



Minutes of the 13th meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation (redacted)

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Thirteenth meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation held via Zoom on Thursday, 10 June 2021.

Members present:

Professor Sir Duncan Wingham (Executive Chair), Nick Folland (Senior Independent Member), Professor Hannah Cloke, Dr Matthew Harwood, Dr Rebecca Heaton, Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, Michael Lewis, Clare Matterson, Gordon McGregor, Professor John Pyle, Professor Gideon Henderson, CSA, Defra (part), Professor Graham Underwood, Chair, Science Committee

NERC/UKRI Directors (Head Office): Nigel Bird (Director, Major Projects) (part), Ruth Elliot (Finance Director, UKRI), Victoria McMyn (Chief Operating Officer, NERC), Alison Robinson (Deputy Executive Chair), Professor Susan Waldron (Director, Research and Skills), Dr Iain Williams (Director, Strategic Partnerships)

Apologies: Judith Batchelar, Professor Karin Lochte, Sue Donaldson

Other attendees: Rob Gillies (entire meeting), Candy Snelling for Item 6, Sophie Hodgson for item 7, Corrina Urquhart for item 8, Karen Hanghøj, (Director, British Geological Survey) for item 9

Secretariat: Helen Page

Introductory items

1. Executive Chair's welcome and introductions (Oral)

- 1.1 Duncan Wingham welcomed members to the thirteenth meeting of NERC Council.
- 1.2 Duncan Wingham asked members for any updates to their declared interests or any vested interests in the items being discussed today.
- 1.3 Rebecca Heaton informed Council that she was moving from her role at Drax to a new role as Director of Sustainability, Ovo Energy from August 2021. John Pyle informed Council that, as he was affiliated with a NERC research centre, he had a vested interest and would not comment on the financial aspects of item 7.
- 1.4 Duncan Wingham asked members for any amendments and matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting. No amendments were made, and the minutes of the twelfth meeting were confirmed as a good record.
- 1.5 Duncan Wingham advised that the majority of the actions listed on the Decisions and Actions paper were completed, on the forward agenda or would be covered under the

Executive Chair's update.

Duncan Wingham added that the action to meet with the Helmholtz Association, Germany would remain open with a view to following it up once restrictions were lifted and a physical meeting might take place. The action regarding the working group on Net Zero plus would be discussed under the Executive Chair update.

2. Update from UKRI (Oral)

- 2.1 Duncan Wingham introduced Ruth Elliot, UKRI Finance Director, who was attending the meeting in place of Sue Donaldson.
- 2.2 Ruth Elliot gave an oral update on some of the key activities and announcements within UKRI including the recent announcement of the preferred candidate for the Chair, UKRI Board, Sir Andrew Mackenzie (Chair, Shell) to replace Sir John Kingman.
- 2.3 Ruth Elliot explained that the financial settlement for 2021/22 had been confirmed and was around £8 billion across UKRI which was slightly lower than last year due to the reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA). Ruth added that the next Spending Review was due to launch soon and it would be important to create a compelling case for science although it was not yet clear how many years it would cover.
- 2.4 Ruth Elliot added that progress was being made on both Reforming our Business and the Simpler and Better Funding System and the business case for the new Service for HR, Accounting, Reporting and Procurement (SHARP) had now been approved by BEIS.
- 2.5 Finally, Ruth Elliot explained that planning was in place for a phased return to Head Office locations in line with Government guidance and plans to develop hybrid working across UKRI were in place.
- 2.6 Gideon Henderson asked whether there was any update on the interface between UKRI and Horizon. Duncan Wingham agreed to provide more detail on the implementation once known.

3. Update from CSA, Defra (Oral)

- 3.1 Gideon Henderson explained that he intended to focus his update on closer working between Government, research and innovation and UKRI with regard to co-design and co-funding of programmes.
- 3.2 Gideon Henderson outlined five key areas for Defra which might help inform future co-design of programmes:
 - i. One Health (animal, human health and zoonosis)
 - ii. Innovation led response to the food strategy
 - iii. Net zero (environment and nature)
 - iv. Measurement and monitoring
 - v. Data science
- 3.3 Gideon Henderson commented that there was activity at a cross-Government level on:
 - i. Space (which was relevant to Defra and NERC from an Earth observation point of view)
 - ii. Oceans (including how to improve co-ordination across Government departments)
 - iii. Closer linkage between environment and health
- 3.4 Gideon Henderson also highlighted the current importance of the international agenda particularly with G7 and COP26 this year.

- 3.5 Council asked about the future of the Copernicus programme and Gideon Henderson confirmed Defra was the lead department, that the UK would continue to associate and fund the programme and have access to calls to be launched in the future.
- 3.6 Council queried how the links between health and the environment might be improved and emphasised the importance of understanding the links between biodiversity and health. Gideon Henderson responded that there might be opportunities for working with the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the National Institute Health Research (NIHR) so it would be important to consider opportunities in the broadest sense.
- 3.7 Finally, Council asked whether a Government strategy was available for net zero and Gideon Henderson explained that a BEIS-led Net Zero strategy would be published this year with a Bio-Energy strategy in 2022.

4. Executive Chair's update (Oral)

- 4.1 Duncan Wingham gave an oral update on some of the key activities since the previous Council meeting.

i. Trusted Research

Duncan Wingham informed Council that the Government had recently published a security review which had included consideration of the security of information related to science and technology. This had led to increased consideration of areas in the NERC portfolio where there might be risk. NERC had decided to provide advice to its researchers when considering the potential risk of working internationally and would learn from other research councils who had experience in this area. Duncan Wingham advised Council that there would be a discussion on Trusted Research at the next meeting.

ACTION: Trusted Research to be added to the Council agenda for September 2021

ii. Open Access

Duncan Wingham informed Council that a proposal on open access had been discussed by the UKRI Board in May when it was agreed that the policy and processes would be examined from a legal viewpoint before final sign off by the UKRI Board in July and subsequent publication of the policy.

iii. Spending Review

Duncan Wingham explained that the timescale for the forthcoming Spending Review was not yet known and that it would be important for the UKRI bid to match Government priorities and that he would be leading on the Net Zero plus agenda. It was agreed to provide a further update at the next meeting including the extent of any agreement to work with other Government departments.

ACTION: An update to be provided on Net Zero Plus at the September Council meeting

Duncan Wingham explained that he would cover the settlement for 2021/22 and 2022/23 under Item 5 and explained that the sub-group of Council would be re-convened once there was increased clarity on the budget with an expectation that this might be by the end of July.

iv. Simpler and Better Funding

Duncan Wingham informed Council that, following discussion at Executive Committee, it had been decided to establish a senior body to approve UKRI grant related decisions and policies as there was not currently a mechanism to do this. He added that to move to a more streamlined funding approach across UKRI there would need to be compromise. It was agreed to provide an update on the Simpler and Better Funding

programme at the December meeting.

ACTION: An update to be provided on the Simpler and Better Funding programme at the December Council meeting

Council queried whether Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) was being considered under the Simpler and Better Funding programme. Duncan Wingham confirmed that the senior body, once established, would be responsible for determining new policy and this would include EDI consideration.

v. National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF)

Duncan Wingham advised Council that a number of NPIF funding schemes had been paused in 2020 due to the pandemic and that these had now been released, including for the Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) and Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF). NERC had recently announced a £31.5 million initiative in novel methods of greenhouse gas removal and Duncan Wingham offered his thanks to Gideon Henderson for his input in suggesting this initiative.

vi. BAS staff recognised with Royal Society Fellowships

Duncan Wingham informed Council that Professor Dame Jane Francis, Director, British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and Professor Richard Horne, Head of Space Weather and Atmosphere team, BAS had been elected as Fellows to the Royal Society.

Items for discussion

5. NERC allocations for 2021/22 and 2022/23 (NERC 21/15) (Slides, item 5)

5.1 Duncan Wingham introduced this item and presented slides to set the context.

5.2 Duncan Wingham explained that some types of potential commitments had been outlined in the accompanying slides and could be summarised under the broad themes of: pump-priming of future strategic research; championing diversity and inclusion; developing the NERC Digital Strategy; supporting existing strategic investments and estate investment for sustainability.

5.3 Council asked whether there might be an opportunity to use some of the NERC headroom in 2021/22 for COP26 to showcase UK research and were informed that UKRI had provided a dedicated and separate budget for this activity. The Executive noted that some proposals for 2021/22 spend would amplify the NERC role in COP26.

5.4 Council asked for more detail on the institute cost pressures detailed in the paper. Duncan Wingham informed Council that there had been considerable tension within the budget due to insufficient funding for the research centres since 2011.

5.5 Council asked whether NERC's position was unique or whether this was a similar situation across the research councils and Duncan Wingham invited Ruth Elliot to comment. Ruth Elliot confirmed that ODA had impacted the councils in different ways and there was no uniform picture across the councils.

5.6 In summary, Duncan Wingham confirmed there was support for the approach proposed in the paper to delegate decision making in 2021/22 to the Executive and it was agreed that an update on progress would be provided in September.

ACTION: The Executive to provide an update on NERC allocations 2020/21 at the September meeting

6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in NERC (NERC 21/16)

6.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and reminded Council that they had previously discussed EDI considerations at their meeting in September 2020 and this item would

provide an update on activity within NERC since then. Candy Snelling observed this item.

- 6.2 Alison Robinson informed Council that NERC had developed a set of naming principles for future use which Council were being asked to agree to. Following Council agreement, it was intended that NERC Management Board would approve a policy based on these principles.
- 6.3 Council welcomed the paper and agreed that the principles were useful and asked for clarity on whether this would apply retrospectively to names already in use. Alison Robinson confirmed that the intention was to apply the principles to future, rather than retrospective, names and that it had been decided it would be better to explain and contextualise current names rather than seek to change them. Council asked that the fuller policy set out guidelines for when a name might be changed, citing the example of The Facility for Airborne Atmospheric Measurements (FAAM) aircraft.
- 6.4 Council were supportive of the idea of establishing a Shadow Council and asked for the timescales involved in taking this forward as it would be useful to obtain guidance from the Shadow Council on issues such as the naming principles. Alison Robinson confirmed that the policy might be taken to the Shadow Council for comment once it was established.
- 6.5 Council suggested an amendment to the principles to include the wider team involved rather than just the individual and suggested that it would be important to measure progress by the use of metrics and data. Alison Robinson agreed that the wording to include teams would be useful.
- 6.6 Following Council suggestions, it was agreed to make the following revisions to the principles:
 - i. Include the possibility of re-naming
 - ii. Amend the wording in principle (vi) 'cause widespread public offence' to focus on the need instead to judge potential risk
 - iii. Nuance the wording in principles 5 and 6 as it would not be possible to take a judgement on foreseeable reputational risk for example at the time of choosing a name
 - iv. Consider whether 'people' should be included when naming future assets, noting that this can in fact send positive signals too, particularly in the EDI space, although currency of the name would also need consideration in light of the timeframe the name would be in use for in relation to a specific object or infrastructure.
- 6.7 Council raised the issue of how we might improve the representation of ethnic minority groups on NERC Council and Duncan Wingham explained that effort had been made to address this and the forthcoming recruitment round would continue to seek suitable appointments. Alison Robinson explained that a recent external review of EDI in NERC Governance had taken place which would provide some guidance in this area. Alison Robinson added that the EDI Action Plan would consider the full range of diverse career backgrounds and that the planned EDI roundtables would help in further promoting diversity and inclusion.
- 6.8 Council requested that information be regularly shared with them to allow Council and the Executive to measure progress and whether the plans set out in the paper were making a difference. Alison Robinson agreed that data would be important and work would be required to take this forward from the baseline and suggested that Council be provided with a first update in June 2022.
- 6.9 Duncan Wingham summarised that Council were broadly content with the principles subject to some nuancing and acknowledged the request to speed up the establishment of the Shadow Council.

DECISION: Council approved the naming principles subject to the agreed

amendments

ACTION: The Executive to accelerate work on the establishment of a Shadow Council

7. Increasing world class, cutting edge, research in NERC centres (NERC 21/17)

- 7.1 Iain Williams introduced this item and highlighted the key requests of Council detailed within the paper. Sophie Hodgson observed this item.
- 7.2 Iain Williams reminded Council that discussion had taken place both at the December meeting, following the 2020 NERC Centre Evaluation exercise that had challenged whether more might be done to increase world class, cutting edge research in the centres and subsequently at the Council Retreat.
- 7.3 Iain Williams explained that he had developed a proposed framework to increase world-leading research in NERC centres and that Council were being asked to approve the framework and consider the four suggested approaches to initiate this work.

Proposed Framework

- 7.4 Council were content with the proposed framework and proceeded to look in more detail at the four approaches proposed.
- DECISION: Council approved the framework**

Approach 1 and 2

- 7.5 Council were invited to comment on the approaches to refine the definition of National Capability and the strategies to attract the best talent to centres.
- 7.6 Council supported the proposal for an iterative process between HO and the centres and the establishment of an independent advisory group to support centres in developing strategies to recruit and retain the best talent. Council asked for clarity on the experts who might be involved in the advisory group and Iain Williams explained that the experts involved would be those who had been involved in similar exercises within institutes from different sectors previously.
- 7.7 Council highlighted the role of both financial reward and lifestyle considerations in attracting and retaining talent. Iain Williams commented that, whilst BAS and BGS were under public sector pay constraints, the independent centres did have greater flexibility on pay.
- 7.8 Council were supportive of the inclusion of cultural leadership in the definition of National Capability although asked whether it might be made clearer. Iain Williams agreed that the definition might be revised and made more succinct.
- 7.9 In summary, Duncan Wingham agreed that salaries were an issue in retaining talent and that he would welcome the independent centres re-visiting their salary structures to address this. He added that the definition of NC had been carefully written to lay out the qualification for NERC funding and to ensure this was measurable.

Approach 3 and 4

- 7.10 John Pyle declared a vested interest due to his affiliation with the National Centre for Atmospheric Science (NCAS) and it was agreed that he would not comment on the financial aspects of the discussion.
- 7.11 Council was asked to approve the funding model for the NC Multi-Centre Science programme that proposed to reward the most ambitious bids with up to 30% more funding formula to distribute Institutional Funding between centres.

7.12 Council asked whether there might be additional flexibility in order to drive innovative research including in the NC Science Multi-Centre funding to ensure they delivered world class research. Iain Williams commented that there was more flexibility within the Institutional Funding, which is the unhypothecated funding allocated to the centres. Duncan Wingham added that the National Capability portfolio was due further consideration and emphasised the role of the Multi-Centre funding which was to ensure collaborative working across the centres.

7.13 Council were supportive of Approach 3 (NC Multi-Centre Science funding).

DECISION: Council approved Option 3 for allocating Institutional Funding

7.14 Council approved the revised formula for calculating Institutional Funding for the centres.

8. Delivery Plan Progress Report (NERC 21/18) (Slides, item 8)

8.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and presented slides. Alison Robinson reminded Council that the NERC Delivery Plan had been published in 2019 and an annual report was made to Council to report on progress with the ambitions which were set out in the plan. Alison Robinson added that the full report was available to Council on the Council Sharepoint site. Corrina Urquhart observed this item.

8.2 Alison Robinson explained that progress was reported via: i) a dashboard setting out performance against the NERC Delivery Plan and ii) by using the UKRI adapted balanced scorecard approach. Alison Robinson provided an update on progress based on both qualitative and quantitative analysis, noting that this was the first time metrics had been included.

8.3 Alison Robinson explained that the annual report indicated strong performance by NERC in the context of a challenging COVID-19 year. Key highlights included: NERC's approach to evaluation, impact and operational delivery (for example, major projects). Areas of ongoing focus included EDI, improving our digital offer and identifying areas of research to meet future challenges (for example, coupled economic and environmental systems). She confirmed actions to improve areas of concern had been identified through the reporting.

8.4 Council asked if the Executive had been too self-congratulatory in assessing as 'green:' 'Demonstrating the impact of NERC research' based on previous discussion at Council about the difficulty in communicating the impact of research. Alison Robinson responded that the quality of the impact of NERC research was high although she acknowledged that there were improvements to be made to the communication aspect which she highlighted was also reflected in the new risk to the NERC risk register since Council last met.

8.5 Council asked whether the information was used by UKRI in terms of performance management. Alison Robinson confirmed that UKRI had not requested information from NERC for this purpose although the information had been shared with UKRI for assurance purposes which had been welcomed. Duncan Wingham added that it was important to have oversight of NERC performance to provide evidence were it to be requested in the future. Council noted that the reporting by NERC against the UKRI Balanced Scorecard allowed this information to be used by UKRI in its overall reporting to BEIS via the Corporate Plan process.

8.6 Council commented that the progress report was extremely interesting and acknowledged that it was evident it had taken significant effort to compile. Council asked whether there was anything specific which might be done to improve the progress on the Digital Environment given its importance and opportunities for co-working. Iain Williams explained that steps were being taken within NERC to address this, including i) appointing a new Associate Director and internal re-structuring ii) working closely with EPSRC and across UKRI given that partnership working would be key to delivering this ambition, iii) developing

a new Digital Strategy for NERC which would be discussed by Council later this year.

- 8.7 Alison Robinson expressed her thanks to the team within NERC who had produced the Delivery Plan Progress Report and acknowledged the huge amount of effort involved.
- 8.8 In summary, Duncan Wingham confirmed that Council were content with the report whilst acknowledging there remained some concern regarding the communication aspects of NERC impact and progress in advancing the Digital Environment ambition.

9. Karen Hanghøj: overview of British Geological Survey (Oral) (Slides, item 9)

- 9.1 Duncan Wingham welcomed Karen Hanghøj to her first NERC Council meeting.
- 9.2 Karen Hanghøj presented slides to provide an overview of the British Geological Survey (BGS) including its vision and mission, public science role and strategy (Gateway to the Earth) including the BGS contribution to three global challenge areas: decarbonisation and resource management; environmental change, adaptation and resilience; multi-hazards and resilience.
- 9.3 Council thanked Karen Hanghøj for her interesting presentation and asked how the current move to open up and make data freely available might affect BGS. Karen Hanghøj confirmed that a data review had recently been initiated at BGS to review this including any potential reduction in income.
- 9.4 In response to a query from Council, Karen Hanghøj confirmed that BGS was not independent of NERC although it did have an independent Board which reported to NERC. Duncan Wingham added that BGS was unique as a geological survey in reporting to a research council and it had been decided to establish a strong board as part of the governance structure. Gideon Henderson commented that it was important to forge strong links between BGS and Government particularly in areas such as adaptation, offshore wind, sub surface and critical minerals.
- 9.5 Council asked about the challenges of i) fixed offshore wind ii) whether there were any links with meteorologists on carbon capture, and iii) the problems associated with an increased demand for hydrogen. Karen Hanghøj acknowledged that there were challenges in delivering fixed offshore wind and explained that BGS were leaders in mapping the shallow marine environment. She confirmed that BGS were working with a variety of partners on Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).
- 9.6 Council asked whether there was sufficient interest in terms of the next generation of geoscientists. Karen Hanghøj replied that there was some concern although she remained optimistic in engaging the next generation particularly on sustainability and solutions in geoscience. She added that it would be important to articulate the benefits of the work BGS does at an early stage to stimulate interest for the next generation.
- 9.7 Council asked about resource competition and whether there was more we might do in the UK based on an international comparison. Karen Hanghøj responded that the UK were in a strong position and the expertise within BGS to contribute to this global issue was acknowledged at Government level.
- 9.8 Duncan Wingham expressed thanks, on behalf of Council, to Karen Hanghøj for visiting Council and encouraged members to visit BGS once restrictions on travel were eased.

10. UKRI COP26 Programme (NERC 21/19) (Slides, item 10)

- 10.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and explained that she was leading on this activity for UKRI and drew Council's attention to the four objectives for UKRI detailed within the paper

to: celebrate UK research and innovation; highlight UK's role in future climate action; support the Government's COP26 plans and inspire action.

- 10.2 Alison Robinson explained that there had been good collaborative working across the research councils and Innovate UK on this activity with a dedicated budget provided by UKRI. She presented slides which provided further detail on the activities planned as part of COP26 including a summary of longlisted proposals and the proposal to include the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* in the lead up to COP26.
- 10.3 Alison Robinson added that a Science and Innovation Steering Group had been established of which she was a member and she was also the Senior Responsible Owner for the Science and Innovation Day at COP26 for Government.
- 10.4 Council commented that it would be important to ensure that any issues with regard to communications were resolved to ensure maximum publicity for UKRI in COP26. Alison Robinson acknowledged that such a high-profile event would require full comms engagement.
- 10.5 Council commented that one of the roles of COP26 was to establish the importance of an international focus to take climate action and encouraged UKRI to consider how it would demonstrate that approach alongside celebrating and promoting the success of the UK research and innovation community. As part of this, Council asked if the work UKRI does internationally, for example with India, China and the US was part of the planning. Alison Robinson confirmed that there was effort within the research councils and international teams to showcase the work of the research and innovation community internationally and that UKRI was engaged with COP26 and Go-Science to support the overall Government approach.
- 10.6 Council also asked whether there might be any potential Government announcements made at COP26 which might benefit UKRI and whether NERC was prepared for this if it materialised. Alison Robinson confirmed that the UKRI COP26 programme team were aligned with the Spending Review planning in terms of timing and there was a list of potential 'announceables' prepared and evolving over time.
- 10.7 Council offered to provide details of potential business partners to work with and it was agreed to pursue this outside the meeting.
- 10.8 In summary, Duncan Wingham concluded that there was strong support from Council and acknowledged that it would be important to balance both UK and international interests.

11. Antarctic Infrastructure Modernisation Programme Phase 2 (NERC 21/20)

- 11.1 Nigel Bird introduced this item and provided some context on NERC activity in Antarctica and its funding, the plan for the next ten years and progress made so far in terms of mitigating and reducing risk.
- 11.2 Nigel Bird explained that research in Antarctica was funded from the NERC portfolio although the infrastructure costs were funded through the Antarctic Logistics and Infrastructure (ALI) partition of the UK Science budget line.
- 11.3 Nigel Bird outlined some of the activities planned for the next ten years: a replacement aircraft; estate needs at Signy Island and Rothera; trials of renewable energy solutions and an options analysis to inform any future decisions connected to the replacement of the Halley VI research station. He confirmed that they had appointed a construction partner and the aircraft procurement activity was underway.
- 11.4 Council asked for more detail on the future of the Halley research station. Nigel Bird responded that, following a successful project to automate most of the data collection, the

station would be operated during the summer only for as long as it was safe to do so (which might be for as long as 15 years). Actions were being implemented to reduce, as far as practicable, any environmental impact from the station, should a sudden calving of the Brunt Ice Shelf prevent de-commission and removal.

DECISION: Council supported the ten-year plan to invest £290 million in Antarctic infrastructure.

12. NERC financial outturn 2020/21 and draft budget 2021/22 (NERC 21/21)

12.1 Victoria McMyn introduced this item and highlighted the underspends in both the NERC resource and capital budgets for 2020/21. Ruth Elliot added that significant underspend had been identified across UKRI in the financial year 2020/21 which had been used to fund COVID-19 research.

12.2 Victoria McMyn reminded Council that discussion of the utilisation of the NERC headroom in the 2021/22 resource budget had already taken place under Item 5. She highlighted that there was £2 million of headroom within the capital budget for 2021/22 and advised that a discussion was scheduled at NERC Management Board on projects this might be utilised for, such as oceanography and flood and drought resilience and the expectation was that the budget would be fully utilised.

13. Review of the Top Risks at June 2021 (NERC 21/22)

13.1 Victoria McMyn introduced this item and highlighted that two new risks had been added to the NERC risk register since Council last met on the lack of effective communications support and the potential failure to invest NERC's budget in 2021/22. Alison Robinson added that she had spoken with the UKRI Director, Communications prior to adding the comms risk to the NERC register and that there were also plans to build capability within NERC in this area post COP26.

13.2 Victoria McMyn explained that a number of risks had been de-escalated or reduced with one risk increased related to climate change adaptation.

13.3 Council were content with the risk report and no further comments were made.

14. Rolling Programme (NERC 21/23)

14.1 Helen Page introduced this item and asked Council for their views on the operation of future Council meetings following the publication of the UKRI Hybrid Working Principles which included consideration of the environmental impact of meetings. Council were asked for their views on whether they would be supportive of moving to a mixture of physical and virtual meetings going forwards and whether they might have their first physical meeting in September 2021.

14.2 Council commented that, as Council meets infrequently, physical meetings would be preferable as they helped to build relationships between members. Council also highlighted the usefulness of visiting the research centres which added value and insight for Council members by providing an opportunity to see NERC funding in action.

14.3 Council acknowledged that the virtual Council meetings had worked well and that virtual meetings provided huge efficiencies. It was agreed that occasional virtual meetings would be acceptable especially were restrictions to be re-introduced.

14.4 Council highlighted that it would be important for all members to attend a physical meeting rather than have some members attend in person and some join virtually.

14.5 In summary, Duncan Wingham agreed that there appeared to be a consensus view that

Council meetings should take place physically to help build a sense of common purpose and that plans would be made to organise a physical meeting in September 2021.

DECISION: Council agreed to resume physical meetings from September 2021 in line with Government guidance

14.6 Finally, Helen Page reminded Council members that any suggestions for forward agenda items might be sent to her at any point.

15. Any Other Business (Oral)

15.1 Council asked whether there might an opportunity to visit the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* when it was docked at Greenwich in October 2021 and it was agreed that this might be investigated further.

15.2 Duncan Wingham thanked Council for a productive meeting.

15.3 The meeting was closed.