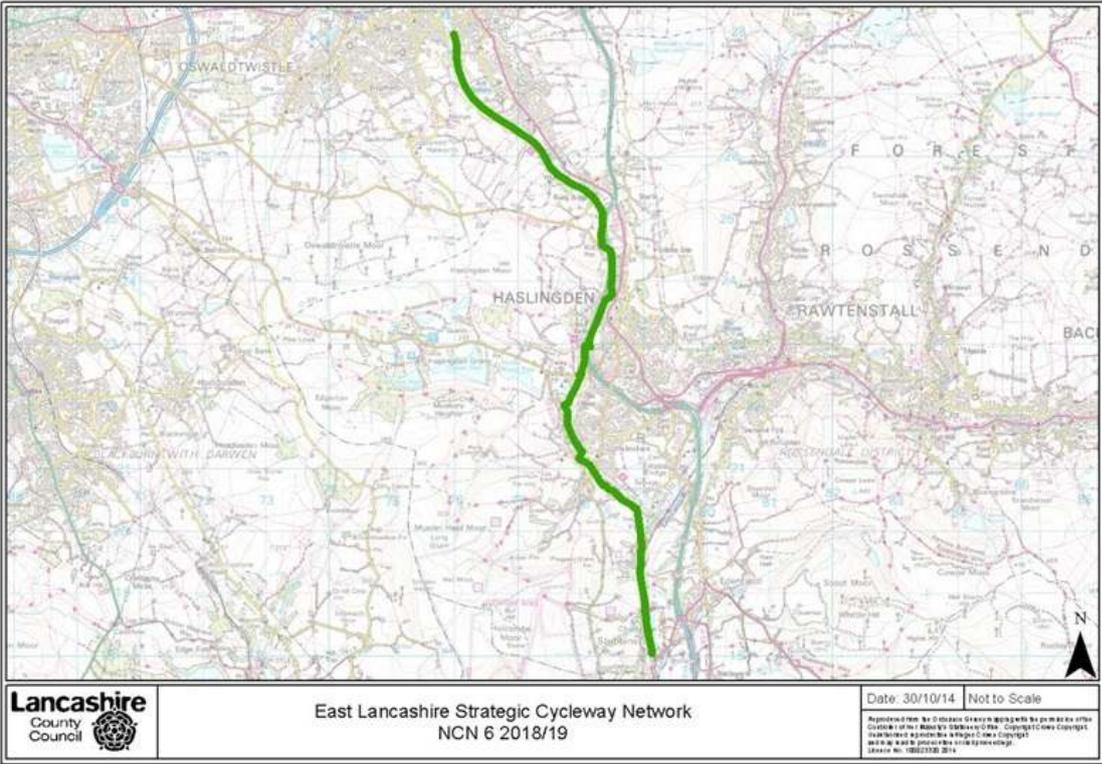


Volunteers on dry stone walling training at Rothwell Heights, the most elevated boundary in the LNR

Globe Enterprises Ltd, on which Hyndburn Borough Council is a 1/3 partner, owns and manages the Platts Lodge reservoir at the most northerly entrance to the LNR. A key step for public access was created in 2007, when a causeway was constructed across the lodge, carrying the National Cycle Network route 6. Many other enhancements have included a viewing platform, protected banks favouring habitat and arrangements for sensitive use by a local angling club. The Council and Globe are currently collaborating with River Ribble Trust, Prospects Foundation, Mid Pennine Arts and others on community involvement and creative feature activities at the lodge. Recently a group of local people have set up a Friends of Platts Lodge and have organised clean-up activities.



Lancashire County Council initiated the public benefit activities at Woodnook Vale through their very early action to protect and reclaim the old railway line to create a public recreation route. Currently, the greenway is managed as an Active Travel route under LCC Highways Service. A significant investment programme is making the much needed cycleway linkages to the south through the East Lancashire Strategic Cycleway network programme. These linkages will add further public value to the Woodnook Vale LNR, as a destination for visitors from other areas.



The greenspaces alongside the cycleway within Woodnook Vale and the adjoining part of Hollins woodland are managed by LCC Countryside Service. This proactive and positive management will continue to contribute to the public access and attractive environment of the LNR.

- 13 The features and values described in 8-12 should be placed in the context of the local authority area, preferably as a separate section.

Woodnook Vale, together with Peel Park, are the highest scoring candidate LNR sites in public ownership in Hyndburn. In an assessment carried out in 2003 they were in the top 6<sup>th</sup> highest scoring sites throughout East Lancashire. The value of Woodnook Vale has been increased dramatically since then through enhanced volunteer involvement for habitat management, together with extensive programmes of site improvements including access networks, entrances, waymarking and woodland management.

It is pleasing that the LNR Declaration will now bring years of work by dozens of organisations, groups, schools and individuals to fruition.

The Wildlife Trust comprehensive assessment of potential LNRs was based on a

community consultation to nominate sites, in 2003. 6 sites were nominated and assessed in Hyndburn, as part of a wider exercise to assess a total of 67 sites throughout East Lancashire.

Of the six sites nominated in Hyndburn, the highest scoring sites eligible for LNR status were Woodnook Vale which scored 32.47 and Peel Park with a score of 30.01 out of a maximum of 50. The Wildlife Trust recommended that one or both of these sites should be considered for LNR status. This compared favourably with the score for Foxhill Bank at 34.25, already designated as a LNR.

For information, at the time of the assessment, Harper's Clough or Star Delph Quarry, scored 34.62. This high score was based on the site being leased by the County Council at the time, however the site ownership was actually private and unsuitable to be brought forward as an LNR.

Following significant improvements since that time, it is thought that the scores for Woodnook Vale and Peel Park would be greatly increased. The assessment will be repeated, as another method of tracking progress over time.

#### 14 Outline of past uses of the site in so far as these are known.

The valley has been enjoyed for tranquil contact with nature by local people for many generations as shown in this very early postcard image of the riverside path alongside Woodnook Water.



Many features of archaeological and historical interest lie within the site, of which one is nationally significant, i.e. the Accrington to Ramsbottom railway, the rest being of County importance, including Platts Lodge as part of the Broad Oak Printworks, the weir on Woodnook Water as part of Woodnook Mill and a former Smallpox Hospital. Significant medieval residences at Woodnook Farm and Hollins Hall leave little trace on the ground but their names live on in local neighbourhoods.

Shoe Mill was initially a cotton mill, driven by water from Woodnook Water, thought to have been built in 1790. It closed after a serious fire in 1860 but part of the mill was

used for manufacturing rubber until 1880. A drained reservoir, waterwheel pit and base of a stone chimney are still visible. A filled circular depression south-west of chimney is probably an old colliery shaft.



Postcard from 1906 showing Shoe Mill and the viaduct.

Rothwell Mill was one of Accrington's oldest industrial sites. In 1790 it was a water-powered fulling mill and dye-house but by the 1820's it had been converted to a bleachworks. Bleaching ceased around 1856 and the buildings were used for a number of purposes including chemical manufacture. The chemical works closed in 1913 and the mill has since been demolished.

The Accrington to Ramsbottom railway was opened in 1848 and closed in 1966. An unusual feature of this line is that it crossed Platts Lodge, which was originally the millpond for the Broad Oak Printworks.



Express train on Baxenden Bank (1960's).

A small pox hospital is shown on the first edition 1:2500 map of 1893 with the addition of the hand-written words 'Smallpox Hospital (Accrington Corporation)'. This lies with Hollins Woodland today with evidence of an old hedgerow boundary, with aspirations for a future community archaeology and interpretation project together with hedgerow restoration within the overall woodland management plan.

- 16 Any known constraints on management, eg soil toxicity, wayleaves, tenancies, rights of common, mineral rights separately owned.

No constraints to LNR management have been identified.

- 17 Purpose of formal declaration as an LNR.

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

Significant improvements in the site conditions, habitat management and community activities, as analysed against the LNR Visitor standards published by Natural England have been achieved, particularly in the last 5 years.

Woodnook Vale LNR (HBC areas) will rank as the second largest LNR in Lancashire (Peel Park being the largest by far). This feat which is only achievable by the collaborative efforts of many organisations, groups and individuals and well as concerted effort by Hyndburn Borough and Lancashire County Councils. Hyndburn will also become the first district in Lancashire to meet (indeed exceed) the national targets for Accessible Natural Green Space.

This is something that Hyndburn can be rightly proud of, reflecting the many years of volunteering and effort already invested by local people who love and enjoy these natural greenspaces.

- 18 Outline management policies/objectives/prescriptions, including access.

A significant raft of survey and management guidance has been carried out, the key and more recent elements are summarized below.

#### Habitat

A full biodiversity management plan was prepared in 2009 with volunteer involvement through a series of workshops led by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

Attached – summary of the management plan

The LNR is very extensive and therefore 7 target areas have been identified as a focused way of updating the management plan, covering a range of habitat types. This is intended to prioritise activity, make the management activities more understandable and help to encourage even more local involvement. Condition assessments have been carried out for these areas – see section 8 for more information.

Attached – condition assessments for the 7 target areas

## Access and visitor facilities

Very significant improvements to the access network, entrances and other infrastructure have been achieved in recent years.



It is easily accessible by an extensive network of multi-user paths, with entrances from both urban areas and open countryside and connections to the wider Public Rights of Way network.

It is intended to continue an ongoing programme of site improvements, with the following priorities identified for progress in the next few years:-

- Access for all – to continue to implement the recommendations of an accessibility audit carried out by Disability First in 2016
- Destination Nature – entrance and focal point enhancements at 3 key locations at Perth St to the north, Miller Fold Avenue to the west and further work at Royds st to the east.
- Strategic cycleway investment lead by Lancashire County Council, to link the greenway into the National Cycle Network southwards towards Manchester. Mid Pennine Arts are running a programme of community engagement and creative features at key points along the route through Woodnook Vale.
- Footpath link from Hollins woodland to the greenway and improved gateway at entrance to Hollins woodland
- Replacement viewing platform at Platts Lodge, exploring options for a higher profile creative feature.
- Link to Priestley Clough, on private land, being explored in tandem with Lancashire County Council
- Continuing restoration of boundary wall followed by creation of a circular route path at Rothwell Heights

- Replacement steps at railway bridge, a key link between the greenway and surroundings rights of way, also in collaboration with LCC
- Viewing point feature at Rothwell Heights
- Gateways and entrances generally – to progressively redesign and upgrade entrances to enable multi-user access, while deterring anti-social and nuisance issues such as motor-bike trespass

Longer term aspirations include continuing the progressive programme of improving access links to adjacent residential areas, community archaeology and interpretation project at Hollins woodland, circular footpath route and interpretation project at Shoe Mill.

#### 19 Outline of capital and revenue costs in first year.

The full Management Plan estimated the annual value of activities to manage and enhance Woodnook Vale LNR to be in the range of £40 - 50K.

In reality there is a multiplicity of activities and involvement by many organisations, with funding from many different grant sources as indicated in the information shown above and in the attached activity sheets.

Hyndburn Borough Council specifically shows it's strong commitment to the Local Nature Reserve, having secured significant external investment for the woodland and access improvements, and continuing to develop ongoing projects with grant support. Internal Council budgets for capital and revenue works for the LNR have been allocated over several years and staffing support and core revenue budgets within the Planning Service and the Parks Service are also available.

Lancashire County Council continue to actively manage the central greenway through their Highways and Countryside Services.

#### 20 Staffing proposals

Management and enhancement of the Woodnook Vale Local Nature Reserve is achieved by very effective collaboration arrangements between many organisations – as shown in the next section and in the activity sheets.

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

Infrastructure improvements such as access and entrances together with larger contract requirements for woodland management are achieved through joint working of the Planning and Parks Services of Hyndburn Borough Council.

Management of the central greenway, together with major improvements are also achieved through various services of Lancashire County Council.

21 Proposed links with voluntary nature conservation bodies and site users.

This LNR Declaration is only achievable through the collaboration of a large number of organisations, groups and individuals.

Thanks and appreciation go to the following:-

Prospects Foundation – with special thanks to Ian Plested and Roger Plum  
Lancashire Wildlife Trust – with special thanks to John Lamb  
River Ribble Trust  
Lancashire County Council  
Globe Enterprises Ltd  
Baxenden Forum  
Fern Gore Residents Association  
Adventure Hyndburn (previously Sure Start)  
Mid Pennine Arts  
Haworth Art Gallery  
Many funders, including Lancashire Environmental Fund, Forestry Commission  
Heritage Lottery Fund, Windfall Fund from Oswaldtwistle wind farm, Springhill and  
Barnfield Area Councils, Bruce Wake Trust and many others

..... and of course Hyndburn Borough Council.....

Attached – some examples to give an indication of the huge range of activities undertaken in recent years and currently in progress – and yet hardly capturing the full range of activity going on in the Woodnook Vale area.