
GSAB Zone Development Position Statement

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere covers 5268 sq km of South West Scotland. Designated in July 2012, with support from The Scottish and UK Governments, the UNESCO designation is international recognition of a commitment by the people, the businesses and the organisations of SW Scotland to put the needs of biodiversity and sustainable development at the heart of decision making.

UNESCO Biospheres in the UK are not currently statutory consultees, nor do they currently have regulatory functions and as such rely on appropriate interpretation of existing legislation to maintain the attributes for which they were designated. All UNESCO Biosphere have three zones a core, a buffer and a transition area.

Core Area Background

The Core of the Biosphere is 106 sq km and is based upon Merrick Kells (SSSI, SAC) Silver Flowe (RAMSAR) and Cairnsmore of Fleet (SSSI, NNR). These Core Areas are a largely 'natural' environment grazed by livestock, wild goats etc. The Core Area also contains designated Wild Land, Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Management of the Core Areas is largely controlled by the limitations imposed by the SSSI, SAC and RAMSAR and SAM designations and the overseeing roles of Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Environment Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government.

GSAB Partnership Core Area Position

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere (GSAB) Partnership Board does not support any form of development in the Core Area of the Biosphere that directly or indirectly negatively impacts in any way on the international and national designations awarded to the three core areas.

Further the GSAB Partnership Board recognise the intrinsic value of the Merrick Kells Core Area being identified by SNH as one of only two "Wild Land Areas" in Southern Scotland and the role that this designation brings in sustaining the "sense of place" that is integral to the remote upland areas that form the core of the GSAB.

Buffer Zone Background

The Buffer Zone of the Biosphere is 845 sq km and largely comprises (86%) Galloway Forest Park (held in public ownership) with some smaller privately owned areas of forestry and agriculture. Within that area are nine SSSI's and three SAC's. The Buffer Zone is also recognised internationally as a Dark Sky Park and, as such, the impact of lighting both on the dark skies and on the surrounding ecology is a significant consideration.

The Buffer zone also contains national designations and regional designations (such as Archaeologically Sensitive Areas and Regional Scenic Areas), which have a mechanism for consideration and protection in policies set out in the Local Development Plan.

The Buffer Zone is largely managed as productive forestry, with sustainable tourism and recreation taking place within it. In the more recent past, changes in forestry management have endeavoured to make good poor land management decisions from the 50's, 60's and 70's through being more sensitive to the ecology of the Biosphere. The current national push on forestry expansion makes it all the more important for future management to proactively seek to balance competing priorities by furthering its ecological integrity, through reducing forest cover in key areas and restructuring to reduce impacts on water courses and on key species.

Management of the Buffer Zone is controlled through the Galloway Forest Park Strategic Plan and the application of forestry best practice guidelines. Landscape management and built development are controlled under the Scottish Government statutory Town and Country Planning system, including the preparation of statutory Local Plans by local councils. Large-scale energy development and associated infrastructure are controlled under specific statutes and Scottish Government policy.

GSAB Partnership Buffer Zone Position

The GSAB Partnership Board recognise the economic value of commercial forestry in the Buffer Zone and believes that with sympathetic and considered management it can deliver both economic, ecological and social benefits which can be reconciled with the Biosphere's other special qualities.

Within the Buffer Zone, The GSAB Partnership Board are supportive of low key development that supports sustainable tourism and contributes towards ecological connectivity, peatland restoration and creation of open ground habitats.

The GSAB Partnership Board are not supportive of developments in the Buffer Zone that have a negative impact on the core of the Biosphere, the ecology of the buffer or its sense of place.

Transition Area Background

The Transition Area of the Biosphere covers 4314 sq km and comprises a mix of settlements, agriculture, forestry and woodland. Within that area are 82 SSSI's, 11 SAC's, 2 SPA's and 1 RAMSAR.

The transition area is where most settlements occur and communities recognise and value their Sense of Place. The Transition zone also contains national and regional designations safeguarded in UK/EU law and by policies in the Local Development Plan.

Beyond the afforested areas which are covered by forestry best practice guidelines, agricultural land in the Transition Area is controlled by the use of GAEC (Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition). Landscape management and built development are controlled under the Scottish Government statutory Town and Country Planning system including the preparation of statutory Local Plans by local councils. Large-scale energy development and associated infrastructure is controlled under specific statutes and Scottish Government policy.

GSAB Partnership Transition Area Position

The GSAB Partnership Board supports sustainable development within the Transition Area that adheres to relevant local development plans, can demonstrate community support and applies appropriate habitat mitigation where relevant.

The GSAB Partnership Board are not supportive of developments in the Transition Area that have a negative impact on the core or buffer of the Biosphere, or its Sense of Place.

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