

The SOC Scotland's Bird Club



COUNCIL MEETING 81/04 3rd December 2017 Minutes

*SOC Scottish Charity Number: SC 009859
A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation*

Session 81/04 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 3rd December 2017 at the RSPB Loch Leven, Kinross.

Present: President James Main (Chair), Jeremy Wilson (Vice President), David Heeley (Hon Secretary), Andrew Thorpe (Hon Treasurer), David Bain, Jeremy Brock, Lesley Creamer, Will Cresswell, Roger Gooch, Alan Knox, Richard Leslie, Melvin Morrison, David Rackham, Neil Stratton, Paul Taylor and Chris Wernham

In attendance: Wendy Hicks (SOC HQ) and Jane Cleaver (SOC HQ).

Action

- 1 **Welcome** The Chair, James Main, welcomed new Members Prof. Will Cresswell (Elected Member) and Jeremy Brock (Stewartry Branch Representative) to Council.
- 2 **Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Frank Hamilton, Helen Aiton, Iain Gibson and Bob McGowan.
- 3 **Absent** John Campbell, Angus McBay and Geoff Sheppard were absent.
- 4 **Minutes of Council Meeting 81/03 held on 13th August 2017** The minutes for meeting 81/03 held on 13th August 2017 were approved without amendment.
- 5 **Matters arising** §5. Bird Recorders' Conference. The Chair, James Main, informed Council that he had been in touch with Mark Holling and was pleased to note that the Conference would be going ahead with an outline date during the summer of 2018. Stuart Rivers was involved with the planning, and Ben Darvill and Chris Wernham were assisting with finding a suitable venue. CW

All other action points were either *in progress* or subsumed under items on the Agenda.
- 6 **Finance** The Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe (AT), offered a brief summary of the key activities that he had been involved in, as detailed in his written report.
 - A new Finance Officer (Mairead Lyons) had been appointed, The vacancy had attracted significant interest with c30 applications having been received. All were potentially viable and suitable. The appointee had emerged as the best candidate and had commenced duties.

- BBRC had indicated that it wished to return records to Local Recorders at some cost. Exclusive of VAT this had amounted to £862. The records had now been returned, but unsurprisingly there was some notable variation in costs across Branches. AT recommended that the cost should be borne centrally and that it could easily be absorbed thus avoiding a lengthy and essentially arbitrary process of cost recovery from individual Branches. Council supported this recommendation, noting that AT would be contacting some of the Branches to clarify whether payment had already been made from their local funds. On behalf of Council, Alan Knox (North-East Branch) offered thanks to AT and Wendy Hicks for their efforts in making the process of return effective and trouble free.

AT

Moving on to financial matters, AT informed Council that the accounts for 2016-2017 had been adopted by the Annual General Meeting in October, and that a hard copy had been sent to OSCR as partial fulfilment of the Club's legal obligations. With respect to the Profit and Loss Account submitted with the meeting papers, he drew attention to the fact that the legacy of £20k discussed at previous meetings had now arrived in the Club's account, and that he had been notified as additional forthcoming legacy of c£5k.

A marked decline in memberships had not been apparent following the increase in Subscriptions. AT anticipated that there would be some losses due largely to the fact that the notification of the increase was likely to draw some members' attention to their Direct Debit instructions resulting in a cancellation. Overall numbers were down, as indicated in the report from the Development Officer later in the Agenda, but this could not realistically be attributed to the Subscription increase. Previous increases had led to a small dip followed later by an adjustment in numbers, and in AT's view this was likely to be the pattern in the present situation.

AT noted that commission from the sale of artworks was higher than in the previous year, and with the commissions from two popular exhibitions by Keith Brockie and Darren Woodhead yet to be received it was anticipated that the profit situation would be even stronger. To offset this AT noted that Optics Sales were down. AT drew attention to the fact that the "optics weekend" was held in October and the figures from this had yet to appear in the accounts. Various bills had yet to be paid, but overall there was a surplus of c£20k more than the previous year at this point. The reliance on legacies did cause some concern, and to a certain extent this type of exposure to such a variable and unpredictable income stream meant that the Club, in AT's view, was in a somewhat precarious position. Council noted that a future move towards proper budgetary planning by the Finance Committee would be especially welcome in light of this observation.

Finance Committee

Presenting the Balance Sheet, AT drew attention to the fact that the Club's position with regard to Assets was moving in a positive direction. The SOC investments managed by Brewin Dolphin had provided a good return. AT was due to meet with Brewin Dolphin in January, and at the meeting would again raise the issue of ethical investment policy.

AT

7 Branch and Membership Development

The Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC) presented a detailed report of membership status for the quarter up to 30th September. Council noted that there had been a steady increase in membership from June 2015 although there had been more cancellation than new members in the last quarter, resulting in a dip in total membership. Council recognised that a single datum did not represent a trend, but did note that at some stage it might be beneficial to have available as

extended a set of figures as possible (for example extending over a 10 year period) so that some assessment could be made of whether the membership was reaching a plateau. It was noted that the cancellation figure might be artificially higher than anticipated as cancellations were moved into the period under consideration in order that a final issue of *Scottish Birds* could be posted out. In line with previous analyses, it was clear from the data that online recruitment was critically important, with some 70% of all new joiners using this method, JC noted that the new website which was nearing completion, would make data analysis easier in future.

The new website would contain a range of new features, and Council welcomed the generosity of professional photographer Laurie Campbell for allowing the Club to use a selection of his images. JC concluded that, in line with industry accepted estimates, the new website would have a life of at least five years before it needed revising. Tribute was paid to *Mucky Puddle*, the developers, for their professional approach the project.

Council expressed disappointment that the SOC submission to the *Nature of Scotland Awards* did not, yet again, meet with success. It was clear that the awards were given in the face of fierce competition, and learnt that this was particularly the case in 2017. The Vice-President, Jeremy Wilson (JW) offered to see it was possible to get some feedback about the submission, although as the judging panel were all external this might prove difficult. Council welcomed this offer.

JW

The Chair, James Main (JM) on behalf of Council asked that thanks be recorded for the extremely useful and informative new brochure highlighting the importance of Legacy giving to the Club, and the contribution made by Willie Prest in its production. The appropriate page on the new website was being designed to enable the brochure to be easily available.

8 Birding Site Guide App: update

The Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC) gave a brief verbal update on progress with the new site guide app. An Invitation to Tender had been devised, and Council agreed that it would be beneficial if a volunteer from REACH could be found to scrutinise the document from a professional legal perspective. Alan Knox (AK) noted that the technical aspects were secure having been reviewed by an IT specialist. He also noted that there were bound to be annual on-costs. Council welcomed the progress made, noting in discussion that there might, at some point in the future, be merit to moving towards a more web-based model as a lot of software development was moving in this direction. Whether this would prove suitable for an app that was aimed specifically for those in the field was unclear.

JC

9 Conferences: update and report.

- The Club Administrator, Wendy Hicks (WH), presented a written report on the 2017 Annual Conference held at the Athol Palace Hotel (APH) in Pitlochry in October. Council were pleased to note that the Conference had returned a modest profit (some £2.2k) indicating that the conference fee had been accurately set. Feedback from those attendees returning the questionnaire had been extremely positive especially regarding the presentations and the hotel facilities. WH expressed thanks to Doreen Main for collating the feedback.
- With regard to planning for the 2018 Conference, WH informed Council that the APH were not in a position to accommodate the Conference on the preferred dates 26th – 28th October 2018. Further, APH had been successively reducing the room allocation as the available weekends clash with other high profile events in the local area and they have a commitment to other bookings. APH had indicated that any future

bookings would, in any case, have to be at a higher rate, especially for single occupancy. WH had approached other venues, and recommended to Council that Conference be held at the Macdonald Aviemore Resort in 2018. This was available for the preferred dates (26th – 28th October), at lower rates than would be charged by APH, and based on previous experiences of using the conference centre at the Resort would offer an excellent range of facilities. Council supported the recommendation and the Chair, James Main on behalf of Council offered thanks to WH for preparing a thorough and detailed analysis.

WH

- After some discussion it was agreed that the Conference Theme should be “Birds in a Human Landscape”.
- WH noted that the initial arrangements for the spring Scottish Birdwatchers’ Conference, organised in conjunction with the BTO were completed and that a leaflet would be distributed with the next issue of *Scottish Birds*. The Conference would be a Donald Watson Centenary Special celebrating the birds of Dumfries and Galloway and will be held at the SRUC campus at The Barony in Dumfries.

10 Strategy Group briefing to Council

Introducing this item, the Chair, James Main (JM) noted that the Strategy Group were anxious that Council should be kept informed of the types of discussions that had been taking place, the areas that were being addressed and the likely outcomes for the Club. He made clear that many of the issues touched on sensitive areas and that the ideas and concepts that the Group were tackling were by no means settled or agreed. Discussions were still at an early stage and therefore he sought Council’s approval to withhold a detailed Minute in favour of a broad outline. Council agreed to this request.

The Vice-President, Jeremy Wilson (JW) continued the presentation by noting that early discussions at the three meetings held to date had focussed on governance including committee structures and support for Club staff and activities, and a Strategy Map that had been developed in preliminary form that embodied the Club objectives and Constitutional aims, which provided an overall framework. JW offered the view that considerable progress had been made. The Strategy Group intended to come to Council with detailed proposals at the March 2018 meeting.

Strategy Group

11 Honoraria

[The Honorary Secretary, David Heeley (DH), and Honorary Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe (AT) , withdrew for the first part this item. The Minute was taken by the Club Administrator, Wendy Hicks]

Council members were unanimous in their decision that the maximum amount of £1k should be offered to both Secretary and Treasurer for duties undertaken in the past AGM year. Council wished to record its gratitude for the vast amount of time, effort and commitment put in by both during the past year. Council agreed that the limit for next year (AGM 2017 – AGM 2018) should be set at £1250.

DH and AT re-joined the meeting.

Council agreed further that the honoraria offered to the editorial team for *Scottish Birds* should remain at its present level but that this was an issue that was in urgent need of review. Council recognised the invaluable contribution that the Editorial Team made but were reluctant to revise the honoraria in an *ad hoc* manner. During discussion Council expressed disquiet about the process by which honoraria in general were determined. It compared unfavourably with the more structured approach that had now been adopted for staff salaries, lacking transparency and unguided by any form of benchmarking. It was agreed that this

Strategy group / Finance Committee

matter should be taken up by the Strategy Group and the Finance Committee with the intention of implementing a revised process for 2018-2019.

12 Data Protection and GDPR preparations

The Secretary, David Heeley (DH), offered a verbal briefing to Council on behalf of the Management Committee regarding preparations for the forthcoming change in legislation regarding data protection. New legislation originating in the EU would be coming in to force in May 2018 with a strong focus on the rights of individuals regarding the holding of their personal data. The new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) would have a significant impact on the way that the Club managed its affairs, affecting in particular issues surrounding communications with members.

DH informed Council that an analysis of the requirements of GDPR had indicated that, as a charity, not all conditions needed to be fulfilled, and that SOC was not legally obliged to register with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Controller (those who hold personal data on file). It was agreed that there was no obvious merit in registering on a voluntary basis. Exploiting the copious guidance on the ICO website it had been possible to identify all of the areas where a change in practice and approach would be necessary to meet compliance requirements, especially in the areas surrounding the obtaining of consent for communication, and an action plan had been drawn up and prioritised.

A meeting had been held with Waterston House staff, DH, and the President (James Main) which had resolved some of the more difficult issues. Challenges still remained concerning members who chose not to use e-mail accounts, although solutions had been devised. DH offered the opinion that the GDPR requirements were happening at what was possibly an opportune moment with the new Contacts Database in the process of being requisitioned, and the new Club website in the process of being designed. This did mean that technical requirements could be put in place at the outset thus avoiding the potential pitfalls of having to revise existing and entrenched systems.

DH noted that a self-assessment exercise using the ICO tools, working on the assumption that all of the goals identified in the action plan had been achieved, showed that the Club would be fully compliant with the legislation when the implementation project was completed. He had confidence that the May 2018 deadline would be met. Concluding, DH noted that dealing with the GDPR represented a significant increase in workload for Waterston House staff, and that it was not without costs. It would likely prove necessary to employ some temporary staff to provide assistance. Management Committee were aware of this and would be reviewing progress to date at its next meeting in early February.

Management Committee

Council concurred with the approach taken by Management Committee to address this issue in a proactive manner.

13 Waterston House staffing: verbal update

Council were saddened to learn from the Chair, James Main (JM) that the Events Coordinator, Dave Allan (DA), had decided to retire at the end of March 2018. Council noted that DA filled a number of different roles at Waterston House, ranging from on-site Birding Officer, Arts Coordinator, running Beginners birdwatching events and being involved in optic sales. These duties had arisen over time to reflect DA's personal expertise and interests, and Council agreed that it was unlikely that a replacement member of staff could be found with this profile. In any event, it was not clear that this would necessarily be desirable. Council agreed with the proposal forwarded by the Club Administrator, Wendy Hicks (WH) that consideration should be given to splitting the existing role into three separate areas, and then seek initially to fill the vacancy for Arts

Coordinator whilst investigating the appointment of a Birding Officer, coupled with assistance from volunteers to cover some of the other duties. It was agreed that this matter should be passed to the Management Committee.

**Management
Committee**

- 14 AOCB** There was no other competent business.
- 15 Forward dates** Council noted the forward dates for 2018: 11th March, 17th June, 9th September and 2nd December.
- 16 Matters for noting** Council noted that the meeting of the Management Committee scheduled for 14th July had been cancelled due to lack of business.
- 17 Papers received** Council received the following documents:
- Minutes of Library Committee 20th February 2017 (Approved)
 - Minutes of Library Committee 1st May 2017 (Approved)
 - Minutes of Finance Committee 30th September 2017
- 18 Next Meeting** 11th March 2018 : 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven

Signed:



Date: 11th March 2018

James Main, President