

Brighton & Hove City Council

Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

Agenda Item 11

Subject: UNESCO Periodic Review of The Living Coast Biosphere

Date of meeting: 21 June 2022

Report of: Interim Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 The Brighton & Lewes Downs UNESCO Biosphere – known as The Living Coast – was designated as a Biosphere Region by UNESCO in 2014. UNESCO periodically review these designations every 10 years and The Living Coast designation will be due for review in 2024.
- 1.2 Brighton & Hove City Council is the lead partner of The Living Coast Biosphere Partnership.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to ask the committee to confirm their support for The Living Coast to complete the periodic review process and concurrently develop the next 10-year management plan required for the designation for the period 2024 – 2034 and, in their role as lead partner, make available sufficient resources as detailed in paragraph 3.17 to successfully undertake this work.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees to support the UNESCO periodic review process to confirm the World Biosphere Region designation for The Living Coast and the development of the next 10-year management strategy.
- 2.2 That the Committee notes that Brighton & Hove City Council as the lead partner for The Living Coast will make available from existing Sustainability Team core budgets necessary resources as detailed in paragraph 3.17 of the report to support the UNESCO review and strategy development process.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Living Coast is Brighton & Lewes Downs UNESCO World Biosphere Region.

The Biosphere is both a spatial designation – [view the online map](#) – recognising the global importance of our local natural environment, and a regional environmental partnership. Brighton & Hove City Council is the lead delivery partner of The Living Coast Biosphere. The Living Coast is the UK's only urban Biosphere, and one of only 3 Biosphere designations in England.

- 3.2 Biospheres are designated by UNESCO to be demonstration areas for sustainable development. They are the spatial designation of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme - which is an intergovernmental scientific programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for enhancing the relationship between people and their environments. The programme combines the natural and social sciences with a view to improving human livelihoods and safeguarding natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable.
- 3.3 The World network of biospheres that support the Man and the Biosphere programme is also designed to be representative of all major natural and semi-natural ecosystems. Our biosphere is designated as an excellent example of a predominantly chalk ecosystem. Our designation is focused on what is known as the Brighton Chalk Block, between the River Adur in the west and the River Ouse to the east, up over the Downs to the Northern boundary of the South Downs National Park and stretching 2 miles offshore to encompass our coast, chalk reef and the marine conservation zone of Beachy Head West, with the urban environment of Brighton & Hove and surrounding towns and villages at its heart.
- 3.4 The environmental partnership of the Biosphere represents around 40 organisations and groups from the community to the national level. These include Adur & Worthing District Council, Lewes District & Town Councils, South Downs National Park, Southern Water, Sussex Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority, University of Brighton, University of Sussex, Brighton & Hove Buses, Environment Agency, Natural England, Fabrica Gallery, ONCA Gallery, Public Health, Visit Brighton, Shoreham Port Authority, RWE Renewables as well as wider third sector organisations. The partnership comes together to better care for, enhance and enjoy our special local environments of countryside, coast and urban areas at a landscape scale.
- 3.5 The UNESCO Biosphere designation is a global brand, endorsement and symbol representing the innovative approach to sustainable development and globally important natural environment The Living Coast region has. The UNESCO periodic review process provides the opportunity for this to be reaffirmed and progress against the Biosphere objectives & functions recognized. Collaborative development of a new 10-year management strategy provides the opportunity for the diverse partnership to come together at a landscape scale to set the shared environmental priorities for the region.

- 3.6 In line with UNESCO requirements the Biosphere Partnership is non-campaigning and politically neutral.
- 3.7 At ETS Committee in July 2013 the application for Brighton & Lewes Downs to become a UNESCO Biosphere Region received cross party support and was strongly endorsed by the committee.
- 3.8 Brighton & Hove City Council declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in December 2018 and becoming Carbon Neutral by 2030 is a corporate priority. The Living Coast programme supports the delivery of the Carbon Neutral programme and vice versa, with the Carbon Neutral programme contributing to the regional, national and international objectives of the Man and the Biosphere programme. The Living Coast programme enables collaborative, longer-term strategic regional development focused on innovation for sustainable development. Climate change mitigation and adaptation underpinned by a resilient natural environment is at the heart of the global biosphere programme and are key strands of the Carbon Neutral 2030 programme.
- 3.9 The UK Government has recently passed into law the Environment Act which aims to protect and enhance our environment for future generations. There are now predictions that the 1.5°C safe global warming limit will be breached within the next 5 years. Addressing local, national and international ambitions on climate change and biodiversity loss require fast paced working at scale, and regional environmental partnerships are a key mechanism for delivering on these ambitions.
- 3.10 At a global level UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme is directed by the [Man and Biosphere Strategy 2015 – 2025](#) and corresponding [Lima Action Plan 2016 - 2025](#) and mapped against the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#).
- 3.11 Nationally the programme is governed by the [UK UNESCO National Commission](#) and UK Man and the Biosphere Network National Committee on behalf of the UK Government.
- 3.12 Locally The Living Coast Biosphere delivers a programme of projects under the [Biosphere Management Strategy](#) with Biosphere partners that deliver on the 3 global biosphere functions:
- **Conservation** of natural resources: landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic diversity both on a regional and global scale
 - **Development** – economic and social development which is culturally and ecologically sustainable
 - **Logistics** – knowledge, engagement, environmental education, research and training to test, demonstrate and communicate innovative approaches to conservation and sustainable development.
- 3.13 To date some of the key successes of the Biosphere partnership have been:

- To develop a catchment scale partnership to protect and enhance the groundwater aquifer serving the population of the wider Brighton region (now known as [The Aquifer Partnership](#))
 - Working with the regional visitor economy to increase the value of tourism whilst reducing its environmental impact through the [BioCultural Heritage Tourism Project](#)
 - Creating opportunities for the regional creative community through [The Living Coast Artist Residencies](#)
 - Enabling low impact travel across the region via [The Living Coast by Bike](#)
 - Celebrating our regional maritime heritage in the [Homeward Bound Festival](#)
 - Developing and delivering a landscape scale restoration project for the eastern South Downs as part of the [Changing Chalk Partnership](#)
 - Creating a [business network](#) to support the transition to more sustainable business practices for our regional SMEs
 - Enabling impactful [research](#) within the Biosphere and global biosphere network
 - Using creative engagement to help school children learn about the water cycle via the use of Minecraft in the Our Water Matters schools outreach programme
 - Innovative approaches to flood management through the use of nature-based solutions in the Portslade Rain Gardens project
 - Enabling accessible engagement with the underwater environment of our Marine Conservation Zone via virtual reality in the Living Coast Undersea Experience
 - Engaging communities with the natural environment through collaborative and creative partnerships such as '[Home](#)' sculptures on the Undercliff Walk
 - Softer benefits such as improved nature connection opportunities for our communities such as via the [England Coast Path](#), the [City Nature Challenge](#), supporting [schools](#) particularly via the Brighton & Hove Environmental Education project, as well as benefits from wider partnership working across the region such as in the development of Sussex Bay.
- 3.14 The UNESCO designation is not resourced by the UK government or UNESCO. The Living Coast partnership make voluntary contributions to fund the Biosphere Programme Manager post (1 FTE), 50% of which comes from the city council (£25,000 per annum). The city council also host the Biosphere Programme Manager post within the International & Sustainability team, contributing additional in-kind staff support (IT, HR etc.). All additional core costs and project development and delivery costs are funded either by the delivery partners, grant funding or a combination of both. Since designation The Living Coast has directly enabled project & research funding to the region of over £1million and supported the achievement of significantly more funding amongst the wider partnership.
- 3.15 The Biosphere Programme Manager's core role is to facilitate and develop The Living Coast Partnership & programme as set out in The Living Coast Role Descriptions (**Appendix 1**). Whilst the Biosphere Programme Manager

leads the development of strategic documents on behalf of the Biosphere Partnership, there is insufficient capacity in the role to maintain and develop the existing Biosphere programme whilst also undertaking the development work required for the UNESCO Periodic Review and new 10-year management strategy. Additional resource is required to support ongoing programme delivery, the periodic review process and strategic development.

- 3.16 In addition to capacity, the periodic review process will require the contribution, collation and presentation of data from the city council, the Biosphere Partnership and wider local and national stakeholders relating to the three functions of the Biosphere region: conservation, development and logistics, as well as in eco-system services, governance, management and co-ordination of the Biosphere Region. Obtaining, collating and presenting this data will also require additional capacity and expertise.
- 3.17 It is anticipated that a resource of approximately £80,000 will be required for external expertise over a 12 - 18 month period from autumn 2022, to support the redesignation process and development of the new 10-year management strategy. Whilst partnership discussions are at an early stage, it is envisaged that the city council, as lead partner, will contribute at least 50% of this cost, so £40,000, and this would be covered through existing budgets (a combination of the council's Sustainability team budget and Carbon Neutral programme budget).
- 3.18 It is also anticipated that a similar democratic process will be undertaken amongst Living Coast partner local authorities in regards to the Biosphere redesignation and strategic development processes.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The periodic review process and development of a management strategy for the designation are UNESCO requirements and therefore not able to be considered optional.
- 4.2 Alternative options to resource the review and strategic development process would be as follows:
- Manage the process through existing resource – not recommended as the Biosphere Programme Manager is already at capacity in delivering the current biosphere programme and is therefore not able to deliver these additional processes.
 - Resource the process through external partnership funding – not recommended. As lead partner of the biosphere, the city council have the responsibility of taking the lead role in supporting and developing the designation. It is expected that external partners will be contributing to the resource required to deliver these processes in partnership with the city council.
 - Resource the process through external fundraising – not recommended. There would be a significant resource and timescale impact to develop the necessary applications for external funding streams, as well as

significant risk in this approach in not achieving the required level of funding.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 The UNESCO periodic review and management strategy development process will require engagement and consultation both across the wider Biosphere partnership, internal and external stakeholders and members of the local community. This engagement and consultation will be planned and delivered within the brief for the external expertise over the 12 - 18 month period from Autumn 2022.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 As the lead partner in The Living Coast Biosphere the city council undertakes the lead role in supporting and developing the Biosphere programme. In order to continue the development of the Biosphere, the partnership is required to undertake the periodic review and strategic development processes.
- 6.2 To successfully complete these processes, the Biosphere requires the additional support from the city council and wider Biosphere partnership as detailed within this report, and therefore it is recommended that the city council makes available from the existing Sustainability Team and Carbon Neutral programme budgets necessary resources as detailed in paragraph 3.17 of the report to support the UNESCO review and strategy development processes.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The Living Coast review will require external expertise estimated to cost £80,000. As lead partner, the Council will support 50% of the costs, whilst working with others in the partnership to find the remaining £40,000. Should that not be successful, the Council would need to provide further funding. The Council's share of £40,000 can be funded by the Sustainability revenue budget (EVN012) and given that the review is estimated to take 12-18 months, may straddle two financial years.

Name of finance officer consulted: Jill Scarfield Date consulted:07/06/22

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 If external support is procured, officers will need to comply with the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland Date consulted: 01/06/22

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The periodic review process requires us to report on multiple socio- cultural measures including: networks to connect diverse groups across the

community, promotion of local culture & heritage, cooperation across local population, indigenous peoples, community language, tangible and intangible heritage, the role of women, as well as the use of traditional and local knowledge in the management of the Biosphere.

- 9.2 A full equalities impact assessment will be completed as part of the development of the next 10-year management strategy.
- 9.3 Climate change impacts are anticipated to disproportionately effect the most vulnerable members of society, both locally and globally. The Biosphere programme seeks to provide mitigation for and adaptation to the changing climate, in order to reduce inequality in line with the sustainable development goals.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 Biospheres are designated by UNESCO to be demonstration areas for sustainable development. They are the spatial designation of UNESCOs Man and the Biosphere programme - which is an intergovernmental scientific programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for enhancing the relationship between people and their environments.
- 10.2 The programme combines the natural and social sciences with a view to improving human livelihoods and safeguarding natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable.

11. Other Implications

Public health implications:

- 11.1 Improving public health outcomes by enhancing the resilience of our natural environment has been and is anticipated to remain a key objective of The Living Coast Biosphere programme.
- 11.2 A Public Health consultant currently represents the public health sector on the Biosphere Board.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

- 1. The Living Coast Role Descriptions

