

**Minutes of the 170th Meeting of the**

**Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) Board of Trustees** **1400 on Wednesday 13 December 2023**

**Hybrid (Botanic Cottage, 49 Inverleith Place, Edinburgh EH3 5QB /Microsoft Teams)**

**Present:** Dominic Fry Chair of Trustees Cara Aitchison Trustee

Elise Cartmell Trustee

Sarah Cathcart Trustee

Sarah Gurr Trustee and Chair of the Science Advisory Committee David Hamilton Trustee and Chair of the Investment Committee

Ian Jardine Trustee and Chair of the Audit Committee Stella Morse Trustee

Liz Trevor Trustee

**In Attendance:** Ian Brown Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk (Items 9.0 and 10.0) Emma Bush Nature Based Solutions (Item 1.0)

Kari Coghill Director of Innovation Projects

Raoul Curtis-Machin Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience Rebeca Drew NRF Scottish Native Plants Horticulture (Item 1.0) Simon Fuller Deputy Director – Rural & Environmental Science and

Analytical Services (Scottish Government) (Item 1.0) Mairi Gougeon Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Item 1.0) Joanne Hannah Director of Resources and Planning and Board Secretary Pete Hollingsworth Director of Science and Deputy Keeper

Emma Lacroix Director of Development and Communications Jennifer Martin PA to the Regius Keeper (Minutes)

Simon Milne Regius Keeper

Amy Murray Head of Edinburgh Biomes (Item 14.0)

Rachel Palmer Deputy Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Item 1.0)

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
|  | **Private Meeting**  The Trustees held a private meeting. |  |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS** |  |
| **1.0** | **Scottish Government**  The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands to the meeting and thanked her for the Scottish Government’s continuing support with particular reference to Edinburgh Biomes. The Chair emphasised the good relationship between RBGE and the Scottish Government which was based on trust, transparency and good governance. The Chair advised that, with the Scottish Government’s backing, RBGE was a key contributor to  Scotland’s response to climate change and biodiversity loss. Outlining RBGE’s |  |

**NO ITEMS ACTION**

achievements over his four years as Chair he noted that the organisation was more commercial, critical and collaborative and concluded by thanking the Board of Trustees and the RBGE team.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands congratulated the Chair on his reappointment for another four years and advised that the Scottish Government were committed to supporting the excellent work of the RBGE who were uniquely placed to deal with the challenges of the climate emergency. Capital investment for the critical Edinburgh Biomes project would be protected and the challenges of inflationary costs were understood and she was interested to hear about the RBGE’s self-generated income.

The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper advised that he was in the midst of a major planning exercise for our science and conservation programmes aligning to the Kunming Montreal COP15 agreement, its derivative global strategy for plant conservation, and the emerging Scottish biodiversity strategy and advised on some of the plans and provided a mix of highlights from the science programme – research, sustainability, food security, biomonitoring, habitat restoration and partnerships.

The Scottish Native Plants Horticulturist talked about the work being undertaken as part of the 3-year Nature Restoration project funded by the Scottish Government in conjunction with Nature Scot to protect threatened plant species in Scotland. The main aims of the project were to safeguard ten priority Scottish plant species in large, genetically diverse *ex-situ* collections; translocate ten priority species into new sites (creating resilient and adaptable populations) and to inspire the public, stakeholders and policymakers to further action through stories of threatened species recovery.

The Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience highlighted the work being undertaken to support the transition to a nature-positive economy, in line with Scotland’s National Strategy for Economic Transformation. RBGE were involved in the promotion of career options in horticulture to create a positive skills pipeline for the future. A collaborative approach to building Malawi’s Botanic Garden capability was being developed in partnership with other botanic gardens. Plant health was another major threat and the RBGE had been the first UK public garden to achieve the Plant Healthy accreditation.

The Nature Based Solutions Scientist advised on the rapid urbanisation and global crises, the need to make more space for nature in our urban centres, highlighted that RBGE were a broker for nature and community-based solutions and outlined the project relating to the question: is Edinburgh a “Good City”.

The Board of Trustees asked for contacts in relation to international aid, if there were other things that the RBGE could do to assist in other parts of the Cabinet Secretary’s portfolio (ie the islands) and the inability to access the apprenticeship levy fund to resource apprenticeships. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands would follow up.

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| **2.0** | **Apologies**  No apologies were received |  |
| **3.0** | **Trustees’ Conflicts of Interest**  No conflicts of interest related to the meeting were declared. It was noted that Cara Aitchison had a potential declaration of interest as she had been appointed to the Board of Visit Scotland from 1 December 2023. |  |
| **4.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 27 September 2023**  The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 27 September 2023 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would place a copy of the approved Minutes in the Library, on the General Drive, RBGE Website and circulate by e-mail to the Trustees and Executive Team. |  |
|  | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
| **5.0** | **Matters Arising**  The Chair reported that the actions from the previous meeting had been completed and an update on progress had been provided. |  |
| 5.1 | Allocation of Board Members to Committees  Cara Aitchison had agreed to take on the role of a member of the Remuneration Committee. |  |
| 5.2 | Centre for Middle Eastern Plants (CMEP)  The Director of Resources and Planning would arrange for a presentation on the CMEP Business model at a future meeting. |  |
| 5.3 | RBGE Risk Report - Autumn 2023  It was noted that Health and Safety and Safeguarding policies were on the Agenda for the Board of Trustees’ information. The Director of Resources and Planning had reviewed the wording in relation to the cyber security training risk and considered the long-term high risks.  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would consider the role of the Board of Trustees in policy development as part of a review that was being undertaken. In progress. |  |
|  | **Director of Resources and Planning** |
| 5.4 | Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee - Key Information  The Head of Edinburgh Biomes had completed the sign off of the Section 1Ai (Infrastructure) Contract. |  |

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| 5.5 | Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Update  Cara Aitchison had shared knowledge on Staff networks and policy development with the Director of Resources and Planning. |  |
| **6.0** | **Chair’s Update**  The Chair reported that he had attended a cyber security course, was supporting the Regius Keeper and Executive Team with Scottish Government budget negotiations and pay settlement, continued to be involved in Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee and the Botanics Foundation and had attended the launch event for Christmas at the Botanics. |  |
| **7.0**  7.1 | **Regius Keeper**  Update  The Regius Keeper gave an overview and advised that he was relatively positive about finances for 2024/25. |  |
| 7.2 | Directors’ Highlights |  |
| 7.2.1 | *Development and Communications*  The Director of Development and Communications advised:   * Communications - Aim to double the number of countries in which we achieve coverage and increase our international audience by 20% by the end of the year. Since September, stories from the gardens had been covered in 16 countries outside the UK, most frequently in the USA, Germany, India, Ireland and France. Overall, we had publications and broadcast reach of 63 million * Fundraising - Significantly grown our philanthropic income this year, (and were on track to exceed last year’s target). Recent successes in the past month have included donations from the Getty Foundation, and the HGH Wills Charitable Trust for the Palm Houses. * Edinburgh Biomes Programme - Work was progressing for the public appeal for the Palm Houses, which would be launched in the Spring. The TV Broadcaster Arit Anderson had recently recorded a film in support of the appeal, and further filming was planned with project champions across the gardens, as part of our Communications Plan. |  |
| 7.2.2 | *Director of Innovation Projects*  The Director of Innovation Projects had been focussing on commercial income generation, the diversification of income streams, the mobilisation of the Edinburgh catering contract and was working on the Digital Transformation Project which related to systems that improved customer engagement, enhanced organisational data for decision making and supported income generation and cost management. |  |

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| 7.2.3 | *Science*  The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper gave an update:   * Plans were being reviewed, there was a restructuring of departments, and the Science and Biodiversity Strategy 2021-2030 was being operationalised via RBGE’s operational delivery planning process. * There had been a recent visit to China where the Scottish Government had highlighted the long-standing and high quality research partnership between the Kunming Institute of Botany and the RBGE. * The UK’s association with Horizon Europe and future funding opportunities were being capitalised on and RBGE would like to lead administratively on appropriate European projects in the future. |  |
| 7.2.4 | *Horticulture and Visitor Experience*  The Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience advised:   * The Garden Management Plans and update to the Collections Policy were progressing. * There was a potential partnership opportunity with Malawi. * We’re looking to develop a research programme in relation to the blue-green infrastructure work. |  |
| 7.2.5 | *Resources and Planning*  The Director of Resources and Planning advised:   * Consideration was being given on the optimisation of the estate beyond the Edinburgh Biomes Project. * Was building on the resilience of the RBGE’s financial health through work on the Botanics Foundation and Botanics Trading Company to build a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. * Recruitment was underway for a new Director of Learning and Engagement post. * In 2024 Amanda Boughey would attend the Board of Trustees’ meetings as a UK Board Apprentice and Stella Morse would be a   mentor. |  |

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
|  | **DECISION ITEMS** |  |
| **8.0** | **Membership Pricing**  The Director of Development and Communications presented a paper and advised that a full review of the Membership Programme had been conducted and opportunities to increase RBGE’s value identified. Option A would offer the greatest benefits and was the preferred choice and, if approved, would be implemented along with the introduction of monthly direct debits. The Board of Trustees suggested that good communications would be required to provide information on the necessity for a price increase. It was noted that an admissions pricing exercise had been undertaken and a recruitment campaign would be put in place. The Board of Trustee’s approved Pricing Proposal A.  **ACTION:** The Director of Development and Communications would implement Pricing Proposal A and arrange for a recruitment campaign to be undertaken. |  |
|  | **Director of Development and Communications** |
| **9.0**  9.1  9.2  9.3 | **Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk presented the Annual Report and Accounts for the Board of Trustees’ approval and advised that a small deficit in year had slightly reduced reserves. The Annual Report and Accounts had been considered by the Audit Committee and following discussions some minor changes and corrections had been made. The Auditors had been very positive and appreciative of the work undertaken by the Finance Team. The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk would meet Audit Scotland in the new year to look at best practice and what could be included in future reports. The Board of Trustees asked if the RBGE should be participating in the civil service reporting when doing the Staff Survey and to reflect on whether some of the challenges should be included in future reports. The Board of Trustees approved the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023.  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would consider who RBGE could be benchmarking with in the Staff Survey and if some of the challenges should be included in future reporting.  **ACTION:** The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk would arrange for the Chair and Regius Keeper to sign the Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2023.  **ACTION:** The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk would arrange for the Regius Keeper to sign the Letter of Representation. | **Director of Resources and Planning**  **Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk**  **Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and**  **Risk** |

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
|  | **DISCUSSION ITEMS** |  |
| **10.0** | **Finance Report to 31 October 2023**  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk presented the Finance Report and highlighted that the full year forecast showed the RBGE was in a better position than the budget. Capital projects were still on schedule to be completed before the year end. The Board of Trustees asked if the procurement issues highlighted were related to the Edinburgh Biomes Project or wider (they were wider market issues) and on future income generation opportunities it was noted that new events (such as Fleurs de Villes) took time to establish and were already bringing in new audiences to RBGE. |  |
| **11.0** | **RBGE Risk Report - Winter 2023**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Risk Report. Following the review there were 47 risks being managed in the RBGE Corporate Risk Register. Two risk scores were increased, and two risks scores were decreased, and two risks were closed, the scores of the remaining 43 risks were unchanged. No new risks were added. It was noted that 2 increased risk scores related to digital systems and an increased risk of a cyber security incident and it was advised that improved infrastructure would assist with managing issues. Two risk scores had been reduced due to the provision of additional space available for conversion to laboratory facilities for science. |  |
| **12.0** | **Key Results Dashboard**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Key Results Dashboard and Report for Winter 2023 and key highlights for the period had been noted in the paper. The Board of Trustees asked about the reduction in the number of Herbarium specimens that had been digitised and the number of peer review publications which were behind the forecast (these related to timing issues in the reporting). It was noted that the digitisation programme was running on target to reach one million specimens by the autumn of 2024 and the Board of Trustees asked about the rate of digitisation and future funding. Alternative funding opportunities were being investigated to continue with the programme and increase capacity. |  |
|  | **INFORMATION ITEMS** |  |
| **13.0** | **Health and Safety and Safeguarding Policies**  The Director of Resources and Planning advised that these had been approved at the Executive Team and Senior Leadership Team and were presented for the Board of Trustees’ information. Robust health and safety systems were in place but there improvements relating to technological support were being made. The Board of Trustees observed that more dynamic risk assessment approaches could be considered if appropriate (as the current risk assessments were static) and asked about the lone working policy which was being reviewed particularly in relation to international  commitments with expeditions. |  |

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| **14.0** | **Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee - Key Information**  The Head of Edinburgh Biomes presented a paper and highlighted for the Board of Trustees’ attention:   * Work on the Palm House renovation was going well. * A key milestone had been reached this quarter with the letting of the infrastructure works which would be a key enabler for succeeding phases. * The forward-looking cash flow included in the paper had been shared with the Scottish Government sponsorship hub and would be reviewed and refined. * The key decision of the letting of the decant glasshouse contract would be addressed early in 2024. |  |
| **15.0** | **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Update**  The Director of Resources and Planning had provided a paper on the work undertaken since the last Board of Trustees meeting. |  |
| **16.0** | **Audit Committee - Report of Audit Committee Meeting held Wednesday 29 November 2023**  The Chair of the Audit Committee presented his paper which provided an overview of the meeting held on Wednesday 29 November 2023. The main issues in relation to the audit recommendations were around the capacity to implement the recommendations of the Cyber Security Audit. |  |
| **17.0** | **Investment Committee**  The Chair of the Investment Committee provided an update. The Executive Team were meeting to consider and prioritise the requests for funding and an update would be provided at the next Board of Trustees meeting. |  |
| **18.0** | **Report of the Science Advisory Committee Meeting held 12 December 2023**  The Chair of the Science Advisory Committee highlighted progress made in recent papers, publications and grant income. Three Heads of Department had attended the meeting and were asked how they could capitalise on the science they undertook. A unified approach should be considered in relation to charging for scientific research information (which was currently provided for free as part of open access) and the RBGE’s consultancy model could be shared. It was recognised that there was a conflict between making data available to the public to allow free access and charging for consultation. RBGE were responding to the Scottish Government consultation on the Climate Emergency. The Board of Trustees suggested that connectivity between the different parts of the areas of commercialisation be considered at a future meeting and next steps for Science would be to raise awareness  about fundraising. A Commercial Strategy was being developed and would be |  |

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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| brought to the Board of Trustees for input (benchmarking against other organisations in the areas of consultancy should be considered). | | |
|  | **CLOSING ITEMS** |  |
| **19.0** | **Any Other Business**  There were no additional items to report. |  |
| **20.0** | **Arrangements for the Next Meeting**  The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 27 March 2024. |  |

**Jennifer Martin**

PA to the Regius Keeper 13 December 2023

**Annex A** Summary of Actions

**ANNEX A**

**SUMMARY OF ACTIONS**

|  |  |  |
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| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| **4.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 27 September 2023**  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would place a copy of the approved Minutes in the Library, on the General Drive, RBGE Website and circulate by e-mail to the Trustees and Executive Team. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
| 5.3 | RBGE Risk Report - Autumn 2023  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would consider the role of the Board of Trustees in policy development as part of a review that was being undertaken. In progress. | **Director of Resources and Planning** |
| **8.0** | **Membership Pricing**  **ACTION:** The Director of Development and Communications would implement Pricing Proposal A and arrange for a recruitment campaign to be undertaken. | **Director of Development and Communications** |
| **9.0**  9.1  9.2  9.3 | **Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would consider who RBGE could be benchmarking with in the Staff Survey and if some of the challenges should be included in future reporting.  **ACTION:** The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk would arrange for the Chair and Regius Keeper to sign the Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2023.  **ACTION:** The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk would arrange for the Regius Keeper to sign the Letter of Representation. | **Director of Resources and Planning**  **Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk**  **Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and**  **Risk** |