

Highland Environment Forum
Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 Sept 2013
Venue: Council Chamber, Dingwall.

Present

Cllr George Farlow - Chair	Highland Council
David Glass	Caithness Biodiversity Group
John Hutchison (VC)	Community Land Scotland
Jon Hollingdale	Community Woodlands Association
Alison Craig	Changeworks (Home Energy Scotland)
Giles Brockman	Forestry Commission Scotland
Ro Scott	Highland Biological Recording Group
Stephen Carr	Highland Council Chief Executives Unit
Daniel Greig	Highland Council Chief Executives Unit
George Brown	Highland Council Dive Unit/Marine Surveyor
George Hamilton	Highland Council Planning & Development Service
Janet Bromham	Highland Council Planning & Development Service
Vanessa Halhead	Highland Environment Network
Carol Masheter	Highland Environment Network
Scott Hay	Highlands, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
Fran Lockhart (VC)	John Muir Trust
Ian Wilson	National Farmers Union
Jenny Wares	National Health Service Highland
Robert Dewar	National Trust Scotland
Kenna Chisholm	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland
Alistair Duff	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
George Hogg	Scottish Natural Heritage
Debbie Greene	Scottish Natural Heritage
Patrick Baird	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Tom Forrest	Wester Ross Environmental Network
Reuben Brown	Wester Ross Environmental Network
Martin Wright (VC)	University of the Highlands & Islands

Apologies

Andy Ford	Cairngorms National Park Authority
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Hamish Trench	Cairngorms National Park Authority
David Cameron	Community Land Scotland
Susan Walker	Crofting Commission
Martin Johnson	HIE Inner Moray Firth
Judi McDonald	Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Welcome & Introduction

Cllr George Farlow welcomed everyone to the meeting. Janet Bromham outlined that the purpose of this initial meeting was to discuss the potential role of Highland Environmental Forum as an effective environmental delivery partnership. The Forum will be administered by the Highland Environmental Network, this support is jointly funded by Highland Council and SNH.

Keynote Presentation: Highland Marine Environment - George Brown, Seasearch, North Scotland / Highland Council Diving Unit

George presented a spectacular display of photographs he has taken in local coastal waters. The images represented the diverse and spectacular range of species that he sees while carrying out local water survey work for Seasearch.

Due to the range of sea bed including rock and mud flats sea lochs and deep waters Scottish coastal waters play home to a vast and beautiful range of warm and cold water species including: Large variety of Sponges, Worms & Sea slugs, Starfish, Crustaceans, Molluscs Jellyfish, Hydroids, Corals and Anemones

While some species are on decline others, possibly due to global warming are becoming more prevalent or were not previously found in the area. However there is significant evidence of the devastation caused by dredging and pollution, creating waste lands which may never fully recover.

Cllr Farlow thanked George for the fascinating display. The question was raised as to how we can better raise awareness of what's in the Scottish waters and the great need to protect it. Marine Protected Areas were discussed as one potential option. Janet Bromham also mentioned the Highland Seashore Biodiversity Project a 3 year project to help to raise the awareness and enthuse people as to the wonderful wildlife we have around our coasts.

Background & Purpose of Highland Environment Forum - George Hogg, Scottish Natural Heritage

George Hogg outlined the potential role of the Forum playing a key role in delivering the [Highland Single Outcome Agreement](#). The SOA outlines how public sector bodies work together to serve the Highland people and wider community. The document sets out the joint commitments made by the [Highland Community Planning Partnership](#) and the Scottish Government to an agreed set of outcomes. 15 local outcomes have been agreed by the Community Planning Partnership based on the needs and issues identified in the Area. These are cast against the 15 national outcomes.

There are six national themes and a seventh theme of Environment has been added for the Highlands, to recognise the importance of our area. Environmental outcomes are:

- Manage sustainably the outstanding natural heritage of the Highlands
- To optimise the economic, health and learning benefits.
- To increase and develop the use of renewable energy.
- A carbon neutral Inverness in a low carbon Highland by 2025
- Reducing fuel poverty
- Supporting communities to be resilient to extreme weather events.
- Improving access to the outdoors.

It is also recognised that the Environment can have role to play in delivering main of the other outcomes too.

Government are actively encouraging greater use of main stream budgets and resources rather than looking to new or specific funding. It was also highlighted that future public sector support and funding will require partners to align services and activities with the objectives of Single Outcome Agreement. This new approach reinforces the need for effective delivery partnerships.

Highland Environment Forum Governance - George Hamilton, Highland Council

George Hamilton presented the Governance paper circulated prior to the meeting. Members discussed the aims of the aims and principles of the Forum.

It was agreed that the aim of the Forum will be to work in partnership to support the Environment outcomes of the Single Outcome Agreement as well as other environmental topics/ issues as agreed by the Forum members. The Forum can also contribute towards the SOA.

The Forum will report to the Community Planning Partnership. The Forum will meet twice annually which will be reviewed after a year, as will the effectiveness of the Forum and the related Working Groups. Working Groups will meet more frequently and communication options will also be explored including utilising Highland Environmental Networks (HEN's) website and social media. Topics identified as work areas will be reported back to the Forum by the lead organisation.

It was recognised that not all members will have the capacity to play an active role on a working group however their input and expertise might be critical for a short period. It was also recognised that potentially lead organisation/s could source funding for some key initiatives or projects. It was clarified the Council does not intend to be the lead of the Forum or the Working Groups though it was recognised that it would take the lead role on specific projects.

Governance Agreement

After discussion it was agreed to go forward with the Aims and Governance Agreement with the following amendments:

Membership: Membership will also open to National Bodies and other non environmental bodies that share common aims or issues.

Chairperson: Once the Forum is established members will elect a new Chairperson from the membership, the chair will rota on an annual basis.

Working Groups: Non Forum members can be involved in working groups or projects. There will be two lead organisations for each working group.

Voting: One vote per organisation/group. The minimum number of members required at a meeting to take a vote is 10.

Priorities for Future Work - George Hamilton, Highland Council

George presented the paper and members discussed a number of the priorities, which had been identified from previous Highland Environment Forum and Biodiversity Partnership meetings. It is anticipated that new priorities will emerge as the forum and its membership develops. The following actions were agreed:

Review of the Highland Climate Change Declaration

Highland Council Chief Executives Unit will lead on this working group. Members will include the Home Energy Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Wester Ross Environmental Network and Highland Environmental Network. Meetings will be arranged date TBC.

Biodiversity

Highland Biodiversity Action Plan Review (to include geodiversity). Working group members will include: Highland Council Planning & Development Service (lead), Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Highland Biological Recording Group and the Caithness Biodiversity Group. Meetings will be arranged with partners in November.

Biosecurity

The Highland Invasive Species Forum will continue to meet annually to provide networking opportunities and exchange expertise. The next meeting takes place on 27th September 2013.

Wildlife Crime

Scottish Natural Heritage will lead on Wildlife Crime and report back on proposed actions or a way forward at the next meeting in March 2014.

Wildfire Reduction

Scott Hay, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service will report back to the March meeting on developments including the Scottish Wildfire Forum which meets on 21st October as well as a new Wildfire Manual which is currently being produced.

AOCB - none

Date of next – The meeting will take place on 18th March 2014.