

Conservation Grazing - Management of Sensitive Sites Scheme at Benone Dune Land	9th January 2018
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For information	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and enhancing our environments and assets
Outcome	All environments within the area will benefit from proactive decision making which protects the natural features, characteristics and integrity of the Borough.
Lead Officer	Coast & Countryside Manager Biodiversity Officer
Cost: (If applicable)	Cost of Burn License £880

The purpose of this report is to inform Members about a conservation management agreement at Benone Strand.

Benone Strand and dune land is located within Magilligan Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and Special Conservation Area (SAC). It was designated because it is one of the largest and most interesting sand dune habitat in Northern Ireland, and has very diverse plant and invertebrate populations.

Due to encroaching sea buckthorn, which is an invasive species, and scrub, some areas of the dunes are in unfavourable conditions, that is to say the natural plants and invertebrates that make up this special dune system are declining as the sea buckthorn and scrub are increasing.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and the Coast and Countryside Team have developed a project to remove the sea buckthorn and scrub from a 0.6 hectare area at Benone dune land and create an additional grazing paddock and handling pen. The creation of the new paddock will allow the introduction of further winter conservation grazing, which will reduce the regrowth of the scrub and sea buckthorn and allow the natural dune flora and fauna to flourish, bringing that area of the designation back into favourable condition.

The overall cost of the scheme is approximately £20,000, which will be funded by NIEA through their Management of Sensitive Sites (MOSS) scheme, and will include:

- Sea buckthorn and scrub removal.
- Provision of stock proof fencing.
- Installation of agricultural gates and pedestrian kissing gates.
- Livestock handling pen.
- Water trough.

Councils' financial contribution will be to meet the cost of a 3 year burn licence (£880) which will allow the burning of the removed sea buckthorn and scrub on site and is not an eligible cost within the MOSS scheme funding. The burn licence will permit Council to carry out burning activity for three years at this site.

This is part of a larger scheme within Magilligan ASSI/SAC which will see similar works being carried out on adjacent land. This aims to bring a standard approach to the management of what is a very special dune land site. It is proposed that works will begin on site in January 2018.