

**FINDHORN BAY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE (FBLNR)
MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN THE JAMES MILNE INSTITUTE AT 1700HRS ON
TUESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2021**

Committee members present:

Roy Dennis (RHD) - Chair
Mike Crutch (MC) - Secretary
Colin Bell (CB) - The Moray Council
Pete Finch (PF) - Findhorn Eco-village
Ann Griffin (AG) - 39 Regt/RE, Kinloss Barracks
Christine Hunt (CH) - Findhorn Village Conservation Company
Davina Thomas (DT) - Findhorn village

Apologies: Glenn Buchanan, Claire Feaver, Manja Hannon, Dr Colin Shedden, Anne Skene, Richard Somers-Cocks, Alan Tissiman, Carl Wright

Secretary's Note: due to the ongoing public health situation and small attendance, the Chair has decided that - for a second year running - the elements usually required of the AGM (i.e. election of officers and review of accounts) will be deferred until the 2022 AGM

1. Welcome & recent news

RHD welcomed everyone present, and expressed his hopes that we - as a committee - can now start to get back on track. Recent bird news for the bay included sighting of up to 48,000 Pink-footed Geese at any one time in the past week - very close to record counts. This year's local breeding Osprey population had reduced slightly due to various factors, with disturbance at nests by photographers on the increase being one of those. RHD also believed that there may be fluctuations in the flounder population affecting the birds choice of foraging areas and subsequent selection of nesting locations.

New to the committee was Ann Griffin from Kinloss Barracks, attending her first meeting having replaced Sarah Kane. The committee extends its thanks to Ian Suttie and Bill Barber, who have stepped down; in the place of the latter, Campbell Ross now represents the Findhorn Angling Club. Alan Tissiman has not stood for re-election in the Forres Community Council elections, therefore a change of delegate may occur in due course.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 5 December 2019

The minutes were accepted.

Previous actions:

a. Kinloss Barracks tern breeding habitat

MC reported that no progress (for obvious reasons) had been made on gaining access to areas of the barracks for evaluation on what may be needed to encourage an expansion of

tern species breeding areas; small numbers had been noted as breeding in 2021. AG stated that the runway is now decommissioned within the estate.

Richard Somers-Cocks will remain the committee's lead on this, and MC would put him in touch with AG in order to make assessment well ahead of the 2022 breeding season.

ITEM CARRIED FORWARD *Secretary's Note: as of 4 October, AG/RS-C are now in discussion*

b. *Updates to the FBLNR MC Constitution*

MC reported that the draft constitution was officially approved by TMC in December 2020.

ITEM CLOSED

3. Chairman's Report

RHD observed that despite the human cost of the pandemic, wildlife generally had thrived during the relative peace. Findhorn Bay continues to be an important area for wildlife, with a number of bird species (both wintering and breeding) remaining steady or even increasing in numbers as pressures are felt in other areas of the Moray Firth.

Despite this, FBLNR-specific concerns remain with the lack of respect and understanding of critical feeding/roosting/breeding areas shown by different types of bay users (e.g. some dog walkers, paddle boarders and wildfowlers). As with the conflicts seen over the last six years with wildfowling activity, a general lack of support to our volunteer group by the national conservation bodies to upgrade the status of FBLNR - with subsequent official ability to control/limit activities which impact on flora and fauna - means that we cannot properly protect the reserve and its contents.

DT suggested an engagement with the Scottish Government, perhaps through Highlands & Islands Green MSP Ariane Burgess to discuss the problem; RHD welcomed the suggestion and he would progress it further. **ACTION CHAIR**

4. New matters arising

a. *Bird hide maintenance*

MC reported that agreement had been reached with Jordan Bowler of TMC's Criminal Justice element to arrange for labour and recycled materials to be used as a cost-free method to replace various damaged/rotten areas of the hide; the committee noted and thanked (via CB) Jordan Bowler's help in effecting this activity. PF stated that hitherto such work may have been able to be performed by Findhorn Eco-village maintenance teams, however the reduction of such due to the pandemic has prevented this. PF will act as on-the-ground focal point for the works to be carried out. **ITEM CARRIED FORWARD**

b. *Warden establishment/funding*

RHD reported that, following an approach by CH on behalf of the Findhorn Village Conservation Company, a meeting had been convened in April 2021 (involving RHD/MC/CH) to provide FBLNR input to the duties of a potential warden post, which could be

created under FVCC-employed auspices.

The following details were submitted by RHD/MC as potential responsibilities for the role:

Wardening of the Findhorn Bay Local Nature Reserve

We enthusiastically support the proposal to explore the employment of a joint warden and consider that part of their duties, in relation to the Nature Reserve, are as below. It would involve working with the Findhorn Bay Local Nature Reserve management team to the benefit of the Bay, its wildlife and visitor enjoyment of wildlife. Included within this would be developing plans for new birdwatching/ educational facilities and exciting new habitat creation.

Rationale:

Findhorn Bay is internationally important for the threatened habitats and species that it contains, year-round. This has been recognised by the award of several important designations:

- It forms part of the Moray & Nairn Special Protection Area, created under the European Union Birds Directive which states that Findhorn Bay is an outstanding area of nature conservation and scientific importance for coastal and riverine habitats, and that it supports a range of bird species throughout the year
- It is designated as a 'Ramsar site', a worldwide network of areas established following the Convention of Wetlands of International Importance held in Ramsar, Iran in 1971 with the UK Government signing up to the convention five years later
- Both Findhorn Bay, and the adjacent Culbin Forest, are designated as a national Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Findhorn Bay was formally designated as a Local Nature Reserve by The Moray Council in 1998. At present, and in an enduring period of funding challenges for both local government and those Scottish/UK government organisations tasked with conservation (e.g. NatureScot, formerly Scottish Natural Heritage), the Findhorn Bay LNR is in urgent need of establishing a new framework to better protect its environmental importance as well as provide dedicated, on-site expertise to undertake conservation activities and also engage with users and visitors alike so they can enjoy the Bay responsibly. An employed warden position is therefore seen as key to providing these services.

With specific responsibilities to the Findhorn Bay LNR, and in addition to maintaining a working relationship with FBLNR management and following a new management plan, the warden's duties would include:

- patrolling the FBLNR to protect the public and wildlife, applying principles of pertinent legislature and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and provide face-to-face advice and guidance to all users of the reserve

- develop working relationships with land owners, farmers and businesses that affect the environment around the reserve and nearby area
- habitat management and protection, in particular the saltmarsh and dunes area that support breeding and over-wintering bird species as well as eradication of invasive plant species through the use of contractors/affiliate organisations
- performing and co-ordinating field surveys of flora and fauna, recruiting and managing volunteers for such and similar activities as required
- act as liaison with The Moray Council, NatureScot, Police Scotland and other bodies, as well as the local community to promote and care for the FBLNR, such as through presenting educational talks, workshops and arranging special events
- carrying out or arranging for repairs to infrastructure around the FBLNR (e.g. fences, bird hide)
- develop the visitor experience and on-site educational benefits of the FBLNR by improving or creating new facilities
- help maintain the FBLNR website

Those present were in agreement with the intent to create such a post, especially as it could help address a number of issues such as education of wildlife disturbance by users of the bay. An initial plan to create the position for three years, and alongside efforts to secure budget for the post from various bodies (including NatureScot, previously SNH), CH was currently drafting a funding application which would need the support of TMC.

ACTION CB/CH

6. Any other business

a. FBLNR land lease agreements

Manja Hannon (*in absentia*) asked for an update. RHD reported that he had reached agreement with Ian Douglas of TMC that the various leases will remain as the sole means of land-use agreements for land forming the body of the FBLNR; it had previously been suggested that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 could have been used, but was found lacking. CB commented that various actions within TMC are still ongoing, with one key member of staff on long-term sick leave, but would continue to progress. **ITEM**

CARRIED FORWARD

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting, including the AGM, will be held in March 2022. The date will be advised in due course.

prepared by Mike Crutch, Secretary FBLNR