

## **Beltane Fire Society**

### **Chair's Report for July 2019 - January 2021**

*As reported to the BFS Membership at the 2020 AGM (held digitally on the 24th January 2021)*



Before going fully into the report, the Board wants to take a moment to remember all those members who are no longer with us at this time. We understand the last year has been particularly hard on us all as a community, so we hope that everyone still feels able to reach out and support one another in our community.

### **The Board of Trustees for June 2019 - January 2021**

At the last AGM (June 2019), the following trustees were elected on by the membership present and the legally defined roles that were taken on by some:

- Alex Nuttgens (*Board Secretary*)
- Brad McArthur (*Chair*)
- Caroline Heavens
- Neil Barton (*Treasurer*)
- Rebecca Conway
- Shae Dunsmore
- Tom Watton

During the tenure of this term, we also co-opted one additional board member:

- Deanna Wolf

Sadly during the tenure of the term, we also had one trustee who resigned from the board:

- Rebecca Conway

I want to thank every trustee that participated in this board term, for helping to guide BFS during a most interesting time and for bringing their skills and knowledge to continue to improve what we do. Without those people coming forward, safeguarding BFS's future would have been a lot harder!

### **What does the Board do?**

The board are the individuals who are legally responsible for BFS the charity with three key areas of focus:

1. GOVERNANCE: Meeting legal requirements for BFS and thinking strategically to safeguarding its future
2. OPERATIONS: Enabling key BFS activities to happen to meet charitable objectives
3. COMMUNITY: Engaging with BFS membership

I have broken down the report into each of these aspects.



## Focusing on Governance

### The Board continued the work of the Governance Review

The last few years, the Board has been improving its governance and this continued further. The Board adopted a Policies and Procedures framework to help standardise how the board creates policies and procedures, so that everything has the same format, terminology, and process of creation. This helps to create a standard that everyone can expect from our policies and procedures to ensure they are created and applied fairly with BFS.

Policies that were approved for the first time or updated during this period:

Conflicts of Interest	Data Protection	Environmental & Biodiversity
Fundraising & Income Generation	Harassment & Bullying	Indirect Cost Recovery
Reserves	Safeguarding	Social Media
Recycling and Waste Management	Organisational Safer Spaces	Staff Entitlements
Volunteering	Whistleblowing	

### The Board initiated a reviewing and update to the Articles of Association

The Articles of Association are one of two key documents that sets out how BFS needs to be governed, the other being the Memorandum of Association. Both were written in 2008, based on a membership sports club. When reviewing these, although the Memorandum of Association was fit for purpose and did not need to be changed, the Articles of Association had a few issues that needed to be changed.

The Board arranged for an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to be held to discuss five proposed changes in October 2020. The changes that were accepted at the EGM (by securing a 75% vote share in favour of those voting) were:

1. Using gender neutral terminology (*removing she/he for they*) and removing the need for a woman's pre-marriage surname within the Articles to improve our inclusivity.
2. Updating the Membership section of the Articles to match how we actually operate to bring us into compliance with our governing documents.
3. Bringing BFS into the digital age (references to digital working as well as paper based) to again reflect how we operate.
4. Showing good operational practice (financial record keeping and recognising how we work) to ensure we comply with recent charity laws and guidelines.

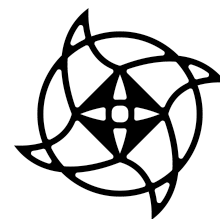
The fifth change was accepted by a majority vote, but failed to meet the 75% threshold and so was not implemented, but instead was discussed and brought for a second vote at the 2020 AGM.



### Improving other Aspects of BFS

Other improvements the Board made this term to ensure BFS is a standard setter in how we treat people we work with as well as ensuring we take a collaborative approach to working with other stakeholders was:

- Acquiring a membership with Arts & Business Scotland to further links with other arts organisations across Scotland,
- Completed consultations with City of Edinburgh Council to ensure our voice is heard in future plans for Calton Hill as one of its key users,
- Furthered our relationship with the Collective to ensure good working relationships on the hill
- Signing up to the “Show the Salary” pledge for when we recruit contractors, which means we will always be upfront about what we will pay people, never ask for previous contract amounts they have been paid as it doesn’t factor into what we are willing to pay, or include a degree as a requirement for the role unless it is essential for that role to be successful.



## Focusing on Operations

### Samhuinn Fire Festival 2019



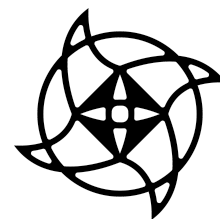
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The first festival of the board term, was another successful Samhuinn Fire Festival on top of Calton Hill. Another amazing selection of groups performed on the hill, and we even tried out having three different processions taking place at points as we still attempted to figure out the best way to make use of Calton Hill to celebrate Samhuinn.

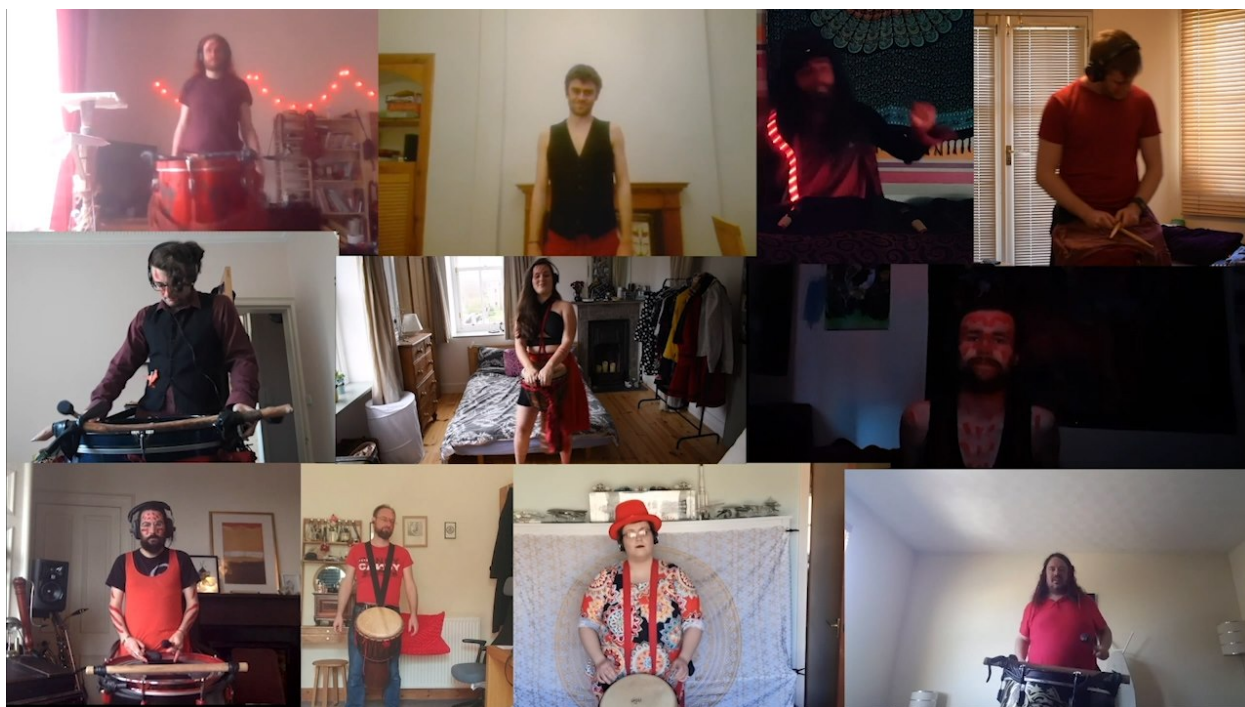
Tickets for the event sold out the day before the event, showing the public is again willing to help financially support the festival when asked. The overall feedback from the public and membership was positive, although some areas for improvement were raised which we aim to keep trying to work on (keeping the audience informed, visibility on the night, etc.)

*Beltane Fire Society is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number: SC040137 Company Number SC341753  
The registered address is 16 Eastcromwell Street, Edinburgh, EH6 6HD  
To learn more about Beltane Fire Society please visit [www.beltane.org](http://www.beltane.org)*





## BOnFire Festival 2020 (Digital Beltane)



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Originally, Beltane Fire Festival 2020 was going to be another physical event with the usual amazing spectacle our volunteers produce. However, with the emerging global pandemic in March, the Board, in discussion with Blues and our Contractors, made the decision to cancel the physical event to protect both volunteer and audience safety. The week following that call, the Scottish government confirmed we made the right choice as lockdown was announced.

After having a few weeks to mourn the loss of our usual gathering to prepare for a festival, BFS started to work on BOnFire 2020 (Be Online Fire Festival) to still help everyone in the community still mark Beltane that year. It was amazing to see those willing to contribute help turn out what was basically a feature length film for the first ever digital celebration from BFS, all within one month!

It was great to see our community pull together to still create and celebrate, and it wouldn't have been possible without everyone's willingness to get stuck in and learn skills we had not used before. This paid off as we saw with the really positive engagement online via Facebook, Youtube, and other social media sites, and even allowed members who live across the world to engage with us.



## Hearth Fire Festival 2020 (Digital Samhuinn)



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Following on from the success of BFS' first ever digital festival, and due to ongoing concerns for volunteer safety, the decision was made in the summer 2020 to again hold a digital festival, this time to mark Samhuinn. This time we looked at how we could safely allow small pods of volunteers to meet up to practice, aware that part of the magic of our festivals is when our members can meet up together to create and socialise. We even managed to give people more notice and allow more time for people to really think about and practice what they wanted to contribute.

This extra time allowed our members to be even more creative than before, resulting in some beautiful pieces for what was to be the second feature length creation of BFS. Again it received a lot of positive feedback from those viewing, even if the start of our event was overshadowed with a government announcement around further restrictions which led to a dip in attendance for the beginning.

It was heart warming to see the commitment that people made to again helping our community celebrate the changing of the seasons, so much so that we even had contributions from people from various parts of the planet. We know that as the year went on, engaging with digital content all the time become more challenging as we all experience Zoom fatigue, so a huge thanks goes out to those that beared with it all.





### Other Activities during the term



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As well as our usual festivals, we also managed to hold several other events in the board term:

- Yule 2019 - a gathering of the community to share food, songs, stories and other activities together.
- Dance into Imbolc - a club night where we invited several BFS adjacent groups to come along and perform to the membership and public. We used this club night as a chance to fundraise and split costs out amongst all the groups performing and BFS to ensure performers benefited financially from participating.
- E-Lughnasadh 2020 - a way to mark Lughnasadh in some form since gathering in person wasn't available as has been done by the community for a number of years now. This was set as a low commitment event with a variety of creative videos being submitted and shared online over the week at the start of August.
- Yule 2020 - whilst we couldn't have our usual meet up for Yule, the community did prepare a Zoom call where we could share recipes in advance, listen to each other perform, and connect with each other in a digital manner.





### Fundraising & Income Generation

The Board continued to examine how it can help diversify BFS' streams of income to ensure we are not wholly dependent upon only festival ticket sales, which given how 2020 affected our finances, needs to continue to be pushed forward. The Chair attended the Institute of Fundraising's Scotland Conference 2019 to learn more about how we can effectively fundraise as well as networked with other organisations and businesses which we may potentially partner with in the future.

The Board also continued to look at merchandise that would appeal to our membership and audiences. So far we still have plenty of the hoodies previously ordered and now also have bottle opener keyrings in four lovely neon colours!



One trend we did notice was that our income from fundraising & income generation activities in 2020 increased from the previous year (6,564 v. 2,250) while our expenditure decreased (221 v. 5,885). This is in part due to these becoming our only income streams for the year, rather than additional to our usual income, so there was still a deficit caused this year. The lower expenditure did relate to having bulk purchased BFS hoodies in 2019 as well as being frugal with how our money was spent in the year after seeing our usual income dry up.

### Sustainability

The Board continued to push BFS to think about how its activities impact upon our natural world. The Chair attended the 2019 Green Arts Conference to speak with other arts organisations in Scotland about how they reduce their carbon footprint, as well as speaking to service providers on what potential ways they could assist BFS in becoming greener. There was also the switch over from British Gas to Ecotrcity for the BFS offices, so that we would have a 100% renewables supplier.

In September 2020, BFS was granted £500 from the Climate Challenge Fund (part of Keep Scotland Beautiful) to explore with the membership how we can improve BFS in terms of sustainability. This money was used to help hold two community discussions around the issues of being more sustainable as audience, groups, and as an organisation, as well as helping the Board experiment with more eco-friendly materials to see if they would be effective with BFS.



The Board also made a commitment to donate to various green causes / organisations with each festival to help offset our carbon footprint as an organisation. This had originally been set up as coming from the surplus generated by each festival, and then to adapt to how we operated in lockdown, it became a commitment of 10% of donations for the festival (capped at £1,000). We have managed to donate £1,345 to 9 different organisations, all noted below, which has even resulted in the planting of a Beltane Grove of 43 trees in the highlands of Scotland.



Trees for L<sup>Y</sup>fe





## Focusing on Membership

### Improving Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in BFS

Over the Summer of 2020, BFS also held a survey around the accessibility of our festivals, both for our members who volunteer as well as for those who attend as audience members. We wanted to get direct information from those who already engage with us to see what we are getting right, what we need to improve, and any other aspects people wanted to highlight to us to ensure we continue to improve as an organisation.

There was also a proposal to set up a committee to help look at how BFS can improve the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion of people from various backgrounds within our membership and audience. As this is a new style of working for BFS, having a committee of volunteers who support the Board on a particular issue, this is currently a trial group till May 2021 to see how it is working. If people do want to get involved in this group, please drop an email to [equalities@beltane.org](mailto:equalities@beltane.org)

### Community Issues

Another key thing that the Board also deals with is complaints being submitted by our members. In a bid to help improve transparency with the community, and to address the feeling that sometimes complaints are ignored, we wanted to highlight some key info on our complaints over the last four years. Below is a breakdown of those key statistics:

	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Received</b>	6	5	10	6
<b>Average time to Resolve</b>	3.5 months	2.6 months	4.1 months	4.8 months
<b>Average Mechanism Used</b>	Resolutions / Emails	Resolutions	Disciplinary	Disciplinary / Emails

For the sake of confidentiality in regards to the complaints, we can't share things such as specifics on what was complained about, who raised or was subject to complaints, or other identifying information around these complaints.

Complaints take time to properly look into, both in reviewing if they are with the scope of BFS to investigate (i.e. relating directly to our activities), setting up meetings with both complainants and complainees, as well as finalising the report and submitting to the whole board for considering the outcomes.



## Looking forward for 2021

To wrap up on what we have done, I also wanted to highlight what key things are on the horizon for BFS and what the next Board will need to manage:

- The need to navigate the continuing pandemic of coronavirus and its impact on our physical festivals. This includes not only looking at how we continue to engage with people digitally while necessary, but also how we incorporate that into our usual ways of celebration. There also needs to be frank and honest discussion around participating within BFS activities, as audience and volunteer, and what safety mechanisms we need to agree to (e.g. wearing of face masks, keeping socially distance, need for vaccination).
- Managing BFS reserves effectively and carefully watching the financial commitments BFS has during 2021, to ensure the charity continues to operate even when our income streams are low / not available.
- Improving areas of governance by finishing the outstanding policies & procedures that we have agreed are needed. We want to ensure that we continue to govern the charity effectively and that we have clear procedures in how we handle things to ensure fairness whenever BFS handles a situation.
- Pushing BFS to be carbon neutral before 2030 or earlier, since we know that we don't have long to act to protect the planet as we currently know it. We know we can never be fully neutral since we play with fire, but we can continue to look at ways to offset and reduce where we can. We should be leading in this where possible, so we can show that if a fire festival can be carbon neutral, anyone can be!
- Ensuring there is a continued drive to build into the community the shared responsibility for safeguarding the community as well as ensuring that equality, diversity, and inclusivity is embedded into the heart of our community.

I want to thank all my fellow trustees, the Blues, and our contractors for helping to navigate what has been one of the most challenging BFS has faced in recent memory. And I want to thank the community for their continued support and engagement.

Thanks,  
Bradley McArthur  
Chair for Beltane Fire Society, 2019 - 2020