

Site Selection Statement for proposed Merkinch Local Nature Reserve (pMLNR).

1. Fulfilment of legislative requirements.

1. Consist of land (generally interpreted to include the foreshore above low water mark of ordinary spring tides or inland waters).

The pMLNR consists of land and foreshore down to the low water (spring) mark.

2. Be managed.

Over half of the area is greenspace actively managed by the Council.

3. Provide special opportunities for study and research of the flora and fauna of Great Britain and the conditions in which they live, and for study of earth sciences of special interest in the area; and/or preserve the special natural or earth science interest in the area; or for both of those purposes.

It provides opportunities for formal and informal studies of a very accessible area identified as of "high wildlife value" by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Currently this area is undervalued and underutilised by those outwith South Kessock.

4. Consist predominantly of flora or fauna of Great Britain.

The area consists of managed grassland, coastal grassland, stoney beach, mudflat, saltmarsh, freshwater pools, reedbed, wet heath, scrub and woodland. All these communities except the managed grassland are likely to have been as a result of natural colonisation.

5. Have the study and research into, or preservation of, nature or the earth sciences as a priority objective and not as an incidental land management consideration.

pMLNR's primary purpose will be to provide a natural resource for the enjoyment and education of the visitors to it. To do this preservation and where appropriate the enhancement of the site's biodiversity will be the key land management consideration.

6. Lie within the jurisdiction of the local authority concerned (or local authorities, where an LNR is declared by more than one authority acting jointly).

The site lies wholly within Highland Council's boundaries.

7. Be owned or leased by the local authority, or be under an agreement from the owner or tenant.

There are two landowners. It is mainly owned by The Highland Council, with the area of wooded embankment leading up to the Muirtown Canal Basin owned by British Waterways. The railway embankments and crossings are excluded from the pMLNR boundary. An agreement is to be sought from British Waterways regarding the designation of the pMLNR. If this is not forthcoming then this area would be excluded from the pMLNR's.

8. Be the subject of consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage.

Completed.

2. Additional Selection Criteria from SNH.

Given that these legislative considerations are complied with, SNH considers that sites most appropriate for LNR status are those where both sets of policy objectives above are met. Thus, SNH recommends that sites should be selected which:

- 1) Provide accessible, positive, current (or potential) informal opportunities for raising people's awareness, understanding and enjoyment of, and involvement with, their local natural heritage;
- 2) Be (or have the potential to be) of special natural heritage interest in the area, through good management and safeguarding of the site.

Justification as to why the site fulfils the above criteria.

- It is an area well used and enjoyed by the community, with a great deal of scope for formal and informal environmental education.
- It is an important area of greenspace within Inverness, the only area of easily accessible foreshore in the city.
- It has an excellent range of habitats on such a small site and the foreshore of the site is in the Beaully Firth, which has been designated as an SPA, SAC and Ramsar site.
- The South Kessock Environment Company are keen to maximise the positive management of the pMLNR, so that the area can give maximum benefit to the local community and Inverness as a whole.
- It has been highlighted by the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Phase 1 habitat survey (1992-5) as an area of key biodiversity importance within Inverness.
- There is great scope for involving the community in monitoring and managing the biodiversity of the site, building their skills and knowledge.
- To raise the profile of the site to the citizens of Inverness and also to the many tourists who visit and are doubtless unaware of this excellent site so close to the city centre.

- To strive to preserve the integrity of the site by protecting it from development that would have an unacceptable impact on its habitats.

Quotes from Scottish Wildlife Trust Phase 1 Habitat Survey. 1995.

“Numerous areas of high wildlife value... such as ... the Muirtown Pools are ideal for visitors and with easy access.”

“A diverse set of habitats around a number of pools, which are partially connected to the sea. Habitats include salt marsh, fresh water marsh with reed beds, bog, scrub and wooded embankments.”

“Muirtown Pools. Area of high habitat diversity with mudflats supporting wading birds, brackish pools with small areas of saltmarsh, freshwater pools with reed bed dominated by Reed Mace (with Mute Swans and other birds nesting), and area of scrub to the north east and a wooded area with a variety of ground flora on the embankment by the canal basin. The north-eastern pool by the scrub supports a small area of salt marsh, with an area dominated by wet heath adjacent supporting species including Cross-leaved Heath and Bog Asphodel. This is a very unusual habitat combination.”