**Minutes of the 156th Meeting of the**

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

**on Thursday 25 June 2020 at 1445**

**via Zoom**

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

Mr Raoul Curtis-Machin Trustee

Prof Beverley Glover Trustee

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 Kari Coghill Director of Enterprise and Communication

Ms Judy Cromarty Head of Resources 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

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Private Meeting**  The Trustees held a Private Meeting prior to the Main Board meeting. |  |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS:** |  |
| **1.0** | **Apologies**  No apologies were received. |  |
| **2.0** | **Trustees’ Conflicts of Interest**  No conflicts of interest were reported. |  |
| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 4 March 2020**  The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4 March 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, the RBGE Website and circulate by e-mail to the Trustees. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **4.0**  4.1  4.2  4.3  4.4 | **Matters Arising**  Crib Sheet  **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would arrange for a “crib sheet” of information to be prepared for Trustees. Action ongoing.  **POST MEETING NOTE:** A revised Edinburgh Biomes Brief for the Cabinet Secretary was under preparation which would be circulated to Trustees in place of the “crib sheet|”.  Appointment of Chair of Audit Committee  The Chair reported that Dr Ian Jardine had been appointed as Chair of the Audit Committee and, on behalf of the Trustees, thanked Prof Ian Wall for his work as Interim Chair.  Appointment of RBGE Representative to the Botanics Foundation Board  The Head of Resources and Planning reported that the legal paperwork to appoint Mr Raoul Curtis-Machin to the Botanics Foundation Board would be processed before the next meeting which would be held in October 2020.  Recruitment of New Trustees  At the last meeting it had been agreed that the Chair would discuss a proposal to recruit three Trustees at the same time (but to defer their start dates to when they would be required) with the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government had agreed and would like process to start in July 2020 and be concluded by the end of 2020. The diversity of the Board would be considered.  **POST MEETING NOTE:** Scottish Government aimed to complete the Trustee recruitment process by March 2021, ahead of the 2021 Parliamentary Election. | **Regius**  **Keeper** |
| **5.0** | **Regius Keeper’s Update**  The Regius Keeper reported where there was a significant shortfall in capacity and expertise to take forward current and emerging priorities:   * Public affairs – to coordinate, advise and respond to governmental activities: raise RBGE’s profile and deliver public relations objectives; assist with raising RBGE’s profile, and provide strategic communications advice. It was noted that there was currently no dedicated public affairs capability in the organisation. * Edinburgh Biomes Project Sponsor – to provide the necessary internal capacity and expertise to lead the Project as it moved from development to implementation. This task was currently being undertaken by Head of Resources and Planning and the workload was becoming unsustainable. The proposal was that this would be funded by the Edinburgh Biomes and would be considered by the Edinburgh Biomes Programme Board at its next meeting. * Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) – to coordinate and provide expertise, delivery and continued development of EDI objectives, including the initiatives briefed to the Board concerning Racial Justice. The workload in this area was increasing significantly, and was currently undertaken on an ad-hoc basis. * Research Grants – to provide capacity and additional expertise to bring in additional research grants.   The Board noted and agreed the need to address the capability gaps, subject to the availability of funding. |  |
|  | **DECISION ITEMS:** |  |
| **6.0**  6.1  6.2  6.3  6.4 | **Confirm and Record Decisions from Pre-Meeting Discussion to Inform Development of the Revised Five-Year Strategic Plan**  The Trustees was invited to consider four papers to inform the production of a further, more impactful, draft of the Five-Year Strategic Plan, that reflected recent societal changes and current government policies and priorities.  Biodiversity Strategy  The Board expressed support for the strategy as outlined, commenting that it was broad in scope and covered all the principal issues. It was emphasised that the RBGE strategy needed to tie in with the Scottish Government’s Environmental Strategy, and at the same time remain true to the RBGE mission. It was felt that the “unique selling point (USP)” could be given more prominence, and that collaboration with other bodies should be given further emphasis. It was also suggested that reference to all of RBGE’s principal outcomes could be expanded. It was agreed that the Board would consider the next draft at its September 2020 meeting, with suggested Key Performance Indicators for discussion and development, before going to Scottish Government for endorsement.  Equalities  The Board welcomed the thoughtful and balanced introduction by Caroline Lehmann and gave its full support to the thrust and conclusions of the Paper. The Chair reaffirmed his commitment to furthering Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in RBGE as a priority. It was acknowledged that an understanding of life on earth could not be achieved without an understanding of human history and that environmental sustainability and social justice were inextricably linked. It was felt that there was a need to address equality and fairness across the board rather than focus on ethnicity as a single issue. The importance of listening and consultation was stressed as was the need to be attuned to the socio-economic agendas of the countries in which we work. It was felt that there was more to do in addressing diversity in natural science and horticulture through career opportunities and that we could also use our collections more effectively to this end. The Regius Keeper welcomed the Board’s support for the proposals, would implement the action as outlined in the Paper and keep the Board informed of progress through a standing agenda item at future Board meetings  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would add the topic equalities to future Board Agendas.  Resourcing  The Board noted and agreed the significant resource challenges facing RBGE, not only in the short term due to the impact of the COVID-19 emergency on income generation, but also in the medium and longer term should Grant-in Aid continue to fail to cover additional staff costs arising from the Government Pay Policy. It further agreed that it would be prudent to conduct an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of introducing entry charges for the Edinburgh garden, in line with the other three RBGE gardens. The Board also discussed and supported the case for gradual restructuring where and when opportunities were presented, so that RBGE staff structure and expertise were aligned with its strategic intent and resources. The Board also expressed its wish to implement Scottish Government 2020/21 Pay Policy, but recognised that it was impossible to do so without additional support to cover the significant deficit arising from the impact of the COVID-19 emergency on self-generated income.  Education  The Board reviewed and supported the overall development of the proposed RBGE education programme presented in the Paper in response to the changing strategic landscape and the COVID-19 emergency The need to determine RBGE’s position on distance learning in relation to short and longer term timescales was stressed. It was unclear if a significant increase in on-line learning was a “quick-fix” or the “new reality”, and suggested that a blended approach of face to face teaching and distance learning might best suit the needs of the students. The need to increase training and education opportunities for the disadvantaged was also stressed, in line with earlier discussions on EDI, and that this should include the international dimension. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **7.0** | **Botanics Trading Company (BTC) Letter of Support**  The Head of Finance reported that the letter confirmed that the Trustees would continue to support the Botanics Trading Company and was required annually. The Chair, on behalf of the Trustees, was content to sign the letter.  **ACTION:** The Head of Finance would obtain the Chair’s signature on the BTC Letter of Support to Chiene and Tait. | **Head of**  **Finance** |
| **8.0** | **Audit Committee Vacancy**  The Chair of the Audit Committee had proposed that a non RBGE employee/Trustee could be appointed to the Committee to provide an external view with appropriate expertise. The Trustees supported this proposal and the Audit Committee Terms of Reference would be amended.  **ACTION:** The Chair of the Audit Committee and the Head of Resources and Planning would consider the changes required to be made to the Terms of Reference to allow an external candidate to be appointed and consider the process for recruitment | **Chair of Audit Committee/**  **Head of Resources and Planning** |
|  | **DISCUSSION ITEMS:** |  |
| **9.0**  9.1  9.2  9.2.1  9.2.2  9.2.3  9.2.4  9.3 | **Edinburgh Biomes**  Programme Update  The Head of Resources and Planning reported that the external and internal teams had reviewed and updated the programme. The current programme of work included all components which were noted in the paper.  Addressing the Budget Challenge  As the programme budget was over the agreed cap of £70M, the Head of Resources and Planning presented a paper with value management options for potential savings for the Trustees’ consideration.  *Option to Reduce the Scope of Visitor Facilities*  The Trustees were concerned about the impact on visitor services, inclusion, and fundraising opportunities. It was noted that a strong visitor experience would be required for Development to prepare a case for support.  *Option to Delete/Reduce the Scope of the Education Building*  As the future ways of working and space requirements in relation to education were likely to change significantly, it was noted that this option presented flexibility in amending the scope with minimal operational impact. As the Education Centre was not physically integrated into other areas of the programme the option (and space) for an additional build could be retained in order to “future proof” the Programme.  *Option to Remove Glasshouse ‘0’*  The Trustees considered that the removal of Glasshouse ‘0’ it would be a strategic and operational retrograde step. Such a move would have significant negative impact on the future of RBGE, particularly in relation to its success as a visitor destination, on public engagement, profile and income generation.  *Reconsider the Budget Cap*  The Trustees did not feel it would be appropriate to adjust the budget cap. In relation to the above discussion, the Board was keen to learn more about the proposed Eden Project in Dundee. The Director of Communication and Learning would liaise with the Chair to consider this further.  **Decisions**  The Trustees agreed that it had no appetite to remove Glasshouse ‘0’ from the project, increase the budget cap for the Programme, or reduce the scope of essential visitor facilities, and agreed that given the likely changes in delivery of education programmes the option to delete/reduce the scope of the Education Centre should be considered, with a fresh look at how the Balfour Building was used to best effect, noting the requirement to extend the Herbarium, but asked that the impact on fundraising opportunities to be assessed. The Trustees thanked the Leadership Team and those associated with Edinburgh Biomes for their continuing and impressive work on the Programme.  **ACTION:** The Head of Resources and Planning would advise the Edinburgh Biomes Programme Board of the Trustees’ preferred option. | **Head of Resources and Planning** |
| **10.0** | **Risk Review**  The Head of Resources and Planning provided the Trustees with the recently updated position on the RBGE’s response to the risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Detailed risk reviews had been undertaken once a month since the Gardens had closed. The Board were content that the Risk Review was as thorough and realistic as it could be in these uncertain times. |  |
| **11.0** | **Award of RBGE Medal**  The Regius Keeper reported that following discussions at the last meeting he and Prof Beverley Glover and Prof Tom Meagher had considered the proposed names.  **ACTION:** The Regius Keeper would circulate the revised list of potential candidates for the Trustees’ consideration. | **Regius**  **Keeper** |
| **12.0**  12.1  12.2 | **Format for Future Board Meetings**  The Chair proposed that the Trustees should aim to meet in person once a year (when it was appropriate to do so) but to continue with a virtual or hybrid format for the other meetings. The Trustees agreed with this proposal (flexibility would be included when required).  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would arrange for future meetings to be one in person meeting and the rest in a virtual or hybrid format.  As the Trustees’ visit to Dawyck Botanic Garden had been cancelled (due to the Garden closure in response to COVID-19) it was proposed that a Trustees’ visit be arranged later in the year.  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would arrange a visit to Dawyck Botanic Garden for interested Trustees when appropriate.  **POST MEETING NOTE:**  Subsequent to the Meeting the Chair and Regius Keeper agreed that the December 2020 Board Meeting would be in person, subject to the COVID-19 situation, and would include an informal gathering post-meeting. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper**  **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
|  | **INFORMATION ITEMS:** |  |
| **13.0** | **Finance Report for the Period to 31.03.20**  The Head of Finance had provided the latest monthly financial information. There had been a small deficit for 2019/2020 (due to COVID-19) which would exceed the unrestricted reserves but the Auditors had no issues in relation to the RBGE being a going concern as Grant-in-Aid was received from the Scottish Government - the Scottish Government were content with the position. It was noted that there would be a delay in presenting the financial statements to the Trustees as a result of the COVID-19 situation impacting on the auditor’s timetable, and the accounts would be brought to the December meeting (they were normally considered at the October meeting). The Trustees noted that, as a result, there would not be as much time to consider the financial report and accounts. The Board noted the ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government regarding the projected budget deficit for 2020/21 and agreed that they would await the outcome of these before further considering options for making appropriate savings, further noting that significant savings could only be achieved through reducing staff numbers with attendant loss in output, and that this, in turn, would require Government agreement and funding for compulsory redundancies. |  |
| **14.0** | **Fundraising Update**  The Director of Development had prepared a paper. There had been a negative impact on the RBGE’s income generation activities (including the postponement of the 350th fundraising activities) as a result of the COVID-19 situation. There were challenges but also opportunities relating to biodiversity conservation and research, health and wellbeing and education. The competition for development funding was likely to increase but the RBGE’s long standing relationships with some funders would be helpful. The Board noted that the increased investment in fundraising was starting to produce very encouraging results. |  |
| **15.0** | **Report of the Audit Committee**  The Chair of the Audit Committee had presented a paper and reported that the Auditors were content with the position. For information there would be a new Auditor General appointed later this year. |  |
| **16.0** | **Report of the Science Advisory Committee**  The Chair of the Science Advisory Committee reported that a meeting had been held on Wednesday 17 June 2020 to consider an RBGE update on COVID-19, racial injustice and the draft Biodiversity Strategy. Discussions on post graduate education post COVID-19 had been postponed to the next meeting when the situation would be clearer. |  |
| **17.0**  17.1  17.2 | **Report of the Arts Advisory Group**  The Chair of the Arts Advisory Group reported that a final meeting had been held on Tuesday 9 June 2020 (and the minutes could be circulated if requested). The Arts Manifesto was attracting much interest and support and had led to the development of a reinvigorated arts programme that was now significantly better aligned to the RBGE Mission. The Group had celebrated the success of funding of £150k from the Outset Transformation Award in collaboration with the Serpentine Gallery in London. Inverleith House would now be referred to as ‘Climate House’ during the project and this would raise the profile of the arts agenda and programme. Changes would be made to allow visitors to access the building safely when it reopened. Creative Scotland were supportive of work on the arts programme. The Arts Advisory Group had agreed that it had fulfilled its remit and would now be disbanded. Ms Emma Nicolson (Head of Creative Programmes) would now be involved in the development of the Scottish Government’s Culture Strategy. The Chair, on behalf of the Trustees, thanked the Arts Advisory Group for their work in raising the profile and integrating the arts programme into the Garden’s Mission.  **ACTION:** The Chair of the Arts Advisory Group would pass on the Trustees’ thanks to the Group for their work.  **ACTION:** The Director of Enterprise and Communication would circulate a link to a podcast for the Trustees information. | **Chair of the Arts Advisory Group**  **Director of Enterprise and Communication** |
| **18.0** | **Annual Health and Safety Report**  The Regius Keeper presented the Annual Health and Safety Report 2019/20202. Trustees asked about the welfare of staff and noted that there was a variety of different types of support available and planning for Operation Open Office was continuing well. |  |
| **19.0** | **Estates, Property Maintenance and Capital Project Updates**  The Director of Horticulture and Learning reported that this report was provided for information to update the Trustees on maintenance issues, priorities and project updates. The main contractor had worked with the RBGE throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and statutory compliance work had continued to be undertaken |  |
| **20.0** | **Proposed Dates for 2021 Meetings**  The following dates were agreed:   * Wednesday 3 March 2021 (virtual/hybrid) * Wednesday 30 June 2021/Thursday 1 July 2021 (on site meeting Edinburgh or Regional Garden to be confirmed) * Wednesday 29 September 2021 (virtual/hybrid) * Wednesday 1 December 2021 (virtual/hybrid)   **ACTION:** All to note the dates of the 2021 meetings. | **ALL** |
|  | **CLOSING ITEMS:** |  |
| **19.0**  19.1  19.2 | **Any Other Business**  Regional Gardens  Trustees asked how the Regional Gardens were managing during the closure. A skeleton staff had carried out essential care and maintenance and all the Gardens would reopen from Monday 29 July 2020.  Thanks  The Regius Keeper thanked the Trustees for their support and clear direction during these challenging times. The Chair, on behalf of the Trustees, thanked the Leadership Team and the Staff for their considerable efforts during the ongoing crisis. It had been a learning process for all involved with new ways of working identified, many challenges addressed with a high degree of professionalism, and speedy and sound decision-making being achieved. |  |
| **20.0** | **Arrangements for the Next Meeting**  The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 30 September 2020. |  |

**Jennifer Martin**

PA to the Regius Keeper

26 June 2020

**ANNEX 1**

**Summary of Actions**

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS:** |  |
| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 4 March 2020**  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would place a copy of the approved Minutes in the Library, on the General Drive, the RBGE Website and circulate by e-mail to the Trustees. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
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| **20.0** | **Proposed Dates for 2021 Meetings**  **ACTION:** All to note the dates of the 2021 meetings. | **ALL** |