

Beltane Fire Society

Sustainability Committee Minutes

17th January 2025,
Black Moon Botanica, Thistle Street, Edinburgh

In Attendance: Sammi Searle - Session Facilitator (SS), Alex Alderton (AA), Bob Ball (BB), Sarah Barr (SB), Seb Lemaire (SL), Maddie Bromfield (MB), Mairi Mackay (MMK), Mailis Marty (MMR), Sophie McCarthy (SMC), Simone McKenzie (SMK).

Apologies: Tamsyn Ball (TB), Jenny Glover (JG), Marc MacPdraig (MMP)

Minutes: Sarah Barr

1. Welcome and Apologies

SS will be facilitating for this session.
There were apologies from TB, JG, and MMP.

2. Current BFS Sustainability and Outreach Work

BB provided a summary of work from previous boards, noting existing Environmental Policy being fine but that the Environmental Plan needs updating, and features three named policies that can't be located. BB noted work by Tom Watton (TW) on carbon footprint calculations, which need locating and/or documented for future use and for evidence to funders.

ACTION: Obtain previous carbon footprint calculations from Tom Watton.

ACTION: Provide list of suggestions for updating Environmental Plan

SS highlighted potential of this committee to function as a continuity thread for environmental work. MMK suggested adding the committee to the website along with Board Minutes.

ACTION: Discuss adding Committee Minutes and information to BFS website with Board.

SS highlighted TW's work with vendors.

ACTION: Ask Tom Watton for sustainability information on festival vendors.

SMK noted work with fabric sharing. MMR noted work with Three Hares Woodland in previous years.

MB highlighted work to be done in Divestment, and potential to list on website that BFS do not accept money from fossil fuels. BB noted this would help BFS regarding potential aggressive emails from funders. It was noted that, at present, BFS relies on festival income, and does not receive any grants at present, but could apply for grants in future. BB suggested work on this area could also include investment policies, in the case of bequeathments in the future. MB suggested signing up to divestment pledges to support collective action. Ethical concerns regarding large donations from individuals were discussed.

ACTION: Check Ethical Fundraising Policy for mention of fossil fuel funding, and make recommendations on wording to Board if needed.

ACTION: Suggest adding a note on fossil fuel funding on BFS website.

ACTION: Look up who gave BFS the £1000 sustainability grant a few years ago, and what that was spent on.

ACTION: Research any existing policy on large individual donations, and investments.

ACTION: Research, and propose signing up to, divestment pledges, and present to the Board.

BB highlighted charity rules around party political campaigning, and separating them from campaigning around government or council issues outside of a party context.

3. Future Courses of Action

Four overall structures for action were outlined: Mitigation, Community Activities, Adaptation, and Policy/Networking. These were discussed in separate sections as below.

3.1 MITIGATION

This was defined mitigation as including energy and fuel use, food and water, travel and transport, consumption and waste, and other ecological impacts.

BB highlighted the change in paraffin fuel use to a more environmentally friendly one; MMK noted that the amount of paraffin burned in run-up and festival is equivalent to the first 10s of a plane taking off.

SL emphasised that a carbon footprint analysis will put variables into perspective, and that it is better to focus on high-impact things like audience travel to the festivals. Solutions to the issue of audience travel to festivals was discussed, including potential FAQs, surveys-at-ticket-purchase, widgets to allow us to calculate carbon from ticket purchase info, and the potential to revisit livestreaming and related problems with that. SL noted that encouraging carbon offsetting or similar donation schemes will not send the right message.

ACTION: Create a project around investigating solutions to carbon emissions from audience travel to and from our festivals.

Food and water issues were discussed. AA and SMC noted a lack of vegan options at festivals and that requiring vendors to provide vegetarian/vegan options may be an easy win.

BB suggested identifying the green map for Edinburgh as it relates to better vendor procurement.

ACTION: Identify the Green Map for Edinburgh.

ACTION: Research greener festival food vendors, and those with more vegan options.

Travel and transport was discussed, SS noting audience travel covered. SMC suggested hiring vans powered with electric or biofuels over diesel or petrol, and AA suggested looking into cargo bike schemes.

ACTION: Identify viability of renting vans that run on renewable energy, including speaking to Tech GOs about van requirements.

ACTION: Research BFS joining a cargo bike scheme.

Consumption and Waste was discussed. AA raised adding costuming/prop sourcing to list, and this was discussed, with MMR adding GRS kits to this. MMK noted it would be worth looking at carbon footprint results to see if worth devoting capacity to. MMR noted that Lore and COs are planning to inventory Beltonia for the purpose of loaning kit. MMK suggested making an online Free Shop for items in Beltonia once inventory prepared.

ACTION: Investigate viability of creating an Online Free Shop for loaning out items in Beltonia.

SS raised question of assessing energy supplier choice; and SMC noted that the lease for Beltonia is ending in 2026. BB noted that an engineer will conduct a green audit on a charity premises for free.

ACTION: Hold a separate meeting to create a set of recommendations to the Board for improving environmental sustainability of new premises, and offer help in researching information while premises hunt ongoing.

3.2 COMMUNITY

Community impacts were discussed, including impacts of weekends away regarding waste, biowaste, effects on ground-nesting birds, destruction of undergrowth and plants. SB suggested benefits of collating resources like firewood and transport for weekends away in some contexts. BB suggested identifying things to warn groups away from ding such as areas where wild camping could be argued against due to ground nesting birds. SS highlighted importance of creating norms rather than just making suggestions. SMK noted importance of keeping

commonly used sites such as Roslin Glen in mind throughout the year re: litter picks and care. A guide for GOs/the community, and a more interactive resource were both discussed.

ACTION: Organise a group of people to put together a year round guide for weekends away and caring for specific traditionally used spaces throughout the year as well as in the run-up, that GOs can consult. Include adaptation (changes in ticks, rainfall, snowmelt, temperature for climate crisis times), and invite contributions to bring together community knowledge on this topic. Consider how it could be interactive.

MMK suggested having a member go to a GO meeting, and MMR suggested the GO Weekend would be useful

SS raised issue of how festivals impact their spaces, including Calton Hill and Holyrood Park. SMC suggested organising a hill assessment in the weeks post derig to fill in holes and pick litter in addition to current litter picks in derig work. MMK noted current efforts by Calton Hill Conservation Trust (CHCT) to encourage people to litter picks, and suggested incentives such as a potluck for members.

SB highlighted the usefulness of combining environmental work with our charitable aims, and that this could be done by combining practical conservation work with a related character workshop to teach street theatre skills.

ACTION: Research litter picks, and motivating members to go to new and existing litter picks with both BFS and organisations like CHCT.

ACTION: Research ways to combine practical conservation work with character workshops or other aspects of theatre that would meet our charitable aims.

ACTION: Find ways to incorporate tangible practical rewilding work into the Wheel of the Year and the festival run-up.

AA raised idea of assessing environmental impacts of our bank and switching accounts. SS noted that Triodos (BFS' savings account provider) is well ranked in terms of environmental impact. SB noted that BoS (current account provider) has various issues for both environment/other ethical considerations, and difficulties in customer service/mandate form security, and that it would be worth swapping accounts where possible.

ACTION: Suggest to treasurer that BFS move its current account from Bank of Scotland to a more environmentally friendly bank with better charity banking customer service.

3.3 ADAPTATION

Adaptation was discussed. BB noted usefulness of the Sniffer organisation, who can advise on dealing with heatwaves and flooding for outdoor rehearsals. SS highlighted desire to think about how the community can adapt to the weather patterns that are happening, and how to help one another. SL noted potential to adapt to the straightening out of Beltane and Samhuinn in line with changes to seasons with climate crisis. SMC noted timelines of working on this ahead of

40th Anniversary in 2027, and revisiting the first festival to now. MMK noted work by Court Selection Committees in asking court applicants about leadership regarding the current climate crisis.

ACTION: BB to contact Sniffer.

ACTION: BB to link committee to Cope Scotland's jigsaw on climate despair.

ACTION: Research how we as a committee can support Court roles in providing leadership on the Climate Crisis within festivals.

BB highlighted importance of making sure that when people hear "climate", the first thing in their head should be "things they can do about it", highlighting work of Britain Talks Climate as a resource. MB seconded the need for empowerment.

ACTION: MB to investigate ways to emphasise empowerment and community when talking about the climate crisis, to mitigate against despair.

AA highlighted MMK's upcoming Active Hope workshop and the usefulness of projects such as Siri Pantzar's Climate book group. MMK noted potential to put such events in Beltonia Bugle Newsletter.

3.4 POLICY AND NETWORKING

Policy and Networking were discussed. SS and BB raised work by SOS Leith to solve issue of Water of Leith pollution, and potential for BFS to do a shout out of their work. BB also noted ECCAN, which AA noted individuals and orgs can both join. SMC noted she now works for ECCAN. AA queried how this group should be defined in terms of recommendations to the Board.

ACTION: SMC to research BFS joining ECCAN and discuss with SS.

ACTION: Research Local (Edinburgh and Lothians) and National campaign groups that BFS could collaborate with.

ACTION: Check if TW has already emailed Business Energy Scotland for help with decarbonising firespinning and other areas; encourage board to contact BES if not already done.

ACTION: Write a proposal saying what the committee is, with long and short term goals, clearly defining remit, scope, and authority. Then, present to Board for review.

4. AOB

Future meetings and internal comms were discussed.

ACTION: Ask Board/Blues/Contractors for a representative to come to our meetings.

ACTION: Decide on a group name by next meeting.

ACTION: SB to create a discord server.

ACTION: SS and AA to find a regular meeting venue, and discuss and decide on one before next meeting.

ACTION: Plan table and possibly short intro speech for Open Meeting.

ACTION: Put a poll on the discord to decide on the date of the next meeting, likely in between the GO Weekend (15-16th Feb) and the Open Meeting (22nd Feb).

End of minutes.