

**ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FOURTH SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE  
BOARD MEETING, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH, 11 MARCH 2020**

**OPEN SESSION CONFIRMED MINUTES**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mike Cantlay	Chair
Angus Campbell	Deputy Chair
Bob Furness	Member
Ian Gillies	Member
Jackie Hyland	Member
Susan Murray	Member
Neil Skene	Shadow Board Member

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Francesca Osowska	Chief Executive
Jane Macdonald	Director of Business Services & Transformation
Sally Thomas	Director of People & Nature (until end item 8)
Robbie Kernahan	Director of Sustainable Growth
Stuart MacQuarrie	Deputy Director of Business Services & Transformation
Ross Johnston	Deputy Director of Sustainable Growth
Jason Ormiston	Head of External Affairs
Graham Boyle	Chief of Staff
Sara Lewis	Governance Support Manager (minutes)
Abi Gardner	Placemaking Support Officer (Young Employee Panel)
Catriona Burns	Outcome Manager (items 5 and 9)
Peter Hutchinson	Head of Supporting Good Development (item 6)
Mary-Anne Thomson	Executive Office Support (Observer)

**APOLOGIES**

Cath Denholm	Deputy Chair
Kate Broughton	Member

**AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS AND APOLOGIES**

1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the one hundred and eighty-fourth Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Board meeting, particularly Abi Gardner from SNH's Young Employee Panel, and Mary-Anne Thomson, from the Executive Office. The Chair further welcomed both Robbie Kernahan and Stuart MacQuarrie to the meeting, and congratulated them on their appointment to the SLT.
2. Apologies were noted from Cath Denholm and Kate Broughton.

3. The Chair highlighted that the agenda had been structured differently to promote greater efficiency at the meeting, and requested a change that the Chair and Chief Executive reports are placed at the start of the meeting from now on.

#### **Decision 01/184**

4. Reflection was made on the forthcoming announcement on the Westminster parliament budget announcement, due during the meeting. Board noted the significance of this in influencing the Scottish Government budget, and the opportunities it presented to engage with SG to negotiate further budgetary increases.
5. The role of the Board was considered in light of conversation during the private Board members meeting prior to this meeting. Chair informed that the role of the Board is key in the organisation, and going forward both the Chair and CE will play a greater role in ensuring the agenda items for future meetings align with the corporate plan.
6. Board discussed the Coronavirus outbreak and the measures taken within the organisation to mitigate against this, including obtaining additional NetExtender licences enabling staff to work away from the office, putting an escalation plan in place, and use of Business Continuity Plans.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

7. There were no declarations of interest.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS**

8. The minutes of the SNH Board Meeting on the 29 January 2020 were considered, with some minor amendments necessary.
9. Board members were content to **approve** the minutes of the SNH Board Meeting on the 29 January 2020 in light of these amendments.

#### **Action Points**

10. The **actions points** were discussed and the following updates were provided:

**Action Point** (AP07/177) Robbie Kernahan updated that the Wildlife Management Principles will be published by the end of the financial year.

**Ongoing.**

**Action Point** (AP13/181) Robbie Kernahan informed that there was no update on the options for disposal of Kinloch Castle.

**Ongoing.**

**Action Point** (AP02/183) Robbie Kernahan provided an update regarding changes to the general licencing list, clarifying that the changes were published in February. There is no update at present regarding the Werritty Report on Grouse Moor Management.

## **Ongoing.**

**Action Point** (AP03/183) Ross Johnston gave an update on providing a narrative on mitigation for the corporate risk register entry regarding SRDP payments. Ross informed that the budget had been cleared, stakeholders have been informed, and contracts for work were being issued. Extra lines to update the risk on mitigation have been provided.

**Discharged.**

## **AGENDA ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING**

11. There were no matters arising.

## **AGENDA ITEM 5: SNH BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21**

12. This paper set out how SNH will prioritise work to deliver nature-based solutions in response to biodiversity loss and the climate emergency. The business plan for 2020/21, presented as Part One and Part Two, covers both the strategic component and operational delivery elements respectively.

13. Stuart MacQuarrie informed that the IPBES drivers of biodiversity loss have given a new context and need for prioritisation for SNH work, and this is strongly reflected in the business plan. It introduces the two NatureScot priorities of 'Enriching Biodiversity' and 'Leading on Nature-Based Solutions to Climate Change', and promotes an agile allocation of resources within the organisation to address cross-cutting priorities.

14. Board considered the business plan, and discussed how Area teams often work across differing priorities to achieve the full SNH remit. Strong corporate consistency and direction was seen to be key in managing this, with effective use of resources and management of external partner expectations.

15. The business plan aligns with the rebranding to NatureScot. The use of strap lines was deliberated, and it was agreed to further consider how these are worded and used, in light of previous business plans.

### **Action Point 01/184**

16. The Board approved the business plan subject to minor wording amendments, and confirmed that risks to delivery of the business plan had been adequately captured.

## **AGENDA ITEM 6: DELIVERING THE CORPORATE PLAN BY INFLUENCING NPF4**

17. Robbie Kernahan introduced this paper which considers how SNH can influence the fourth National Planning Framework – the spatial expression of the Scottish Government's (SG) development and economic strategy.

18. Peter Hutchinson explained the five challenges for NPF4, and presented them in terms of a new narrative which could be used to position nature at the heart of the

planning system. The Board were asked to discuss these challenges, to inform the SNH response to the government consultation on the NPF4.

19. The Board discussed the challenges and were supportive of the direction of travel. It was recognised that responding to the government consultation was an important opportunity to lead and influence policy at the planning stage, and it was considered how the SNH response to SG will provide the basis for ongoing discussion and development of wide ranging nature-based approaches to planning.
20. The operational challenge of implementing Biodiversity Net Gain was considered, noting that promotion of certain elements of biodiversity may cause the loss of others. Peter Hutchinson informed that practical guidance would be provided to assist with this, and that offsetting has been used in previous situations. Discussion with the National Parks has begun, with further discussion planned with them and SG chief planners, to ensure a collaborative approach. Board members offered their support in providing opportunities to promote this work wherever possible.
- 21 Finally, Board agreed with the recommendation to raise these challenges as hooks for further discussion with other partner, private and public sector and with SG as part of the response to the NPF4 consultation.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 7: DUNNET FOREST – ASSET TRANSFER**

22. This paper was introduced by Sally Thomas, and asked the Board to endorse an asset transfer request under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. The transfer specifically relates to c105 hectares of SNH owned land at Dunnet Forest, to the Dunnet Forest Trust (DFT).
23. Sally highlighted that the area of Dunnet Forest has been successfully managed by DFT for the last 18 years. After a full assessment, and financial valuation the transfer is recommended. It is expected that DFT will achieve a higher contribution to SNH outcomes as a community body, in line with Community Empowerment legislation as well as the SNH Rural Land Asset Management Policy. In addition, there will be minor savings in SNH staff time as well as in management duties.
- 24 The Board were asked to note the result of the scoring framework used to assess the request, the timescales involved (decision to DFT by mid-March to allow their stage 2 application to the Scottish Land Fund), and the conditions put in place should DFT be wound up post transfer.
25. Board agreed to approve the transfer of the SNH owned land at Dunnet Forest to the DFT.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 8: BOARD AND COMMITTEES – STANDING ORDERS/TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW**

26. Graham Boyle presented this paper to the Board, which gives updated versions of the Board Standing Orders, Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Terms of Reference (ToRs). The updates were necessary

to align process with practice, and gave the opportunity to highlight demonstration of openness and transparency within the organisation. Graham informed that the SAC ToRs had been updated by the SAC Chair and Sally Thomas, while the ARC ToRs were considered and approved during their February 2020 meeting.

27. Subject to the inclusion of additional comments, Board members were content to approve the Standing Orders and Terms of Reference. They noted that the Standing Orders and ARC ToRs had been updated to reflect current practice in number of meetings held, as well as the number of members on the ARC, name changes to internal teams, and the inclusion of openness and transparency practices. The requirement for an annual review dates for internal policies was discussed, and a system for review requested.

**Action Point 02/184**

*Sally Thomas leaves the meeting.*

**AGENDA ITEM 9: DEEP DIVE – OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT COSTS**

28. This paper updated the Board on a review of the Operational Management area of expenditure, which took place to ensure that the allocation of resources is in line with corporate priorities. The deep dive was requested by the Board in May 2019 as part of a larger scale programme to strategically review the 6 largest areas of spend within the organisation.
29. Jane Macdonald introduced the paper, and highlighted that within the operational management budget there were several elements to consider, with travel and subsistence (T&S) being the most significant. Catriona Burns informed that operational management costs have reduced significantly between April 2012 and March 2019, however the organisation is now at a point where further reduction would make it challenging in facilitating staff to do their jobs. There would be detrimental effects on areas such as line manager/staff relationships, training and meetings with external partners if T&S were to be further reduced.
30. Board discussed the use of the operational management budget for foreign travel in support of the international influence of SNH, responsible use of T&S, and the use of corporate subscriptions and hospitality. It was agreed that the key was for staff to make rational and appropriate decisions when considering the use of the operational management budget, recognising a balance of virtual and face-to-face meetings.
31. Consideration was made of carbon neutral travel options, particularly regarding variances in traveling time for different methods, along with differing costs. It was recognised that where there are realistic opportunities to reduce the use of carbon related travel they should be taken. In addition, Board members discussed how operational management costs could be supported by non-SNH funding streams,
32. The Board supported the following recommendations:
  - Avoidance of mainland UK flights where possible, giving consideration to carbon/cash costs in travel decisions, promotion of the existing travel hierarchy

- Further efficiencies to be sought in costs related to corporate subscriptions, internal hospitality, events and corporate clothing
- Seek further reductions in costs of telephony and office equipment, increasing use of collaborative technologies
- Maintain investment in real terms in staff T&S, external hospitality, field equipment, Personal Protective Equipment, and specialist training

## **AGENDA ITEM 10: OUR AMBITION FOR A NATURE-RICH FUTURE & HOW WE WILL DRIVE ITS IMPLEMENTATION**

33. This paper concerned the first of the four building blocks agreed by the Board in August 2019, consequent to setting SNH's strategic vision. The building blocks will help shape priorities for the 2022/26 corporate plan, and inform the messaging linked to brand recognition for NatureScot.
34. Eileen Stuart introduced the paper, explaining that it advocates a step-up in ambition for the organisation. The paper seeks a decision from the Board that the main goal of NatureScot should be 'a nature-rich future', and that this concept is used as an easily understood mission as part of the NatureScot brand.
35. Roddy Fairley explained that the paper covered the two issues of what a nature-rich future is, and what the consequences are for SNH, if it is to be delivered. The paper promotes a nature-rich future as the only way to achieve a net-zero carbon target, and resilience to climate change and biodiversity loss.
36. The Board debated the contents of the paper, and made the following points:
- Board were content that the organisation had already adopted a nature-rich future as the appropriate response to the climate emergency and drivers of biodiversity loss
  - SNH's ability to influence policy is critical, and links directly to the work on contributing to NPF4.
  - How the next steps include submission of a proposal to SG regarding an agricultural support framework to promote a nature-rich future
  - The importance of work-streams underway to identify additional funding with SG, and for extra research and trial work in support of a nature-rich future
  - The need for a strong, clear offer of leadership and nature-based solutions from the organisation, and detail on how this will be delivered and achieved
37. The Board confirmed that 'a nature-rich future' is the mission for NatureScot, and that the concept will be promoted as an easily communicated mission as part of the new NatureScot brand.

## **AGENDA ITEM 11: CHAIR'S REPORT**

38. The contents of the Chair's Report were noted, in particular the visit to Balbirnie Estate to look at low carbon approaches to arable farming, and involvement in discussing the impacts of Sea Eagles.

## **AGENDA ITEM 12: DEPUTY CHAIR'S REPORT**

39. It was acknowledged that Cath Denholm was absent due to attendance at the JNCC meeting in Cambridge on behalf of SNH.
40. Angus Campbell offered a verbal update on his involvement in the Argyll and Outer Hebrides area team meeting held on the Isle of Skye. He observed that much of the conversation had mirrored that of this Board meeting, but also had included discussion on adaptive management, conflict management tools and tourism conflict on the island. Conversations with crofters were also mentioned, including how nature can be part of housing and employment needed in the area.
41. Eileen Stuart offered an update on the 'Refreshing the Policy Framework for Rangering in Scotland' paper which was discussed during the January Board meeting. She updated that the petition committee had closed, and that SNH had been shown in a positive light. Thanks were given to the Chair and Angus Campbell for their support with this issue.
42. The Chief Executive (CE) queried the preferred approach to coordinating Board engagement with area teams. It was agreed that the Chief of Staff will provide a coordinated approach which will consider geographical logistics as well as referencing the Board Skills Matrix to ensure best use of Board members engagement time.

## **AGENDA ITEM 13: AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE QUARTERLY REPORT**

43. Jane Macdonald provided a verbal update on behalf of Kate Broughton, highlighting the current issue of the use of personal email accounts by Board members for SNH business. She informed that technical options to address this were being considered via the Audit and Risk Committee.

## **INFORMATION PAPERS**

### Chief Executive's Report

44. The Board noted the content of the Chief Executive's written report.

### Biodiversity Programme Board and the Impending CBD Workshop

45. This information paper provides an update on several activities planned internationally and nationally in support of SNH work on biodiversity. The Board noted the contents of the report regarding events planned between 31 March and 3 April 2020.

### NatureScot Rebrand Progress Update

46. This information paper offered an overview of the work undertaken to deliver the NatureScot rebrand on 1 May 2020, and an update on implementation plans. The Board noted the contents of the report.

### Forward Agenda – 06 May 2020

47. The Board noted the forward agenda for 06 May 2020, which would follow a Board Development day on 05 May. Current plans for this to take place on the Isle of May were acknowledged, as well as the need to remain flexible in terms of possible restrictions placed by the Covid19 outbreak.

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB)**

#### SNH's Young Employee Panel (YEP)

48. Abi Gardner updated that the YEP had welcomed the opportunity to be involved in discussions on the business plan and NPF4 work. She also informed that the YEP were contributing to a Board discussion paper on the challenges for young employees.

49. Abi thanked the Board for her attendance at the meeting.

#### Date of Next Meeting

50. The next SNH Board Meeting is planned to take place on 06 May 2020 in Fife, however this will be confirmed in light of the emerging situation with the Covid19 outbreak.

51. The Chair thanked all those in attendance and closed the meeting.

**END.**