

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed:			
Any especially affected Wards Denver; all Downham Market Wards; Emneth with Outwell; Feltwell; Methwold; Tilney, Mersheland & Wiggshall; Upwell & Delph; Walsoken, West Walton & Walpole; Wissey	Discretionary	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide:		YES	
		Need to be recommendations to Council:		NO	
		Is it a Key Decision?		NO	
Lead Member: Cllr Paul Kunes E-mail: <i>cllr.paul.kunes@west-norfolk.gov.uk</i>		Other Cabinet Members consulted: Cllr Elizabeth Nockolds			
		Other Members consulted:			
Lead Officer: Peter Jermamy E-mail: <i>peter.jermamy@west-norfolk.gov.uk</i> Direct Dial: 01553 616239		Other Officers consulted: Phillip Eke, Stuart Ashworth, Alan Gomm, Corporate Management Team			
Financial Implications NO	Policy/Personnel Implications NO	Statutory Implications NO	Equal Impact Assessment YES If YES: Pre-screening	Risk Management Implications NO	Environmental Considerations YES

Date of meeting: 10 May 2021

FENS BIOSPHERE PROPOSAL

Summary

The Fens, including part of King's Lynn & West Norfolk, is a candidate UNESCO Biosphere. This report seeks in principle support for its nomination for formal designation.

Recommendation

That the Borough Council expresses in principle support for the designation by UNESCO of a Fens Biosphere.

Reason for Decision

To provide support for the proposed designation.

1 Background

1.1 Biosphere Reserve status is awarded by UNESCO to unique and valuable landscapes. The stated aims of biospheres are to connect people, economies, and nature to secure a future where all can thrive, meeting the needs of current and future residents and working towards providing secure and happy futures for all. Further, that biospheres aim to improve the natural environment, using new ideas, science, and technology to explore new ways of living every day in ways that solve global challenges.

1.2 Part of our borough lies within the proposed Fens Biosphere geography (see map Appendix A) and includes part of the proposed Biosphere Core Zone of the Ouse Washes, which already enjoys statutory protected status. There would be 3 zones within the Biosphere designation:

The Core Zone: these are the sites of specific conservation value like the Ouse Washes and Wicken Fen. They are already legally designated protected areas and are carefully managed to enhance their wildlife.

The Buffer Zone: this area surrounds the Core Zones; the Biosphere will support activities in this area which are strongly focused on linking people, science and conservation to support the Core Zones. These activities could include trialling new agricultural crops and techniques, encouraging communities to develop new spaces for nature or looking at how water resources can be managed on a landscape scale.

The Transition Zone: this is the outer zone which often contains the towns, cities and villages of the Biosphere. Because this is where most people live, activities will focus on ensuring that resident needs (housing, jobs, recreation and so on) are sustainable and, if possible, benefit wildlife and the environment.

1.3 A summary guide to The Fens Biosphere proposal has been produced and is attached as Appendix B.

1.4 The proposed Fens Biosphere was awarded Candidate Status by the UK Man and Biosphere Committee (UK MAB) and the UK National Commission for UNESCO in November 2019. This is the first stage in achieving Biosphere Reserve designation by UNESCO. The UK currently includes seven areas that have achieved designation. These are the Isle of Wight, Brighton and Lewes Downs, North Devon, Isle of Man, Galloway and Southern Ayrshire, Wester Ross and Biosffer Dyfi. If the Fens Biosphere were to achieve designation it would be one of 714 designated Biospheres in the world, located across 129 countries, and would be the only lowland Biosphere in the UK and the only Biosphere in the East of England.

1.5 To gain UNESCO Biosphere designation, the Biosphere initiative must show the widest level of local support, including that of local authorities. Although several local authorities within the candidate area have voiced support, to achieve designation, it is a requirement that this support be demonstrated through formal endorsement.

2 Proposal

2.1 A Fens Biosphere provides an opportunity to bring people, nature and science together to promote innovative, sustainable solutions to help address these challenges and create a stronger, more resilient Fens. It can be the catalyst for achieving a sustainable living Fens landscape, supporting more and better spaces for nature and a better place for people to live, work and enjoy.

2.2 Crucially, rather than restricting or hindering ambitions for a better economy and society, a Fens Biosphere can open up new opportunities and accelerate positive economic, social and environmental change, including:

- Accelerating the transformation to sustainability in farming, adding value to agriculture and safeguarding Gross Value Added (GVA)
- Society-wide commitment to managing water and other natural resources responsibly
- Building a Biosphere brand that signifies sustainability, a high-quality environment, and a place to visit and re-locate
- Diversification of the economy
- Leveraging in investment and achieving better returns on investment
- Building international profile and reputation, thereby generating additional investment."

2.3 It is important to note that supporting the Fens Biosphere proposal would not require any financial input from the Borough Council. The Steering Group is also of the opinion that no specific planning policy proposals need to be set out as existing strategic planning policy provides for all planning needs and the Biosphere will not attempt to interfere in planning matters and will respect existing legal protection/ designations for planning decisions.

2.4 It is also worth noting that Biospheres are not the same as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). AONBs are protected areas for conservation due to their significant landscape value. Once an area has achieved Biosphere status it is known as a Biosphere Reserve, but this does not mean that it is a protected area. Biospheres are not protected areas (apart from the already protected Core Zones) and as such cannot prohibit any activity.

Structure for the Biosphere

2.5 The Fens Biosphere is a multi-sector partnership, co-ordinated by Cambridgeshire ACRE and drawn from all sectors of life, working together to achieve UNESCO Biosphere status for the Fens.

2.6 The Chair of the Fens Biosphere Steering Group is Roger Mitchell (Cambridgeshire Conservation Forum, Natural Cambridgeshire), the Deputy Chair is David Thomas (Chief Executive Officer, Middle Level Commissioners).

2.7 Partners on the Fens Biosphere Steering Group are:

Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire;
Natural England; National Farmers Union; Country Land and Business

Association; Environment Agency; G's: Cambs. Farm Growers Ltd; Cambridgeshire Geological Society; Anglia Ruskin University; Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust; Cambridge Conservation Forum; Historic England; National Trust; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; Water Resources East; University of Cambridge; The Fenland Trust; Middle Level Commissioners; St Ives Eco-Action; Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk (represented by Phillip Eke).

2.8 Partners or Partnerships supporting the Fens Biosphere are:

Natural Cambridgeshire – Local Nature Partnership; Dame Fiona Reynolds: Master Emmanuel College; Fens for the Future; ADA – Association of Drainage Authorities; Centre for Ecology and Hydrology; University of East London; Great Ouse Valley Trust; PECT – Peterborough Environment City Trust; Kingfishers Bridge Nature Reserve; Ely Group IDBs; North Level IDB; and Redlist Revival.

2.9 The development of the Fens Biosphere is funded by the People's Postcode Lottery's Postcode Dream Trust as part of the Water Works project which is managed by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

2.10 The steps towards becoming a Biosphere can be summarised as:

- Find an organisation willing to take on applying to UNESCO: done.
- Find some funds for the organisation to do the job (in partnership with Wildlife Trust BCN): done.
- Define the Biosphere area: in progress.
- Get a partnership of interested partners together: done.
- Talk – to everyone about what the Biosphere should do and who wants to be involved: in progress.
- Define what the Biosphere will do, how and who will run it, how it will be funded: in progress
- Complete the application form, submit it in late Spring 2021, wait until 2022 or 2023 to hear if successful.

Conclusion

2.11 Designation of The Fens as a Biosphere would raise the profile of the area bringing economic, social and environmental benefits to this part of the Borough at no financial cost to the Council. At this stage the support looked for is 'in principle' only. It is considered that it would be appropriate to give this 'in principle' support, particularly as the Council is represented on the Steering Group, while further details of the project and its geography are established.

3 Policy Implications

3.1 None.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 None, no financial contribution is required.

5 Personnel Implications

5.1 None.

6 Environmental Considerations

6.1 Biospheres aim to improve the natural environment.

7 Statutory Considerations

7.1 None, this is not a statutory designation.

8 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(Pre-screening report template attached)

8.1 There are no equality implications.

9 Risk Management Implications

9.1 None.

10 Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

10.1 None.

11 Background Papers

(Definition: Unpublished work relied on to a material extent in preparing the report that disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based. A copy of all background papers must be supplied to Democratic Services with the report for publishing with the agenda)

Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment

Borough Council of
King's Lynn & West Norfolk



Name of policy/service/function	FENS BIOSPHERE PROPOSAL				
Is this a new or existing policy/service/function?	New				
<p>Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened.</p> <p>Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations</p>	<p>Biosphere Reserve status is awarded by UNESCO to unique and valuable landscapes. The stated aims of biospheres are to connect people, economies, and nature to secure a future where all can thrive, meeting the needs of current and future residents and working towards providing secure and happy futures for all. Further, that biospheres aim to improve the natural environment, using new ideas, science, and technology to explore new ways of living every day in ways that solve global challenges.</p> <p>Not statutory.</p>				
Question	Answer				
<p>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>N.B. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
Age				x	
Disability				x	
Gender				x	
Gender Re-assignment				x	
Marriage/civil partnership				x	
Pregnancy & maternity				x	
Race				x	
Religion or belief				x	
Sexual orientation				x	

	Other (e.g., low income)			x	
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Question	Answer	Comments
2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?	No	
3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	No	
4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	No	
5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section	Yes / No	Actions: Actions agreed by EWG member:
If 'yes' to questions 2 - 4 a full impact assessment will be required unless comments are provided to explain why this is not felt necessary: Decision agreed by EWG member: Claire Dorgan.		
Assessment completed by Name	Peter Jermany	
Job title:	Principal Planner Policy & Water Management Officer	
Date 24/3/21		