

The Fens Biosphere

This Council is proud to be a partner in Natural Cambridgeshire, the Local Nature Partnership for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which launched its Doubling Nature vision last year. Achieving the vision depends on collaborative partnerships and the sharing of the vision with a wide range of stakeholders, including various agencies, organisations, communities, landowners, farmers and developers.

Biosphere Reserve status is awarded by UNESCO to unique and valuable landscapes. The stated aims of biospheres are to connect people, economies, and nature to secure a future where all can thrive, meeting the needs of current and future residents and working towards providing secure and happy futures for all. Further, that biospheres aim to improve the natural environment, using new ideas, science, and technology to explore new ways of living every day in ways that solve global challenges.

East Cambridgeshire lies wholly within the proposed Fens Biosphere geography, and includes the proposed Biosphere Core Zones of the Ouse Washes, Wicken Fen, and Chippenham Fen, all of which already enjoy protected status.

The proposed Fens Biosphere was awarded Candidate Status by UK Man and the Biosphere (UK MAB) on behalf of UNESCO in November 2019, which is the first stage in achieving Biosphere Reserve designation by UNESCO. The UK currently includes seven areas that have achieved designation. Eight former Biosphere sites in the UK have withdrawn from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. If the Fens Biosphere were to achieve designation it would be one of 714 designated Biospheres in the world, located across 129 countries, and would be the only lowland Biosphere in the UK, and the East of England.

In order to gain UNESCO Biosphere designation, the Biosphere initiative must demonstrate the widest level of local support, including that of local authorities. Although several local authorities within the candidate area have voiced support, in order to achieve designation, it is a requirement that this support is demonstrated through formal endorsement. For the Fens Biosphere project, a date of June 2022 has been given by which that endorsement must be demonstrated.

The Council discharges its statutory duty to control and determine development in the district through adherence to national legislation and local planning policy, currently the National Planning Policy Framework and the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015.

This Council:

- notes the efforts of those involved to date in achieving Candidate Status
- recognises the potential value of the Fens Biosphere, but
- believes the implications of Biosphere Reserve status are not yet clear

Further, this Council notes:

- the Government's recently closed White Paper consultation "Planning for the Future" which sets out plans for fundamental reform of England's planning system, the outcome of which is, as yet, unknown
- that there has been no consultation on the Fens Biosphere with Parish, Town and City Councils, communities and residents to date

This Council therefore:

- requests further investigation of the implications and benefits of designation for East Cambridgeshire, and
- instructs the Chief Executive to write to Cambridgeshire Acre to seek further information

Proposed by Cllr Anna Bailey

Seconded by Cllr David Ambrose Smith