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| Board of Trustees’ Meeting | Time: 14:10 – 16:30  Date: 26/03/2025  Location: Patrick Geddes Room/Teams |

Present:

Dominic Fry, Chair of Trustees

Cara Aitchison, Trustee

Elise Cartmell, Trustee

Sarah Gurr, Trustee and Chair of the Science Advisory Committee (part attendance)

David Hamilton, Trustee

Ian Jardine, Trustee and Chair of the Audit Committee

Stella Morse, Trustee

Elizabeth Trevor, Trustee

In Attendance:

Emma Bush, Nature Based Solutions Scientist (Item 1.0)

Lauren Bradshaw, Director of Development and Communications

Ian Brown, Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk (Item 12.0 – 13.0)

Sarah Cathcart, Director of Learning and Engagement

Laurel Dunning, Longwood Fellow

Joanne Hannah, Director of Resources and Planning and Board Secretary

Will Hinchliffe, Deputy Curator Edinburgh (Item 1.0)

Pete Hollingsworth, Director of Science and Deputy Keeper

Jennifer Martin, PA to the Regius Keeper (Minutes)

Gill McCrum, Boardroom Apprentice

Simon Milne, Regius Keeper

| No. | Item | Action |
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|  | Private Meeting (Trustees Only) |  |
|  | Presentations and Discussion |  |
|  | RBGE’s Response to Extreme Weather Events  The Deputy Curator Edinburgh gave a presentation, reflected on the storm damage and outlined the steps that were being taking to ensure the RBGE’s short-medium and long-term response to global change and extreme weather events was well considered. The Nature Based Solutions Scientist gave a presentation highlighting the areas they had been focussing on. There were opportunities for Nature Based Solutions and ecosystem-based adaptation to be integrated into the estate and a new 5-year collaborative programme of research, innovation and knowledge exchange would assist with dealing with the most pressing urban problems. The Board of Trustees asked about plans for more extreme weather in the future and if a greater use of technology was being used to predict requirements. The Board of Trustees discussed if the Plants with Purpose project could be applied elsewhere, and the development of consultancy rates. The Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, thanked the Deputy Curator Edinburgh and the Nature Based Solutions Scientist for their updates. |  |
| 2.0 | Learning and Engagement Strategy  Cara Aitchison provided an introduction and advised that the Strategy was another driver for the diversification of the organisation and there was the potential for growth in fundraising through education. The Director of Learning and Engagement gave a presentation and provided some background to the Strategy, advised that this was the first of two presentations (the second would be provided at the next meeting following comments from the Board of Trustees), and asked the Board of Trustees to consider the big ideas presented and answer two questions; what is the change in the world we want to see? and what is it we want people to know, understand and act on? The Board of Trustees were asked to provide feedback on the presentation and the Strategy document would be completed and the cost of the potential investment required to achieve it would be calculated.  ACTION: The Director of Learning and Engagement would provide a copy of the presentation, and the Board of Trustees were asked to provide feedback. | Director of Learning and Engagement/  Board of Trustees |
| 3.0 | Longwood Gardens Fellows Programme – Update on Project  The Longwood Gardens Fellow had been working at the RBGE for two months and gave a presentation on her experience and her tree management project. It had been an inspirational time, and she had also learned about the science side of botanic gardens. The Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, thanked the Longwood Gardens Fellow for her presentation and wished her well for the future. |  |
|  | Opening Items |  |
| 4.0 | Apologies  No apologies had been received. |  |
| 5.0 | Trustees’ Conflicts of Interest  Cara Aitchison confirmed that she had been made an Honorary Professor at the University of Edinburgh. |  |
| 6.0 | Minutes of the Previous Meeting  The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 25/09/2024 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 email to the Board of Trustees and Executive Team. | PA to the Regius Keeper |
| 7.0  7.1  7.2  7.3 | Action Points and Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting  The Chair reported that most of the actions from the previous meeting had been completed and an update on progress had been provided. The actions still in progress were noted.  RBGE Risk Report - Autumn 2024  ACTION: The Regius Keeper would programme a Board of Trustees’ discussion to consider scenario planning around RBGE’s future budget challenges including maintenance of RBGE’s estate infrastructure, and planning for extreme risks at the Board Strategy in June 2025. In progress.  RBGE Key Results Report and Dashboard: Autumn 2024  ACTION: The Regius Keeper would programme an update to the Board of Trustees in 2025 on the future strategic direction for the Centre for Middle Eastern Plants, and an associated discussion on lessons learned for further development of science and knowledge-based consultancy. In progress*.*  Commercial Strategy 2025-30  ACTION: The PA to the Regius Keeper would add Commercial Strategy to the Agenda for the next meeting. With approval from the Chair this would be moved to a meeting later in 2025. In progress. | Regius Keeper  Regius Keeper  PA to the Regius Keeper |
|  | Activity and Performance Reports |  |
| 8.0 | Chair’s Update  As it was the Director of Horticulture & Visitor Experience’s last meeting the Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, thanked him for his excellent work over the years and wished him well in his new role at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The Chair welcomed the new Director of Development and Communications and the Boardroom Apprentice to their first meeting and the Longwood Fellow to the meeting as a development opportunity. The Chair had been involved in the Scottish Government Board of Trustees and Regius Keeper’s recruitment processes and in the recruitment of the Director of Development and Communications. Individual appraisal meetings had been held with the Board of Trustees. |  |
| 9.0 | Regius Keeper’s Update  The Regius Keeper was pleased with the performance since the last update, forecast outturns were mainly positive (except for a shortfall in some income areas which would be discussed later) and a balanced budget would be presented at the year end. The storm had a major physical and cost impact at all four gardens and assistance with the clear up was received from many groups and individuals. Prompt media exposure and the launch of a fundraising appeal had successfully generated additional income with teams working together to achieve a positive result. With the departure of the Director of Horticulture & Visitor Experience in April (and the Regius Keeper’s retirement at the end of the year) the future Executive Team structure had been considered. It was concluded that a delay in the recruitment of a successor would allow the next Regius Keeper an opportunity to build their Executive Team and the post would be gapped until then. The Director of Resources and Planning would have oversight of the Botanics Trading Company’s commercial operations, and some fixed term temporary support would be put in place to assist in addressing the senior leadership gap. The Curator Edinburgh already line managed the Curators at Benmore, Dawyck and Logan Botanic Gardens and was now supported by a new position of Deputy Curator. The Director of Learning and Engagement would take over the line management of Horticulture and the Regius Keeper would provide a strategic overview of the area. The Board of Trustees asked if there were any work that would have to be delayed due to capacity issues following the decision to gap the post and were advised that as many of the initiatives introduced were already managed by different teams that would not be an issue. The Regius Keeper’s current priorities included the maintenance of the support of current and new donors, supporting the Director of Resources and Planning and her Team to drive commercial activities (Stella Morse was thanked for her assistance with the development of the next Commercial Strategy), and work on the next phase of Edinburgh Biomes. Key collaborators would be reassured on the transition to a new Regius Keeper. |  |
| 10.0  10.1  10.2 | RBGE Key Results Dashboard  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the information for Spring 2025. The Board of Trustees asked about the fundraising pledges and were advised that it was usual practice for most to be honoured and noted that the extensive cultivation of donor relationships and the success rate with Trusts and Foundation on funding for the Edinburgh Biomes programme had impacted positively on the targets. The Board of Trustees asked if they could receive information in the RBGE Key Results Dashboard on the performance of the Botanics Trading Company so they could observe if there were any issues developing. The Board of Trustees asked for information on Members as the recruitment remained challenging although it was noted that income had increased. The Board of Trustees asked that the information across all RBGE reports be aligned.  ACTION: The Director of Resources and Planning would consider including information on the Botanics Trading Company to inform the Board of Trustees on its performance.  ACTION: The Director of Development and Communications would consider including data on existing membership and retention information in future reports. | Director of Resources and Planning  Director of Development and Communications |
| 11.0  11.1  11.2  11.3  11.4  11.5 | Directors’ Updates  Director of Horticulture & Visitor Experience  The recently completed Living Collections Policy (internal document) and Our Vision for the Living Collection (external document) were distributed for information. The Director of Horticulture & Visitor Experience had made horticulture more visible at Board level and a succession plan had been put in place. It was noted that new commercial initiatives were in the pipeline and blue/green infrastructure works were going well with matched funding and buy in which had provided RBGE with a high profile in this area.  Director of Resources and Planning  A review of the Botanics Trading Company performance would be undertaken to consider future priorities and build on the current opportunities. A new catering offer had been introduced in the John Hope Gateway and a new events space and offer would be launched in May 2025. Work continued on the Commercial Strategy and the new Regius Keeper appointment was likely to have a more commercial focus. A consultancy company had been appointed to consider an Integrated Income Strategy, and the Board of Trustees would receive a presentation at their next meeting. The Digital Transformation Programme was key to enable success and implementation work would continue in the next financial year to provide improved technology solutions for several areas across RBGE, including income generation functions  Director of Development and Communications  There were opportunities to develop income streams and build marketing and communications with both UK and international impact. The Storm Damage Appeal had generated over £225k and significant grant income had been received recently, and a healthy pipeline of fundraising projects was being developed.  Director of Learning and Engagement  A new Head of Engagement had been recruited. There had been success at Lantra Scotland’s Awards for Land-based and Aquaculture Skills for James Douglass (Lecturer) who had received the Higher Education Award BSc, Charlotte Masson (Horticulture with Plantsmanship Student) who had received the Higher Education Award HNC and Patricia Berakova (Horticulture Apprentice) who had been runner up in the Horticulture Learner of the Year. There would be recruitment of an Engagement Team to plan events and activities between the summer and the public opening of the restored Edinburgh Biomes Victorian Palm Houses.  Director of Science and Deputy Keeper  The Nature Restoration Fund team were currently undertaking extensive planting of native trees, and the Board of Trustees would be welcome to assist in future planting opportunities. Work was underway on the establishment of a UK/China botanic garden summit in the autumn, and it would be the 25th anniversary of the British Consulate in China. For information there might be an opportunity to increase impact and influence funding calls at a European Parliament event on the biodiversity genomics programme. |  |
|  | Finance and Risk Items |  |
| 12.0 | Finance Report  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk presented his report and advised on the key highlights in relation to core unrestricted funding, Botanics Trading Company contribution via gift aid and capital project approvals. The Board of Trustees discussed the Scottish Government’s position on no compulsory redundancies. RBGE had no current plans to make any compulsory redundancies. |  |
| 13.0 | Budget Planning for 2025/2026  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk presented the proposed revenue Budget for 2025/26 and highlighted that there was a £100k deficit shown which was in line with the position of previous years. However, the Scottish Government had advised that the RBGE’s actual Grant-in-Aid allocation would be £130k less than they had previously suggested and as a result the Pay Policy might need to be reconsidered. The Board of Trustees asked about the reasoning for showing a deficit in next year’s budget and were advised that the additional Grant-in-Aid provision for 2025/2026 would be used to cover the Pay Policy and increased National Insurance contributions and the RBGE would be gapping the post of Director of Horticulture & Visitor Experience to allow the new Regius Keeper some time to make a decision on future requirements. Staff would still be required to make in year savings to bring in a balanced budget at the year end. The Board of Trustees noted the drop in gift aid from the Botanics Trading Company to RBGE and asked about potential income generating activities. Visitor numbers to Benmore, Dawyck and Logan Botanic Gardens had reduced post Covid bounce but features were being developed to encourage an increased footfall. The Board of Trustees asked if Benmore, Dawyck and Logan Botanic Gardens could become centres of expertise for projects like Nature Based Solutions. Income generating opportunities were being considered for the use of the Victorian Palm Houses when the renovation works were completed and would include community group engagement, Patrons, private tours and future activities when it opened to the public. It was noted that if the buildings could be opened earlier than scheduled that would assist with income generation. The Board of Trustees would like to see the key enablers in place to provide self-help (eg the Digital Transformation Programme). The Board of Trustees approved the Budget for 2025/2026. |  |
| 14.0 | Report of the Audit Committee  The Chair of the Audit Committee had presented a report of the meeting held 12/03/2025. A good Internal Audit Report on Budgetary Control and Financial Sustainability had been received and it was noted that when work on financial planning was available the Board of Trustees should review what information they required in relation to budget forecasts. The Board of Trustees noted the Report. |  |
| 15.0 | RBGE Risk Review  The Director of Resources and Planning advised that the high priority risks were being targeted through capital investment in the next financial year when it was hoped to reduce the risk scores. Key challenges included infrastructure and resilience (eg financial and commercial). Plant health risks and issues would remain an ongoing issue/concern. It was noted that the Risk Review for Spring 2025 had been considered previously by the Audit Committee. |  |
|  | Health and Safety |  |
| 16.0 | Quarterly Report  The Director of Resources and Planning advised that, as requested, this was the first version of a Dashboard Report to be presented. A procurement exercise had been run and PHSS had been appointed to undertake external health and safety audits, the new health and safety software system had been launched (in future trend data would be available) and policies would be reviewed. In the next financial year staff health and wellbeing data would be reported and any trends identified. The Board of Trustees encouraged consideration of increasing hazard reporting from visitors, staff and contractors as a prevention mechanism for serious accidents. David Hamilton was thanked for being the Board of Trustees’ representative in this area.  ACTION: The Director of Resources and Planning would consider increasing hazard reporting. | Director of Resources and Planning |
|  | Information |  |
| 17.0 | Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee – Key Information  The Regius Keeper advised that the Victorian Palm Houses would be handed back to the RBGE in early July 2025 and confirmation of Scottish Government funding for 2026/2027 was being pursued with vigour to allow the contract to be released for the next stage which was the building of an Energy Centre. A Business Case for the remainer of the project was with the Scottish Government for consideration. For information the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee (who had delegated authority from the Board of Trustees) had approved an additional £1.73M spend for the Victorian Palm Houses ironworks. |  |
| 18.0 | Report of the Science Advisory Committee  The Chair of the Science Advisory Committee provided an update on the meeting held on the morning of 26/03/2025 and highlighted the positives and the progress made by the Science team, ably led by the Director of Science and Deputy Keeper. The progress report was rich in content and a Science Day meeting led to Section Heads compiling notable successes in each of their respective areas. Whilst income this year had not reached its target, income over the past three years had exceeded £2M per annum, on average. A presentation was received from the Nature Based Solutions Scientist Emma Bush and PhD student Isla Kendall who talked about the need for, and impact of, rain gardens in urban landscapes, that was green infrastructure to combat extreme urban weather events. The Science Advisory Committee made useful suggestions about how this project could be put more in the public domain by publicising it more widely. Thomas Meagher talked about his reflections on the recent Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings and the need for the presence of RBGE at future meetings (perhaps by drawing on the enthusiasm of RBGE staff to compere a session at the next Conference of the Parties). The Deputy Director of Science (Research) Alex Davey addressed the need for some sort of RBGE policy statement with regards to scientific integrity, and a useful discussion ensued about how to affect this by drawing on other’s policies. It was a very useful meeting, with good engagement from all Committee members and a great report from RBGE. The Board of Trustees asked about the grant successes and if there were any concerns in relation to capacity or expertise. The last two years had been the most successful on record and a training programme on grant writing had been introduced for staff. |  |
|  | Closing |  |
| 19.0 | Any Other Business  There was nothing additional to report. |  |
| 20.0 | Date of Next Meeting  The next meeting would be held on Thursday 19/06/2025. |  |

Annex A: Summary of Outstanding Actions

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