

Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Strategic Development Planning Authority

**To: Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Strategic Development Planning Authority
Joint Committee**

On: 12th September 2022

Report by

Stuart Tait, Manager

***Clyde Peatlands* Project Officer - Recruitment Proposal**

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for the Joint Committee to a proposal for the recruitment of a new “*Clyde Peatlands*” Project Officer as part of the suite of Green Network Blueprint delivery initiatives.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Joint Committee are asked to consider the report and agree
- the creation a Clyde Peatlands Project Officer post;
 - the use of Clydeplan reserves to underwrite a year's extension to the initial contract advertised with funding covered by a Letter of Comfort from Peatland Action (refer Appendix) as per paragraph 5.3; and,
 - that Green Network Partnership directly host the new post via Renfrewshire Council.

3. Context

- 3.1 The *Clyde Peatlands* was launched and endorsed at the Glasgow City Region Cabinet meeting in June 2022 as the most recent Green Network Blueprint delivery initiative following on from the Clyde Climate Forest.
- 3.2 The aim of *Clyde Peatlands* is to bring about a step change in the scale and rate of peatland restoration across the City Region which would make a significant contribution to the region's drive for net zero and respond to the ecological crisis by restoring a UK and Scottish priority habitat.

- 3.3 The original intention was to employ two new project officers, one senior Project Officer and a second Project Officer, on a lower grade, who would have a more of a community focus.
- 3.4 Both posts would be fully funded through NatureScot's Peatland Action Fund including all on-costs, training, travel, insurance and equipment. This funding is currently secured until March 2024.
- 3.5 The posts were advertised in June 2022 but unfortunately had an extremely poor response with only one applicant for each with neither meeting the necessary criteria at interview. There are likely to be three main reasons for the poor response.
- 3.6 Firstly, there is a limited pool of people in the job market with the necessary skills and experience to fully meet the requirements of the job profile. Therefore, any new posts need to be attractive to those people which leads to the other two reasons, length of contract and pay scale. It's likely that the two-year contract and pay scales offered by *Clyde Peatlands* simply weren't competitive enough.
- 3.7 All the above is disappointing but has allowed for a review of how *Clyde Peatlands* should be resourced going forward, a proposal for which is set out below.

4. Peatland Officer

- 4.1 As discussed above any new post will need to be competitive in the marketplace. It was always going to be a difficult ask to get someone with the necessary experience for the lower graded post on circa £23,000, and it's likely that anyone recruited to that post would need a significant amount of support and capacity building which would be difficult given existing officer capacity.
- 4.2 Although the senior officer was advertised at a more competitive salary of circa £33,000, when benchmarked against other recently advertised peatland posts it falls short e.g., Cairngorms National Park recently advertised two permanent contracts on a pay scale of up to £39,000.
- 4.3 In discussion with NatureScot's Peatland Action Team, it was agreed that creating a new higher-grade post benchmarked against the Green Network's Development Officers (£35,000 - £39,000) was the preferred option. It was felt that with support from the Peatland Action Team and the Green Network, a single experienced officer could deliver against the ambitions of *Clyde Peatlands*.

5. Contract length

- 5.1 The Peatland Action Fund is resourced directly by the Scottish Government with funding allocated in two yearly cycles. The current cycle runs until March 2024 meaning that *Clyde Peatlands* can currently only offer a firm contract up until that point. With the time lost going back through the recruitment process this means that in reality the post would be offered at 18 months, which is likely to be even less attractive than the first time.
- 5.2 Given the Scottish Government has committed £250 million up to 2030 for peatland restoration, it is a virtual certainty that the next funding cycle from April 2024 to March 2026 will be available to *Clyde Peatlands*. Peatland Action hope that that would be confirmed as early as October/November this year.

- 5.3 Peatland Action has indicated that if the money could be found to underwrite a new contract beyond March 2024, then they could provide a written assurance that when the next tranche of Scottish Government funding is released, the money used to underwrite the contract would be taken back off the table and replaced with Peatland Action funding. The Letter of Comfort from NatureScot is set out in the Appendix.
- 5.4 If money was found to underwrite for a year, this would allow the post to be advertised for an initial contract of around two and half years (October 2022 - March 2025) with an agreement that this would be extended by Peatland Action until March 2026 when their funding is confirmed.
- 5.5 The cost of underwriting the contract for a year is estimated at £45,000 and the ask is that Clydeplan cover this cost through the utilisation of its reserves.

6. Hosting arrangements

- 6.1 It is proposed that hosting a new officer directly within the Green Network team and employed through Renfrewshire Council is the preferred option similar to that of the recently appointed Green Network Wetlands and Grassland Development Officer.
- 6.2 This would also be helpful for synergy in terms of the two posts being located in the same organisation and office and would be a more efficient way of managing the process.

Appendix



Glasgow & Clyde Valley Green Network,
Room 2.29,
40 John St,
Glasgow,
G1 1JL

17 August 2022

Dear Ally

GLASGOW & CLYDE VALLEY GREEN NETWORK (GCVGN) - PEATLAND ACTION FUNDING

At our recent meeting at which we discussed the future funding of Peatland ACTION officer posts within GCVGNP I said I would write to set out our position as it stands.

The current Scottish Government/NatureScot budget commitment to the Peatland ACTION Programme means that all posts within the programme are fully supported until 31 March 2024. As you know this means any posts currently advertised can only be offered to that date. We recognise that this limited period may affect candidates thinking of applying for posts.

Whilst we cannot formally guarantee any funding beyond March 2024 the context is encouraging. The Scottish Government has pledged a ten-year funding package worth £250 million to support the restoration of 250,000 hectares of degraded peat by 2030. Peatland ACTION is the government's programme tasked with delivering this target and the government confirms their ongoing commitment to fund the programme on an annual basis. Given this pledge we are confident that support for all posts will go beyond 31 March 2024.

Over the coming months the programme will be discussing the extension of all posts to 31 March 2026 with the Scottish Government and within NatureScot. It is our aim is to confirm this has been secured before the end of this financial year. We cannot, of course, absolutely guarantee this commitment until we formally receive it from Scottish Government/NatureScot.

You highlighted the challenge in trying to recruit a new officers given the short contract period on offer. You suggested that the post could be advertised to 31 March 2025 with the local authority underwriting the funding of the post from the 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 period. This lengthier contract would make it a more attractive to potential candidates.

We discussed the possibility that, on confirmation from Scottish Government/NatureScot that that all Peatland ACTION posts would be extended to 31 March 2026, Peatland ACTION would then take responsibility for covering the costs for that same period and the local authority could re-allocate their commitment elsewhere. I have discussed this suggestion with our programme manager and we are content with that approach.

We are also content with idea that the number of posts be reduced from two to one but that this single post will retain a community engagement element. We can agree the detail on of this in due course and amend our memorandum of agreement accordingly.

We would be happy to discuss any of the above or other related issues with you or a local authority representative if that would be of help.

Yours sincerely

Barry

Barry Dunne
Peatland Action Project Manager - Delivery

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NatureScot is the operating name of Scottish Natural Heritage