

September 2012

Our ref:

Your ref:



Bruce Cutts,
Natural England, Mail Hub
Block B, Whittington
Road, Worcester,
WR5 2LQ

T 07900 608 274
F

Dear LAF Chair

Dedication of Natural England Freehold National Nature Reserves

In November 2011 the Natural England Board decided that all parts of our eligible NNRs and similar holdings should be dedicated for permanent public access unless there are compelling reasons on particular sites not to do so. This gives Natural England a real opportunity to show how seriously we take integration of our various statutory roles, to respond to the clear agenda for improved public engagement with nature, set by the Natural Environment White Paper.

In April 2012, planning for the four-year implementation programme got underway. Within Natural England our NNR staff will be working closely with the Access Team to assess all parts of the NNRs we own or hold on a long lease for potential dedication during this period. The first six-monthly batch of dedication proposals will be ready for approval in September.

The resulting open access rights will run with the land permanently. By default, dedication is for open-air recreation on foot but for each site we will also consider the potential to create higher rights for horse riders and cyclists if appropriate, for example along specific tracks or link routes.

At each NNR there will be detailed discussions involving the site manager, the responsible officer for the SSSI and the local open access lead adviser, to agree proposals that ensure there will be no significant detrimental effect on the key features of the site. Where this requires some kind of special intervention, the discussions will consider the role of tried and tested management techniques which we already use on many sites. These can be supplemented by specific local restrictions if necessary to address known issues.

In each case we will adopt the 'least restrictive' approach that delivers on our statutory responsibilities, is consistent with the approach to dedication agreed by the Board and the primary conservation purpose of NNRs. Non-dedication of eligible NNR land is likely to be exceptional but we will retain the option to recommend this to the Chief Executive if it is the only practicable outcome for nature conservation, public safety or other reasons.

Your input

The case officers will be interested to hear from your LAF of strategic ambitions for higher rights on these sites in line with the criteria set out in annex 1. In addition they will be interested in the wider access context of the NNRs in your area; how they fit into the access network and any ambitions for the enhancement of the network as set out in a ROWIP or other strategic document.

I have included a list in annex 2 of all of the NNRs to be dedicated along with a proposed completion date. If you are a LAF with NNRs falling within your patch, we would be happy to come and meet you and discuss the dedication programme at one of your meetings. Please contact me on the number below and I can put you in contact with the relevant case officer to arrange a time to do this.

Yours

Bruce Cutts
Project Manager