

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held remotely
by Microsoft Teams on Friday, 4 September
2020 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Aitchison (Chairman), H. Anderson, G. Edgar (from para 3),
J. Greenwell, S. Haslam (from para 3), H. Laing, D. Paterson, E. Robson and
S. Scott

In Attendance:- Service Director Customer & Communities (J. Craig), Chief Planning &
Housing Officer (I. Aikman), Corporate Policy Advisor (M. Cook), Ecology
Officer (A. Tharme), Environmental Strategy Officer (L. Cox), Chief Officer
Roads (J. Hedley), Energy & Building Services Officer (J. Caldwell),
Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling).

WELCOME

Chairman, Councillor Aitchison, welcomed Members, officers and members of the public to the on-line meeting of the Sustainable Development Committee. In his introduction, he referred to the first meeting of the Committee held in January and the proposal at that meeting to take a report on the climate emergency to Council. That report had been produced but delayed due to being overtaken by events in the form of the Covid-19 outbreak. Hopefully the report would now go to Council at the end of this month. The paper had been amended slightly in reflection of the emergency response to the pandemic and Councillor Aitchison referred to the question "was Covid-19 a dress rehearsal for the climate emergency?" He explained that the purpose of this meeting was to catch-up and to gather information. He welcomed the guest speakers to the meeting and strongly recommended that Members accessed all the supporting papers referred to in the presentations via the links provided in the agenda (also included in the text below).

1. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting of 31 January 2020.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

MEMBERS

Councillors Edgar and Haslam joined the meeting during the discussion below.

2. **BIODIVERSITY**

- 2.1 The Chairman introduced Charles Dundas, Chief Executive of Borders Forest Trust (BFT) and Chair of Scottish Environment LINK. Mr Dundas was in attendance to give a presentation, accompanied by slides, entitled "The Climate and Biodiversity Crises – globally and at home". He explained that, in 2019, the UN established Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) released a global assessment of humanity's relationship with nature. This was written by more than 500 experts from over 100 countries. It concluded that such was the rate of decline that the risks posed by biodiversity loss should be considered on the same scale as those of climate change. This alarming trend endangered economies, livelihoods, food security and the quality of life of people everywhere. It was estimated that we were losing around 135 plant, animal

and insect species every day. The seven principle drivers of loss were identified as: the changing use of the land and sea; over-exploitation of species; climate change; pollution; invasive non-native species; and indirect effects arising from people's disconnect with nature; and a lack of value and importance placed on nature. Mr Dundas explained that, on a more local level, Scottish Environment LINK was the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. LINK and SNH's the State of Nature Scotland report 2019 revealed that, since recording began, 49% of Scottish species had decreased whilst 28% had increased. The presentation went on to look at historical losses incurred within Scotland, relating to changes in land use within the 20th century. Between the 1940s and 1980s the area of broadleaved and mixed woodland fell by 23% and 37% respectively and native Caledonian pine forests now covered less than 90,000 hectares – just over 6% of the original area. The current situation, in terms of woodland, was that just 22% of the total woodland area in Scotland was native, the rest was non-native. In the Scottish Borders just 7% of the total woodland area was native, which represented 1.4% of the total land area of the Scottish Borders. Mr Dundas concluded his presentation by showing slides of areas of the borders where work was being carried out to plant native woodland. BFT owned over 3000ha of land in the border area and to date 738ha of that land had been planted with native woodland and over 1000ha planted on privately owned land. With most of the work being carried out by volunteers, BFT worked alongside landowners and other organisations in the borders to restore and protect natural habitats.

- 2.2 Members welcomed the presentation and discussed the challenges raised, with Mr Dundas answering questions on particular points. Members expressed concern about the south of Scotland's wooded area being dominated by non-native species and an apparent national policy for the planting of large areas of commercial woodland in this area. Mr Dundas referred to the need for an alternative vision to present to landowners and to Scottish Government to look at longer term rewards by supporting the planting of commercial broad-leaved trees. He emphasised the importance of strategic land use planning and that an agreed Land Use Strategy should be at the top of the land use planning structure overriding the Local Development Plan, Forestry and Agriculture. Mr Aikman confirmed that regional land use planning was on the agenda for discussion with partners, including with the new South of Scotland Enterprise agency, Dumfries and Galloway Council and as part of the Borderlands initiative. It was anticipated that a regional land use strategy would follow. Discussions included looking at a pilot programme with Scottish Forestry to develop more effective ways of producing woodland which could be formulated into a Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which could perhaps be used as a grant funding base. The Chairman thanked Mr Dundas for his presentation.

Supporting Documents:

1. IPBES report <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>
2. State of Nature Scotland <https://www.nature.scot/state-nature-scotland-report-2019>
3. ScotLink: Nature on Red Alert <https://www.scotlink.org/publication/scotlands-nature-on-red-alert-climate-change-impacts-on-biodiversity/>

DECISION

NOTED the presentation

3. CLIMATE CHANGE: A JUST TRANSITION

- 3.1 The Chairman introduced Kate Rowell, who in addition to being a Just Transition Commissioner, was Chair of Quality Meat Scotland, a livestock farmer in the Scottish Borders and qualified vet. She was also on the South of Scotland Enterprise agency Board. The Just Transition Commission was established by Scottish Ministers in January 2019 to advise on how just transition principles could be applied to climate change action in Scotland. As an explanation Ms Rowell referred to the quote: "The imperative of a just transition is that Governments design policies in a way that ensures the benefits of climate

change action are shared widely, while the costs do not unfairly burden those less able to pay, or whose livelihoods are directly or indirectly at risk as the economy shifts and changes". Just Transition was an internationally recognised movement but Scotland was first to look at the principles on a whole country basis and, with climate change as a focus, to also use opportunities presented to adjust existing inequalities. The Commission was made up of academics, environmentalists and representatives from organisations including Trade Unions, agriculture, industry including oil and gas and representing youth groups - the 2050 Climate Group. The Commission had also been asked by the Cabinet Secretary for advice on a green recovery from the Covid-19 outbreak. To gather information and with the realisation that it would be useful to meet groups on an informal basis, meetings had been held in different locations within Scotland, focusing on different groups and sectors; for example a meeting was held in Melrose focusing on land use and agriculture. The Commission's interim report, summarising emerging themes, initial recommendations and plans for the year ahead, was published in February 2020 (see link below to the interim report). During the summer in a 'Call for Evidence', the Commission invited written submissions to inform the development of final recommendations. The submission from Scottish Borders Council had been circulated with the agenda.

- 3.2 Ms Rowell referred to three main themes, described within the interim report:
- Planning ahead – the need for clear transition plans to be developed. Ms Rowell emphasised the importance of a strategic vision and transition plans for each sector to provide certainty and empowerment to encourage buy-in from all stakeholders.
 - Engagement - the need for on-going and proactive dialogue with all areas of society as the behaviour of everyone would need to change to meet Scotland's climate change ambition.
 - Equity – action to tackle climate change had the potential to create both winners and losers – this transition must be fair. An example was the potential inequality faced in rural communities and the importance of paying attention to connectivity when changing transport systems, where networks in rural areas may be less resilient.

- 3.3 In the ensuing discussion Members expressed their keen support for the principles behind the Just Transition movement and asked Ms Rowell for more information about particular issues. With regard to help that could be given to farmers for transition Ms Rowell emphasised that farmers were part of the solution to climate change and not the problem. She gave the example of Rumbleton Rigg Farm in the Scottish Borders where it was being demonstrated that there were lots of small changes in practice that could be put in place to make a difference and bring about improvements in the environment whilst maintaining production. In response to a question about the cost of conversion to low carbon heating systems in houses Ms Rowell advised the scale and cost of transition of heating throughout Scotland had not yet been identified. In terms of carbon efficiency there may be more inequalities in rural areas and it may be prudent for houses not on the gas network to be converted first. Members discussed the use of money routinely provided by companies involved in commercial renewable developments for the benefit of the local community. Rather than this being used to fund individual projects it was suggested that it could be used strategically and in a more constructive way, within the area of the development, for example to pay for house insulation. In a conclusion of the discussion Mr Aikman confirmed that many of the points raised by the presentation aligned with work being developed by officers and the report being put forward to Council. The next steps, once the report had been considered, would be to establish baseline indicators, formulate an action plan and set targets and ambitions. The Chairman thanked Ms Rowell for her presentation.

Supporting documents:

1. Just Transition Commission Interim Report, February 2020
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-commission-interim-report/>
2. SBC Response to the Just Transition Commission Interim Report (copy attached)

3. Just Transition Commission Advice for a Green Recovery, July 2020
<http://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-commission-advice-green-recovery/>
4. Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/towards-robust-resilient-wellbeing-economy-scotland-report-advisory-group-economic-recovery/>
5. Infrastructure Commission: Key Findings Exec Summary (Jan 2020)
https://infrastructurecommission.scot/storage/278/Phase1_ExecutiveSummary.pdf
6. CERG – Climate Emergency Report (Aug 2019)
<https://www.changeworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/Climate-Emergency-Statement.pdf>
7. CERG – 8 policy Packages for a Green Recover (July 2020)
https://www.changeworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/CERG_Green%20Recovery_Final%20report_July2020_0.pdf

DECISION
NOTED the presentation

The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm