

**AYRSHIRE JOINT PLANNING STEERING GROUP**  
**16 December 2009**

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**Proposed Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere**

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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To advise Councils on the work being undertaken to progress the principle of a UNESCO designated biosphere covering the rural parts of South and East Ayrshire and part of Dumfries and Galloway Council.

**BACKGROUND**

2. As part of the approved policies in the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan four key tourism economic development opportunities were identified. One of the four was a proposition to explore the potential offered by the natural environment to promote a UNESCO initiative for a biosphere reserve in southern Ayrshire. Biosphere reserves form a unique global network of special places for people and nature. They are designated by UNESCO with the aim of being sites of excellence to explore and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable economic and social development at a regional scale. After initial work was undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage, South and East Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway Councils asked AJPU to take the project forward as chair of a Biosphere Steering Group. This report indicates current progress as the project enters a critical stage.

**DEVELOPING THE PROJECT**

3. Since 2005, the Steering Group has been pursuing the concept of a modern biosphere in SW Scotland as result of the UNESCO requirement to review the two existing biospheres that already exist in the area. To aid this understanding, two major studies have been undertaken. The first, "Working Towards a Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve", funded in part through LEADER and supported by partners, undertook an extensive consultation exercise aimed at engaging communities in understanding the opportunities that a biosphere might bring. The conclusions were a very positive general support for the principle but a strong feeling that it should not be agency led.
4. The study also identified a potential fundamental barrier to any engagement with the biosphere model in terms of the difficulty of quantifying the added value that biosphere status can deliver and any consequential financial implications. This has been addressed through a further study by economists Mackay Consultants to identify the socio-economic potential a biosphere. In a series of future scenarios based on potential investment over a 10 year period a return or leverage of 6:1 could be expected, that is for every £1 spent an additional £6 could be generated. The conclusion to the study suggests that substantial financial benefit could accrue to the area with biosphere status.

5. After a meeting last year with the previous Environment Minister the Group was asked to explore other possible spatial options, but the partners remain convinced that biosphere status is the most suited to SW Scotland. However, if the biosphere is to become a reality then in the light of earlier consultation it cannot be entirely agency or council led and partners are turning their attention to a more broadly based community driven process. This is being explored on two parallel tracks.

### **CURRENT WORK**

6. Firstly, the case for a biosphere would be strengthened if the many community groups within the area could be encouraged to identify local “biosphere champions” to develop relations between local groups and businesses and foster an informed and joined up approach. In some parts of the area there is already strong evidence to suggest this is possible and an exercise will start shortly to extend the principle.
7. Second, an EU INTERREG 4A application has been submitted with partners in Ireland and Northern Ireland to link river basin management, ecosystem services and community futures and to share that experience trans-nationally. If approved, this £2m project will explore in detail three river systems in SW Scotland, the rivers Doon, Cree and Stinchar to link communities to public sector agencies in the proactive management of their future environment and sustainable economic growth. This project is seen as a major building block for the management of the biosphere in the future.

### **CONCLUSION**

8. The project to develop a biosphere for Galloway and Southern Ayrshire is at a critical point. Studies put in place by the partners have made a convincing case for a biosphere in SW Scotland. Over the next six months it will be necessary to intensify public, community and other stakeholder engagement to identify further biosphere champions to take ownership of the biosphere concept and drive it forward towards submission. This will undoubtedly bring the biosphere into high public focus and place communities at the heart of the final stages of the application process. After a recent meeting with the Environment Minister a cautiously optimistic view is being taken of government support providing community support can be demonstrated.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

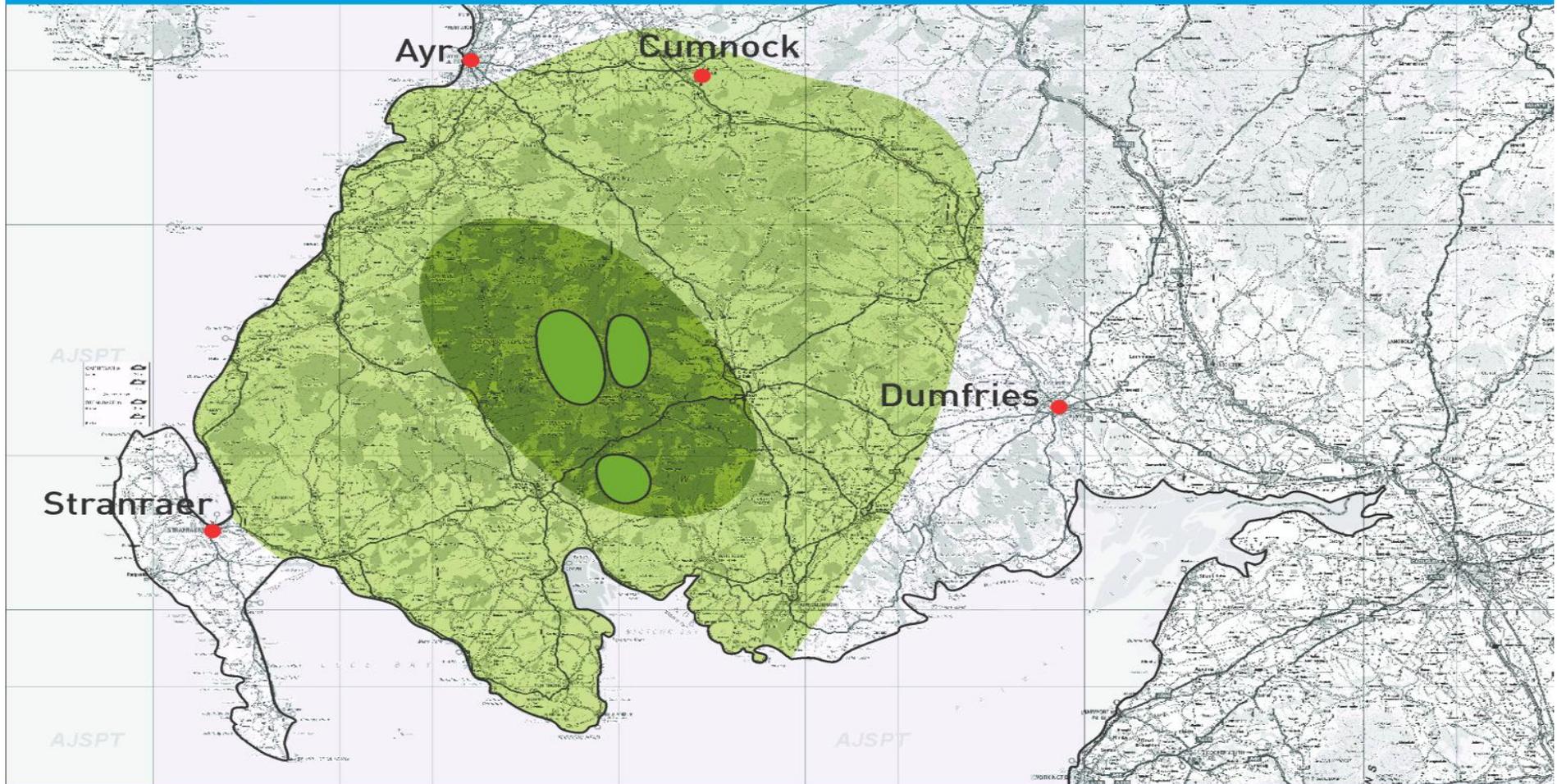
10. The Steering Group are asked to note this report.

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# The Proposed Biosphere



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