

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Urban Biosphere City Status</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>19 January 2009</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Director of Strategy &amp; Governance</b>
<b>Contact Officers: Name:</b>	<b>Mita Patel, Matthew Thomas Tel: 29-3332, 29-2371</b>
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<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report outlines proposals for Brighton and Hove to achieve the status of Urban Biosphere City. It summarises outcomes from the 2008 Sustainability Conference where the proposal was explored and presents proposals for moving forward.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 (1) That the Cabinet Committee affirms the council's commitment to work towards designation of Brighton & Hove as an Urban Biosphere.
- 2.2 (2) That the Cabinet Committee seeks integration of the Urban Biosphere target into the work programmes of the City Sustainability Partnership and 2020 Community Partnership.
- 2.3 (3) That the Cabinet Committee, working with the 2020 Community Partnership, publishes an agreed strategy and costed action plan to set out the steps required to achieve Urban Biosphere status.

#### 3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

##### Purpose and Benefits of Biosphere Reserves

- 3.1 Biosphere Reserves are designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Biosphere Reserves are a unique designation in that they recognise the need to achieve the conservation of biological diversity alongside a high quality of life for people. The over-arching purpose of Biosphere Reserves is therefore to promote biodiversity conservation as a vehicle for achieving sustainable economic and social development.

- 3.2 At present there are over 500 Biosphere Reserves distributed over more than 100 countries, including nine in the UK. Although some Reserves across the world include sizeable urban populations, all the UK Reserves so far designated are rural and relatively remote.
- 3.3 The 2006 Brighton & Hove Sustainable Community Strategy is perhaps unique in the UK in committing the 2020 Partnership to work towards designation of the city as a Biosphere Reserve. If successful, Brighton & Hove would be the first city in the UK to achieve this status.
- 3.4 The benefits of Biosphere Reserve status for Brighton and Hove include:
- Setting new standards of excellence for integrating biodiversity into city living to improve quality of life, involving opportunities to establish new partnerships and working relationships.
  - International and national recognition of Brighton & Hove as a 'sustainable city' with consequential benefits to tourism and economic development amongst others.
  - A vehicle for raising awareness and improving community cohesion and involvement in local decision-making.
  - Opportunities for additional external funding.

### **Sustainability Conference 2008**

- 3.5 The Brighton & Hove City Council Sustainability Conference, held in October 2008, explored in detail what it might mean for Brighton and Hove to become an urban 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.
- 3.6 The two day conference attracted 250 delegates from a wide variety of sectors including city residents, UNESCO representatives, architects, local community and residents associations, various interest groups, the public sector and academia. There were also 22 exhibitors from a broad range of organisations and community groups, tours of the neighbouring One Brighton development provided by the developers, Bioregional Quintain, and participatory workshops which provided delegates with opportunities to engage in debating and exploring some key themes.
- 3.7 The conference agenda included presentations from 15 experts from across Europe on a broad range of subjects. These included the benefits of biodiversity to urban renewal and economic development; the social, educational and community benefits of urban biodiversity; the opportunities for urban food

production and the health benefits of urban biodiversity. Question and answer sessions provided opportunities for delegates to debate key issues in the local context.

### 3.8 Key findings from the conference included:

- There is considerable potential to involve local people in the design and management of communal open space. Experience from other urban areas has shown that such involvement would promote community cohesion and reduce the fear of crime. Urban Biosphere status would set the standard for a step change in this area and potentially draw in new sources of funding and expertise for delivery.
- Opportunities for synergy between the health agenda and urban biosphere status are substantial. GPs are already prescribing improved access to natural open space to help address physical and mental health problems. There is potential to establish a 'Natural Health Service' for the city based, on a number of successful initiatives from around the country, with offered support from Natural England.
- Urban Biosphere status would help to mainstream pioneering work by the University of Brighton and the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership to promote urban food growing which would have a range of benefits to the city.
- Best practice across European cities has shown that there is potential to draw substantial economic benefits to an urban area by recognising environmental improvement as a key driver for change.
- Provided the goals are clearly set and agreed from the outset, urban biodiversity initiatives can promote development and therefore support private sector investment.
- Brighton and Hove has already drawn keen interest from UNESCO in its Biosphere aspirations because of the potential to learn lessons for other cities across the world. There is potential to work with this momentum at national and international levels.

3.9 Despite being promoted as a local event, the conference received national and international as well as local media attention. This highlighted the high level of interest in the urban Biosphere concept and the broader benefits the city would gain if it chose to commit to achieving Biosphere Reserve status.

### **The Way Forward**

3.10 UNESCO has an established application procedure for achieving Biosphere Reserve status which would require commitment from a range of organisations across the city and the integration of the aspirations of the Biosphere Reserve concept into decision making at high level. The key requirements which would need to be delivered for a Biosphere Reserve application to be successful include:

- The 2020 Community Partnership would need to adopt Biosphere Reserve status as a part of its core business.
- The council would need to be able to demonstrate wide buy-in to the concept from a documented consultation process and letters of support from key organisations in the city.
- A dossier of information would need to be compiled on the wildlife of international importance within the city, including sites and habitats of international value, their condition and the plans proposed to achieve and maintain their favourable conservation status.

3.11 A next step towards Biosphere Reserve designation would be to map and quantify the processes which would need to be put in place, for consideration by the council (and the 2020 Community Partnership). This 'Biosphere Action Plan' could be written within existing resources, although the Plan would be unlikely to be completed before autumn 2009. A full Biosphere Reserve application would take some months longer to compile and therefore submission to UNESCO would be unlikely before autumn 2010, within existing resources.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

4.1 Consultation on the recommendations have been undertaken with the Council's Sustainability Team and with the Environment Directorate's City Services Division.

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

##### Financial Implications:

5.1 The report recommendations would have no direct financial implications for the council, and the strategy and action plan could be written within existing financial resources. However the delivery of Biosphere Reserve status is likely to involve costs which are currently unknown.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Patrick Rice*

*Date: 10/12/2008*

##### Legal Implications:

5.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. However, in developing a strategy for achieving Urban Biosphere status, the Council and its partners should consider how this dovetails with legislation such as the Climate Change Act 2008, the Marine & Coastal Access Bill, and any proposals submitted from residents or businesses in Brighton & Hove under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007.

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Oliver Dixon*

*Date: 10/12/2008*

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The strategy for achieving Biosphere Reserve status would need to engage a broad spectrum of the community as an explicit condition of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve application procedure. This would take account of the council's Community Engagement Framework.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 A key objective of Biosphere Reserve status is the conservation of biological diversity which is also a central objective of Sustainability. It is also anticipated that Biosphere Reserve status would have a positive effect on reducing the council's climate change impact.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 None.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 The main risks are:
- The city fails to achieve Biosphere Reserve status after investing time and resources into working towards it.
  - A lack of buy-in and support from the wider community and from key partners across the city.
  - Other priorities may lead to a failure to adequately integrate Biosphere Reserve objectives into the agenda of the 2020 Community Partnership.
- 5.7 There are significant opportunities that support the proposal including:
- Existing recognition and commitment from the 2020 Community Partnership via the Sustainable Community Strategy for the Biosphere Reserve proposal to be a priority for the city.
  - The experiences and commitment created from the 2008 Sustainability Conference. Key achievements initiated from the conference included:
    - cross-party support
    - support from key partners and experts
    - support from the wider Brighton & Hove community
    - the creation of contacts and networks on key themes such as health, social inclusion and education
    - access for the city to relevant expertise in the various themes considered.

- recognition and support from high level within UNESCO to enable the proposal to be successfully taken forward.

5.8 Existing and emerging policy supporting the Biosphere Reserve concept including the draft Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework (which explicitly refers to the Biosphere Reserve objective), a draft Supplementary Planning Document for integrating nature conservation into new developments in the city, the emerging Open Space Strategy and various projects and initiatives either already underway or scheduled within City Parks.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.9 The economic benefits to the city as an 'urban biosphere' tourist destination.

5.10 The health benefits to the city through: improved access to biodiverse open spaces and corridors, access to locally grown food, and increased access to sustainable homes and transport.

5.11 Implications for community engagement and active participation in setting out an urban biodiversity plan for the city and in helping to achieve it.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

6.1 Not applicable.

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 Not applicable.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

1. Conference agenda

**Documents In Members' Rooms**

None

**Background Documents**

None