

JOHN MUIR TRUST: TRUSTEES' MEETING

Minutes of Meeting held on Saturday 5 September 2015 at Elgol Village Hall, Elgol, Isle of Skye

Present:

Peter Pearson (Chair), Gill Bond, John Finney, John Fox-Davies, Jim Gibson, Steve Green, Patricia Jordan, David MacLehose, Rob Mc Morran, Duncan Macniven, Jo Moulin, Chris Townsend, Will Williams, Deirdre Wilson, Bill Wright

Apologies: None

In attendance:

Stuart Brooks (Chief Executive), Fiona Kindness (Director of Resources), Rob Bushby (Manager, John Muir Award), Mike Daniels (Head of Land Management), Helen McDade (Head of Policy), Linda Coupar (minute taker)

Item 1 – Welcome

The Trust's Chair, Peter Pearson, welcomed everyone to the meeting. He asked whether there were any conflicts of interest - Will Williams declared his interest in the National Trust in England. John Fox-Davies declared that he knows Ian Ross. Both declarations were noted but not considered material to the agenda items.

Item 2 – Minutes of meeting of 12 June 2015

The draft minute with tracked changes had been circulated to trustees. No further amendments were made. The minutes were **approved**.

Item 3 – Matters Arising

Chair's update – Lord Provost of Edinburgh, no response received re civic reception
No other matters arising.

Preliminaries – Friday night discussion

a) Briefing and visit to Skye Properties

Ally Macaskill and Sarah Lewis provided a welcome. They asked trustees if they had any questions concerning the circulated briefing paper which provided background and information on recent and current issues. The aim was to focus discussion about priorities for the future. They questioned the balance of costs and benefits for the Trust and others who use the farm. An outline of the grazing agreements was provided and how JMT makes the land available to the community. JMT want to continue improving the ecological condition of the ground and maintain the basic infrastructure of the farm. PP outlined the excellent work undertaken by Ally to bring Strathaird farm up to good condition. SB pointed out that the farm posed both a challenge and an investment but was a place where the community interacted with JMT. Trustees learned that the farm buildings were primarily used for storage and, in future might be used for over wintering cattle.

There were no immediate plans for alternative use of the buildings, including the church but options could be considered in the future, although this would require significant investment. Further information was provided on the Blue Shed café, progress with the Collie & Mackenzie Statue and the Elgol Hydro scheme.

After the visit to Strathaird farm on Saturday, trustees were pleased to see the good work undertaken to date and any significant change in strategy or new major development projects would come back to the Trustees at an appropriate meeting.

b) Stronelairg

HM said there was nothing to report. Seven months is an unusually long period of time for a judicial review. She provided an update on proposed new windfarm developments.

c) Draft Wild Land Policy

SB provided a presentation to support input from the trustees in their review of the Trust's Wild Land Policy. He asked trustees to consider whether the policy should be restricted to protection or expanded to include enhancement of wild land. The policy should focus on protection and make reference to enhancement.

HM talked trustees through the various definitions of 'wild land', 'wildness', 'wild places' and 'wilderness'. There followed a discussion around the wilderness areas shown on the European map and whether an area involving reindeer farming (extraction) for instance should be described as wilderness. It was agreed that terminology is difficult, it needs to be considered in a European context. A consistent use of language - getting tight definitions to use consistently - is important. Also, size of area and no extraction are difficult notions to work with. It was pointed out the US passed a wilderness act in the 1960s and that hunting continues in recognised wilderness areas.

It was suggested that the JMT should acknowledge the concept of 'wilderness' as a positive state but attaining it in the UK, even in one or two areas, would be a very long term ambition.

The definition of wild areas (from Wild Europe) was discussed and also comparisons outlined between JMT and SNH's definitions of wild land. It was pointed out that the scope of JMT's policy, whether UK or global, was important if we need to be involved in the debate on an international level, especially for EU policy on agricultural payments.

HM suggested pursuing a process to recognise the top 10% wild land areas in different countries of the UK. She also asked for consideration of the sea/coast and inland water.

Everyone found the discussion very useful, and SB has enough information to produce a first draft of the policy. He aims to bring the final Wild Land Policy to the Board in December, but it will be discussed earlier at the October Topical Forum.

AP1 – SB to draft revised Wild Land Policy for discussion at October Topical Forum.

d) Chair's report & discussion

PP spoke about the Governance Working Group and his attendance at the training course run by Civic Society in London and the list of 9 points to take forward. In respect of a Remuneration policy, processes currently exist although not written down as policy. This will be referred to the HR working group – although there are other priorities for staff to focus on just now.

The process for succession planning for trustees will be referred to the Governance Working Group to see if any refinement is needed. Reconsidering co-options to the Board will be raised as a potential option to ensure necessary expertise.

The questions relating to Board priorities and performance measures will be discussed at the next Topical Forum.

Performance management policy – eg appraisal and training – is already undertaken but not yet written down as policy.

It was recognised that risk assessment is important to build into all future reports.

PP stated that the meeting with Community Land Scotland was successful and common issues were discussed.

Trustees **noted** the report.

AP2 – Bring governance questions to next Board Meeting

Item 4 – Action Points from Previous Meetings (Paper A)

8th December 2014

2 – Governance Working Group to consider media relations – outstanding. A meeting will be arranged to follow the next Topical Forum. GWG members are to advise JF of their availability

23rd March 2015

8 – Provide Trustees with draft Communications Strategy – outstanding

9 – Review HR Policy Committee remit – outstanding

12th June 2015

All items discharged

Item 5 –Operational Report (Paper B)

The Operational report provided trustees with an overview of activity across all area of Trust operations in the period since the last meeting of trustees in June 2015. SB was congratulated on the Trust becoming a member of IUCN. Trustees questioned various aspects including fencing at Ardvar, Nevis and the SNH grant for JMA (covering core costs).

SB provided an update on the Spirit of Muir event on 9 September, which has over 300 ticket sales to date with 80% of tickets being bought by non-members. He also pointed out the recent launch of the Trust's new website and its ability to improve communication channels. The work done by Kevin Lelland was recognised and trustees praised the new website.

Trustees **appreciated** the detail provided by the Operational Update.

Item 6 – Financial Update (Paper C)

FK spoke to the circulated Financial paper which provided the financial position up to 31 July 2015. There is a deficit at this point in the year, but she pointed out that the Knoydart appeal will follow later this year. The deficit was budgeted and she felt we would come in at the end of year in line with the budget. Legacy income is slow and new legacy notifications are below average for this time in the year. This is the second year where legacies have not reached the levels of previous years.

Concern was expressed by SB & FK for the 2016 budget. The lack of notified legacies is a considerable issue, and there is a need to cut costs. A Finance Committee meeting will immediately follow the Board meeting to discuss the timetable and process.

Trustees **noted** the financial position.

Item 7 – Greater London National Park City (Paper D)

RB provided the background behind the initiative and the trust's involvement. The idea of a National Park City was launched in April 2014 and momentum has built since then. A paper, outlining the concept and vision, has been distributed widely and there is a high level of support locally and by high profile personalities. RB stated that the initiative ties in with the JMT's desire to work in partnership with other

organisations and is useful in our engagement work, in particular within urban green space, and is seen as a positive thing for the Trust to be involved in. This model might be applied to other cities in the future. Concern was expressed about it being called a national park and that it could devalue the term, particularly in the minds of politicians and the general public. Contrarily there was the belief that it will raise awareness of national parks as there are millions of residents and visitors to London. There was the view that the term 'National Park City' was used as a metaphor to attract people to wild places and green spaces and would be useful in tying in with the work of JMA.

RB reassured trustees that there was no prior concern over the name, but he would explore how it sits with other national parks to ensure it is not seen as a threat.

After a lively discussion which showed strong feelings on both sides, PP summarised that there is concern over the 'National Park City' name and use of JMT resources. SB also stated that he is nervous about the wider implications for the Trust's reputation and our partnership work in London if we withdrew our support, and would like to continue with the existing low level of input.

Trustees voted 10-3 (CT, BW, GB) with 2 abstentions (DMcL, DW) in favour of the Trust's ongoing involvement with the project, but asked RB to follow-up a discussion with National Parks England to gauge their views including the wording of the name. The IUCN might also have a view and SB said he would follow this up via the UK National Committee.

AP3 – RB to explore views of National Parks England.

AP4 – SB to explore situation with IUCN UK National Committee

Item 8 – Stronelairg legal action (pending ruling) (Paper E)

Judge's ruling still outstanding.

Item 9 - Meeting Dates 2016 (Paper F)

The 2016 AGM will be held in Inverness and we are currently looking at alternative venues so there might be a change to the date in the circulated document.

The costs of board meetings was raised and the point made that most Trustees travel from the south to Pitlochry. Although meetings held further south would involve saving on travel costs for trustees, it was pointed out that there is no cost for the meeting room in Pitlochry.

It was noted that most meetings are Monday or Friday and it was questioned whether some could be midweek.

SB asked Trustees to inform him if there are problems with any of the dates, so that the document can be finalised.

AP5 – Trustees to feed back to SB with suggestions for the draft meeting dates for 2016.

Item 10 – Confidential – Land Acquisition (Paper G)

Item 11 – Report from Wales Working Group (Paper H)

A paper has been circulated for information. SB reported that the first meeting of group, in June 2015, was positive.

Date of next meeting – Monday 7th December at Tower House, Pitlochry

Summary of Action Points

8th December 2014

2 – Governance Working Group to consider media relations – outstanding. A meeting will be arranged to follow the next Topical Forum. GWG members are to advise JF of their availability

23rd March 2015

8 – Provide Trustees with draft Communications Strategy – outstanding

9 – Review HR Policy Committee remit – outstanding

4th September 2015 AP1 –

AP1 - SB to draft revised Wild Land Policy for discussion at October Topical Forum

AP2 – Bring governance questions to next Board Meeting

5th September 2015

AP3 – Greater London National Park City - RB to explore views of National Parks England.

AP4 – Greater London National Park City - SB to explore situation with IUCN

AP5 – Trustees to feed back to SB with suggestions to the draft meeting dates for 2016.