

CABINET

PROPOSALS TO FORM A MORECAMBE BAY AND DUDDON REGIONAL PARK

11 November 2008

Report of the Head of Planning Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To inform Members of the conclusions of the Scoping Study commissioned by the Morecambe Bay Partnership and to obtain approval to support the creation of the designation and take part in its implementation.				
Key Decision	X	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member	
Date Included in Forward Plan	October 2008			
This report is public				

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR EVELYN ARCHER

- (1) That Cabinet resolves to support the designation of a Morecambe Bay and Duddon Regional Park.**
- (2) That a lead Cabinet Member be appointed to sit on developmental working groups or Committees in the event that adjoining authorities agree to pursue designation.**
- (3) That the Chief Executive be authorised to pursue the designation in cooperation with other partner authorities.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Morecambe Bay is one of 9 potential Regional Parks identified in the North West Regional Economic Strategy. Regional Parks already exist in the UK and overseas but there is no fixed model. They have common themes of sustainable communities and investment in the environment, recreation and tourism. There are already Regional Parks covering the Mersey Waterfront and Ribble Estuary.
- 1.2** There has been a scoping study commissioned by the Morecambe Bay Partnership to assess whether there are potential benefits associated with designating Morecambe Bay as a Regional Park. The study looked at two tests :

- a) Whether better collaboration between the authorities around the Bay might be a useful addition to locally focussed activity unlocking investment.
- b) Whether beneficial projects might be delivered, which may otherwise be unlikely to proceed.

1.3 Over 20 stakeholders were consulted and there was widespread support. Most saw the Regional Park as having the potential to promote sustainable development, green infrastructure and tourism alongside the environmental protection which is key to the Bay's fortunes.

1.4 Officers from the Planning Service were able to provide input on behalf of the City Council. Copies of the consultants' report, and an accompanying report prepared by students from Liverpool University are attached for Members' consideration.

2.0 Proposal Details

2.1 The study concludes that a Regional Park would satisfy both the tests and steps now need to be taken to establish whether there is a consensus to move forward. There are currently weak levels of collaboration around the Bay, although the Morecambe Bay Partnership on which this authority is well represented, brings together many of the interest groups around it. From initial Officer meetings to discuss the findings it appears clear that the case for a Regional Park designation needs to be specifically fitted to the activities and resources of the partnerships around the Bay and to be driven by tangible and affordable benefits. There will be little interest in duplicating activities so replacing existing activities or rebranding to encourage wider interest will be to most receptive message.

2.2 It is believed that those benefits for the specific stakeholders (and particularly local authorities) around the Bay could be summarised as :-

- A clear statement of spatial planning objectives reflecting the Regional Spatial Strategy objectives for sub regional partnerships and cross administrative boundary cooperation.
- A shared brand capable of complementing, but not competing against the higher profile Lake District "attack brand". This brand could be used for marketing tourism, regeneration investment, higher education and even housing delivery.
- The natural evolution of the Morecambe Bay Partnership into a Management Board to ensure continuing collaboration between statutory bodies the business and voluntary sector.
- A clear sub-regional justification for supporting key projects which can be demonstrated to provide benefits beyond current administrative boundaries.

2.3 Duplication can be avoided in a number of ways. All Councils are being asked to examine their spatial and geographical relationships with their neighbours and these have to be reflected in the work of their Local Strategic Partnerships, and their Local Development Frameworks. The designation of a Regional Park and creation of cross boundary working arrangements would create the opportunity to enter into a Multi Agency Agreement of the form advocated in the Sub National Review.

2.4 All the authorities around the Bay are involved in marketing whether it is for regeneration or tourism purposes. Re aligning this to a newer and wider brand need not involve greater cost and might even involve some savings. A good example of multi authority co-operation with a single brand would be the Forest of Bowland Tourism marketing for Bowland festival and themed visits.

- 2.5 The Genecon study identified a number of key regeneration projects around the Bay which are already in the process of design or implementation. Interlinking them with a wider regeneration strategy around the bay adds complementary weight to their justification and outputs with very little need to re-design them. In cases where proposed projects require funding or review, this new sub regional spatial linkage can only strengthen the case for such projects and not weaken it.
- 2.6 There will inevitably be the concern that the creation of a Morecambe Bay Regional Park would result in the creation of another level of bureaucracy or the specific loss of powers and influence to another body such as happens with the Lake District National Park Authority. This need not be the case. There are already models of partnership between various agencies which act in a coordinating role rather than a managing one. AONB Partnerships such as those active for Arnsdale/Silverdale and the Forest of Bowland are good examples. Clearly there would be a need to administer any Management Board to enable member organisations to decide which initiatives could be carried out independently or shared, but like an AONB management function, these could be undertaken by a lead authority, or by a jointly funded partnership office. Under the latter model the Morecambe Bay Partnership Officers could be evolved into an administrative unit for a Management Board
- 2.7 The next stage is to obtain general support and consensus from the local authorities and other partnerships and organisations around the Bay for the concept and to open discussions on how the Park might operate its terms of reference, and its geographical boundaries. A conference will be held on 16th October to place the concept in front of interested organisations with the specific purpose of trying to enlist support.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 The Arnsdale/Silverdale AONB Executive Committee has expressed support for the designation of a Regional Park.
- 3.2 The City Council's Planning and Economic Development Services believe that such a designation would be very beneficial to the City Council and would help to define the role of the local authorities around the Bay in a joined up approach to regeneration, conservation and tourism.
- 3.3 Lancashire County Council have also expressed informal support at Member and Officer level.
- 3.4 If a decision is made by all the relevant authorities to pursue designation widespread stakeholder consultation will be carried out before formal designation took place.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

- 4.1 **Option 1** To support the concept of a Regional Park and to allocate Officer and Member time to working with adjoining local authorities and other partners to develop it to designation. This option has the benefit of identifying a clear spatial network of local authority areas with shared interests and challenges, and to demonstrate to Government and funding agencies a joined up approach to regeneration. It would also demonstrate to Government that the local authorities in the North Lancashire and Cumbria sub region know how to work together to achieve the greatest benefits for their communities and the economy of their area.
- 4.1 **Option 2** Not to support the concept and to take no further part in discussions with the Morecambe Bay Partnership. Whilst this option would not directly harm the existing levels of progress that the City Council is achieving with its LDF and other

regeneration strategies, it would lose the opportunity for the City Council to take a leading role in improving cross boundary cooperation in the sub region, and could reduce the potential for external funding for schemes and projects in the future. It would also remove the potential for a realistic Multi Area Agreement based on recognisable geographical links, and leave Lancaster District appearing as a lone District operating beyond other emerging partnerships in an insular manner.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 5.1 The Officer preferred option is Option 1. Lancaster City Council has an opportunity to take a leading role in the development of the Morecambe Bay Regional Park and to use its experience and reputation with various Government Agencies to strengthen the level of external investment in the economy around the Bay. The Park would also help to strengthen the hierarchical status of the District in the Sub Region and create opportunities to share workload and resources in tackling shared challenges such as Affordable Housing, regenerating low demand settlements, and managing sensitive conservation assets.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 It is concluded that there are significant benefits to the communities in Lancaster District which could arise from the designation of a Morecambe Bay Regional Park, and that the City Council should support its development.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The proposal has a good strategic fit with a number of national, regional and local policies. It could provide the framework for a Multi Area Agreement in line with the Sub National Review. It recognises the spatial relationships around the Bay in line with the objectives of the Regional Spatial Strategy. Finally it fits well with the linkages with other communities identified in the Councils Adopted Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The objectives of the Corporate Strategy can also be advanced more effectively through the designation of a Regional Park.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

The designation can assist significantly in helping to revive communities which suffer from deprivation and under investment around the Bay. It can enhance services locally and advance the principles of sustainable procurement and tourism. It can also address issues of rural poverty and affordable housing by pooling resources and lobbying power to tackle these issues.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Initially costs of working to designation will involve officer time and some service based resources which will be absorbed within current budgets. In addition, there will also be an element of Member time required. Further scoping and development work is likely to attract funding from the Regional Parks Exchange and Morecambe Bay Partnership are seeking to attract circ £25,000 developmental costs. Successful designation is likely to have the effect of securing external funding for projects from the North West Development Agency and English Partnerships because projects relating to cross boundary sub regional initiatives are likely to take higher priority.

In the medium term some level of annual funding may be required to contribute to the operation of a partnership board; there is scope for £3,400 currently budgeted for contribution to Morecambe Bay Partnership to be reallocated in full or part for this purpose.

In the long term joint working on issues such as a combined Local Development Framework may result in shared funding agreements emerging for each of the partner authorities and this would be the subject of a further report to Members.

DEPUTY SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Initial costs associated with option 1 are capable of being absorbed within current budgets. If the Council collaborates in the successful designation of a regional park, it is likely to be expected to provide funding for the operation of a management board. Members are advised to recognise this commitment and be mindful of the need to consider any potential financial implications as future years budgets are developed

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

If option 1 is recommended Legal Services will advise on the consideration of the opportunities for joint working and procurement of services. In addition, to formalise these arrangements, should the scheme proceed, Legal Services would advise and assist in the preparation of any documentation necessary to achieve the objectives referred to in this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The monitoring officer has been consulted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Morecambe Bay and Duddon Regional Park: Developing the Concept. GENECON May 2008.

Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary Regional Park: University of Liverpool June 2008.

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