

**EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CABINET : 17<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2008**

**UK BIOSPHERE RESERVE  
CAIRNSMORE OF FLEET, MERRICK KELLS & SILVER FLOWE  
PROPOSED REVIEW**

**Report by Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

**1.1** The purposes of this Report are to:-

- (1) Inform the Cabinet of the actions that have been undertaken to date regarding establishing community and Agency support for the re-designation and extension of the existing Cairnsmore of Fleet, Merrick Kells and Silver Flowe Biosphere Reserve; and
- (2) Seek approval for the Council's participation, with South Ayrshire Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage, with the support of the Scottish Government, for the preparation of a formal submission to UNESCO for the re-designation of the Biosphere Reserve

**2 BACKGROUND**

**2.1** In 1976/1977 a total of eight Biosphere Reserves were designated in the UK by UNESCO under the Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme.

**2.2** One of the Reserves was the Cairnsmore of Fleet, Merrick Kells and Silver Flowe Biosphere Reserve located in Dumfries and Galloway, to the south of Loch Doon.

**2.3** The Biosphere Reserve is composed of two separate sites. Silver Flowe is a unique bog formation and one of the least interrupted undisturbed mire systems in Europe. Its high value is principally due to the landscape pattern of an assemblage of discreet mires. In addition it is a breeding site for the rare Azure Hawker Dragonfly. Silver Flowe is also designated as a Ramsar site. Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention.

Merrick Kells contains three habitats of European interest - Blanket Bog, Montaine Acid Grasslands and Wet Heath with Cross-Leaved Heath. There are nationally important breeding bird populations in the site and important invertebrate populations. The site is the largest remaining unafforested area of upland in Galloway

### 3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE CONCEPT

**3.1** Initially the principal focuses of Biosphere Reserves were on conservation of biodiversity and the provision of opportunities for research. However over time, the concept has evolved to reflect global trends in conservation and sustainable development. The need to involve local people and communities in conservation has been recognised and this became a central focus in the 1980s linked to the emerging concept of sustainable development. In 1995 the whole concept was revised leading to a formal “statutory framework” and a regular Review Process to ensure that the “new look” Biosphere Reserves adhere to these new principles (The Seville Strategy).

**3.2** Today, Biosphere Reserves form a unique global network of special places for people and nature. Biosphere Reserves are chosen as being representative of their region and are “sites of excellence to explore and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development on a regional scale”. There are now just over 500 designated Biosphere Reserves in over 100 countries. Well known examples include Uluru (Ayres Rock-Mount Olga), Australia; the Danube Delta, joint Romania-Ukraine designation; Lanzarote and Menorca, Spain; Yellowstone, U.S.A. and Niagara escarpment, Canada.

**3.3 Functions** – The “new look” Biosphere Reserves are intended to fulfil three complementary functions:-

- Conservation – to contribute to conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
- Sustainable Development – to foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable; and
- Logistic – to provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation and development.

**3.4 Zones** - There are three complementary types of zones within Biosphere Reserves:-

- Core area – devoted to nature conservation, and legally protected
- Buffer zone – in which only activities compatible with the conservation of the core area can take place – within clearly defined boundaries
- Transition area, or area of co-operation, in which sustainable development is promoted and developed, with a flexible outer boundary, and where most of the population lives

**3.5 Co-ordination and Management** - Biosphere Reserves include land owned and managed by a mixture of private individuals, government and non-governmental organisations. Activities within them therefore have to be co-ordinated within a management structure that involves a wide range of land-owners and other “stakeholders” such as public authorities, local community organisations, private interests and environmental organisations. It should be noted however that unlike the designation of a National Park, the designation

of a Biosphere Reserve does not introduce a new legislative Planning framework.

#### **4 THE REVIEW OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES**

- 4.1** The Biosphere Reserves in the UK were designated at the start of the Man and Biosphere Programme and a review of each Reserve has been initiated with a view to developing “new look” Reserves, conforming to the new principles. In 1998 the UK MAB Committee published a report by the Environmental Change Institute which assessed the status of each reserve and the issues that needed to be addressed if they were to be restructured in line with the Seville Strategy principles.

Progress towards addressing these issues differs from reserve to reserve. Braunton Burrows Biosphere Reserve in Devon, for instance, was re-designated in 2002. An application for the re-designation of the Dyfi Valley Biosphere in Wales was submitted to UNESCO in January, 2008 and approval is anticipated in November, 2008

#### **5 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASE FOR A “NEW LOOK” GALLOWAY AND AYRSHIRE BIOSPHERE RESERVE TO DATE**

- 5.1** In January 2005, Scottish National Heritage initiated a consultancy study and supported an initial workshop/meeting on the future for the Galloway Biosphere Reserve.

- 5.2** The consultant’s report was presented in April 2005 and concluded that there was general support to initiate the development of a case for the designation of a “new look” Biosphere Reserve based around the existing Biosphere Reserve, the Galloway Forest and extending into South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire. This was in recognition of the very high conservation value of the core area and also recognition that designation may help support the regeneration and development of the area and the creation of sustainable communities.

- 5.3** In August 2005, an Officer Steering Group was established to oversee the Review of the Biosphere Reserve. Membership included officer representatives from the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan Team, Scottish National Heritage, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway, Forestry Commission Scotland, South Ayrshire Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and East Ayrshire Council.

This Steering Group has continued to meet on a regular basis and is progressing the preliminary work that is required before developing a detailed Bid for the designation of a “new look” Biosphere Reserve.

- 5.4** In July 2006, the EU LEADER Programme in Dumfries and Galloway and the Councils jointly funded the appointment of the Southern Uplands Partnership and East Ayrshire Woodlands, on a consultancy basis, to undertake an extensive consultation exercise with local communities to confirm whether the local populations wished the status of Biosphere Reserve to be retained and if so, to identify how the new designation would be used to realise the three complementary functions of Conservation, Sustainable Development and Logistics, as described above.

- 5.5** The Consultancy report was presented in September 2007 and the findings confirmed that there was considerable community and business support for the development of a Biosphere Reserve concept.
- 5.6** In November 2007, a visit to the Cevennes Biosphere Reserve in France, as the final part of the LEADER/Council funded consultation exercise, was undertaken by Councillors and officials along with business and community representatives. Councillor McDill of East Ayrshire Council was one of the delegates.
- 5.7** In November 2007 Elected Members from East Ayrshire Council were invited to attend a briefing/presentation on the findings of the visit and to discuss the potential opportunities that might be provided by Biosphere Reserve status.
- 5.8** In February 2008, the Steering Group commissioned Mackay Consultants to undertake a study to investigate the economic and social benefits that might result in the event of a "new style" Biosphere being designated in South West Scotland.
- 5.9** The draft of the consultancy report has now been received and confirms that designation would have the potential to have significant economic and social benefits and might provide a catalyst for the regeneration of some areas and for the creation of sustainable communities.

Comments on the draft report have been prepared by the members of the Steering Group and forwarded to the consultants. The final report is expected to be prepared in September 2008.

- 5.10** In May 2008, a meeting was held involving Councillors from Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Council to discuss the Biosphere Reserve. Following that meeting, it was agreed to establish a Member /Officer group to progress this opportunity. Councillor McDill represents East Ayrshire Council on this group.

On behalf of the Group, Cllr McDill has invited Mike Russell MSP, Minister of the Environment, to a meeting with a view to gain the support of the Scottish Government and this invitation has been accepted. The date of the meeting has now been confirmed for 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2008. The support of the Government for the Review of the Biosphere Reserve is an important requirement.

## **6 THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF DESIGNATION AND SOURCES OF FUNDING SUPPORT**

- 6.1** Designation of a Biosphere Reserve is important, not only in its own right, but as a potential catalyst to drive forward the regeneration and sustainability agendas in the local area, as it would:-
- Help secure the conservation of an area of very high natural value and promote research and capacity building in respect of ecosystem management;
  - Represent an important tourist attractor to the area in its own right and also complement proposals for the further development of the Galloway Forest Park - currently under consideration;

- Provide an important marketing brand for the area;
- Contribute to the development of strategies for local small towns some of which, particularly outwith the City Regions, may identify tourism linked to conservation as a new focus for creating sustainable communities; and
- Establish new, or reinvigorate existing, mechanisms that encourage discussion and agreement between people with different values and priorities.

**6.2** A number of potential funding opportunities that might support eligible activities in a “new style” Biosphere Reserve exist or are likely to emerge. These include:-

- (1) The European Regional Development Fund 2007-2013 - Lowlands and Uplands Scotland Programme.
- (2) The Interreg 1V EU Programme for Cross Border Territorial Cooperation 2007-2013 – Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland
- (3) The Rural Development Regulation 2007-2013. - LEADER
- (4) The European Union LIFE+ Programme

In addition, there may be other local sources of funding that may be able to support eligible related projects.

## **7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1** There are no legal implications at this stage arising from this report

## **8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**8.1** It is proposed that the costs of preparing a formal submission will be shared by the members of the Steering Group. An initial contribution of £5,000 from East Ayrshire Council has been agreed, to be funded from within existing resources and approved under the Scheme of Delegation.

## **9 COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

**9.1** The Single Outcome Agreement 2008-2011 indicates that in East Ayrshire, Community Planning Partners are committed to improving the environment including by promoting and developing the case for a Biosphere reserve.

## **10 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**10.1** It is recommended that the Cabinet:-

- (1) Notes and endorses the actions that have been undertaken to date regarding establishing community and Agency support for the re-designation and extension of the Cairnsmore of Fleet, Merrick Kells and Silver Flowe Biosphere Reserve; and

(2) Approves the Council's participation, with South Ayrshire Council Dumfries and Galloway Council, the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage, with the support of the Scottish Government, in the preparation of a formal submission to UNESCO for the re-designation and extension of the Biosphere Reserve

**Elizabeth Morton**  
**Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support**

**3 September 2008**

### **Background Papers**

- (1) "Working Towards a Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve"  
Report on the Consultation Undertaken by the Southern Uplands Partnership and East Ayrshire Woodlands.

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