

## **The Highland Council**

Minutes of the Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held **REMOTELY** on Friday, 29 January 2021 at 1.30pm.

### **Present:**

Mr B Boyd	Mr S Mackie
Mrs I Campbell	Mr A MacInnes
Mrs M Davidson	Mrs A MacLean
Mr C Fraser	Mr D Macpherson
Mr J Gordon	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr J Gray	Mr D Rixson
Mr D Louden	Mrs T Robertson

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment  
Mr K Masson, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  
Mr J Perry, Climate Change Coordinator  
Mr D Burns, Engineer  
Mr N Chaplin, Mechanical Design Engineer  
Ms N Wallace, Environment Manager  
Mr P Shannon, Consultancy Manager  
Mr R Bamborough, Senior Sustainability Officer  
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Sonia Wayman, Landscape Architect  
Catriona Jeorrett, Marine Scotland (Policy Lead, Marine Climate Change / Secretariat, Scottish Blue Carbon Forum)  
Bill Austin, St Andrews University

### **Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce and Mr B Thompson.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. Blue Carbon in Highland Presentation**

A presentation had been undertaken at the meeting by Catriona Jeorrett, Marine Scotland, Scottish Government and Bill Austin, St Andrews University.

During the presentation, Catriona Jeorret reviewed the vital role blue carbon played in mitigation and adaptation of climate change and outlined blue carbon habitats along with associated benefits. The role of blue carbon in the Scottish Government's Green Recovery from Covid-19 and Blue Economy Action Plan was also highlighted. Promoting education, facilitating projects and identifying blockers were all identified as useful actions for Local Authorities. The following projects were reviewed; The Dornoch Environmental Enhancement Project (DEEP), Project Seagrass (Seagrass Spotter Tool), and Nigg Bay Coastal Realignment Project. Opportunities for collaboration and support were suggested by way of the Blue Carbon II International Conference (11 & 12 November 2021 during COP26, Royal Society of Edinburgh) and the Blue Economy Action Plan which was currently under development. Highland was encouraged to identify blue carbon projects, ambitions, targets or partnerships to showcase at the conference. Furthermore, Ms Jeorret expressed interest in projects, pilots and case studies to include in the Blue Economy Action Plan to exemplify best practice and action on the ground. Ms Jeorret and Mr Wayman offered their support and assistance to those interested in becoming involved with either opportunity for collaboration.

A secondary presentation was undertaken by William Austin, University of St. Andrews on Scotland's blue carbon resources. Carbon storage in saltmarsh habitats, sequestration rates and long-term carbon stores in soil were reviewed. Project involvement of the C-SIDE team in carbon storage in intertidal environments was highlighted. It was explained that an outline method for UK-specific reporting had been developed by the C-SIDE team with an objective to produce a roadmap for trial implementation of greenhouse gas emission and removals from saltmarshes in the UK greenhouse gas inventory. It was suggested that this would provide an important step in accounting for, protecting and restoring long-term carbon stores and effort towards climate change mitigation. Lastly, it was emphasised that blue carbon offered an emerging opportunity to support the political commitment to a "Nature Covenant" that tackled the twin issues of climate change and biodiversity loss.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Members welcomed the fascinating and thought-provoking presentations;
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) were doing a great deal of work and planning to promote environmental issues;
- there was a wealth of natural resource in Highland but also a requirement for sustainable coastal jobs which at times presented a conflict that had to be successfully managed. Additionally, aquaculture planning guidance was a factor that had to be followed;
- regarding the Nigg project, there were some concerns locally that high tidal events would pose risks to farmland and the population locally;
- the Tain mussel beds were coexisting with the DEEP project which had created some disagreement in the past and potential for future differences as it related to discussion for future expansion, though generally the project had been supported locally;
- a Member from a family of seaweed harvesters from North Uist and Western Isles expressed interest in collaboration with Ms Jeorrett and this would be further explored out with the meeting;

- there were potentially expansive Maerl beds off Arisaig and there had been concern on the West Coast for the implications of dredging and curiosity expressed as to the impact on seabed and novel methods used;
- in response to a comment, it was explained that there was a difference between harvesting wild seaweed and cultivating it in a way that slowed wave action in a manner to protect infrastructure and used the vast growth rates of kelp;
- regarding NatureScot mapping of saltmarshes, interest was expressed to determine where saltmarshes could be expanded, and it was remarked that this question was currently under study;
- it was emphasised that part of the blue economy approach meant that livelihood and jobs were considered when planning;
- with areas that were flooded, it was observed that adjacent landowners would require assurances that their land would be protected;
- increasingly, landowners were realising that becoming involved with environmental concerns could benefit them financially and spiritually and the only way forward would be to work collaboratively; and
- it was important for Members to give greater focus to the blue carbon habitats outlined and to question whether there could be as much done for these habitats as there was for the Peatlands.

Thereafter, Members **NOTED** the presentation.

#### **4. Low Carbon Solutions in Developing Green Infrastructure Presentation**

A presentation had been undertaken by Sonia Wayman, Landscape Architect, Highland Council to raise awareness on how low carbon solutions and developing green infrastructure could be incorporated into future projects. Progress of the team was reviewed along with obstacles faced. The Council assets opportunities were reviewed, highlighted by the examples of the Charles Kennedy Building and Inshes Park. In conclusion, it was emphasised that improved collaboration between relevant Council officers and departments would be key to overcoming challenges to progress as design and maintenance were intrinsically linked in delivering successful low carbon solutions.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- there was desire for progress towards these initiatives however, some of the obstacles proved quite challenging to overcome. Collaboration with Members and a need to promote a trial area to demonstrate the benefits of similar projects would be vital to success;
- education would be a useful factor regarding the planting of wildflowers, soil fertility and maintenance;
- it was suggested that the Inshes Park project required fundraising from local Members to allow for a knowledgeable candidate with relevant experience to be employed to carry out the work until it was well-established; and
- community groups were getting involved and setting up spaces in their local areas and it was queried if they could contact the landscape architects for advice. In response, it was suggested that basic general advice would be welcomed however, project specific questions would be unrealistic due to the time constraints and ongoing projects of the team.

Thereafter, Members **NOTED** the presentation.

## **5. Landscapes as Carbon Sinks**

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/1/21 dated 18 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Council had links with the Ramsar Secretariat and there had been significant back and forth communication in relation to other projects;
- regarding rising world temperature, a query was made about the impact on the Flow Country and focus on the protection of landscapes. In response, it was confirmed that focus remained on maintaining land in a healthy condition to mitigate the impact of climate change and this work would be primarily carried out by locals;
- in response to a comment regarding the importance of being ambitious with obtaining/managing funding and investing in local communities, it was confirmed that a finance model was a primary focus of the project along with notifying landowners of claims they were entitled to as well as new subsidies that arose; and
- the Climate Change Coordinator was commended on their efforts in opening lines of communication with locals and it was highlighted that the Flow Country along with the NC 500 were surrounded by local communities. It was emphasised that there would be no meaningful progress without the support of the local communities.

Thereafter, Members **NOTED** the report.

## **6. Climate Change & Energy Team – Strategic Control Plan**

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/2/21 dated 12 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- in response to a comment it was confirmed that strengthening communities would be a core part of the vision moving forward and it was highlighted that due to the lack of capacity in the Climate Change Team historically it was unable to have the focus it deserved and required. More action in this regard was anticipated and a report brought back to the Working Group to review at an appropriate time;
- it was highlighted that communication with local communities would be a major aspect of the net zero plan and it was emphasised that tackling net zero not only as a Council but as a region required a holistic and collaborative approach; and
- in response to a question, available funding and support from government presented significant opportunity for local areas and it was clear that

Highland played a fundamental role in the emerging vision of Scotland as the agreed upon targets would not be met without its contribution.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

The meeting ended at 3.29pm.