

Subject: The Living Coast Review & Relaunch

Date of meeting: 18 July 2023

Report of: Chair, Greater Brighton Programme Board

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For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 The Living Coast biosphere was designated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in 2014. This recognises both the region's outstanding natural environments and capacity to foster cross-sectoral cooperation for excellence in sustainable development. It is both a spatial designation with national and international recognition, and [a local partnership](#) with over 40 different organisations encompassing businesses, conservation, education, voluntary, and local government partners.
- 1.2 Every ten years UNESCO requires biospheres to take stock of the work that has been delivered and to consult all local stakeholders to shape the future strategy, leading to an official renewal of the designation. This work is currently underway and progressing well, and is an opportunity to identify synergies between the UNESCO biosphere and the priorities of the Greater Brighton Economic Board ("the Board"), addressing objectives of the [GB10 Pledges on the Environment](#).
- 1.3 The Living Coast has set a budget target of £80k for the essential work around this review & relaunch process. These costs include consultancy fees to prepare a management plan, and key activities such as research, stakeholder engagement and communications. Biospheres receive no funding from UNESCO or national government and are instead funded by partner bodies. Funding for the work associated with re-designation is being sought from existing partners and wider stakeholders. The Living Coast is seeking a financial contribution from the Greater Brighton Economic Board to support this work.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Board agrees to provide £10,000 of funding to support the Living Coast's UNESCO redesignation work as set out in 3.13 below.
- 2.2 That the Board agrees to work more closely with The Living Coast, so as to maximise the collaboration opportunities where objectives and priorities align.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere was nominated by national government and designated by [UNESCO](#) following the creation of a wide-ranging partnership to pursue the objectives of [UNESCO biospheres](#) in our region. Biosphere Reserves are natural 'learning places for sustainable development' and provide local solutions to global challenges. In their own contexts, they have been implementing projects that address each Sustainable Development Goal and target of the Agenda 2030 in a creative and innovative way. There are 748 biosphere reserves in 134 countries and the Living Coast Biosphere is part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, aiming to be sites of excellence for sustainable development through:
- **Conservation** of biodiversity and cultural diversity;
 - **Economic development** that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable
 - **Knowledge sharing underpinning development** through Education, training, research and data.

Geography

- 3.2 Partners provide full geographical coverage of the Biosphere area, together with sectoral diversity, from the Ouse to the Adur. A flexible approach to this geography enables opportunities and synergies to be pursued that are not necessarily restricted to rigidly applied geographical boundaries. Part of the redesignation process will include looking at the geography of the Biosphere area to determine whether it still best reflects what the designation is seeking to achieve, or whether it should be expanded.
- 3.3 Marine elements are included within the biosphere's boundaries which include the coastal stretch between the two rivers. This combination of urban, rural and marine landscapes is unique within biospheres in the UK, providing special and valuable opportunities.

The Living Coast Partnership

- 3.4 Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) is the lead partner, hosting and resourcing the administration and making substantial financial contributions to core funding. Wider local government sector support comes through Adur & Worthing Councils and Lewes District Council. Additional financial and further support comes from other partner organisations, including the South Downs National Park, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Southern Water, University of Brighton, University of Sussex, Brighton & Hove Buses and several others. The current management strategy is available [here](#).
- 3.5 The interdisciplinary cooperation between people and organisations has brought together real and tangible work that positively impacts the City Region environment and communities, in relation to habitats, biodiversity, carbon reduction, climate, food production and distribution, and arts and cultural benefits for the people who live and work in Greater Brighton and wider area.

- 3.6 Always collaborative, The Living Coast has an important role to play in bringing together the organisations that are instigators and collaborators in the vital actions that we all need to take whatever our roles and responsibilities. The backing of the UNESCO designation is important in bringing extra leverage to support, develop and expand these actions.

Economic Impact

- 3.7 Developing the attractiveness of our region as a tourist destination with increasing UNESCO support.

- The Biocultural Heritage Tourism project developed a decision support tool to assist in strategic tourism planning, including:
 - an interactive map of areas of opportunity and pressure;
 - a toolkit for tourism businesses offering practical guidance on making the most of our natural and cultural heritage and operating more sustainably;
 - a suite of destination marketing assets;
 - a Living Coast by Bike website with routes linked to train stations, information about natural and cultural heritage on the routes and suitable for all abilities..

Clearly much of the process, learning and development could add value across the Greater Brighton geography.

- Supporting local businesses in their sustainable journey by developing networking opportunities, [resources and best practices](#), such as [Slake spirits distillery in Shoreham](#) and [The Depot Cinema, Lewes](#), and helping SMEs transition to sustainable development
- Partnering with local companies to encourage sustainable transport and living - [Ultra low emissions for Brighton & Hove buses](#) and [Southern Railway's sustainability strategy](#)

- 3.8 Working on water quality and quantity, as the region is particularly water stressed:

- Implementing nature based solutions to manage flood risks, protect water and restore wildlife – creating raingardens and sharing knowledge in Brighton with [the Wild Park rainscape](#), [in Portslade](#) & [Wilder Ouse](#) in Lewes.
- The Aquifer Partnership demonstrates and explores ways in which we can protect the quality of our local groundwater, reduce demand pressures and flooding risk, working with farmers, landowners and businesses and in both rural and urban environments. This partnership with the Environment Agency, Southern Water, South Downs National Park and Brighton & Hove City Council is tackling vital issues relevant across all geographies.
- Researching how to tackle pollution from rain drainage - [University of Brighton: The Wild Park Rainscape and dedicated UNESCO funding](#), and innovating in Biodiversity Net Gains.

- 3.9 Rewilding projects in urban and coastal areas:
- Rewilding local habitats with local road verges ([Wilder Verges](#)) animal grazing ([Changing Chalk](#), [Wilding Waterhall](#), [Devil's Dyke](#)), rewilding and replanting in Butterfly Banks ([Greening the Cities projects](#))
 - Changing Chalk is reinforcing the value of bringing more wildflowers and pollinators into our urban environments and doing so in ways that are sensitive to the flora and fauna of the habitats that surround our urban areas is of value across the region.
 - (Re)Planting vegetated shingles on the Coast - [The BlackRock Rejuvenation Project](#)
- 3.10 Raising residents' awareness on how to live a more sustainable lifestyle:
- Leveraging a communication footprint of 10k followers across online platforms to highlight all of the above lifestyle – promoting a wide array of accessible activities: [What's on - The Living Coast](#)
 - Engaging various audiences with citizen projects that could readily be extended to include wider participation from across the wider Greater Brighton geography, such as the [City Nature Challenge](#) (with the University of Sussex, University of Brighton and South Downs National Park)
Further information on these and other The Living Coast projects can be viewed at www.thelivingcoast.org.uk
- 3.11 Lobbying could be another area of cooperation as UNESCO biospheres can access Defra through the UK Commission for UNESCO.

The UNESCO Redesignation

- 3.12 As outlined in section 1.2, the original 10-year designation expires in 2024, meaning that the Living Coast has now started a review & relaunch process ahead of the hard deadline of 30 September 2024 set by UNESCO.
- 3.13 Stakeholder engagement workshops include dedicated work with local players on sustainable business and tourism economy, education and communities, biodiversity conservation, strategy, and interactions with residents, including those living in more deprived areas or with specific needs. Reports will be produced and shared with strategic stakeholders across the period of Q4 2023-Q1 2024 for the new strategy to start being implemented in 2024.
- 3.14 The Biosphere is funded by its partner organisations and receives no funding from the United Nations or UK Government to sustain its important work. It has a small core team of less than two FTE officers, albeit supported operationally by some very committed and passionate representatives of partner organisations. It therefore needs to invest in the support of consultants to assist in the delivery of the redesignation and strategy review work, without which the biosphere partnership would cease to function. Core funding and resourcing is in place for the current and coming year, met principally by BHCC and the contributions of several other leading partners.

- 3.15 While the official submission to UNESCO will be in September 2024, the core goal of this process is to trigger the opportunity for strategic direction to be aligned to the challenges of the coming ten-year period, as societal, legislative and financial frameworks change and develop. While the biosphere will continue to deliver on its goals across 2024-2025, there will be ongoing discussions with UNESCO over that period of time to ensure alignment, and hopefully a national celebration of the renewed designation will take place in Summer 2025. There exists a significant opportunity for wider engagement and involvement of organisations and individuals. A detailed roadmap of the work to be undertaken in 2023 and 2024 can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.16 The budget of £80k has been set for this crucial piece of work which includes £35k earmarked for consultants' fees, other resource (£15k), and research, engagement and communications (£30k). A number of leading partners have already determined that they wish to see the work of the Biosphere continue, and through their generosity the Living Coast has thus far received commitments to 50% of this requirement. Other partners such as the universities have committed to help in-kind through assisting with elements of the research needs that accompany the redesignation submission. Partnership members are being approached together with appropriate non-members in an effort to build on this solid base.
- 3.17 The Greater Brighton Economic Board will be consulted by the Living Coast as a key stakeholder and partner in the strategy development that will flow from the redesignation process.
- 3.18 The Board has set ambitious sustainability targets as captured in the GB10 pledges agreed in 2020. Board officers are currently preparing a Transition to Net Zero Action which will capture, monitor and report on all the work going on in relation to carbon reduction and the wider sustainability agenda. There are clear opportunities for synergies through working across the environmental work of Greater Brighton collaboratively, including the imminent work flowing from new legislation and the local nature recovery strategies, the opportunities of exploring improvements to our marine environment, the Sussex Bay project and several other areas where the Board and The Living Coast is facing the same strategic challenges and with very closely related objectives.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 If the work of the Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere is to continue beyond 2024/25 it is essential that the work associated with redesignation moves forward at pace to adhere to the September 2024 deadline set by UNESCO. Funding is required so that the consultancy work and stakeholder/community engagement can proceed in the necessary timeframes. If key stakeholders such as the Board do not provide modest financial support towards this work, there is a risk that the timelines will not be met, and/or there will be a detrimental affect on the quality of the outputs.
- 4.2 As the Living Coast embarks on developing a new 10-year strategy, there is a clear opportunity to identify synergies between the biosphere and the

priorities of its key stakeholders, including the Board. The biosphere and the Board share a number of priorities and objectives which can be better achieved by closer working between the two organisations.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 The Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere has led and supported many projects encompassing community engagement, such as the collaboration with the Aquifer Partnership in the Moulsecoomb area in Brighton, and the varied groups of volunteers to deliver the rewilding projects across the city (see Greening The Cities). The communication on social media is (and has been) also an excellent way to interact directly with communities.
- 5.2 As part as the review & relaunch process currently underway, four workshops are being led to consult and interact with distinct communities, and a dedicated survey will be shared with many local community groups, with the help of Community Works and other similar umbrella organisations.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This paper has outlined the requirement that by September next year the Living Coast must apply to UNESCO for redesignation to cover the period 2024-34. Sections 3.14-3.15 set out the funding required to develop a new 10-year strategy and other work associated with the application process.
- 6.2 Some of the benefits and impact of the Living Coast's work have been highlighted, particularly through sections 3.6-3.10. To ensure that this work continues, the recommendation at 2.1 is that the Board provides some funding towards the redesignation work.
- 6.3 There exist further opportunities that can be exploited from closer co-ordination and collaboration between the Living Coast and the Board and this is set out in recommendation 2.2.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The recommendation of this report is to allocate £10,000 to support the Living Coast's UNESCO redesignation work. This funding will be met from the existing workplan budget and therefore will not require further funding from Board Member organisations.

Name of finance officer consulted: James Hengeveld, Head of Finance
Date consulted: 07/07/2023

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Wendy McRae-Smith, Senior Lawyer
Date consulted: 05/07/2023

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 As stated in paragraphs 3.12 and 5.2 above, there are going to be stakeholder engagement workshops and interactions with residents, including those living in more deprived areas or with specific needs.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 As it is in the Biosphere's DNA to support sustainability, this is at the heart of every project delivered by the team.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

- 1. Draft redesignation timeline

Appendix 1 – The Living Coast Draft Redesignation Timeline

Q1 2023

- Biosphere Programme Manager on maternity leave; Cover role advertised and recruited
- 3 Task & Finish groups set up: Strategy & Finance, Research & Data; Comms, Marketing & Engagement
- Consultants tender for periodic review support to deliver formal UNESCO requirements: finalized, advertised, answers assessed and appointed.
- The Living Coast Board meeting
- Meeting of the UK Biospheres in Northern Ireland ('UK MAB')

Q2 2023

- Periodic review consultants start under the supervision of the Programme Manager
- Research work delivered with [a mapping of initiatives delivered by or with the support of the Biosphere](#)
- Renewal of social & web media support contract for 2023/24 to be prepared by end of Q2
- The Living Coast Board meeting
- Task & Finish group meetings
- Wider stakeholder engagement initialized
- Stakeholder data gathering for periodic review/research & data group requirements ongoing.

Q3 2023

- Task & finish group meetings ongoing – consultants reporting into strategy & finance group
- First consultancy drafts of periodic review reports completed and presented to Biosphere Board
- Feedback on development of new strategic plan to Board from Strategy & Finance group
- Endorsement of other key strategic stakeholders of the report and new strategy
- Biosphere Board meeting

Q4 2023

- 'State of the biosphere report' executive summary to be delivered by the consultant
- Final draft approved at The Living Coast Board meeting (December)
- Final draft to Brighton & Hove City Council Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee (or in Q1 2024)
- Task & Finish group meetings
- Development of new strategic plan started (Strategy & Finance Group) including future financial sustainability

Q1 2024

- Final draft circulated to wider stakeholder group

- Biosphere Programme Manager maternity cover ends
- Ongoing Strategic Plan development
- Biosphere Board meeting

Q2 2024

- Final Draft submitted to UK Man and the Biosphere Committee
- Final draft to partners' governance requirements
- Biosphere Board meeting
- Ongoing Strategic Plan development

Q3 2024

- Submit final report to UNESCO (digital & physical)
- 30 September 2024 hard deadline to be received by UNESCO Paris – all Periodic Reviews need to be physically submitted by this date globally.
- Biosphere Board meeting
- Ongoing Strategic Plan development

Q3 2024

- Submit final report to UNESCO (digital & physical)
- 30 September 2024 hard deadline to be received by UNESCO Paris – all Periodic Reviews need to be physically submitted by this date globally.
- Biosphere Board meeting
- Ongoing Strategic Plan development

Q4 2024 – Q2 2025

- Ongoing talks with UNESCO to answer potential questions arising from the reports
- Ongoing Strategic Plan development

Summer 2025

- Official Ambassador visit from UNESCO to the biosphere to celebrate the new designation and strategy with all local players and partners

