

Title of Report:	Proposed UNESCO Biosphere Status - Binevenagh
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	17 June 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Information
To be discussed In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing our Environments and Assets Resilient, Healthy and Engaging Communities
Outcome	Citizens will have access to Council recreational facilities and protected natural environments which help them to develop their physical, emotional and cognitive health. Our natural assets will be carefully managed to generate economic and social returns without compromising their sustainability for future generations.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation Coast and Countryside Manager

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	End of June 2025

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	n/a
Included in Current Year Estimates	NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of an exercise being undertaken by Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust and Binevenagh & Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership to explore the potential of establishing a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the wider Binevenagh area.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Binevenagh & Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership is funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund until 2027. Council is also a contributing partner to the Landscape Partnership. The exploration of establishing a Biosphere Reserve in the Binevenagh area is being considered as a legacy to the work initiated through the Landscape Partnership Scheme from 2020 to 2027.
- 2.2 A UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is a region recognized by UNESCO for its unique ecosystem, valued environment, and sustainable way of life of its residents. A Biosphere is a region that includes wildlife and natural habitats of international importance. It encompasses communities with distinct cultural identities, as well as historic landmarks and heritage sites.
- 2.3 Presently there are no Biosphere Reserves designated in Northern Ireland. There are seven reserves in Scotland, England and Wales and two in the Republic of Ireland.

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 Council officers have been invited to contribute ideas and expertise to assist in the preparation of boundary options and name for a potential Biosphere Reserve. This will in turn be subject to consultation locally, nationally and internationally.
- 3.2 The initial boundary being suggested for discussion is centred around the watershed of the River Roe taking in Lough Foyle, Magilligan and upland areas to the south leading into the north Sperrins. Contained within this area are eighteen designated sites including Areas of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protected Areas. These areas would form the core area of the Biosphere Reserve.

4.0 Issues and Implications

- 4.1 At this point Council is not being asked to endorse the concept of Biosphere but to solely contribute to an initial discussion around the boundary of such a reserve in and around the Binevenagh area.
- 4.2 The addition of an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area may contribute to the concept of sustainable tourism and destination management.

5.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Leisure and Development Committee note the participation of Council staff in this initial assessment of a boundary for a potential UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the wider Binevenagh area.