



Forest of Dean
— DISTRICT COUNCIL —



FOREST OF DEAN
BIOSPHERE

Forest of Dean Candidate UNESCO Biosphere

“People & the Forest Thriving Together”

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Parish & Town Councils

September & October 2026

Outline:

- **What is a biosphere?**
- **Who 'runs' a biosphere?**
- **Process steps/questions...**

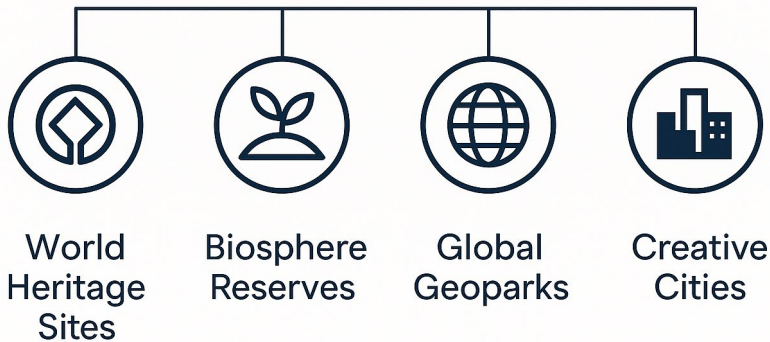


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*Will the biosphere impose
restrictions on the Forest of Dean?*

already live within a biosphere in the UK.

Family of UNESCO Designations



<https://unesco.org.uk/our-sites>

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS





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<https://unesco.org.uk/our-sites>



1938	FoD declared first National Forest Park (Crown Estate (Forestry Commission))
1947	Hobhouse report identified FoD & Wye Valley as a 'conservation area' (AONB)
1971	Wye Valley designated AONB
1997	General election pledge "to offer the Forest of Dean a new custom-built special status"
1999	Review of special status report (Countryside Agency) • 'FoD warrants special status' • FoD should be awarded special status in the interests of achieving an integrated approach to its environmental, social and economic problems and opportunities"
2008	Council Motion to support the designation of a new or extended AONB within FoD in accordance with the principles of Sustainable Development
2015	Council motion to support the Campaign to Protect Rural England (Gloucestershire) in their quest for the Forest of Dean to achieve Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
2019	Corporate Plan identifies 'to take forward economic case for biosphere...'
2019 – on-going	Biosphere Action Group set up, with local representatives and support from North Devon Biosphere Officer to investigate potential of Biosphere designation. Group secured funding through UKSPF to support survey work and an 18 - month appointment of Sustainable Environmental Research and Development Officer in 2024.
2019	Forest Economic Partnership presented with Office for National Statistics produced report setting out an economic case for Biosphere designation.
2021	Forest Economic Partnership conducted a public survey (Oct – Dec 2021) entitled "The Forest We Want" to get feedback on the idea of becoming a Biosphere.
2022	National Landscape review (Glover Review) "[FoD]...considerable local support that national designation would be good. There is a collaborative National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported project (the Foresters' Forest) which would appear to provide an excellent jumping-off point for a new designation. We support it."
2022	Corporate Plan "to continue to explore the best ways of reconciling the protection of biodiversity with its sustainable use."
2024	Council Officers present to UNESCO UK Man and Biosphere (MAB) Committee who subsequently gave Biosphere 'candidate status' to the Forest of Dean. (Candidate status is an expression of interest to UK MAB in applying for UNESCO Biosphere status in the future).
	Note: Over the timeline there have been an extensive and repeated debate regarding the consideration of the Forest of Dean's special status. The above highlights what are considered to be the key policy events and form background to the current position.

Full Council 20-3-25

Resolved that council approves an application, prepared with partners, for UNESCO Biosphere designation is supported.

Full Council 21-5-26

Resolved that a delay of 6 months in the process is now implemented so that a full and proper consultation exercise is undertaken.

Forest of Dean Biosphere Key Factors

- Local partnership led.
- No additional legal powers/impositions.
- Internationally recognised framework for communities to set out future ambition.
- International recognition 'special qualities' of the area.
- 'Place' recognition in unitarisation (LGR).

What is a Biosphere?

A biosphere is designated by UNESCO at the request of member states to be a part of the worldwide network of sites under the Man and Biosphere intergovernmental science programme. There are currently seven biosphere in the United Kingdom.



What is a Biosphere not?

A biosphere is not a restriction imposed from the UN or from UK Government. A biosphere is not a statutory protection measure and therefore does not provide additional protection beyond existing SSSI status, it is just a designation. The status cannot impact decisions such as planning permission.

The functions of a biosphere include conservation (of ecosystems, habitats, species, and genes), development (i.e. sustainable development or use of the area), and learning (research, training, and knowledge sharing).



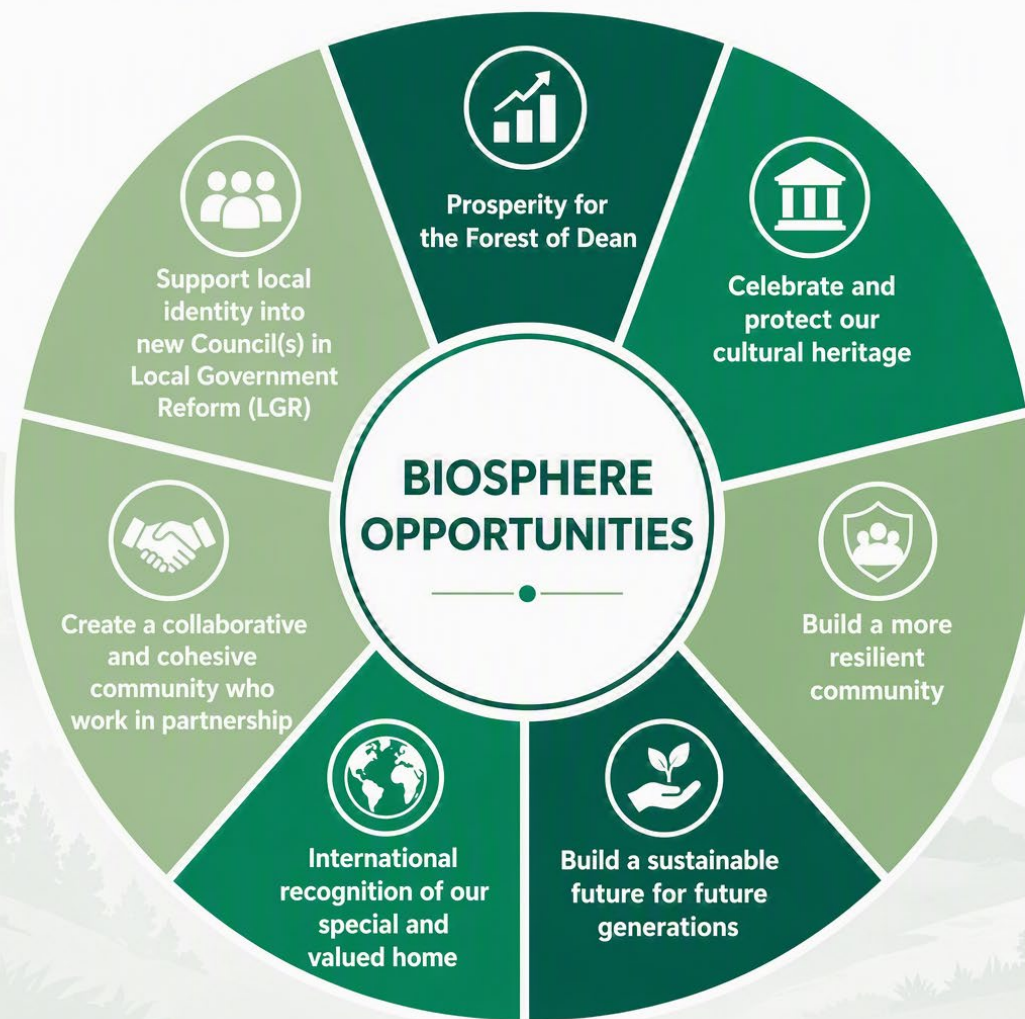
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Benefits of Biosphere Status





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A long-term vision to support the sustainability of our communities, environment & economy

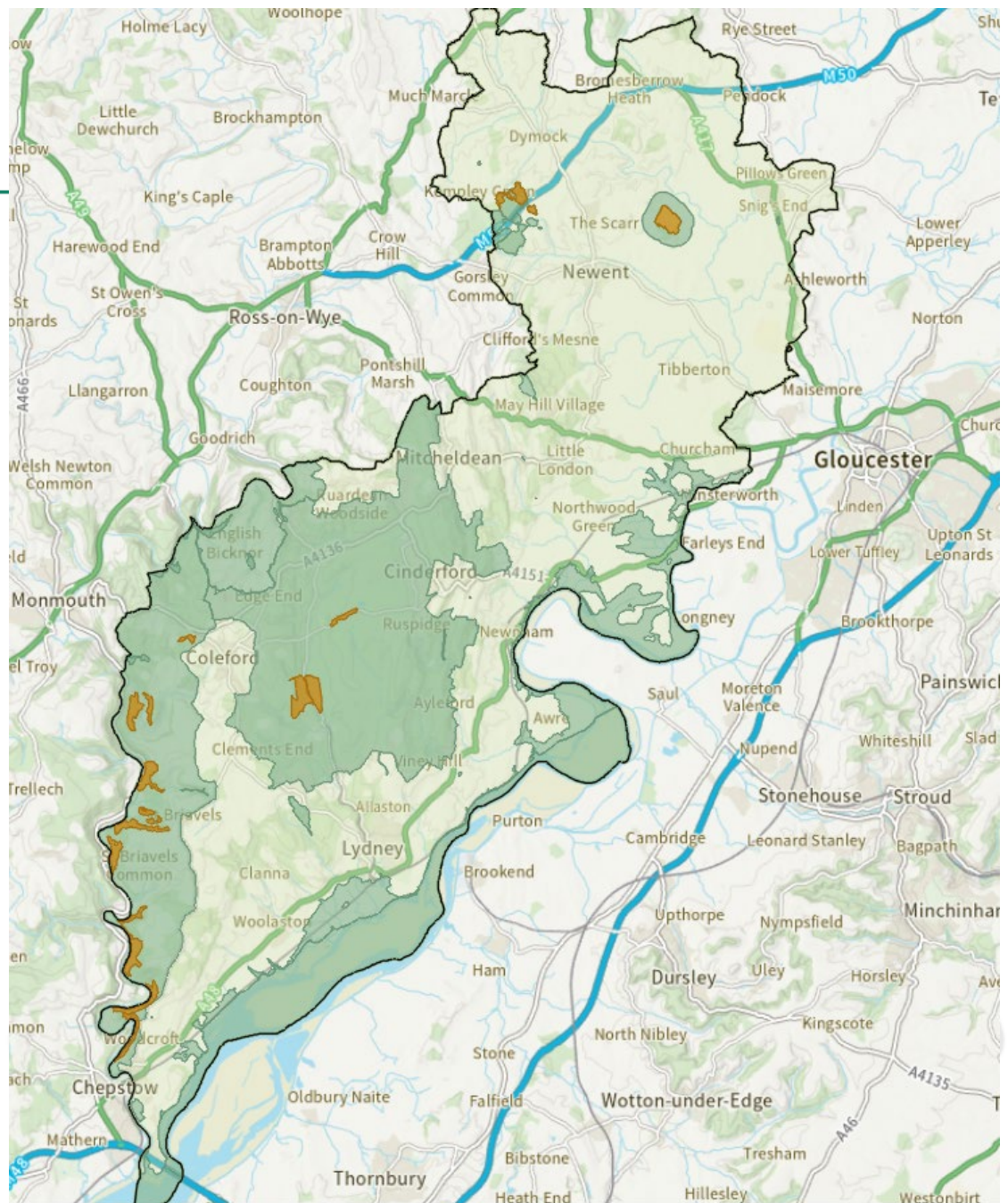
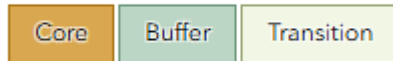
Opportunities for a collaborative approach, where groups are united and work together to achieve common aims under the umbrella of biosphere designation.

- Celebrating cultural heritage & identity.
- Recognising what is special & valued.
- Promoting sustainable development & prosperity for the Forest of Dean.
- Facilitating community & stakeholder participation & collaboration.
- Supporting resilience, adaptation & self-sufficiency.



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Forest of Dean Biosphere



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

The Three Biosphere Zones

Biospheres are constructed of three zones: core areas, buffer zones and transition areas.

Core areas comprise of existing designations such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) for example, which contribute to the conservation of landscape, ecosystems, species and genetic variation.

Care/ Buffer zones are areas which can either surround the core zones or are other areas of importance within these areas which are compatible with sound ecological practices such as scientific research, monitoring, training and education.

Sustainable Development/Transition areas where communities foster socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable economic and human activity. Existing designations help to make up these zones.

The descriptive language of the three zones is also adapted to suit local context and sensitivities such as on the Isle of Man sticks, where the term core zone is used but they rename the buffer zone the '**care area**' and the transition zone is known as the '**sustainable development area**'. This is all about responding to the local context and connecting with what makes it a locality. The buffer zone can also be known as the support zone.

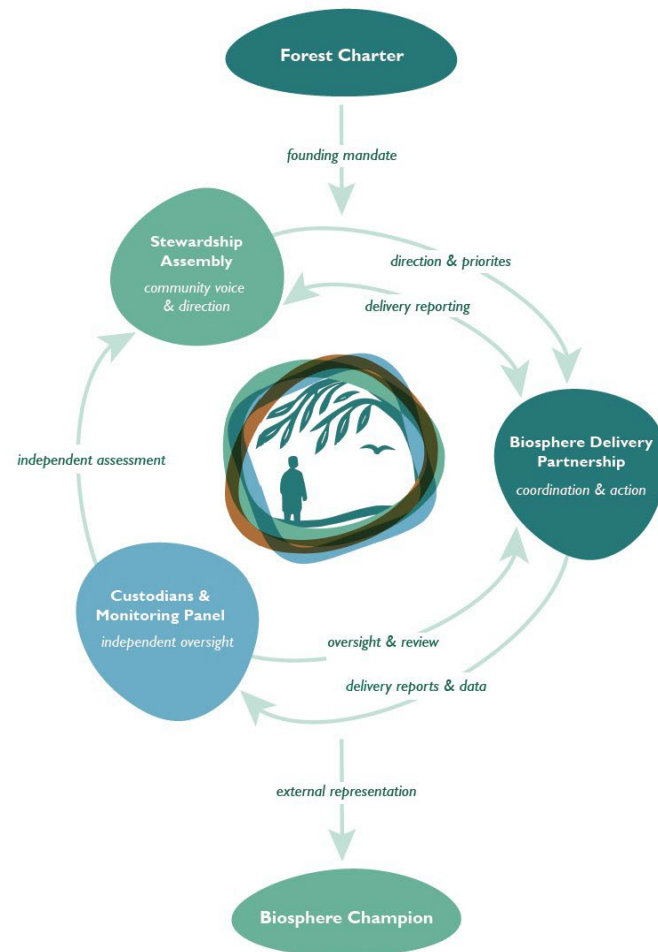


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- No set template
- For local decision
- Inclusive & practical framework
- Subject to change and development

Working Illustration

Biosphere Governance Model





Environment
Agency



Forestry
England



HARTPURY



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL



River
Severn
Partnership



Gloucestershire
Wildlife Trust



Dyffryn Gwy
Tirwedd Cenedlaethol
Wye Valley
National Landscape

FORESTERS'
FOREST



glos
nature
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
LOCAL NATURE PARTNERSHIP



DEAN
HERITAGE CENTRE



FOREST
ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP
Delivering a thriving economy



FODCAP
FOREST OF DEAN
CLIMATE ACTION
PARTNERSHIP



UNIVERSITY OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

UWE
Bristol

University
of the
West of
England

WYLDERNE
BIOREGIONING

In the Forest of Dean

Wouldn't a National Landscape (AONB) be better?

Over the years there have been many requests to central government for consideration. None have been successful. The last was through the Glover Review in 2019. Biospheres and National Landscapes can operate together, and one does not exclude the other.

Will it get rid of local rights and practices such as Freemining, Commoning, or the Verderers?

No, there are no additional legal powers. In fact by saying such practices are important to the biosphere (people and place) it strengthens their position in a national context and accentuates local specialness.

Will there be more fences, stop dog walking, or restrict access?

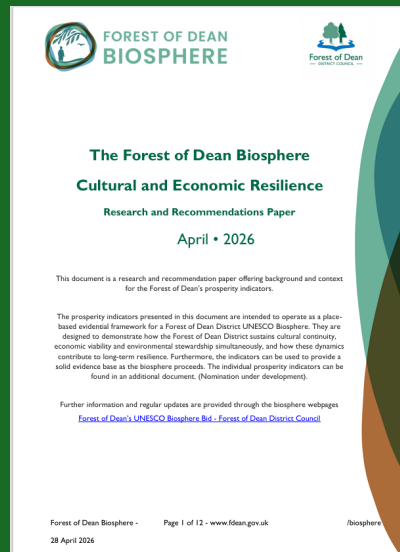
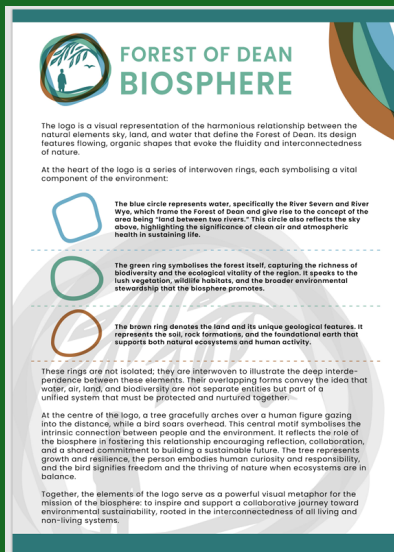
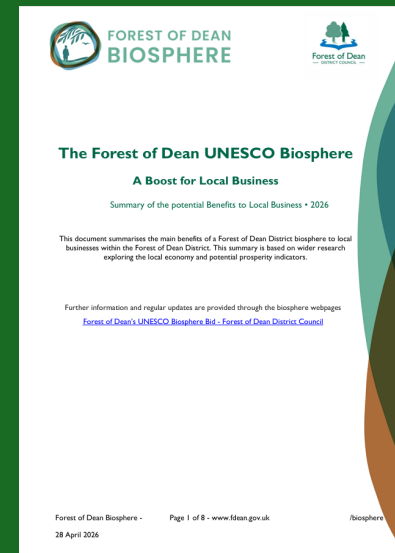
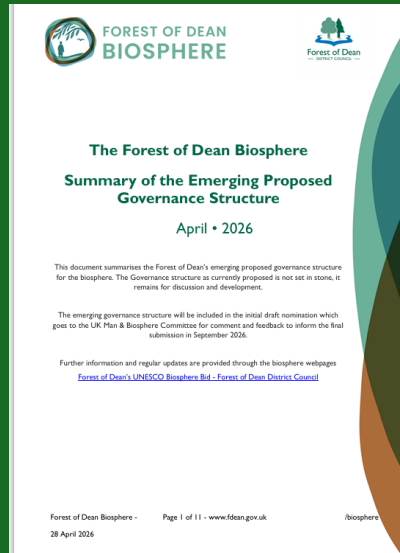
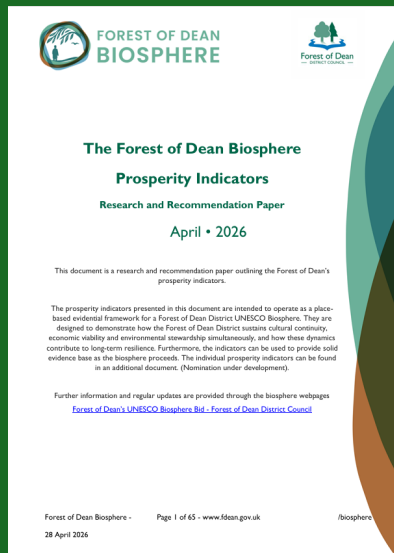
No, there are no additional legal powers. There are no changes to land ownership or management responsibilities as a result of designation. Biosphere does provide a framework for communities and stakeholders to work together on shared objectives.

Will it involve the transfer/ selling off land or assets?

No, there are no additional legal powers. There are no changes to land ownership or management responsibilities as a result of designation.

What power will UNESCO have and can it be de-designated?

The biosphere must align with the objectives of biospheres to advance the wellbeing of human beings and nature; it is not merely a title or a synonym for nature conservation. A biosphere should benefit people as well as the environment. We derive locally how we will work towards that goal. Biospheres report on their progress to UNESCO. UNESCO/the area can choose to de-designate.



Forest of Dean's UNESCO Biosphere Bid - Forest of Dean District Council

Consultation & Engagement - Completed

- Forest we want survey & engagement (FEP).
- Meetings with Freeminers, Commoners & Verderers.
- Social media posts and updates since 2021 (continuing). [Communications archive 2019-2026 - Forest of Dean District Council](#)
- Local Plan Reg 18 (2026 & 2024).
- Partner networks.
- Parish & town council letter & survey (November 2025).
- Engagement with youth groups & young people.
- Presentations to some parish & town councils, interest groups, the tourism association etc. (continuing).
- District wide householder leaflet.
- February Parish & Town Council Event (February 26).
- Parish & Town Council Webinar (27-4-26).

Consultation & Engagement - Ongoing

- Further invitations to meet/engage with Freeminers, Commoners & Verderers.
- Social media posts and web updates (continuing). [Communications archive 2019-2026 - Forest of Dean District Council](#)
- Partner network engagement (continuing).
- Potential for 'cluster meetings' with groups of villages.
- Engagement with secondary schools youth groups & young people.
- Presentations to some parish & town councils, interest groups etc. (continuing).

Updated Submission Timeline

- Initial research & evidence base completed.
- Initial draft nomination form completed.
- UK MAB review undertaken.
- Further consultation underway.
- Report back to full council (FoDDC).
- If agreed, submission to be made by September 2027.



Frequently Asked Questions

Who's in charge of a biosphere?

- No one organisation is in charge or responsible for a biosphere.
- Governed through a partnership of key stakeholders including local communities, businesses, and councils, along with national organisations such as the Environment Agency, Forestry England, and Natural England etc.
- North Devon's Biosphere Partnership take on the organisation and coordination of biosphere activity, as an 'office' for the biosphere, as part of the biosphere partnership.

Are new rules, legislation, or administration required for a biosphere?

- No requirement for new legislation or administration for a biosphere.
- Working together through existing regulations as a local community with a common goal (objectives) of supporting businesses, communities and the natural environment (an example of sustainable development).

How much does it cost?

- Bringing together existing skills and resources, working together with a common vision (objectives).
- Evidence shows that for every £1 invested in a UK Biosphere a return of between 4 and 20 times the original investment can be expected.
- Greater opportunity to access grants, project funding, and commercial income.
- 'Glue' that brings and connects the activities of partners requires some funding. Depending on the size and range of work of the biosphere this could be from £80k-£200kpa. Existing funding, grants, and projects are expected to make up the lion's share of this investment - returns expected.

How does it affect planning?

- Planning legislation remains unchanged. National and local policy continues.
- Does not prevent development and does not reduce government housing targets.
- Potential to help structure and propose new local policy that reflects the objectives of the biosphere.

Will it push house prices up or affect 2nd homes?

- The Forest of Dean is a great place to live - while a biosphere recognises that and sets out a share vision, that 'value' already exists.
- Designation is not expected to affect house prices or 2nd homes, pressures already exist.
- Factors more likely to affect housing include national demographics, changing population, supply of new housing, and connectivity to road, rail, tolls, and broadband etc.



Further Information

[Man and the Biosphere Programme \(MAB\) | UNESCO](#)

[UNESCO MAB Programme in the UK | UNESCO in the UK](#)

[A Forest Biosphere? » FEP](#)

[The Forest We Want » FEP](#)

[FoDDC Council Report \(3/25\)](#)

[Biosphere - Forest of Dean District Council](#)

<https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/>

[Isle of Wight UNESCO Biosphere Reserve](#)

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