

STATEMENT FROM DAVID BALL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES, WIRRAL COUNCIL

SUBJECT: GILROY SCRAPE, WEST KIRBY

DATE: 9 FEBRUARY 2017

1 Gilroy Scrape - current position

Since the last Council Statement in November 2016 there has remained a high level of public interest in the area of land known as Gilroy scrape on privately owned agricultural land at West Kirby and so this further statement is being issued to update the current situation.

Following the action taken by the Council in November 2016 and the filling in of the new ditch cut between Gilroy Scrape and the adjoining ordinary watercourse by the private landowner without the permission of the Council there has been concern expressed that not only has the scrape failed to re-fill to its previous level, but the water level in the pond in the adjacent to Gilroy Nature Reserve has also fallen in recent weeks. The Council has undertaken further investigations into this matter.

Gilroy scrape is not a man-made feature, but a low-lying area of land which floods in certain conditions. As such it does not include the features which would typically be included in a man-made scrape to manage and retain water levels at all times of the year for the benefit of wildlife such as a clay liner or sluice gate.

Maintenance of the adjoining ordinary watercourse (which the landowner is legally required to undertake and which drains a surface water sewer serving the adjoining residential area) is likely to have resulted in the draw-down of water levels in the field containing the scrape and adjacent Gilroy Nature Reserve pond. The water level in Gilroy Nature Reserve pond, which is regulated by a weir, is likely to have been at an artificially high level due to the restricted flow in the ordinary watercourse, prior to the recent maintenance, but is now at its design level.

The Council will shortly be meeting with the landowner to discuss his future management of this land and it is hoped that some management arrangement can be agreed to ensure the future of the area of land which floods. Natural England is willing to discuss Countryside Stewardship with the landowner. Further information on this will be provided once the meeting has taken place.

2 Future Protection

In relation to future protection of wildlife interest in this area the Wirral Local Wildlife Sites Partnership discussed this matter on 18 January 2017. There are three actions being considered which are set out below:

ACTION 1

'Gilroy Scrape' is particularly noted for its use by black-tailed godwits as a high tide roost site. Black-tailed Godwits are a feature of the Dee Estuary SPA/Ramsar Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore SPA/Ramsar sites along the Wirral coastline. Other locations in the wider Wirral landscape are also used as high tide roosts and are functionally linked to the SPA/Ramsar sites. These locations are of value to black-tailed godwits (and other non-breeding birds) at different times for different purposes. The Wirral Local Sites Partnership has decided to request that Natural England include in their future work programme the undertaking of a formal assessment of the potential for Site of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI) designation for this area.

ACTION 2

Recognising however that because of this wider use of this 'functionally-linked' land in north and west Wirral, statutory designation of a single small site such as Gilroy Scrape in isolation may not be the best mechanism to support the non-breeding birds; a better approach may be to build a wider landscape partnership to seek ways to support the land owning community and other stakeholders based on a more detailed understanding of functionally-linked land in the wider area. The Wirral Local Sites Partnership will also ask Natural England to lead on a study to identify the extent of the functionally linked habitat at a landscape scale.

ACTION 3

Wirral Local Sites Partnership is responsible for identifying the network of non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites in Wirral (which would become a consideration in relation to activities which require planning permission) for adoption by the Council for planning purposes. Local wildlife sites are intended to sit below the national statutory designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and unlike SSSIs, local wildlife sites provide a comprehensive, rather than a representative suite of sites and all locations that meet the assigned criteria should normally be designated. Wirral Local Sites Partnership is currently gathering additional evidence to support the case for designation of the Scrape and the wider area as a Local Wildlife Site.

3 Contacts for further information

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