

**Motion submitted by Councillor Steve Tierney regarding  
The Fen Biosphere**

1. The biosphere is the world in which we live and which we share with other living things - the zone of life on Earth - the soil we grow things in, the air we breathe and the sea where we swim and fish. More technically, the biosphere is composed of the biota (all living things) and the abiotic (non-living) factors from which the biota derives energy and nutrients.
2. UNESCO (The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation), through its "Man and the Biosphere" (MAB) Programme, "aims to establish a scientific basis for enhancing the relationship between people and their environments. It combines the natural and social sciences with a view to improving human livelihoods and safeguarding natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable." - according to the UNESCO website.
3. There are more than 700 Biosphere Reserves around the world in over 120 countries which are recognised by UNESCO through its World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
4. Biosphere Reserve status is granted by the MAB International Co-ordinating Council based on recommendations made by individual countries' National MAB Committees.
5. In the United Kingdom there are currently seven recognised Biosphere Reserves: Brighton & Lewes Downs, North Devon, the Isle of Wight, Biosffer Dyfi in Wales, Galloway & Southern Ayrshire, Wester Ross and the Isle of Man.
6. Proposals have been drawn up for a Fens Biosphere. The only principal local authority area which would fall entirely within the boundary of the proposed Fens Biosphere is Fenland District Council, although parts of each of the following principal local authority areas would also be included: Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Peterborough, East Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Cambridge City, South Cambridgeshire, King's Lynn & West Norfolk, West Suffolk and South Holland.
7. We understand that unanimous support from relevant local authorities is required to proceed with seeking Biosphere Reserve status from UNESCO.
8. In April a Fenland District Council Members' Seminar was held, addressed by David Thomas (Chair of the Fens Biosphere Steering Group), Roger Mitchell (Vice-Chair of the Fens Biosphere Steering Group) and Mark Nokkert (Project Development manager) on behalf of the Fens Biosphere Project, seeking FDC's support for UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status for the Fens Biosphere Project.
9. The Fens generally, and Fenland in particular, have remarkably few natural landscape areas, unlike the existing UK Biosphere Reserve areas. The Fens' natural landscape was fundamentally changed through drainage to form the highly professionally controlled (but nevertheless precarious) managed landscape that we have today.
10. Unlike other UK Biosphere areas, fundamental management of our uniquely controlled artificial landscape lies in the hands of public bodies, primarily Drainage Commissioners and Internal Drainage Boards.
11. Any suggestion of reversion to the natural landscape of the Fens, in whole or in part, fundamentally fails to take into account the immense economic and social risks of altering the existing land management balance effected by our public drainage bodies.

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12. Any suggestion that the current landscape balance effected by our local drainage schemes should be altered needs to be rigorously scrutinised and assessed prior to implementation.
13. Maintaining and reviewing, more generally, the balance between the so-called "natural" environment (much of which, in Fenland, is artificial rather than natural) and our built environment is one of the fundamental responsibilities of local authorities in producing their Local Plans. The first draft of Fenland's proposed revised Local Plan is due to be published in the next few months.
14. Members attending the Seminar last month were, on the basis of their questions and comments at the Seminar, wholly unconvinced that the Fens Biosphere Project had any clear vision as to:
  - a. how, and to what extent, our existing landscape balance should be changed.
  - b. what effect any changes to policy relating to the proposed Biosphere status would or could have on the general economic and social well-being of local residents, and on the economic growth agenda of Fenland District Council.
  - c. whether Biosphere Reserve status would have any practical effect whatsoever, and if so, what that effect would be.
15. Questioning and, where necessary or advisable, amending the balance of our existing highly managed artificial local ecosystem is an appropriate activity for us as a local authority, and for the community as a whole.
16. However, the existing Fens Biosphere proposal is so vague and so poorly articulated and defined that it is impossible to determine whether it is meaningless or meaningful, and if it is meaningful, what the effects of the Biosphere designation would be or what they could be in the future.
17. As a responsible local authority in an area with a precariously, but highly professionally, artificially managed landscape, it would be irresponsible for us to sign up to a proposal the meaning of which is so poorly defined, but which could potentially have a massively negative impact upon our District, its economy and its residents.
18. To use a colloquial expression, the Fens Biosphere project as currently constituted is a "pig in a poke" - it does not have local community support and is therefore rejected by Fenland District Council.
19. As the only local authority which is wholly contained within the proposed Fens Biosphere area, Fenland District Council officially OPPOSES putting the Fens Biosphere project forward for consideration as a UNESCO-recognised Biosphere Reserve.
20. Fenland District Council resolves to forward this resolution to:
  - a. the Chair and Vice Chair of the Fens Biosphere Steering Group, the Programme Development Manager and the Community Development Manager of the Fens Biosphere project, together with Dame Fiona Reynolds, the Fens Biosphere Ambassador
  - b. the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire
  - c. Cambridgeshire ACRE
  - d. Middle Level, North Level and the Internal Drainage Boards wholly or partially within Fenland.
  - e. Fenland's Town and Parish Councils
  - f. the local authorities listed in point 6 above.
  - g. Professor Matthew Cragoe (Chairholder of the UK MAN National Committee) and Professor Martin Price (Vice-Chair of the UK MAN National

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Committee) or their successors in Office.

h. Steve Barclay MP

i. BEIS, DEFRA and the MHCLG.