**Minutes of the 157th Meeting of the**

**Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) Board of Trustees**

**on Wednesday 30 September 2020 at 1400**

**via Microsoft Teams**

**Present:** Mr Dominic Fry Chair of Trustees

Mr Raoul Curtis-Machin Trustee (part attendance)

Dr David Hamilton Trustee

Dr Ian Jardine Trustee

Prof Thomas Meagher Trustee

Ms Diana Murray Trustee

Prof Ian Wall Trustee

**In Attendance:** Mr Simon Milne Regius Keeper

Mr Ian Brown Head of Finance

Ms Judy Cromarty Director of Programmes and Planning and Board Secretary

Prof Pete Hollingsworth Director of Science and Deputy Keeper

Ms Emma Lacroix Director of Development

Mr Kevin Reid Director of Horticulture and Learning

**Apologies:** Ms Kari Coghill Director of Enterprise and Communication

Prof Beverley Glover Trustee

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Future of RBGE Education**  The Head of Education gave a presentation. The COVID-19 pandemic had presented opportunities to refocus the delivery of Education at RBGE with an increased role for online learning and the requirement for the upskilling of staff. The priority areas were HND, BSc and MSc courses, the certified programmes, associated training and Continuing Professional Development, young people, the viability of the short courses and the streamlining of processes and procedures in administration. The plan was to increase income and reduce expenditure and it was hoped to implement the proposals for the restructuring of the Education Team by February 2021. Trustees suggested that the move to greater on-line learning would be an opportunity for RBGE to take a lead in this area. The Board endorsed the approach presented, and the Chair, on behalf of the Trustees, thanked the Head of Education for the strategically important and most welcome presentation.  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would arrange for the Head of Education to provide an update to the Board of Trustees at the Board Meeting on Wednesday 3 March 2021. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS:** |  |
| **1.0** | **Apologies**  Apologies were received from Prof Glover and the Director of Enterprise and Communication. |  |
| **2.0** | **Trustees’ Conflicts of Interest**  No conflicts of interest were reported. |  |
| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 25 June 2020**  The Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 25 June 2020 were accepted as a true 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. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **4.0**  4.1 | **Matters Arising**  Crib Sheet  The Chair thanks the Regius Keeper for the information provided in the Edinburgh Biomes Brief. |  |
| **5.0** | **Chair’s Update**  The Chair:   * Had written to offer the Board of Trustees’ condolences to Prof Glover following her recent loss. * Thanked the Director of Programmes and Planning for her excellent work (where she had overseen many changes and improvements at RBGE) over the last few years and wished her well for her future role. * Thanked the RBGE Team and congratulated them for their work towards achieving £50M of funding for Edinburgh Biomes from the Scottish Government. This was evidence that the Scottish Government were committed to a green recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. * Attended a Patrons event and was pleased to see the safety and welfare provisions put in place for all involved. * Participated in a Ginkgo planting ceremony with the Consul General of Japan and the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and thanked the staff involved in planning and arranging the event. The tree had been grown from the seeds of a tree that had survived the atomic blast in Hiroshima. The Chair and Consul General of Japan would plant another tree in Benmore Botanic Garden on Wednesday 7 October 2020. * Had a telecon with the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform and a walk round the Garden with the Scottish Government’s Director, Environment and Forestry both of whom were very supportive of the work of RBGE. The Chair was also grateful for the assistance and support of the Deputy Director Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services. There was currently a very constructive relationship between RBGE and the Scottish Government. * Had visited Logan Botanic Garden and was given a tour by the Curator and planned to visit Dawyck Botanic Garden and Benmore Botanic Garden in due course. * Thanked the Regius Keeper and Leaders’ Group for their work in difficult and challenging circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic. * Welcomed the growing incidence of RBGE’s core messages about our work on the biodiversity crisis and the climate emergency being picked up in media coverage and by our key stakeholders. |  |
| **6.0** | **Regius Keeper’s Update**  The Regius Keeper reported:   * He was very pleased with the progress being achieved in the strategic and operational development of RBGE education programmes. * Work was being undertaken on the budget submission for 2021/2022. This included various scenarios for any continued reduction of income due to COVID-19 * Following the resignation of the Director of Programmes and Planning the job description for the post had been reviewed and responsibility for Edinburgh Biomes would move to the new post of Edinburgh Biomes Programme Director, who would report to the Regius Keeper in the latter’s capacity as Senior Responsible Officer for the Programme. * Profile raising to key audiences and decision makers continued apace, with a strong focus on Edinburgh Biomes and in support of fundraising programmes. An encouraging range of media coverage was being achieved across all major activities. * Diplomatic links were continuing to be developed with a focus on countries with whom we already work or with whom we hope to work, and in support of the Scottish Government’s International Development Strategy and the Global Strategy for Plan Conservation. * The catering contractor at Benmore Botanic Garden Café had been offered a two-year extension which they had declined and as a result the contract would finish at the end of the season. * The Scottish Government had received a Freedom of Information request in relation to decisions made in 2016 concerning Inverleith House. * The biosecurity systems that had been put in place during COVID-19 were working effectively, with good feedback from visitors and staff. Homeworking for those that could remained the default position. * Visitor numbers were good given the current restrictions, but the loss of income remained a concern, particularly if COVID-19 restrictions continued into the next financial year. |  |
|  | **DECISION ITEMS:** |  |
| **7.0** | **Corporate Plan**  The Regius Keeper reported that the ‘Strategic Plan: RBGE’s Response to the Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Emergency’ had been revised to reflect the changing world and the Trustees’ previous comments. Trustees were asked to consider the revised text and commented as follows:   * In relation to the strategic direction the title could be reviewed to ensure that it conveyed the proactive (rather than merely responsive) nature of RBGE’s work. * It could be more explicitly stated that RBGE were experts in their field in a more innovative and dynamic way. * The Science Advisory Committee had scrutinised the document ‘Responding to the Biodiversity Crisis and the Climate Emergency – RBGE’ at their meetings. * The direct environmental impact of plants and horticulture could be included * Apprenticeships should be promoted. * Guidance was requested on the proposed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the strategic performance. Suggestions included: * The number of positive grant applications could be shown as a percentage of the total grants. * External awards or recognition should be included (ie the Regius Keeper’s Institute of Directors’ Scotland Director of the Year Awards). * Metrics could be added to reflect high profile national/international collaborations. * The Scottish Government’s views on KPIs should be sought. * Influences in relation to media statistics/reach should be considered. * The number of scientific publications should be added. * The difference RBGE was trying to make with the strategy and what it was achieving should be reflected. * It would be useful to include comparative numbers across the years. * The percentage number of Herbarium specimens digitised compared with the number of specimens held in the Collections should be included.   In summary the ‘RBGE’s Response to the Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Emergency’ was an outward facing document and the Key Performance Indicators were for internal use and provided information for the Scottish Government and the Board of Trustees. It was noted that the measuring of impact would be difficult to quantify in some areas.  It was agreed that subject to final amendments the Board was content for the Strategic Plan to go to the Scottish Government for endorsement, following a final review by the Chair and the Regius Keeper  **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would consider further the ‘RBGE’s Response to the Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Emergency’ in response to the Board’s comments. | **Chair/**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **8.0** | **Annual Report from RBGE Audit Committee 2019/2020**  The Chair of the Audit Committee presented his report. The paper provided assurances that the Audit Committee had been meeting regularly, there were no issues to raise with the Board of Trustees and assurance was provided for approval of the Annual Accounts. An external member had been approached to join the Audit Committee. |  |
|  | **DISCUSSION ITEMS:** |  |
| **9.0** | **Botanics Trading Company (BTC) Annual Accounts 2019/2020**  The Head of Finance highlighted that there had been a profit of £835k. A good audit report had been received from Chiene and Tait (auditors) with no areas of accounting or internal control weakness that should be brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees. Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) were moving to the next stage of making tax digital and future VAT returns would require additional automation. New software for the shop tills would assist and consideration was being given to the further automation of financial information. Trustees suggested that there remained potential for greater income to be generated for RBGE. There was a refit planned in January 2021 for the Edinburgh shop and there had been changes to shop staff, and to the areas of retail and events.  **ACTION:** Mr Curtis Machin would discuss ideas for increased income generation with the Director of Enterprise and Communication. | **Mr Curtis-**  **Machin/**  **Director of Enterprise and Communication** |
| **10.0** | **Risk Review and Risk Register Q1 2020/2021**  The Director of Programmes and Planning reported that during the first quarter more frequent reviews of risk had been undertaken in response to Covid-19 impact and the usual risk review timetable was now in place. The Audit Committee had considered the Risk Register at their last meeting. It was noted that the core grant-in-aid funding received from the Scottish Government no longer covered staffing costs and RBGE would be unable to implement the Scottish Government’s Pay Policy in the future [without a commensurate increase in grant-in aid]. Discussions were ongoing with the Scottish Government. The Director of Programmes and Planning noted that some changes to the supporting structure of the organisation might be beneficial when the opportunity arose – ensuring that it was in the best and most efficient position to function a non-departmental public body, a commercial company and a charity. Some staff roles would need to change to support the organisation in the future and financial and/or training support would be required to assist with this process. The risk in relation to the glasshouses had been reduced slightly due to ongoing maintenance works, pending implementation of the Edinburgh Biomes programme. Trustees suggested that it would be useful to see the mitigating actions (the Audit Committee already received this information) to allow them to fully assess the Risk Register.  **ACTION:** The Director of Programmes and Planning would consider circulating the Risk Register with the mitigating actions to the Board for information. | **Director of Programmes and Planning** |
| **11.0**  11.1  11.2  11.2.1 | **Edinburgh Biomes**  Project Update  The Regius Keeper reported that full planning permission was in place and the Energy Centre and Plant Health Centre were almost “shovel ready” and detailed design work was now being undertaken. The Scottish Government had allocated up to £50M from the Low Carbon Fund and an additional £20M would be required to be raised. RBGE were working with the Scottish Government on the cash flow and any restrictions in relation to this funding. The Director of Programmes and Planning reported that the process to replace the cost consultant (formerly provided by Arcadis) had been concluded and Gardiner and Theobald had been chosen and would report directly to RBGE. The SCAPE procurement process had been used with three contractors having been considered. McLaughlin and Harvey had been selected to work with no fees to produce a feasibility report over a ten week period. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions there had been delays in undertaking this work, but the reports had now been received and they would be provided for the Board’s consideration at the meeting on Wednesday 2 December 2020. There was now the option to go with the current contractor, reconsider the other two potential contractors or go back to the market. Work on the Full Business Case was being undertaken. As there would be a gap between departure of Director of Programmes and Planning and the appointment of the new Edinburgh Biomes Programme Director work would be undertaken by PMP in the interim. The revised governance structures were noted as follow:   * The Board of Trustees. * An Oversight Committee (a Sub Committee of the Board of Trustees) which would have some decision making powers and would include three Trustees (it was suggested that the Chair, Dr Hamilton, and Prof Wall be appointed), the new Edinburgh Biomes Programme Director and the Regius Keeper. The Edinburgh Biomes Programme Director would be the lead for the project and act as the interface between ownership and delivery. A Job Description been produced, the position would be advertised shortly and Prof Wall had agreed to join the interview panel. Trustees asked that consideration be given to identifying a Deputy for the Regius Keeper for the project.   **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would identify a Deputy for his role in the project.  **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would circulate the Job Description for the Edinburgh Biomes Programme Director for information.   * The Regius Keeper was the Senior Responsible Officer and would hold formal monthly meetings. * The membership of the Edinburgh Biomes Programme Board would be reviewed.   Fundraising Campaign Update  The Director of Development presented a report. The Development Team would have a target to raise £20M from statutory and philanthropic sources for the Edinburgh Biomes project (and with fundraising for other RBGE projects there would be a combined target of £32.7M). There would be a seven year campaign to 2027 which would remain in the “silent phase” until 50% of the target was reached and a public campaign would then begin. This would be the largest fundraising campaign undertaken by RBGE and the Director of Development was confident that it would capture the imagination of the public. As access to lottery funding had been reduced and RBGE was no longer eligible for the Heritage Horizons Funding Programme (which was upwards of £10M) the Development Team would now need to bring in more “gifts” to reach the target in the timescales and greater fundraising resources would be required to deliver this. This proposal was being considered by the Leaders’ Group. Trustees were concerned about the cost profile of the programme and requested information on what funding would be needed, when, and what it would deliver. It was noted that clarification of the funding profile would be possible when the cash flow of the Scottish Government’s contribution in each financial year was received. The detail in the timelines would be scrutinised by the new Oversight Committee and an overview would be provided to Trustees at future meetings.  **ACTION:** The Director of Development would provide the Board with a summarised (separate) funding reports for Edinburgh Biomes and core fundraising. | **Regius**  **Keeper**  **Regius**  **Keeper**  **Director of Development** |
|  | **INFORMATION ITEMS:** |  |
| **12.0** | **Early Career Research Presentations**  Three students gave presentations. Aireen Phang had been a RBGE MSc student in 2019/2020 and worked on Taxonomy of the Madhuca of Singapore which included a comparison of online and in-person herbarium research. She undertook taxonomic analysis on the genus for the flora of Singapore during lockdown and reported that digital information had been an essential tool particularly during COVID-19. She now has a job in the Singapore Herbarium. Cornelia Simon-Nutbrown is a PhD student at RBGE, Heriot Watt and NatureScot and was working on Scottish maerl beds: biodiversity hotspots under threat from climate change. She was currently undertaking a three month placement with NatureScot and had received excellent publicity for her project. Emma Bush was an early career researcher who joined RBGE in May 2020 and was working on plants, climate change and building resilience. She had recently published research in ‘Science’ on the “Long term collapse in fruit availability threatens Central Africa forest megafauna”. The Chair thanked the three students for their wonderfully informative presentations and suggested that these types of presentations become a standing Agenda item.  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper to add presentations as a standing Agenda item. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
| **13.0** | **Update on Equalities**  The Regius Keeper reported that a Racial Justice Working Group was being established. The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper was taking over the Chair of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group pending the appointment of the new Director of Resources and Planning. The Group’s aim was to assist RBGE in becoming a more inclusive organisation. Work on making the website accessible was being undertaken. A volunteer was undertaking research on the Scottish Government equalities initiatives and cross referencing them to work in the public sector.  **ACTION:** The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper would circulate information on the Racial Justice Working Group. | **Director of Science and Deputy Keeper** |
| **14.0** | **Update on 350th Events**  The 350th Anniversary Programme Coordinator had prepared a report. The Director of Development reported that the programme planned for spring/summer 2020 had to be amended due to COVID-19. There was a wide variety of virtual talks (which provided an opportunity to reach a wider audience) and a time capsule was being prepared of 2020 memories for RBGE’s 400th anniversary in 2070. The Botanics Trading Company had introduced a new range of products and Trustees suggested consideration be given to VIP gifting of products. In 2021 there would be a small number of key activities which had been deferred from 2020 including the Chelsea Flower Show, the Rhododendron Exhibition, and a potential Scottish Government Reception at Edinburgh Castle. The anniversary expedition to Papua New Guinea was being reconsidered. |  |
| **15.0** | **Finance Report for the Period to 31.08.20**  The Head of Finance presented his report and highlighted that up to £2M of additional grant-in-aid funding had been provided by the Scottish Government to assist with COVID-19 related losses and a balanced budget position was now forecast. Trustees asked about insurance cover in relation to COVID-19. RBGE had put in a claim to Hiscocks, through the insurance brokers, who had initially refused to pay out. The insurance companies had been found to be in the wrong in not paying out in certain circumstances but they were now appealing the decision and the outcome was awaited. |  |
| **16.0** | **Update on the Botanics Trading Company**  The Regius Keeper reported that there were ongoing concerns in relation to income generation as previously reported but ticket sales for Christmas at the Botanics were encouraging. |  |
| **17.0** | **Estates, Property Maintenance and Capital Project Updates**  The Head of Estates had prepared a report and the Director of Horticulture and Learning highlighted that glasshouse glazing works were being undertaken and a Carbon Management Plan was being developed. |  |
| **18.0** | **Report of the Investment Committee**  The Chair of the Investment Committee presented his report and highlighted two formal decisions for the Board of Trustees’ consideration. The Treasury Management Policy and the Investment Policy and Performance had been reviewed by the Investment Committee and were recommended to the Bord of Trustees. The Board of Trustees were content to approve the recommendations of the Investment Committee. |  |
| **19.0** | **Report of the Audit Committee**  The Chair of the Audit Committee presented his report and advised that the Annual Report and Accounts would be brought to the next Board Meeting. |  |
|  | **CLOSING ITEMS:** |  |
| **20.0** | **Any Other Business**  There was nothing additional to report. |  |
| **21.0** | **Arrangements for the Next Meeting**  The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 5 December 2020. |  |

**Jennifer Martin**

PA to the Regius Keeper

1 October 2020

**ANNEX 1**

**Summary of Actions**

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Future of RBGE Education**  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would arrange for the Head of Education to provide an update to the Board of Trustees at the Board Meeting on Wednesday 3 March 2021. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS:** |  |
| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 25 June 2020**  **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. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
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| **7.0** | **Corporate Plan**  **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would consider further the ‘RBGE’s Response to the Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Emergency’ in response to the Board’s comments. | **Chair/**  **Regius Keeper** |
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