

# ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## Agenda Item 27

Brighton & Hove City Council

**Subject:** Biosphere Reserve  
**Date of Meeting:** 8 November 2010  
**Report of:** Director of Environment  
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**Wards Affected:** All

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1. ECSOSC on 13 September 2010 considered a report on the Open Spaces Strategy. The report included a letter to the Chairman from Councillor Amy Kennedy and detailed information from Planning and City Services officers.
- 1.2. In discussion of this item the Committee resolved to request an officer update on the Biosphere Reserve. (It was also agreed to arrange an informal workshop on the Open Spaces Strategy early in 2011 and to forward an extract from the minutes of this item to the Chairman of the Planning Committee.)
- 1.3. This report sets out further information on Biosphere Reserves as requested.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1. That Members consider the enclosed report and request progress be reported at a suitable time to scrutiny, in its policy overview role.

#### 3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

##### What is a Biosphere Reserve?

- 3.1. Biosphere reserves are large sites recognized under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. They innovate and demonstrate

approaches to conservation and sustainable development. They are independent, but share their experience and ideas nationally and internationally within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. There are 553 sites worldwide in 107 countries.

- 3.2. Biosphere Reserves are not nature reserves as we know them in Britain. Rather than being about small, fenced areas of land, the aim is to demonstrate how large scale social and economic development can profit from and promote a top quality natural environment.
- 3.3. A number of cities internationally have already applied Biosphere Reserve principles, with the intention of using the concept as a tool for planning and managing sustainable urban development. Several Biosphere Reserves also incorporate large urban areas. However to date there are no 'Biosphere Reserve cities', although the concept is being actively debated by UNESCO.

### **Who are UNESCO?**

- 3.4. UNESCO is the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Their Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme is the international coordinating body for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

### **How do Biosphere Reserves work?**

- 3.5. Biosphere Reserves are based around a 'Core area' where the natural environment is protected. The Core Area sits in, or next to a 'Buffer Zone' where nature is conserved along side other, compatible land uses such as agriculture, tourism and recreation. Buffer zones can also be important as they may connect separate parts of a core area. The Core Area and Buffer Zone sit within a 'Transition Area' where people live. Here the aim is to promote a high quality of life, based on a superb natural environment.
- 3.6. Biosphere Reserves have three functions:
  - **Conservation** - contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation.
  - **Development** - promote economic and social development which is ecologically sustainable.
  - **Demonstration** - centre of excellence for environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to sustainable development.

### **The benefits of Biosphere Reserve status for Brighton and Hove include:**

- 3.7. Setting new standards of excellence for integrating biodiversity into city living to improve quality of life and health.

- 3.8. International and national recognition of Brighton & Hove as a 'sustainable city' with consequential benefits to tourism and economic development amongst others.
- 3.9. The designation should attract new resources and skills for environmental research and education at all levels. The profiles of existing environmental education initiatives should be increased.
- 3.10. A vehicle for raising awareness and improving community cohesion and involvement in local decision-making.

### **What would Brighton and Hove have to do to qualify to be part of a Biosphere Reserve?**

- 3.11. Biosphere Reserves are selected via an international application process, using strict qualifying criteria. The relevant UNESCO national committee must approve an application before it can be passed to a national Government for scrutiny. Favourable nominations are then forwarded to UNESCO for consideration by a dedicated committee.
- 3.12. A bid will need to focus more on rural / downland aspect surrounding city although the biosphere will cover the urban area as well. Further, there needs to be a rationale for the area selected to be covered by the biosphere which makes sense on the ground i.e. covering a water catchment area, or particular type of geology and landscape.
- 3.13. The UNESCO application form asks for evidence of the following:
  - Proof of the existence of the three elements of 'core area', 'buffer area' and 'transition zone'.
    - The core area or areas in Brighton and Hove, could focus on Castle Hill, on the outskirts of Woodingdean, as it is an internationally important wildlife site (a Special Area of Conservation). Part of the area is in Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council administrative areas.
    - Under the Biosphere Reserve model, the built-up area of Brighton and Hove would be included in the 'transition zone'. The city would need to demonstrate how steps are being taken to 'green' this zone, for example via green networks and other planning policies such as the Conservation SPD.
  - Show how the city conserves:
    - Endangered and important species at the local and global scale.
    - Important and rare habitats
    - Unique land use practices

- Genetic biodiversity

Brighton & Hove supports significant populations of bats which are recognised as internationally rare. It also has areas of ancient chalk grassland, an internationally threatened habitat type, managed by sheep grazing. The Southdown sheep is a rare genetic breed, endemic to the Sussex Downs which is also an integral part of chalk grassland conservation.

- Details of how environmental research, monitoring of activities and education takes place.
- Details of how the reserve has the potential for fostering economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable
- A Management Plan showing how the aims of the Biosphere Reserve will be implemented across the area. The plan would need to address all of the elements described above and set out clear mechanisms and a timetable for ensuring they will be progressed. Existing plans which would support this include the council's climate change adaptation strategies, the open space strategies and the Local Development Frameworks.
- A "designated authority or mechanism" to implement the Management Plan. Organisational arrangements should be described to ensure the involvement and participation of a range of public authorities, local communities and private interests.

### Progress to date

- 3.14. The 2006 Brighton & Hove Sustainable Community Strategy is perhaps unique in the UK in committing the 2020 Partnership to work towards designation of a Biosphere Reserve. In 2008 the Sustainability Conference explored in detail what it might mean for Brighton and Hove to included in a Biosphere Reserve. The conference was organised in partnership with the University of Brighton with financial help from the Environment Agency. The conference was supported at the highest level, with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the council both making presentations and the Chief Executive of the council and Pro-Vice Chancellor of Brighton University chairing conference sessions
- 3.15. **Biosphere steering group.** An initial group has been established to coordinate early work on the Biosphere Reserve. The group is chaired by Chris Todd, Chair of the Sustainability Partnership. It is attended by Sussex Wildlife Trust, Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, teacher and butterfly specialist from Dorothy Stringer School, and council representatives from Cityparks and the Sustainability Team. The form of this group may change as other parties need inclusion.

- 3.16. **UNESCO Biosphere Visit.** In the summer, a visit was arranged from UNESCO representatives of the UK Man and Biosphere Committee. This committee feeds into the overarching Biosphere work of UNESCO. It will make recommendations to the UK Government on biosphere reserves applications which are then recommended by the Government to UNSECO.

Representatives were the chair of the UNESCO UK Man and Biosphere Committee URBAN Forum, the chair and deputy chair of UNESCO UK Man and Biosphere Committee and a Senior Urban and Partnerships Officer at the Countryside Council for Wales

**Key messages from the representatives were as follows:**

- A Biosphere Reserve including Brighton & Hove is perfectly feasible and there was much enthusiasm for putting the city and its surrounding countryside forward. It was felt that the city had all the basic ingredients to succeed.
  - Any bid should focus more on rural / downland aspect, although the biosphere will cover the urban area and cannot be ignored.
  - The demonstration of extensive community engagement is a growing requirement for Biosphere Reserve status
  - The status of Biosphere Reserve should be treated as an accolade not a designation.
  - It would take 2 years to work up bid and the whole process could to gaining a biosphere status could be up to 3 years
- 3.17. Policies from the council and other organisations which effect the management of biodiversity and sustainability are being collated to assess where there are gaps.
- 3.18. Work is underway on the establishment of a **Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP)**, setting out the habitats and species of importance in the city and defining what needs to be done to ensure their conservation at sustainable levels. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the summer 2011.
- 3.19. In addition, a **review of the city's Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI)**, is taking place to ensure all land of nature conservation importance in the city is recognised and subsequently conserved, in line with current best practice and the requirements of National Indicator 197. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the summer 2011.

**Further work**

- 3.20. The council will need to engage with surrounding authorities as a Biosphere Reserve will need to focus on the rural/downland area.

Discussions will take place with relevant officers from Lewes District Council and East Sussex Council initially in due course.

- 3.21. A need to increase levels of community engagement on the Biosphere Reserve to gain a common understanding of the principles, and to develop management plans with residents, partner organisations and neighbouring authorities. Initial discussions will need to take place with residents and existing groups involved on green spaces on how the council should engage with them at a local and strategic level. A draft paper is due to be presented this year for groups for comment.
- 3.22. Thought will need to be given to the governance and management structures for the Biosphere Reserve bid and once the Biosphere Reserve status has been achieved. The involvement of Local Strategic Partnership, health organisations, voluntary and community sectors, and businesses will be important – the reserve needs to be led by the city rather than the council, albeit the council will have a significant stewardship role.
- 3.23. Developing a bid for a Biosphere Reserve with the necessary building blocks in place is extensive. To progress the bid resources will need to be committed to manage the process. This will impact on a project plan which needs to be developed.
- 3.24. A project plan needs to be drafted and it is suggested that it is reported to scrutiny for early review and feedback.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Establishing and maintaining a Biosphere Reserve requires extensive consultation across communities, businesses, voluntary organisations and other public sector bodies. The intention is for all parties across city to 'own' the biosphere reserve and thus allow for the protection and enhance of landscapes and ecosystems. The role of universities and schools will be significant in the research, monitoring and education element of the Reserve requirements. Consultation is increasingly seen as important in Biosphere Reserve bid applications.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Developing a bid for a Biosphere Reserve is extensive and further resources will need to be committed to manage the process in a timely fashion.
- 5.2 The maintenance of a Biosphere Reserve and oversight by a management arrangement will require on going support and resources. At this stage it is unknown what level of support and resources will be needed.

#### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 None at this time although as the project develops there is likely to be implications which need consideration, for example, the establishment of management arrangements for the Reserve.

#### Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 In engaging residents and business it will be essential to ensure that traditionally under represented groups have a voice and opportunity to shape the Reserve.
- 5.4 Further, by working across the city and with partners in health there is the opportunity to promote access to green spaces and nature for improved physical and mental health and more broadly address the quality of the environment and impact on quality of life.
- 5.5 Equality Impact Assessments will need to be developed as part of the project.

#### Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 A Biosphere Reserve is about conserving landscapes and ecosystems. As well as the traditional conservation practices it also means adopting more sustainable economic and social development practices to preserve ecosystems.
- 5.5 Further, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to sustainable development as essential components.

#### Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 None

#### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 A Biosphere Reserve is a huge opportunity to build strong links with communities particularly around green spaces and about sustainable practices.
- 5.7 Alongside the 1010 campaign and the work of the Food Partnership the city can take forward a strong environmental agenda which delivers substantial environmental and quality of life improvements.
- 5.8 There is a real opportunity to raise the importance and develop a common understanding of ecological resources of the coast and downland within and outside the city and the impact this has on health and well being.
- 5.9 It will be a challenge to harness cross working across a range of partners but the benefits of all partners working in unison towards a common agenda with agreed actions to further sustainable management practices across a Reserve should be substantial. There should be a much increased progress to improving the environment.

#### Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.10 A Biosphere Reserve will cover the city and extend outside the administrative boundaries. Thus there will be a need for ownership of the reserve across partners, the voluntary, business sectors and other

public sector organisations. Further it is highly likely that the reserve will need to extend to other local authorities.

- 5.11 There will be implications on the way green spaces are managed and the Downland Initiative will be increasingly important.
- 5.12 Assessments of council policies and practices and the impact of other organisations policies and practices will need to be assessed to ensure they do not conflict with the Biosphere Reserve principles and where possible policies and practices aid the conservation of landscapes and ecosystems.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

None

### **Background Papers**

'Urban Biosphere City Status' report to 19 January 2009, the Sustainability Cabinet Committee