

JOHN MUIR TRUST: TRUSTEES' MEETING

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 4th December 2017 at Atholl Centre, Pitlochry

Present:

Peter Pearson (Chair), David Broom, Alan Dobie, Peter Foulkes, John Fox-Davies, Steve Green, Derek Johnston, Duncan Macniven, Jo Moulin, Hugh Salvesen, Chris Townsend, Andrew Whitfield and Douglas Wynn.

Apologies: Patricia Jordan and Deirdre Wilson.

In attendance:

Andrew Bachell (Chief Executive), Kerry Ross (Director of Finance and Resources), Rob Bushby (John Muir Award Manager), Mike Daniels (Head of Land Management), Helen McDade (Head of Policy) and Jim Gibson (Financial Adviser).

Item 1 – Introductory items

Peter Pearson welcomed everyone to the meeting. The apologies were noted. Peter Pearson requested declaration of any conflicts of interests: there were none.

Item 2 – Minutes of last meeting

The draft minutes of the meetings on 23rd September and 27th October 2017, which had been circulated, were **approved** with minor corrections.

Item 3 – Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Item 4 – Action Points from Previous Meetings

Progress recorded in the paper was **noted**.

Item 5 – 2018 Budget

Speaking to the paper, Kerry Ross noted that the Trust was in the satisfactory position of having sufficient reserves to cover expenditure during the year, even if unpredictable income fell short. The budget assumed greater use of restricted funds to cover expenditure which served the specified purpose. The success of fundraising efforts was of course uncertain but the fundraising team was focussing its efforts on where the resources were most needed, and was confident that the budget target was achievable. Expenditure – including the proposed 2% pay increase – was more predictable and at Jim Gibson's behest she had included a contingency of £20k. Douglas Wynn, who chaired the Finance Committee, confirmed that the Committee had scrutinised the proposals (except for the Trading Company) with care and was satisfied that the draft budget struck the right balance between prudence and action.

In discussion, Trustees:

- considered whether to recommend a membership fee increase at the 2018 AGM and concluded that the level should be reviewed in a year;
- noted that we expect the SNH funding for the Award to be secure for 2018 at least;
- welcomed the major donation foreshadowed on page 8 of the paper;

- concluded that the scale of resources devoted to policy work, crucial for a campaigning organisation, should be reviewed as part of the corporate strategy preparation;
- noted that, although the level of reserves exceeded the target, the budget still envisaged a substantial deficit which suggested that reserves were not excessive.

Trustees **approved** the Trust budget for 2018, including the proposed pay uplift, and the Trading Company budget for 2018 and 2019. Kerry Ross and Jim Gibson were thanked for their work on preparing the budget.

Item 6 – Fundraising Committee and staffing

Andrew Bachell explained what he proposed to do to strengthen the fundraising team, following the departure of the Head of Development and a recruitment exercise which had not resulted in an appointment. He noted that Trustees were little involved in the governance of fundraising, despite its crucial importance to the achievement of the budget, and that the Trustees collectively lacked senior professional experience of fundraising oversight.

He proposed that the Governance Working Group should be asked to consider two options to improve the governance of fundraising: a sub-committee of the Board with co-opted members or a special working group. He intended to bring the fundraising team under the management of the Head of Communications and Membership (whose job title would be amended to reflect the change). He planned also to recruit a Head of Fundraising who would not be a member of the Management Team but who would attend Team meetings when the agenda demanded, in the same way as he intended to involve other senior members of staff in appropriate parts of Team meetings. His aim was to strengthen support for the fundraising team; to reduce the size of the Management Team; to free the Head of Fundraising from the organisation-wide responsibilities carried by Management Team members; and to recognise the synergies between membership and fundraising (granted that much fundraising was focussed on members), which had been noted in a review of the Trust's fundraising some years ago.

In discussion, Trustees explored the capacity for the Head of Communications and Membership to take on the new responsibilities, the importance of having the fundraising function represented at Management Team meetings and the practicability of finding expert outsiders willing to sit on the advisory panel. Trustees **agreed** that the Governance Working Group should urgently review the two options for involving outside experts in the proposed senior advisory panel and **noted** Andrew Bachell's proposed organisational changes, which would be initiated in the new year [**Action Point 1**].

Item 7 – Development of a new Corporate Strategy

Andrew Bachell spoke to the paper which set out the results of the work so far on the preparation of a new Corporate Strategy. He invited Trustees to respond briefly in writing, by the end of December, to the strategic questions in the paper, in particular highlighting their views on the highest priorities [**Action Point 2**].

The following points were made in discussion:

- it would be important to review whether the vision, mission and values were still valid – but that was best done towards the end of the process;
- the Wildness Policy should be completed as soon as possible, as an important input to the Corporate Plan [**Action Point 3**];
- it would be useful to have a critique of the achievement so far of the current Corporate Plan;
- it would be helpful to concentrate on what the Trust does best, rather than spread effort too thinly;
- while the start point for the Trust was wildness for its own sake, the Plan should take account of the benefits (to health etc) which could flow from wild areas.

Trustees confirmed their agreement to the next steps in the preparation of the Plan, set out in Appendix 1 to the paper.

Item 8 – Wales Working Group

Andrew Bachell circulated the letter of 18 October from the members of the Wales Working Group, expressing concerns about the decisions on Welsh issues taken at the Trustees' meeting on 23rd September. Prompted by the letter, Peter Pearson and Andrew Bachell were meeting the Group on 19th December.

Andrew Whitfield and Peter Foulkes explained that the letter had been based on a misunderstanding of the conclusions of the 23rd September meeting. They envisaged that the forthcoming meeting would allow the Chairman and Chief Executive to reaffirm the Trust's interest in Wales, and the way that the Group's proposals would be taken into account in the preparation of the new Corporate Plan.

Trustees **welcomed** the Group's continuing contribution to the work of the Trust.

Item 9 – Glenridding Leases

Peter Pearson reported that the lease from the National Park Authority had been concluded, and that the lease of the area of land jointly owned by the Authority and the National Trust lacked only the National Trust's signature. The entry date had been backdated to 20th October and Pete Barron was planning 10 days of work on footpaths on the property, to make an early impact. Trustees **welcomed** progress.

Item 10 – Operational and Financial Update

In discussion of the Operational Report:

- Trustees regretted the lack of recent Trustee involvement in the Trust's work parties and Andrew Bachell agreed to circulate the 2018 programme to encourage volunteering [**Action Point 4**];
- Peter Pearson noted the fundraising team's involvement in the John Muir Day lunch on 21st April 2018, being organised by former Trustee Denis Mollison, marking the thirtieth anniversary of the launch of the Trust.

Trustees **noted** the report.

Kerry Ross spoke to the Financial Update, forecasting a surplus for the calendar year, even after disregarding a major land acquisition donation. Trustees **noted** the report and **welcomed** the outcome.

Item 11 – Chairman's Report

Peter Pearson highlighted the success of the Trust's stall at the Kendal Mountain Festival, noting for the future the desirability of staffing the stall more systematically (perhaps including Trustees), to maximise its impact. Trustees **noted** the report.

Item 12 – Trustee skill set and election

Kerry Ross circulated the near-final version of the tabulation of Trustees' skill sets, which would be a useful input to the call for new Trustees in 2018. Andrew Bachell would circulate the key dates for nominations [**Action Point 5**]. Peter Pearson encouraged Trustees to identify suitable candidates, noting that he himself would not be making nominations.

Item 13 – John Muir Award 21st Birthday

Rob Bushby briefed Trustees on plans for the celebration of the Award's 21st anniversary on 26th February 2018, including a motion in the Scottish Parliament and an event at Dunbar which would so far as possible replicate the original launch. Trustees **noted** the plans.

Item 14 – Any Other Business

On Brexit, Helen McDade briefed Trustees on her recent meeting with Greener UK, which aimed to amend the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill to incorporate EU environmental protections into UK law..

Peter Pearson updated Trustees on the zipwire proposed for the Thirlmere valley, adjacent to Glenridding Common and partly visible from the summit of Helvellyn. The planning application was very contentious locally and, while the wildness of the Thirlmere valley had been greatly reduced by grazing and afforestation, the experience of wild land would be reduced by the proposed development. Helen McDade explained that, while the Trust did not generally comment on planning applications on adjacent properties, it had done so in at least one case in the past. It was important however for comments to be based on a thorough analysis of the effect of the development, and time was too short to complete such an assessment before the period for comment expired. Trustees **agreed** that the Trust should submit a holding objection, explaining that time was too short for a proper analysis, and that an assessment should be put in hand, perhaps drawing on the skills of a local member who had written to Peter Pearson, to allow staff to decide whether a substantive objection should be raised.

Summary of Action Points

- AP1** On fundraising, the Governance Working Group should urgently review the two options for involving outside experts in the proposed senior advisory panel and Andrew Bachell should put in hand the proposed organisational changes.
- AP2** On the Corporate Plan, Trustees should respond briefly in writing, by the end of December, to the strategic questions in the paper, in particular highlighting their views on the highest priorities.
- AP3** The Wildness Policy should be completed as soon as possible, as an important input to the Corporate Plan.
- AP4** Andrew Bachell should circulate to Trustees the 2018 work party programme, to encourage volunteering.
- AP5** Andrew Bachell should circulate to Trustees the key dates for nominations for the 2018 Trustee elections.

Duncan Macniven
12th December 2017