**Minutes of the 169th Meeting of the**

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

**1400 on Wednesday 27 September 2023**

**Hybrid (Professors’ Room, 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 11.0-12.0)Kari Coghill Director of Innovation Projects

Rebecca Drew NRF Scottish Native Plants Horticulturist (Presentation)

Aline Finger Conservation Geneticist (Presentation)

Simon Fuller Deputy Director – Rural & Environmental Science and

Analytical Services (Scottish Government)

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 13.0)

Dave Signorini Interim Director for Environment and Forestry (Scottish Government)

**Apologies:** Raoul Curtis-Machin Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Private Meeting**  The Trustees held a private meeting. |  |
|  | **Presentation**  Aline Finger (Conservation Geneticist) and Rebecca Drew (NRF Scottish Native Plants Horticulturist) gave a presentation on the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund (a competitive fund, which specifically encouraged applicants with projects that restored wildlife and habitats on land and sea and addressed the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change). The project with which RBGE was involved was Scottish Plant Recovery (a three-year project with a ten-year maintenance phase working in collaborations and partnerships) which had employed three new horticulturists and also involved eight existing members of Staff. The main aims 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 innovative aspects of the project were highlighted. The Board of Trustees asked about the resilience of species and testing - there was increased genetic diversity of plants cultivated in the Nursery and plantings in a wide variety of locations to maximise the opportunity for regeneration. In relation to afforestation and the management of the landscape the importance of planting a varied collection of trees (as opposed to the monocultures of rapid rotation forestry sites) would be communicated. The Board of Trustees asked about RBGE’s communication and engagement with audiences. Visitors were invited to the Nursery to find out about the work being undertaken, RBGE was in communication with other nature organisations and exchanging information, presentations were given, there was activity on social media and there would be more engagement with local communities during the planting and monitoring phase of the project. In relation to conservation horticulture, RBGE was leading on engagement in the UK. It was noted that the long-term establishment of self-sustaining populations would take longer than the three years of the project and work would be ongoing. |  |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS** |  |
| **1.0** | **Apologies**  Apologies were received from the Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience. |  |
| **2.0** | **Trustees’ Conflicts of Interest**  No conflicts of interest related to the meeting were declared (but it was noted that Sarah Gurr had been appointed to the Science and Medicine Committee of the Wolfson Trust and Liz Trevor was a non-Executive Director of James Hutton Ltd). |  |
| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 29 June 2023**  The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 29 June 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** |
| **4.0** | **Matters Arising**  The Chair reported that the actions from the previous meeting had been completed except the following where an update on progress had been provided: |  |
| 4.1 | Allocation of Board Members to Committees  **ACTION:** The Chair would confirm which Trustee would take on the role of a member of the Remuneration Committee. Action ongoing. | **Chair** |
| 4.2 | Investment Committee - Report of the Meeting held Tuesday 6 June 2023  A meeting was held with the Investment Committee and the Investment Managers to agree the best method for selling the investment. In the future, updates on the use of the investment would be provided to the Audit Committee. |  |
| 4.3 | People Strategy  Discussions were on-going with the Director of Resources and Planning and the Head of People and Organisational Development around RBGE's future workforce as part of delivery of the aims and activities of the new People Strategy. |  |
| 4.4 | Centre for Middle Eastern Plants (CMEP)  The Board of Trustees asked if they should consider the CMEP resourcing model in the future. They were advised that there was currently a review being undertaken and there had been investment in new roles. Consideration would be given to how CMEP could be more impactful (including business development, resourcing and ethics) and an update provided.  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would consider arranging a presentation on the CMEP Business model at a future meeting. | **Director of Resources and Planning** |
| **5.0** | **Chair’s Update**  The Chair reported that he participated in regular Edinburgh Biomes meetings, had attended the Saving the Palm Houses event (and engaged with potential supporters) and been involved in Finance discussions with Environment and Forestry Directorate (ENFOR) Team at the Scottish Government where further collaboration was being considered. |  |
| **6.0**  6.1 | **Regius Keeper**  Update  The Regius Keeper gave an overview and advised: |  |
|  | * Excellent progress was being achieved with the delivery of our objectives this year and there were no significant “red flags” appearing (other than the ongoing challenges of Edinburgh Biomes, and potential budget issues in meeting the Scottish Government pay policy). * There had been no significant health and safety incidents or issues since the previous meeting. Investigations had revealed no reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete present in the Edinburgh, Dawyck or Logan Gardens, and the workshops at Benmore were being checked for final sign off. * The current focus was on navigating a course for Edinburgh Biomes through the difficult challenges of rising costs and the complexities of the Scottish Government budget mechanism, and leading and managing the Staff through programme changes. The Head of Edinburgh Biomes was commended for her perseverance and the high quality of her work. RBGE was continuing to work constructively with Environment and Forestry Directorate (ENFOR) on the plan for delivering the project beyond the current five-year funding round and work was progressing very well with the renovation of the Palm Houses. * RBGE was on track to meet the approved budget at the end of the financial year, but it was noted that this year’s pay settlement had yet to be agreed. Should RBGE be required to follow the Scottish Government pay strategy, without receiving additional Grant-in-Aid, there would be a large deficit) and discussions to resolve the matter were ongoing. * In relation to the Scottish Government’s Public Sector Reform (which aimed to achieve fiscal sustainability and effective delivery of public services) the RBGE’s focus was on the delivery of Ministerial priorities, making further efficiencies and generating more income. Work was ongoing on a variety of submissions and updates to the Scottish Government on the Public Service Reform. It was noted that RBGE had achieved ongoing programmes of efficiencies and income generation over the past ten years.      * It was pleasing to see the new intake of enthusiastic undergraduate and MSc students. High quality PhDs had started, there had been recruitment of apprentices, excellent research papers were being published, successful supporters’ events had been held, there were high profile international collaborations and impactful and innovative conservation work underway. |  |
| 6.2 | Directors’ Highlights |  |
| 6.2.1 | *Science*  The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper gave an update on four areas:   * Data production – The Darwin Tree of Life project had reached a 1000th milestone and, working in collaboration, had collected, sequenced and released to public databases 1000 reference-quality genomes. The Herbarium digitisation programme was on track to reach one million specimens by next year (a third of the Collection). * Funding – A grant had been received from the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) on lichens in montane systems. Sixteen PhD students had started which brought financial, scientific and research benefits. It was noted that the UK Government had reached a deal with the European Union to be associated with Horizon Europe and RBGE participated in consortium building for future applications. * Impact work – A workshop had been held in London on the deforestation impact of rubber and how to translate it into practice and an app had been developed to map where rubber was planted which would track that it had been sourced from sustainable areas. RBGE were working with NatureScot on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. * Future plans – Consideration was being given to the internal facilities required to support future projects. |  |
| 6.2.2 | *Development and Communications*  The Director of Development and Communications advised:   * Fundraising – This had been the most successful year to date, the campaign for the renovation of the Palm Houses was progressing well and an engagement event held which had brought in additional funding (this model would be replicated for other events). * Planning was underway for a public campaign for Edinburgh Biomes (which would provide an opportunity to engage with the wider public) and this would be launched in February 2024. * There was a new focus on development of fundraising activities in the USA with the launch of the American Friends of the Botanics Foundation and a lecture tour on the east coast of America to build support. * The Patron’s Programme had been relaunched and a very successful Annual Supporters Dinner held against the backdrop of the Fleur de Villes exhibition. * Communications and marketing were focussing on brand review, increasing international coverage and collaboration with key partners to amplify RBGE’s messaging and profile. There was growth in the social media channels. The Membership magazine had won the ‘Best Magazine Launch or Relaunch’ at the MEMCOM Excellence awards. |  |
| 6.2.3 | *Resources and Planning*  The Director of Resources and Planning advised:   * Succession planning - Following changes made in April 2023 the Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience would take over the leadership of the Botanics Trading Company (BTC) from 1 January 2024. A new Director post was in development to further strengthen delivery of the RBGE strategy. A talent pipeline to shape the future workforce and respond to future need was being considered. * Scottish Government Public Service Reform – Would ensure RBGE communicated their impact to the Scottish Government with projections over a 10-year period. * Impact – An Economic and Social Impact Assessment was being undertaken and would be concluded in March 2024. * There was a gap in finances for the Scottish Government’s proposed pay award and consideration was being given to a four-day working week. * RBGE had been successful in the application to be a host for the UK Government’s pilot Board Room Apprentice Programme in 2024. |  |
| 6.2.4 | *Director of Innovation Projects*  The Director of Innovation Projects had been working with the Botanics Trading Company and would be in a position to handover to the Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience at the end of the year. Work was underway on the tendering for the catering contract at the Edinburgh Garden. A business review was considering the existing income streams and looking at admissions (where there were opportunities to align pricing across the four Gardens and improve the gift aid uptake) and changes would be in place for the 2024 Visitor season. A review of Membership was underway with the new Head of Individual Giving appointed. Work had started on the Digital Transformation Project where existing processes had been mapped against systems with a roadmap and timeline now in place. A review of publishing would be undertaken. |  |
| 6.2.2 | *Horticulture and Visitor Experience*  The Regius Keeper advised that the Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience was representing the RBGE at the annual Botanic Gardens Conservation International Advisory Committee (BGCI) meeting in Missouri and there would be discussions on the new Strategy for Plant Conservation, the illegal trade in wild plants and the constraints in the sharing of plant material. In Scotland RBGE was participating on the development of a blue-green infrastructure project and the development of the long-term plans for the four Gardens (with a revision of the Plant Collections Policy to ensure the Living Collections met future needs). At Logan Botanic Garden a large quantity bark chippings had been spread to reduce the weeding, a new viewing platform was being installed at Dawyck Botanic Garden along with an expansion of the International Conifer Conservation Programme, at Benmore Botanic Garden the outcome of a grant application was awaited on investment into the Walled Garden and in Edinburgh renovation of the Queen Mother’s Memorial Garden had been completed. The sale of tickets for Christmas at the Botanics was progressing well. |  |
| **7.0** | **View from the Scottish Government - Overview and Public Bodies Reform Update**  The Interim Director for Environment and Forestry and the Deputy Director – Rural & Environmental Science and Analytical Services provided an update. The environment and climate were high profile issues with the Scottish Government and a major consultation was being undertaken in relation to their Biodiversity Strategy on statutory nature targets. A report had been published on the Future of National Parks and it was noted that there were difficult choices in the prioritisation of climate and biodiversity and funding. A new First Minister had been appointed in March 2023 and a Programme for Government with priorities published. RBGE were in the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (who was supported by the Minister for Energy and the Environment). The Public Bodies in the portfolio were seen as part of the broader Scottish Government family. Public Service Reform was a decade long programme and the Scottish Government had shared the financial circumstances and constraints with the Public Bodies and three areas had been identified (short term efficiency gains, longer term structural opportunities and what could be done in collaboration with others). The Scottish Government and RBGE relationship included transparency in the sharing of information. This was a difficult period in relation to public finances but RBGE was in a good place to support future challenges. The Board of Trustees suggested that collaborative working/shared services was not a new idea and although there might be some potential for savings it was noted that this initiative wouldn’t close the current funding gap and other ways of doing this would need to be considered. The Board of Trustees asked if it would it be helpful for the RBGE to publicly respond to the current consultation on nature related programmes and the Scottish Government would advise. |  |
|  | **DISCUSSION ITEMS** |  |
| **8.0** | **Self-Generated Income and Innovation Projects**  The Director of Innovation Projects gave a presentation and highlighted some of the results in income streams including a new ticketed event - Fleur De Villes (which had taken place from 15-24 September 2023) where it was suggested that approximately 80% of Visitors were new to the RBGE (a review of the event would be undertaken) and it had provided an opportunity to build relationships with sponsors. The Patrick Geddes Room in the John Hope Gateway had been renovated and was now an income generating venue. Information was being shared with other organisations on income generation. Innovation ideas for 2023/2024 had been presented at the March meeting and an update on progress provided. Following the consideration of innovation ideas from Staff successful behind the scenes glasshouse tours had been trialled over the summer and the results were being assessed. The Board of Trustees asked if there was enough support to assist with embedding the brand and philanthropy in the organisational culture. |  |
| **9.0**  9.1  9.2 | **RBGE Risk Report - Autumn 2023**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Risk Report and advised that the PESTEL analysis would be populated in the Risk Register in the future and thanked Elise Cartmell for sharing horizon scanning information, which was being progressed as part of RBGE’s risk framework. The Report had been commended by the Audit Committee (who had reviewed it in detail). The Board of Trustees noted that the Safeguarding Policy had been signed off by the Executive Team and Senior Leadership Team and asked if the Trustees should have oversight on the development or implementation on some types of policies, asked about the closure of the risk in relation to cyber security training which had been completed by 90% of Staff and at what point should a different approach be taken with risks that remained high over a period of time.  **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.  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would review the wording in relation to the cyber security training risk and consider the long-term high risks. | **Director of Resources and Planning**  **Director of Resources and Planning** |
| **10.0** | **Key Results Dashboard**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Key Results Dashboard for Autumn 2023 and the Key Results Report. Key highlights for the period had been noted in the paper. |  |
|  | **INFORMATION ITEMS** |  |
| **11.0** | **Finance Report to 31 August 2023**  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk advised that the main headlines were on the front page of the Report for the Board of Trustees’ information. |  |
| **12.0** | **Botanics Trading Company (BTC) Annual Report and Accounts and Audit Summary**  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk presented the Botanics Trading Company (BTC) Annual Report and Accounts and Audit Summary. It was noted that the Accounts had been signed by the Regius Keeper after the last Board of Trustees’ meeting following the August BTC Board meeting. |  |
| **13.0** | **Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee - Key Information**  The Regius Keeper advised that the Section 1Ai (Infrastructure) Contract was to be signed off by Friday 29 September 2023 and the Board of Trustees’ approval would be required due to the level of cost. The Board of Trustees agreed that they were content to take the advice and endorsement of the three Trustees who were on the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee in relation to this request. The Head of Edinburgh Biomes provided an update. The works to renovate the Victorian Palm Houses were progressing well and a change request in relation to the windows was being considered by the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee. Completion of the Palm Houses’ restoration was expected at the end of 2024. The next works would be in relation to Section 1A(i) infrastructure and the Decant Glasshouse (Section 2). Challenges included the cash flow (a review had been conducted for the current financial year) and the long-term programme costs (it was noted that the current costs were being reported back against the December 2020 business case budget). The Executive Team and the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee had conducted a scenario and timeline planning review and associated profile of required Scottish Government funding. The initial tranche of funding from Scottish Government was allocated in a five-year budget, but the next allocations would be single year with considerable ramifications for the efficient planning, contracting and budgeting of this long-term project. A refresh of the 2020 Business Case would be required to support subsequent Government funding.  **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would advise the Head of Edinburgh Biomes to complete the sign off of the Section 1Ai (Infrastructure) Contract. | **Regius Keeper** |
| **14.0** | **RBGE Brand Review**  The Director of Innovation Projects had provided a paper with the final version of the brand foundations which included a new Vision, brand narrative, Values and an amended Mission Statement for the Board of Trustees’ information. |  |
| **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.  **ACTION:** Cara Aitchison would share knowledge on Staff networks and policy development with the Director of Resources and Planning. | **Cara Aitchison** |
| **16.0**  16.1  16.2 | **Audit Committee**  Report of Audit Committee Meeting held Wednesday 13 September 2023  The Chair of the Audit Committee provided an overview of the meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2023 and highlighted that there had been a good level of assurance on the Payroll Audit. There was a concern that the implementation of some of the recommendations in relation to cyber security issues had slipped and it was suggested that an update on the Digital Strategy and roadmap might be of interest to the Board of Trustees.  Draft Annual Report by Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh Audit Committee for the Financial Year 2022/23  The Chair of the Audit Committee presented the Annual Report which informed the Board of Trustees of the work undertaken by the Audit Committee and provided assurance when approving the Annual Accounts. |  |
| **17.0** | **Investment Committee**  The Chair of the Investment Committee provided an update. The investment funds would be used in line with the bequest to fund plant-based projects and a plan was being developed. The risk on the investments had been reduced. Some elements of responsibility would move to the Audit Committee. A final meeting would be held in November and a report would be provided at the December Board of Trustees’ meeting. |  |
| **18.0** | **Report of the Science Advisory Committee Meeting held 26 September 2023**    The Chair of the Science Advisory Committee advised that they had met on Tuesday 26 September 2023 and had received a very encouraging report on the Centre for Middle Eastern Plants - an initiative that had gone from a deficit to profit. Four other areas of success were highlighted: botanical resources and plant inventories, conservation, sustainability and livelihoods and capacity development. The Deputy Director of Science (Collections and Herbarium Curator) had made an excellent start in this new post and provided an useful update on administration and strategic developments. The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper had reported on the successes of recent publications and impact and provided highlights, and was thanked for his achievements and the forthcoming publication of a paper in Nature. |  |
|  | **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 13 December 2023. |  |

**Jennifer Martin**

PA to the Regius Keeper

27 September 2023

**Annex A** Summary of Actions

**ANNEX A**

**SUMMARY OF ACTIONS**

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 29 June 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** |
| 4.1 | Allocation of Board Members to Committees  **ACTION:** The Chair would confirm which Trustee would take on the role of a member of the Remuneration Committee. | **Chair** |
| 4.4 | Centre for Middle Eastern Plants (CMEP)  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would consider arranging a presentation on the CMEP Business model at a future meeting. | **Director of Resources and Planning** |
| **9.0**  9.1  9.2 | **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.  **ACTION:** The Director of Resources and Planning would review the wording in relation to the cyber security training risk and consider the long-term high risks. | **Director of Resources and Planning**  **Director of Resources and Planning** |
| **13.0** | **Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee - Key Information**  **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would advise the Head of Edinburgh Biomes to complete the sign off of the Section 1Ai (Infrastructure) Contract. | **Regius Keeper** |
| **15.0** | **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Update**  **ACTION:** Cara Aitchison would share knowledge on Staff networks and policy development with the Director of Resources and Planning. | **Cara Aitchison** |