

Approved Minute

Inaugural Meeting of Galloway & Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership

Held Wednesday 9th October 2013
Galloway Arms Hotel, Newton Stewart

Present: Roger Crofts (Chair), , Chris Miles, Joseph Murphy, Andrew Bielinski, Keith Muir, Alison Blair, Joan Mitchell, Alison Steel, Peter Mason, Mary-Ann Smyth, Cllr John McDowall

In Attendance: Alan Edgar, Simon Fieldhouse, Pip Tabor, Ed Forrest, John Esslemont

Apologies: J Mark Gibson, Howard Wilkinson, Maggie Gordon, Iain Cruickshank, Gillian Anot, Ewan Green, Christine Cuthbertson, Chris Savage, Wilma Finlay, Chris Rollie, Gordon Mann, Teresa Dougall, Cllr Robert McDill, Cllr Graham Nicol, John Smith

ITEM 1 – welcome and apologies for absence.

Roger Crofts welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the new Biosphere Partnership. Apologies for absence were noted.

ITEM 2 – Report On SCIO Status

John Esslemont presented a paper advising that the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) approved the Partnership's application for Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) on 15th July 2013. John outlined the role of the Trustees and the Partnership Board, the charitable purposes and legal obligations. The next steps required by the constitution include appointment of a chairperson and confirmation of appointment of trustees.

John expressed his thanks to Paula Duncan at OSCR for her assistance in completing the successful application for SCIO status.

Whereas the constitution requires the Board to meet a minimum of twice per year, it was agreed, given that the SCIO status was not approved until halfway through 2013, that only one meeting is necessary this year.

ITEM 3 – Appointment of members, chairperson and trustees

Roger Crofts stepped down as chair of the meeting. Alan Edgar proposed that all members of the previous Biosphere Partnership be deemed to be members of the new Partnership Board and SCIO. This was unanimously agreed by all present. Alan Edgar requested that all members should confirm their appointment by completing the membership application form that had been circulated with the agenda and return to him at East Ayrshire Council, Planning & Economic Development, Johnnie Walker Bond, 15 Strand Street, Kilmarnock KA1 1HU (or email alan.edgar@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)

Following discussion it was unanimously agreed to ratify the constitution as presented in Item 2.

Alan Edgar advised the meeting that Roger had volunteered to continue as chair for a period of one year. Alison Steel proposed that Roger be appointed as Chairperson for a period of one year and the motion was seconded by Joan Mitchell. There were no amendments and the motion was carried unanimously.

Roger Crofts resumed chairmanship of the meeting. Roger advised the meeting that he is keen that another member of the board volunteers to chair the Partnership following the end of his tenure in 2014 and requested that all members should give consideration to this in the run up to the AGM.

It was noted that the Trustees who signed the charity declaration forms that accompanied the SCIO application are deemed to be appointed as Trustees. It was moved by Chris Miles and seconded by Joseph Murphy that the appointments be ratified. There were no amendments and the motion was carried unanimously. The current Trustees therefore are J Mark Gibson, Peter Mason, Chris Miles, Roger Crofts and Chris Savage. The Trustees are required to appoint a chair and a secretary from amongst themselves. The chair of the Trustees cannot also be the chair of the Partnership Board.

It was discussed that the constitution requires one Trustee to have relevant financial expertise. Simon Fieldhouse advised that Dumfries and Galloway Council will investigate appointment of one of the Council's finance officers to the Board of Trustees.

ITEM 4 – Review of Progress and Priorities For Future Work

Roger Crofts presented a paper reviewing the development of the Biosphere up to the present time from the early work to obtain the UNESCO designation and the development of the Partnership.

The meeting recorded their gratitude to Nigel Wallace of the former Ayrshire Joint Planning Unit for his skill, hard work and dedication in driving forward the designation of the Biosphere and the development of the Partnership.

Roger encouraged all members to promote the Biosphere at every opportunity, particularly at the grass roots level, and to ensure that information is accessible to all. Roger noted that there are major challenges ahead relating to the large scale land use changes associated with on-shore wind energy and surface coal mining. There is a need to rekindle the debate on land use management. The earlier work done to bring land managers, public sector agencies and communities together to debate how land should be used and managed at the level of the river catchment was noted. More recently, a project to map ecosystem services within the Biosphere has been completed and this will provide a basis upon which to consider how ecosystem services can be managed.

Roger Crofts noted that there have been requests for the Biosphere Partnership to state a position on individual onshore wind farm planning applications and the development of wind energy more generally. Following a discussion, it was unanimously agreed that the Partnership should retain a neutral stance and its role should be to support informed public debate. In support of this position the following factors were discussed and agreed:-

- The Biosphere Partnership has no statutory planning powers and decision making is vested in the Planning Authorities and the Energy Consents Unit;
- Renewable energy development has a role to play in the sustainable development of the area and the Partnership supports appropriate development which is fully sustainable
- Many of the Biosphere partner organisations have a corporate view of onshore windfarms and would be compromised if the Partnership were to adopt a contrary view.

Following a discussion on priorities for future work the following items were identified:-

1/ Thematic Groups. It will be a priority to reinvigorate the thematic groups once the Biosphere Officers (see ITEM 5) are in post.

2/ Sense of Place. Requires to be relaunched and businesses and local organisations encouraged to develop and utilise the resource.

3/ Promotion of the Partnership. The officers should continue the work done by the BOB Officers to promote the Biosphere to local people and organisations.

4/ Use of Social Media. The website is an important resource, however, we should explore the use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to get the Partnership's message out, particularly to younger generations.

5/ Focus on Ecosystem Services. The Ecosystem Services Study is nearly completed and a suite of maps will be available demonstrating the different services provided by the land in different locations. The Partnership is at the forefront of this new approach to informing debates about management of land use. This method has the benefit of highlighting the trade-offs that are made in choosing between alternative uses of land. The Biosphere Partnership has been identified as one of a small number of projects which demonstrate the practicable application of the ecosystem services approach and it is essential therefore that this aspect of the Partnership's work is driven forward by the Thematic Groups.

6/ Youth Conference. East Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway Councils have agreed a concordat on Education using the Biosphere as a tool for studying sustainability. A Youth Conference is planned in July 2014 which will examine employment opportunities linked to sustainable management of the natural environment. Links between young people and the Biosphere could be further developed by linking up with the Scottish Government's Rural Youth Parliament. This type of activity will help take forward the educational priorities of the Partnership.

7/ Wild Land Map 2013. The Scottish Government's Main Issues Report for the third National Planning Framework and Scottish Planning Policy are currently at consultation stage. The Biosphere Partnership has the opportunity to comment on this significant national planning designation. The Southern Uplands do not feature very highly. This is primarily due to the extensive commercial forests which do not meet the criteria for Wild Land. Only a small area around the Merrick Kells is identified. A response putting forward the Partnership's view that more recognition needs to be given to the wild character of parts of the Biosphere will be sent in.

8/ Related to the Wild Land Map, the meeting discussed “Lie of The Land” outdoor learning project which engages school pupils in landscape matters through production of a film about their local landscapes. There is an opportunity to learn from this and apply it within the Biosphere.

ITEM 5 - Developing The Biosphere – Next Steps Proposal 2013 to 2014

Simon Fieldhouse presented a paper outlining a proposal to employ three full time staff to undertake work on behalf of the Biosphere Partnership for a three year period. Funding for the posts is to be provided by Scottish Natural Heritage, Dumfries & Galloway Council, South Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, Forestry Commission Scotland and Southern Uplands Partnership.

This is seen as an interim measure to ensure that the momentum that has been built up is not lost whilst more permanent staffing and funding arrangements are put in place.

The posts will be overseen by the funding partners, with Southern Uplands Partnership providing the day to day management and personnel functions. As part of their contribution, Forestry Commission Scotland has offered office accommodation at Kirroughtree, near Newton Stewart.

The staff will work to ensure that the three core Biosphere objectives of Conservation, Sustainable Development and Learning & Research are jointly taken forward.

Development Officer – will give overall direction to the team and will concentrate on ensuring that the Biosphere and associated projects such as Dark Skies Park and recreation and tourism, develop visibility within the social and economic sectors. Engagement with businesses and communities will be a core duty for the post-holder.

Natural Heritage Officer - will involve community groups in understanding, managing and recording biodiversity. The development of a Biosphere wide group of local recorders, identifying requirements for new survey work and engagement with land managers will be among the core duties for the post-holder., alongside working with key stakeholders, such as farmers and landowners.

Community Officer - will concentrate on developing educational opportunities. The post-holder will work with schools, community groups and businesses to develop new opportunities that can use the UNESCO Biosphere status. Developing and deploying the Sense of Place Toolkit will be a key role for the post-holder.

A range of defined outcomes are being developed to provide a framework for activities over the next three years to allow the continued development of the Biosphere locally whilst enabling the SCIO to secure longer term funding.

The Chairman welcomed the proposed funding package and thanked Scottish Natural Heritage, the three Local Authorities and Forestry Commission Scotland for their support. The Board expressed support for Southern Uplands Partnerships role, which provides a measure of independence from any one particular organisation.

Following discussion it was agreed that:-

- an Action Plan for the work of the officers should be agreed by the Board
- the staff should be in post for February 2014.

- a Partnership Agreement needs to be agreed and signed by all the contributors.
- The designation needs to be promoted through gateway signage, information made available through Tourist Information Centres and use of the portable Biosphere exhibition pack.
- The promotion, protection and enhancement of landscape should come within the remit of the natural heritage officer post.

ITEM 6 – Research Priorities Presentation

Joseph Murphy presented a draft paper on research priorities for the Biosphere. He emphasised that the paper is a working draft that will continually be added to and updated. All Board members are encouraged to submit ideas for research and to identify opportunities on an ongoing basis. Following discussion it was agreed:-

- There needs to be opportunities for the research ideas of members of the public to be identified and taken forward;
- There should be a one-stop-shop to record all research taking place within the Biosphere. Information on projects could be in-gathered to a central website or sign-posting provided to external sites;
- The opportunities that exist for research within the Biosphere should be promoted to other research organisations and we should work jointly with other Biospheres in the EU to access EU research funding;

The discussion on research led to a discussion around the management of information within the Partnership and it was agreed that a Public Relations strategy is necessary to ensure the Partnership has a coherent identity and a consistent means of communicating information both internally within the membership and externally to the public, media and other organisations.

ITEM 7 – Awards for All Funding Application

Alan Edgar presented a paper on progress with the Awards for All funding application for production of a business plan. The business plan will establish criteria for identifying and prioritising biosphere related projects and would produce an audit of potential projects. The project includes contact with community and other groups and organisations and the production of a ten year action plan.

The meeting noted that the application has been delayed by the need to have a formal, constituted, organisation to represent the Biosphere and that the application can now be progressed.

ITEM 8 – Logo and Branding Guidelines

Paul Mahoney of Countryside Ltd provided a presentation on the work done to date to produce a logo for the Biosphere and a set of Branding Guidelines. Examples of logos produced for other Biospheres were circulated as well as sample logos for the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere.

Following discussion, it was agreed that:-

- all members of the Board should be consulted on the draft logo designs produced so far. These will be circulated electronically and the logo should be finalised by 15 December 2013.
- The words “Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere” need to be included within the logo;
- The image needs to include references to people, nature, water and networks;
- A square version of the logo is likely to be suitable for most uses, however, an additional linear version would be useful in some situations such as letterheads.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Board should be held in March 2014 when it is hoped to be able to introduce the new members of staff to the Board.

The first AGM should be held one year from now.

Ends

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