

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Report No</b>	<b>ECI/22/2021</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Economy and Infrastructure

**Date:** 5 May 2021

**Report Title:** Flow Country World Heritage Site Nomination – Accountable Body

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

### 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents a summary of progress in respect of the submission of a Nomination dossier to UNESCO World Heritage committee via the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), summarises a revised new governance structure and seeks approval for the Council to act as Accountable Body for the UNESCO bid.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the content of the report.
  - ii. Support a request for the Highland Council to act as one of the Accountable Bodies for the Flow Country UNESCO World Heritage bid submission.

### 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - there are no additional resource implication arising out of this report. The Bid process is already supported by a Project Officer, a post co - funded by Nature Scot, RSPB, Wildlands and Highland Council.

If additional costs are identified, then these will form the basis of a separate paper to the project partners and the Highland Council.

- 3.2 **Legal** - there are no additional legal obligations arising out of this report, other than the employment of a Project Officer. Any additional liability would depend on what further involvement the HC wants out of the site once inscribed and would be governed by a separate agreement.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - There are no direct Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications arising from this report. However, completion of the nomination pack, which if accepted and approved will lead to achieving UNESCO World Heritage Status for Caithness and Sutherland, an international accolade for Highland, which would undoubtedly attract future investment and safeguard a site of local and international importance.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - Climate change and biodiversity are inextricably linked. Securing UNESCO World Heritage status will help safeguard this internationally important peatland site for the benefit of both biodiversity and Carbon and result in positive action in tackling the global climate and ecological emergency.
- 3.5 **Risk** – Failure to deliver the bid in time may negatively impact the organisation's reputation and the Council's commitment to the declared climate and ecological emergency. The nomination folder needs to be completed and with DCMS by September 2022, for onward delivery to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Spring 2023.

Working towards this Status aligns closely with the stated aims of the Council's climate and ecological emergency i.e. safeguarding our natural heritage and repositioning Highland as a low CO<sub>2</sub> region.

- 3.6 Gaelic - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

## 4 Background

- 4.1 The Flow Country has been on the UK Tentative list of potential World Heritage Sites since 1999. The Peatlands Partnership, of which the Council is a partner, has submitted three Technical Evaluations to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), in 2013, 2015 and 2019. Following the 2019 submission, approval from DCMS to develop a full Nomination to UNESCO for The Flow Country as a proposed World Heritage Site was granted in March 2020.
- 4.2 The Council along with SNH, HIE, RSPB and Wildland Ltd. funded the first World Heritage Officer post to undertake significant local engagement and coordinate the submission of the successful 2019 technical evaluation. The Highland Council hosted the position of Project Coordinator for The Flow Country World Heritage Site Project for the first stage nomination. A New Project officer was appointed in February 2021.
- 4.3 Work has started on the nomination dossier with important progress being made on the definition of the proposed site boundary and confirmation of the criteria on which the site will be nominated. The nomination folder needs to be completed and with DCMS by September 2022, for onward delivery to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Spring 2023.

## 5 Governance

- 5.1 To bring the nomination forward to UNESCO and to provide a longer term, post-inscription management structure, a new steering group and working group structure has been proposed (See appendix 1). These revised structures will work to the Highland Council and Nature Scot as accountable bodies (AB).

The revised structure is as follows:-

- 1) a set of **Accountable bodies** for the nomination;
- 2) a **Steering Group** of stakeholders;
- 3) a **Working Group** to do the day-to-day work of the bid, which is only for the bid period; and
- 4) a smaller **Executive Group** of funders and the Steering Group Chair, which is initially for the bid period.

- 5.2 **Accountable Bodies** - The bid needs to be led by an Accountable Body(s) which is properly constituted and permanent. The Peatland Partnership is currently unable to take this forward as it is not constituted body. It is therefore proposed that both lead partners, Nature Scotland (NS) and Highland Council (HC) take this role – as formal institutions, one of which is the local democratic authority. The Accountable Body(s) will be responsible for signing the final submission and holding project resources.
- 5.3 **Steering Group** - The steering group will act as the Strategic decision-making group. The Steering Group is a DCMS / UNESCO requirement and is where all of the key Stakeholders have the opportunity to have their say and make the final decisions.
- 5.4 Member representation from Caithness and Sutherland has been sought for the steering group and Councillors Deirdre Mackay and Karl Rosie have been nominated to represent their areas.
- 5.5 The **Working Group** is the staff who are doing the day to day work and will report to the Steering Group and Executive Group. These are a mixture of experts and generalists, and they will be writing the documents and commissioning others to write parts of them.
- 5.6 The **Executive Group** - comprises the Accountable Bodies and other funders, plus the Steering Group Chair. Responsible for securing resources and set the agendas for the Steering Group.
- 5.7 Alongside all of this is the **Peatland Partnership** - important wider stakeholder body and linked into all of the above structures.

## 6 Next Steps

- 6.1 Whilst progress has already been made in recruiting a new project officer, work now needs to step up a gear to ensure appropriate structures are in place and key targets dates are met, in particular boundaries need to be agreed and a comparative analysis needs to be undertaken which demonstrates that the Flow country is unique in a global context and therefore can justify UNESCO inscription.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 24 March 2021

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## Appendix 1 - Draft

### Proposed structure: representation and roles

