

Title of Report:	Cregagh Wood Local Nature Reserve
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	15 April 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and enhancing our environment and our assets.
Outcome	Generating economic and social returns without compromising our natural assets.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	N/A

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£4,000 per annum
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	YES
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to consider the future management of Cregagh Wood as a Local Nature Reserve.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local Nature Reserves, (LNRs) are areas that have been specially set aside for biodiversity and where people can enjoy wildlife. In contrast to other designated sites, such as national nature reserves, which tend to be areas with high importance for plants and animals, or with features of great geological interest, LNRs do not have to contain rare or threatened species or habitats. They are usually areas with good wildlife content which are accessible to people and provide them with opportunities to be close to wildlife. Hence many LNRs lie within or close to urban areas. Local Nature Reserves are very much what their name suggests - sites where the principal objective is nature conservation, but where local people can have easy access and be involved, for example, in practical conservation measures taken on site.
- 2.2 As the power to declare LNRs lies solely with district councils, the Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme had requested that Moyle District Council agree to partner with them to progress the designation of Cregagh Wood, Cushendun as a Local Nature Reserve through a Management Agreement with the landowner. This request was considered at their meeting of 11th August 2014.
- 2.3 At that meeting Council agreed to support the proposed project in principle subject to the Heart of the Glens LPS, in conjunction with the councils Biodiversity Officer, preparing a detailed management plan with associated yearly management costs for approval by council. The Management Plan was produced by Councils Biodiversity Officer.
- 2.4 Moyle District Council subsequently signed the Cregagh Wood LNR Management Plan for a Ten-year period from 1st April 2015 until 31st March 2025.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 As the current Management Plan expired on 31st March 2025, Council must now decide if it wishes to continue the management agreement with the landowner to manage the site for a further 10-year period.
- 3.2 Declaring a site as a LNR is a visible sign of a local authority's commitment to protecting biodiversity. Often designation is linked to actions and targets within a council's Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).
- 3.3 LNRs are important for many reasons:
- They help to protect valuable habitats and natural heritage, including geological features.
 - They raise awareness of wildlife through publicity, events, site signage, etc.
 - They provide opportunities for people to encounter and enjoy wildlife.
 - They can be used for environmental education.
 - They help to create a sense of ownership of the site by local people.
 - They can provide a chance for local communities and volunteers to be involved in practical biodiversity projects and site management.

A copy of the new Management Plan is attached **Annex A**.

4.0 Options

- Option 1 Council does not renew the Management Agreement with the landowner to manage Cregagh Wood LNR.
- Option 2 Council renews the Management Agreement.

5.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Leisure and Development Committee considers the detail presented in this report, with either Options 1 or 2 presented for recommendation.

Management Plan for Cregagh Wood Local Nature Reserve



Introduction

The name Cregagh Wood comes from the Glens of Antrim Gaelic, ‘Creagach’ meaning craggy, rocky and barren. This gives a good picture of the underlying land onto which this ‘plantation of largely beech trees and other non-native trees was made circa mid 1800’s. The woodland was originally planted to attract Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) for shooting but has matured and developed into one of the few large deciduous woodlands in The Glens of Antrim. The development of local Nature Reserves status and access to the site will further protect and enhance this iconic woodland for the future.

Definition of a Local Nature Reserve

A “nature reserve” is defined under Article 2 of The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985

“nature reserve” means any area reserved, managed and used for the purpose of –

- 1. conserving flora, fauna or features of geological, physiographical or other scientific or special interest therein or*
- 2. providing, under suitable conditions and control, special opportunities for the study of, and research into, matters relating to flora and fauna and the physical conditions in which they live, or for the study of features of geological, physiographical or other scientific or special interest therein;*
- 3. Or for both of those purposes;*

Article 22 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 gives district councils the power to acquire, declare and manage Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). There is no actual definition of a “Local” Nature Reserve (LNR) contained in the legislation. The term ‘nature reserves’ is used in the Order but throughout the UK, nature reserves declared by local authorities, have come to be known as Local Nature Reserves.

Powers of district councils

- 1 A district council may provide nature reserves on any land in its district (not being land held by, or the subject of an agreement or covenant entered into by the Department, under this Part), where it appears to the council expedient that the land should be managed for such purposes.*
- 2 A district council may acquire land by agreement for the purposes of paragraph (1).*
- 3 Where a district council provides a nature reserve under paragraph (1), the council may make byelaws for the protection of the nature reserve, and paragraph (2) and (3) of Article 19 shall have effect in relation to byelaws made under this paragraph as if for reference to the Department there were substituted references to a district council.*
- 4. District councils shall exercise their functions under this Article in consultation with the Committee for Nature Conservation.*
- 5. In this Article the expression “provide” shall be construed in accordance with Section 147 (a) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.*

Based on these legal definitions and evolving good practice throughout the UK, the working definition of a LNR is;

“A Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is an area of land, designated by a district council, to conserve its nature conservation, earth science and recreational value, with the primary land use being for conservation purposes”.

Cregagh Wood for LNR

Cregagh Wood fulfils many of the criterion for Local Nature Reserve

- 1. Of high natural heritage and/or earth sciences interest/value in the local context.*
 - Cregagh Wood is of high local value as broadleaved woodland, close to Cushendun and Cushendall providing access to a woodland that supports a variety of habitats and species.

Or

2. Of high value for environmental education or research.

- Some environmental education has taken place in the wood through the Glens Red Squirrel Group in the past and through the Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme the Glens Red Squirrels Group activities developed for the wood include nature walks, interpretation and small observation hide.

Or

3. Of high value in the district council area for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public.

- Local people use the woodland regularly for walking and biodiversity. Current lease discussion with the landowner and the Council will further develop the woodland for biodiversity and people. The wood is of high value for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public.

And

4. Capable of being managed for the conservation of nature/earth sciences and/or the maintenance of special opportunities for study or research as a priority concern.

- The woodland currently is protected by a covenant between the landowners and the National Trust. The Glens Red Squirrel Group work within the wood to protect and enhance the red squirrel population and, monitor and record other species with in the wood. The Council and the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust are working with the landowner to enhance the informal access, provide interpretation and some minor tree works and develop a management agreement for the Council to look after the sites access.

Management of Site

Management for Biodiversity

As a mature planted, largely deciduous woodland, Cregagh Wood is going through a second-generation succession, with the original beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) seeding new trees. As well this growth, in places, of native pedunculated oak (*Quercus petraea*) and an understory layer of holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is also adding to the biodiversity and of the woodland.

There are a small number of other mature non-native trees in the wood, but there is no management requirement regarding same.

By-in-large the main management of the biodiversity in the wood, which is a climax community, will be minimal intervention and leave it to its own natural processes.

There may be on occasion a need for:

1. Removal of non-native plants
2. Removal of non-native animals (e.g. Grey Squirrel)
3. Planting parts of the site in local provenance native trees if required (For the most part this should occur naturally).

4. Grazing to be permitted only as recommended by biodiversity/sustainability plan

It is not envisaged that these actions are, at present, essential to the future of the woodland. However, the Grey Squirrel poses a threat to the Red Squirrel in the area and to trees within the woodland, currently removal of this non-native species, as well as feeding supplement to local Red Squirrels is being carried out by The Glens Red Squirrel Group at no cost to council. However, this is a charitable organisation and funding constraints may change this in the future, and as such it is recommended that a small annual sum be set aside to support this work (£300).

Annual costs to council associated with the management of the site and trees along the pathway and boundary.

Initial preparation for the nature reserve and pathway have been jointly funded by Council and Heart of The Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme. Ongoing annual maintenance will focus on three main areas:

- Maintenance of forest trail and directional signage
- Annual Tree Survey
- Occasional tree works
- Removal of Fly-dumping

The maintenance of the forest trail will be a minimum cost and will involve, where necessary, occasional cutting back of vegetation at entrance gateway and occasional repair of the three small drains across streams.

Falling trees and limbs mean that a recommended annual tree survey along pathway and boundaries would be best practice to ensure public safety. On the occasion, when work is identified a further cost relating to tree works would be incurred.

Fly dumping is an occasional concern on all rural locations and the possibility of this form of anti-social action on the site is a reality. While the designation and official use of the site as a public amenity is likely to further discourage any incidence of fly dumping, clearing of same should be allowed for in any management action

Community Education Potential

There is a significant educational potential from Cregagh Wood. Given that deciduous woodland of this size and maturity is rare, the potential of the site as a focus for woodland wildlife training and awareness could be explored by the Council's Biodiversity Officer. This, in time could add significantly to the attraction of the site to visiting schools and universities to the area.

Boundary Wall

The Landowner will remain responsible for the boundary wall of the site and as such this will not have any impact on council.

Covenant between Owner and National Trust

Cregagh Wood is subject to a covenant between the owner and The National Trust. The covenant is simply to protect the integrity of the broader woodland and to limit any actions that would damage it. It has no implications for the LNR and access plans in the site.

The role of the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust

The Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust working in partnership with Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council on this access and LNR project and have invested a significant amount of money in the project. During the life of the agreement CCGHT are interested in partnering council and other organisations on the any issues that may improve biodiversity and public knowledge of the site. This may be in the form of interpretation, talks, volunteer works, surveys etc.

The role of the Glens Red Squirrel Group

Manage and maintain and secure when not in use the Cregagh Wood Observation Hide on behalf of the Council.

The GRSG will be responsible for booking and issuing of passcodes to hide users.

(Council will remain responsible for maintenance of access from the wood boundary (Clady Road) to the hide for access for all users)

Council Management

The Councils Leisure & Development, Tourism & Recreation Coast & Countryside Team will be responsible for the management actions of the woodland. An annual survey of the pathway through the site will be required along with the tree survey. The Coast & Countryside Team will then be able to advise council of any action. The Biodiversity Officer will advise on any other actions that may be required from time to time to ensure the rich biodiversity of the site is maintained or increased.

Indemnity

To keep the Grantor fully indemnified from and against, damages and public liability arising directly or indirectly from the permitted use.

Costs

It is envisaged that the costs of managing the Cregagh Wood LNR will be minimal, this will be far outweighed by the public benefit of the wood, which is one of the largest areas of mature deciduous woodland in the area.

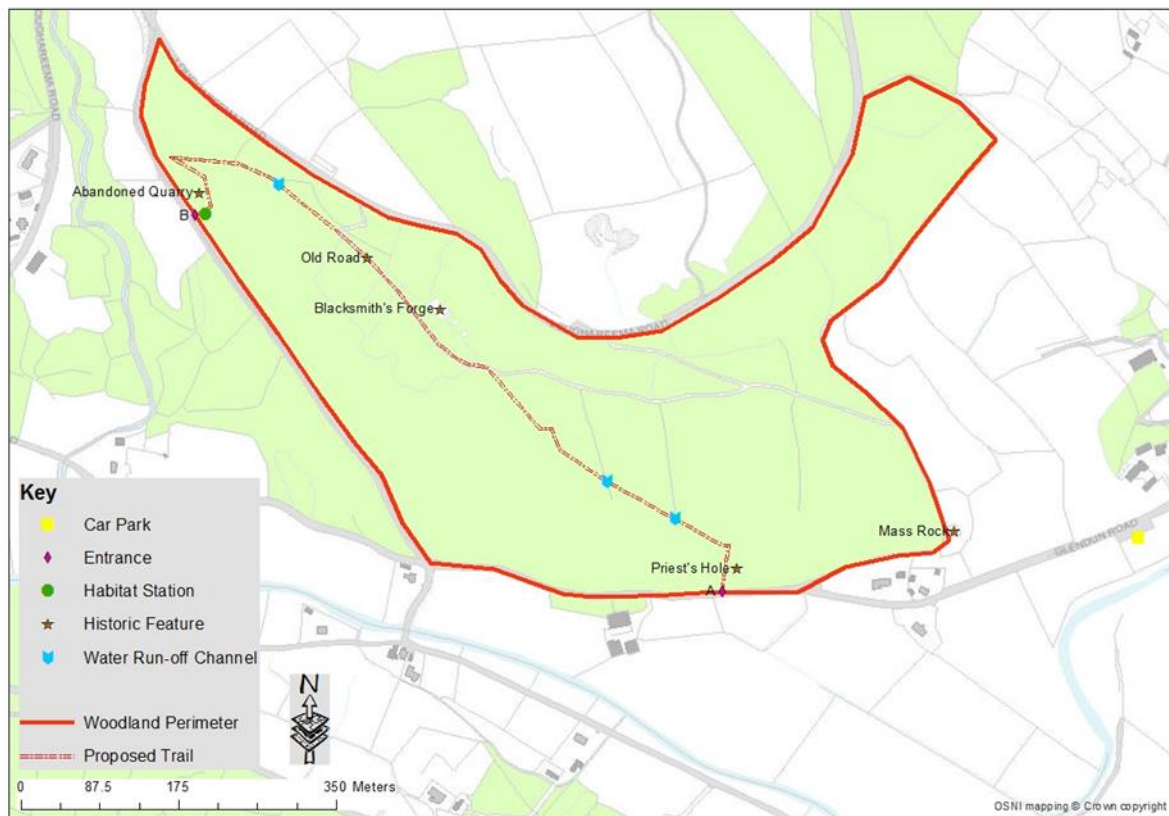
With an annual woodland survey of costing approx. £1,000 and with occasional tree works and path repairs, plus £300 for Grey Squirrel control and Red Squirrel protection. It is recommended the Council set a management figure of approximately £4,000 per annum. It is most unlikely that in most years, this figure will be required and in fact the average annual budget for management of this natural asset will be as little as £1,200 to £1,500 in most years.

Duration

The Management Plan will subsist throughout the term being **TEN** years beginning on **01 April 2025** and finishing on **31 March 2035** unless this Agreement is terminated by either party by giving the other in writing six months' notice.

The Management Plan will be reviewed annually between the landowner and the Council.

The Agreement will terminate where there is a breach of duty of this Management Plan by the Grantor or the Council which is not remedied within 21 days after the service by one party of written notice on the other specifying the breach and the steps which are necessary to remedy the same but without prejudice to the rights and liabilities of either party against the other party for any antecedent breach of duty.



Map of Cregagh Wood showing permitted pathway through the woodland

SIGNED by the Grantor –

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• **In the presence of:**

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• **SIGNED** on behalf of the Council

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• **PRESENT** when the Official Seal **CAUSEWAY COAST & GLENS BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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• **Was affixed hereto: -**

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• **Mayor of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council**

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• **Clerk & Chief Executive**

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