

**Cambridgeshire and Peterborough  
Biological Records Centre  
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for the Director of Operational Services to sign a Memorandum of Understanding setting out the management arrangements for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Steering Group came into being in 1997. The steering group comprises a partnership of key stakeholder organisations and HDC is an active member. The local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP) were subsequently produced and launched in 2000 to focus attention on local habitats and species requiring particular actions to ensure their conservation and further enhancement. This represented the local delivery of a national commitment to biodiversity, stemming from the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.
- 2.2 Huntingdonshire District Council has been an active partner in the BAP process since its inception. The BAPs exist to safeguard and promote the county's wildlife, and to encourage local people to become involved in the process.
- 2.3 The Steering Group identified the establishment of an effective and independent Biological Records Centre (BRC) as an essential requirement of the BAP process. There is a need to know where wildlife is, if it can be protected or enhanced, and how people can fully appreciate the biodiversity that surrounds them.
- 2.4 Many counties have had BRCs since the 1970s. Cambridgeshire is currently a serious gap in the network. The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) is a major initiative promoted by a consortium of organisations including English Nature, the Environment Agency and the Natural Environment Research Council, with funding from DEFRA. The NBN seeks to establish a comprehensive network of Local Record Centres across the UK.
- 2.5 A number of benefits will arise from setting up the BRC, principally these are:
- Giving the natural environment a similar factual basis to the built environment.
  - Creation of a single reliable and independent source of the best and most up-to-date information for planning and conservation. The centre could be used to get information to help determine planning applications, for example.
  - Facilitating rapid, soundly based, sustainable decision making in relation to biodiversity, with a consensus on facts.
  - Improved access to the natural heritage and enhanced understanding of the district/county and its wildlife.
  - Creating a mechanism for the targeting of scarce resources

- 2.6 The major source of funding for the BRC will be a £224,000 grant which has been offered towards the initial three year project by the Heritage Lottery Fund. As part of the bid for this grant the Biodiversity Partnership produced a business plan which describes how the BRC will operate and deliver the following:
- The operational set-up of the Centre, which will necessitate the bringing together of a wide range of data on local wildlife.
  - The provision of a quick and efficient system for the collection of new information from volunteers and professional bodies alike.
  - The training of volunteers in biological recording and data capture.
  - The process of accessing information by user organisations and the public.
  - The interpretation of data for educational uses (thereby linking local schools and students to the biodiversity of Cambridgeshire).
  - The encouragement of wider participation in the recording of local wildlife.
- 2.7 Although the BRC will be an independent company, it is proposed to be run and be managed by a partnership of the Cambridgeshire Local Authorities, English Nature, the Environment Agency and a variety of voluntary organisations. The management arrangements are being established through a Memorandum of Understanding (attached as Appendix 1). The BRC is to be based in the Wildlife Trust offices in Cambourne.
- 2.8 The aim is that the BRC will maintain itself after an initial three year set-up period through the following means:
- a) Keeping annual running costs to a minimum.
  - b) Establishment of Service Level Agreements with the partners who will be the primary users of Information.
  - c) Income from pay-as-you-use services to developers, utilities and other commercial users.
  - d) Funding for specific surveys and projects (e.g. water vole survey, butterfly atlas, county flora).

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 A funding contribution for the capital set-up costs has been sought from all the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partners to provide match funding for the successful lottery bid.
- 3.2 Huntingdonshire District Council's initial capital contribution towards the BRC will be £14,480 for the set up period. This will comprise three annual grant contributions of: £5,604 (for 2004-5), £4,468 (05-06) and £4,408 (06-07). These sums are below the Council's de minimis level for capital expenditure and so can be funded from the revenue Planning Delivery Grant (therefore having no impact on the Council's budget).
- 3.3 The following table shows the financial contributions of the other Cambridgeshire Authorities (all of whom are already signed up to the BRC). Half of the contribution required from the local authorities is being met by the County Council and Peterborough City Council; the residual is being met by district council contributions, the level of which is related to the population of each authority.

		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
	%	£	£	£
<b>Cambridge City Council</b>	10	3,996	3,186	3,144
<b>East Cambridgeshire DC</b>	6	2,374	1,893	1,868
<b>Fenland DC</b>	7	2,904	2,316	2,284
<b>Huntingdonshire DC</b>	14	5,604	4,468	4,408
<b>South Cambridgeshire DC</b>	12	4,621	3,684	3,635
<b>Peterborough City Council</b>	13	5,007	3,992	3,938
<b>Cambs. County Council</b>	37	14,493	11,555	11,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>39,000</b>	<b>31,095</b>	<b>30,678</b>

3.4 After the initial three year set up period it is anticipated that Huntingdonshire District Council will enter into a Service Level Agreement with the centre. The cost of this will be dependent on the level of service required and met from the existing planning budget. This will be considered further once the new centre is up and running.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- (a) Support the establishment of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre and approve the use of funds from the Planning Delivery Grant as detailed in paragraph 3.2 of this report;
- (b) Authorise the Director of Operational Services to sign a Memorandum of Understanding setting out the management arrangements for the Records Centre.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre Business Plan (2001)

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