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| Agenda Item | 5.       |
| Report No   | CPB/8/22 |



**Community Planning Board – 9 December 2022**

**Highland Environment Forum  
Report on activities and opportunities for future action**

**Report by: Highland Environment Forum**

**Summary**

This report highlights some of the work undertaken by the Highland Environment Forum and indicates opportunities for future action.

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| <b>1.</b> | <b>Background</b>   |
| 1.1       | <p>The Highland Environment Forum (HEF) was established by the Highland Community Planning Partnership in 2013 to provide an arena for discussion, networking and action on environmental subjects. The Forum contributes to the community planning partners aims of delivering 'better outcomes 'for the region, and to the HOIP aim of reducing inequalities.</p> <p>It is a unique vehicle for engaging with the Highland environmental community, successfully attracting people from across the region and representing public bodies, third sector organisations, land managers, private business and interested individuals.</p> <p>The aims of the Forum are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster and coordinate activity on environmental matters</li> <li>• Take forward relevant actions identified in the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, and be a valuable source of practical advice</li> <li>• Identify, and respond to, emerging environmental agendas</li> <li>• Provide a link between local groups and national strategies, action plans and reporting</li> <li>• Raise awareness and promote good practice on environmental issues</li> </ul> |

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| 1.2 | <p><b>Budget and administration:</b> The 2022 - 2023 Forum contract is jointly funded by Highland Council (£6,000) and Scottish Forestry (£5,000). NatureScot has provided funding support in all previous years and for the current contract continues in its support and advisory role. These three organisations make up the steering group.</p> <p>The Forum is run by a coordinator on a 73-day annual contract. The work programme is set as a result of discussion with the steering group; Forum members; Highland Nature biodiversity action plan partners and other Forum working groups.</p>   |
| 1.3 | <p><b>Members:</b> Membership is available to anyone with an interest in environmental issues, who agrees with the Forum's aims (above). At present the Forum has over 440 members from all across the region.</p>  |
| 2.  | <p><b>The work</b></p>  |
| 2.1 | <p><b>Digital communication:</b> The Highland Environment Forum communicates with its members through a regular e-newsletter (every week to 10 days) containing news, consultations, environmental jobs, research and events.</p> <p>Information is also shared through the <a href="#">website</a>, <a href="#">facebook</a>, <a href="#">instagram</a> and <a href="#">twitter</a>. Members are encouraged to share information that will be of interest to others. The website includes directories on biodiversity projects, volunteering, citizen science, environmental research and 'Experts on Offer'.</p> <p>Members often comment on how much they value this communication.</p>  |
| 2.2 | <p><b>Seminars:</b> Pre-covid, the Forum held two main in-person Forum meetings a year in March and September; an annual biodiversity conference and ran a number of working groups and field seminars. For the last two years the focus has moved to online seminars and working groups and outdoor field seminars. This model, allows the flexibility to arrange online events at relatively short notice, and to invite speakers from further afield than would otherwise be practical. Recent seminar topics have included Deer management, Tourism and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. HEF is now more dynamic and responsive to current political and policy agendas and can facilitate webinars at short notice to test community reaction to the evolving environmental agenda. This in turn can be fed back to politicians and policy makers to help deliver measures that reflect community aspirations.</p> <p>The field seminars enable people to get together to learn from experts and to exchange valuable experience. Many people in the Highlands work in relative isolation and so these visits are important not only for the ready exchange of experience and contacts, but also in providing a positive mental health and energy boost to ongoing nature action work.</p> <p>Both the pre-covid and post-covid events have a reputation for being stimulating, with comprehensive programmes, high quality presentations, a diversity of speakers and wide-ranging debate.</p> |

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| 2.3 | <p><b>Working with other Highland initiatives:</b> The Forum plays a valuable role in working with other Highland partnerships and building connections between them, This includes working with: Highland Green Health Partnership; Highland Adapts; the North Highland and Islands Climate Hub and informally with many other organisations and partners.</p> <p>Highland Environment Forum, Highland Green Health Partnership and Highland Adapts are jointly creating a guidance leaflet for community partnerships about working together across these subject areas.</p>   |
| 2.4 | <p><b>Working Groups:</b></p> <p><b>Biodiversity:</b> The Forum coordinator works with 46 Biodiversity Action Plan partners to create and oversee the delivery of <a href="#">Highland Nature: Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 – 2026</a>. New partners are welcome to join Highland Nature at any stage, and the plan has the flexibility to incorporate new ambitions and actions.</p> <p><b>Invasive non-native species:</b> After a short gap as a result of covid, the invasive non-native species group has continued to meet. The working group has consistently had the support of members, who value the opportunity to meet and exchange practical experience and new opportunities. In 2022 field seminars have been held at:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Woodland Trust Ledmore and Migdale Reserve, Bonar Bridge</li> <li>2. Poolewe and Inverewe in association with National Trust for Scotland and Scotland's Rainforests</li> <li>3. Nigg Bay in association with RSPB Scotland</li> </ol> <p><b>Marine Litter:</b> Forum meetings on the subject of marine life and marine litter in 2015 and 2017 led to short life working group on the subject, and a marine conference in Ullapool in October 2018. The conference attracted a full house of 80 delegates representing agencies, community groups, voluntary organisations and interested individuals. Meeting notes can be downloaded from the <a href="#">Forum website</a>. The Forum remains open to new opportunities to work with partners on marine issues.</p> <p><b>Outdoor volunteering:</b> This group arose from the 2015 biodiversity conference on environmental volunteering, and met in different Highland locations to share good practice, look for opportunities for partnership working and discuss future ideas. An interest in developing Highland green health opportunities was stimulated by Forum meetings and by the 2017 conference 'Wellbeing and the Environment' run jointly with HTSI. The Forum coordinator works closely with the Highland Green Health Partnership, sat on the High Life Highland Green Events project steering group in 2020 and will continue to enhance links between environmental and health groups. You can see outdoor volunteering opportunities on the <a href="#">Forum website</a> and the <a href="#">outdoor volunteering facebook page</a>.</p> |

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| 3.  | <p><b>Potential new work opportunities for 2022 - 2024</b></p> <p>The Forum has the track record and expertise (through the coordinator, steering group and membership) to develop new areas of work, whilst continuing to build upon existing partnership working. Additional funding would be required to develop the ambitions highlighted below, but each would build upon existing Forum working methods and expertise to:</p>   |
| 3.1 | Strengthen the connection between the Forum, the Highland Community Planning Partnership and Local Community Planning Partnerships.   |
| 3.2 | Work with Highland Council, the Highland Community Planning Partnership, Biodiversity Action Plan Partners and others to deliver Nature Networks across the region.   |
| 3.3 | Look for opportunities to help to deliver the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and to build on Highland Nature: The biodiversity action plan for 2021 to 2026   |
| 3.4 | <p>With other partners, seek ways with other partners to improve biodiversity data gathering and recording including;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of training skills in species identification and survey – there is a shortage of expertise to provide species verification of citizen science records.</li> <li>2. Continue to make organisations aware of the need for good biodiversity data - and the need to adopt methods to achieve this - the Cairngorms National Park are adopting the Norwegian Nature Index model, which has been proven over more than a decade of use in Norway.</li> </ol> |
| 3.5 | Work in partnership with Highland Council to encourage and support communities to put forward areas that they value for nature as Local Nature Conservation Sites   |
| 3.6 | Continue to work with Highland-wide partnerships such as Highland Green Health Partnership; Highland Adapts and the North Highlands and Islands Climate Hub to provide – biodiversity and wider environmental knowledge; links to relevant organisations, groups and individuals who can assist in the development of their work; promotion their work to Forum members and across social media.  |
| 3.7 | Continue to work with the High Life Highland ranger service – providing partnership working, and promotion through newsletters, website and social media.   |
| 3.8 | Offer regional events across Highland in association with local groups, on subjects of priority to the area.  |

**Recommendation:**

The Board is asked to:

- i) To continue to support the work of the Highland Environment Forum
- ii) To consider how they might support and engage with the Forum in the Future

- iii) To recognise the role of HEF in delivering the HOIP by connecting and enabling local communities to play their role in mitigating and adapting to the climate and nature emergency

**Author: Highland Environment Forum**

**Date: 1 December 2022**