

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE : 11 JANUARY 2006

POTENTIAL GALLOWAY AND SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Report by Executive Director of Development and Property Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise committee on proposals for a potential Biosphere Reserve within Galloway and the southern portions of Ayrshire and to seek authority to further investigate the viability of the proposal.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 In 1970 the United Nations Educational and Scientific organisation (UNESCO) launched the Man and the Biosphere Programme which established a series of Biosphere Reserves throughout the world. In the UK eight areas of high ecological quality and representative of their region were designated including in 1976 the Merrick Kells, Silver Flowe and Cairnsmore area in Dumfries and Galoway.

2.2 A recent review of the programme worldwide revised the criteria for designating reserves and all existing reserves are required to be reassessed. Under the new criteria Biosphere Reserves require to:

- i. preserve genetic resources, species, ecosystems and landscapes
- ii. foster sustainable economic and human development, and
- iii. support demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to issues of conservation and sustainable development.

2.3 In the UK the review is being co-coordinated by the UK Man and Biosphere Committee.

2.4 Only one of the original eight Biosphere Reserves – Braunton Burrows in Devon – has currently been recognised as a 'New Look' Biosphere Reserve with arrangements in place for community involvement, a Biosphere Board and locally based supporting team to implement projects. Local businesses are actively

involved and have benefited from the designation. Strong support has also been given by the North West Devon Economic Partnership.

3. BIOSPHERE RESERVES

3.1 'New Look' Biosphere Reserves are made up of 3 tiers: a Core Area, Buffer Zone and Transitional Area. The Core Area has to be based on legally designated nature conservation sites such as National Nature Reserves, Special Protection Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The Buffer Zone must surround the Core Area and activities within it should be limited to ones that are compatible with conservation objectives. In the Transitional Area sustainable management practices should be promoted. The Buffer Zone and Transitional Zone can contain communities.

3.2 Applications to develop Biosphere Reserves need to be approved by the UK Government however UNESCO makes the final decisions as to which areas are to be designated. Biosphere Reserves do not convey any statutory designation and would not place further restrictions over and above those that are already there on those who own and manage land. Biosphere Reserve designation is regarded however as a material consideration in planning applications. No funding is available through UNESCO to go with the designation however the title Biosphere Reserve can make it easier to draw down funding from other sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

4. POTENTIAL GALLOWAY AND SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE BIOSHERE RESERVE

4.1 To assess the potential of the current Biosphere Reserve to meet the new criteria consultants were appointed by Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland. The consultants concluded that the creation of a Biosphere Reserve based on the Galloway Forest Park and designated sites on higher ground above the forest and extending into South and East Ayrshire (around the Loch Doon area) should be explored as an option.

4.2 The consultants report stated "The impact of the Biosphere Reserve on the local economy is likely to be positive; but how positive will depend entirely on the resourcefulness of the [Biosphere] reserve institutions, and the degree of support and buy-in from local communities and businesses. The workshop participants saw significant marketing opportunities associated with an internationally recognised "environmental quality" brand, especially for tourism, and also felt that the emphasis on sustainable development and practice might underpin and promote new initiatives in forestry and farm product development. However, care should be taken not to compromise the open and accessible image of the Galloway Forest Park."

4.3 However the report also stated that, "Success – of the proposal itself and the resulting biosphere reserve – will be critically dependent on community, local government and enterprise company buy in. Their close involvement with the development of the proposal, and in particular the definition of boundaries and objectives, is essential. The report offers detailed guidance as to how this might be achieved."

4.4 Initial discussions at officer level have been held with various potential partners through the auspices of the Ayrshire Structure Plan Team. It is considered that the proposal contained in the consultants report merits further more detailed consideration particularly in relation to the role that East Ayrshire Council should take, assessing the level of community support, the potential economic and social benefits arising from designation under the revised scheme compared to the resources that may be required, and to explore the relationship with the Council's Community Plan and current work with the Dalmellington Partnership.

4.5 Given the work that has been undertaken to date and that the Merrick Kells, Silver Flowe and Cairnsmore areas of Dumfries and Galloway are already designated (under the initial programme) as a Biosphere Reserve prior notification has been received that the UK Man and Biosphere Committee is proposing to meet in the Dumfries area in March 2006. This will provide an opportunity for the Council to obtain further information on the review process, hear about progress with the review process in other areas, receive an update on the economic and social impact of designation in Braunton Burrows, Devon, and help with the assessment process outlined above.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6. LEGAL/PERSONNEL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is recommended that the committee agrees

- (i) that further detailed consideration be given by officers of the Council to the potential designation of a Biosphere Reserve within the Galloway Forest and southern areas of Ayrshire in conjunction with South Ayrshire Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, SNH, Forestry Commission and other partners;**

- (ii) that the Council be represented at the March 2006 Man and Biosphere UK Committee meeting in the Dumfries area;
- (iii) that a future report be submitted once the assessment is concluded; and
- (iv) to otherwise note the report.

James Lavery
Executive Director of Development and Property Services

7 December 2005
(KD/SA)
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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee, Potential Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve, 3 June 2005.
2. Galloway Biosphere Reserve, Hambrey Consulting in association with Landwise Scotland, April 2005.

Implementation Officer: Alan Neish