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Dear Newent Town Council,

Thank you for interest in the Biosphere initiative. These are good questions, please find below responses to the questions which you have requested a formal written response to. We hope that the online briefing conducted by officers was informative and sufficiently updated the Councillors at Newent Town Council.

What specific, named governance mechanisms will ensure that areas such as Newent are not disadvantaged under reduced councillor representation, and when will these be formally embedded in the new authority's constitution?

Essentially this is a Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) question, whilst this is not specifically my portfolio area however as a councillor, I can offer what I understand to be the current situation.

Councillor representation under LGR remains unconfirmed while we wait for the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's decision as to the particular unitary model/s that will represent Gloucestershire. As such, the detailed design of the new authority's constitution, including ward boundaries, committee structures and representation ratios, is subject to formal consultation processes that have not yet concluded. Those arrangements will be developed through structured public participation as LGR is implemented, which again is dependent on the Government's decision, expected in June. Further detail on the proposals for Unitary Authority model/s can be found on the [Future Gloucestershire](#) website.

We feel that biosphere designation and its governance structure will help to improve community (and district wide) representation in a new larger unitary authority in the absence of a District Council.

At what defined stages will elected members be able to meaningfully influence the Biosphere application and governance model, and will there be a formal approval point before decisions are finalised?

In March 2025 the Forest of Dean Council unanimously voted to submit an application to UNESCO. We continue to provide update and feedback sessions for members and we are publishing a draft nomination so that people can see and feedback as the nomination progresses. The governance proposals are currently just that and are

provided as a start point rather than set at this stage. Upon designation it is proposed that a forest assembly meeting would review and agree the governance for the new biosphere. Further information on proposed governance can be found at [UNESCO Biosphere Application - Forest of Dean District Council](#).

Can you provide a clear, published map showing how the 15 ha reserve, 67.04 ha core area, and 247.06 ha buffer zone for Collin Park Wood relate to each other, including access arrangements and ownership?

There is a clear published interactive map on the website which shows the proposed zones in terms of core, buffer and transition zones. These zones do not impact access arrangements or landownership these would remain exactly the same. Please access the map using the link below. In terms of Collin Park Wood a 500m zone around the Site of Special Scientific Interest has been used to identify the 'buffer' area.

<https://fdeandc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=035e20a03616494ebe0c9678f539ed85>

Can you confirm that existing public access and activities—including walking, dog access, horse riding, and seasonal visits such as daffodil viewing at Dymock Forest—will be maintained, and under what specific conditions any restrictions could be introduced?

Current public access and recreational use are explicitly stated as remaining in place under the proposed Forest of Dean Biosphere designation. On the biosphere web page under the published FAQs, it says that biosphere status “does not introduce new public access restrictions” and that “walking, cycling, and other recreational activities would continue as they do now.” The existing permissions, agreements, and regulations would remain unchanged.

The FAQs are available via the weblink below;

<https://www.fdean.gov.uk/forest-of-dean-s-unesco-biosphere-bid/frequently-asked-questions/>

Will existing infrastructure such as parking, trails, and access points be retained or enhanced, and which body will have ultimate responsibility for these decisions?

Yes, biosphere would not change the responsibilities for the provision and management of existing infrastructure such as parking areas, trails, cycle routes, visitor facilities, and access points. The biosphere would present the opportunity to work collaboratively to support more joined up approaches and improvements, seeking funding where appropriate.

What specific mechanisms will ensure that communities such as Newent receive direct, measurable benefits, and will there be transparent, place-based reporting of investment and outcomes?

Communities such as Newent should see direct, measurable benefits through a better connected local economy, part of a place recognised as being special and being part of a strong governance structure which has a clear vision and ambition for the future. The proposed Biosphere model already commits to locally led decision-making through

a partnership board involving groups such as councils, businesses, landowners and community groups.

In practice, this should mean that towns like Newent are not simply included geographically, but are able to shape priorities and access dedicated support for projects linked to local economic resilience, market town regeneration, skills, sustainable tourism, transport connectivity, heritage, and nature recovery. Existing work on market town regeneration and community consultation in Newent provides a foundation for this place-based approach.

Transparent, place-based reporting will be essential. This could include annual public reports showing how activity is distributed across the district, including Newent, alongside delivery outcomes and community impact measures. The Biosphere proposal already emphasises evidence-led planning, partnership working, and long-term stewardship, which creates the basis for this kind of accountability.

Importantly, biosphere status itself does not bring a single central funding pot from the UK Government or UNESCO; rather, it strengthens the area's ability to attract grants and investment.

In summary, biosphere status is intended as a framework for collaboration, not control. It cannot amend law, constrain rights, or impose policy. Its value lies in whether local communities choose to use it to attract investment, coordinate effort, and celebrate the Forest of Dean's unique cultural and environmental heritage. We shall make the content of this letter available through the biosphere website as others may find the questions and answers useful.

Yours sincerely

Chris McFarling

Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency & Biosphere