



Note of meeting between SNH and LINK held on 26 January 2009 at Battleby.

SNH: Andrew Thin (Chair)
Ian Jardine (Chief Executive)
Karen Wright (Head of External Relations)

LINK: John Mayhew (Chair)
Helen Zealley (President)
Lloyd Austin (Trustee)
Jen Anderson (Chief Officer)
Alice Walsh (Development Officer)

1. Introductions

This was HZ's first formal meeting as LINK President. JM reported that Andy Myles had recently started as LINK Parliamentary Officer. He would be meeting KW on 12 Feb with JA and AW.

2. LINK Corporate Strategy for 2009-12

The CS, sent in draft to Karen, had been approved by the Board on 22 Jan subject to a few amendments. JM explained the process so far, and that it was very much a refresher rather than a new strategy. KW noted that the language did not reflect the current administration's central purpose (sustainable economic growth) and that it to do so would be more politically aware. AT felt it would be useful to be perceived as helpful to government achieving its purpose, to remain relevant to it. We felt that the strategy should reflect where LINK is coming from, as an advocate for the environment, in the context of sustainable development, and relating to any administration over the period to 2012.

Key performance indicators relating to this strategy were being developed. These would necessarily be output focussed reflecting LINK's role in bringing members together for information sharing, discussion and concerted action. IJ noted that the value added from having LINK, to see that members are supporting LINK, the ability of LINK to have a view on issues that cut across the individual NGO interests is valuable to SNH in informing its view. JA cited the climate statement as a good example. IJ asked our key priorities for the year ahead – marine, flooding implementation, natural heritage bill, planning policy (NPF2 and SPP) and funding for environment – these would be discussed more fully at the staff meeting with KW on 12 Feb. **Action: Staff would circulate the amended version of the strategy to KW early February.**

3. Overview of LINK progress over the past year and cooperation with SNH.

Both sides reported good cooperation. KW mentioned flooding in particular and the benefits of this liaison for discussion of the issues informally. KW mentioned climate as an area where there was little liaison. LA explained that most of our work is done through SCCS, where LINK provides much of the policy lead. JM asked if there is ever dissatisfaction from SNH on the level of liaison that this should be raised.

KW asked the extent which smaller bodies have the opportunity to contribute. LINK gave examples, level of sign up to statements; eg *Delivering the Goods*, where case studies from big and small bodies were given equal prominence.

KW asked how LINK is experiencing working with the SNP Government in contrast to the previous administration. JM noted that it is very different, we were working with all of the parties, and M Russell has been keen on meetings. On further prompting from AT, LA said that some aspects were better and some were worse, and it depended on which Minister one was dealing with as our interests were reflected in different portfolios. AT said we needed to think tactically of how we engage with this government; NGOs are perceived as middle class. IJ said that we need to persuade them we can help them deliver against the National Performance Framework; AT that we needed to proactively counter the perception that we are anti-economic growth. JM explained we had considered the NPF at the Congress and also that Andy Myles was proving very helpful on political strategy and tactics already.

On SEW KW asked for more detail and was hoping for better SNH participation for 2009. **Action: JA would call her to discuss soon.**

4. Opportunities / threats ahead for the environment and potential for cooperation on issues including

SRDP review: IJ raised this as an important issue for SNH in terms of limited funding for a long list of wants. LA explained the Agri TF's plans for a conference to look at the purpose of land use and rural development, and that LINK would be inputting to the review via representatives on the SRDP stakeholder group. IJ said that if SNH were to comment on the balance of funding it would need good evidence for whether SRDP funds were contributing or not, and views from LINK members would be welcome. It was agreed that a meeting between the TF and SNH would be useful.

Action: meeting to be organised with ATF.

Natural Heritage Bill (deer, SSSIs etc): LA explained that members' focus was at present on deer, SSSIs and protected areas. LINK broadly supported the DCS proposals and the proposals in the SNH Board paper though had concerns wrt workload should government have a wider agenda of reviewing designations.

IJ said that SNH was not keen for a review of designations, that the Minister feels that people do not engage with current designations, there is confrontation round them. He had agreed that SNH could review it as a marketing issue mainly, to revise terminology and communications. SNH (Kenneth Fowler leading) had commissioned work due to report in March, and would send details to LINK for circulation to members with a view to a workshop. If the Minister was happy with the outcome a review of designations could be avoided. Liaison on non-native species would continue (Deborah Long and Paul Walton on the biodiversity TF. LA noted that the 4,400 signatures showing popular support of marine protected areas had been downplayed by the Government.

Action: information from SNH and workshop to progress.

National Parks review: JM reported that a seminar with BEFS had been held to discuss. Whilst a brief response may go in from LINK, member bodies would respond individually, and not feel straitened by the questions in the consultation. Peter Rawcliffe was the SNH lead. AT advised asking for further national parks in general

terms, rather than terms used by the previous administration, particularly wrt coastal and marine NPs.

National Planning Framework: All agreed there were positives within it, though level of inconsistency between rhetoric and proposed developments.

Scottish Planning Policy: JM updated on LINK engagement, meeting with the Chief Planner in November. Jane Clark was the lead for SNH; liaison between her and the Planning TF was agreed useful. **Action: planning task force**

SNH and planning casework: IJ explained SNH's reasoning behind the recent changes, acknowledging it had not got full backing from staff. SNH had not got resources to deal with the increasing case load, and hopes that resources put in upstream will be more effective - Development Plans, engagement with developers, priority cases and responses appropriate to the case (citing examples of overkill). He agreed it was an act of faith that councils would take more account of their DPs. They would assess the influence on the outcomes and which councils were heeding the advice or not. SNH's input would only rarely be framed as objections, so that the responsibility would lie with the elected representatives. AT noted that all the parties were keen on reinvigorating local democracy, so need to move this way on various fronts. LINK acknowledged the problems experienced by SNH, reported the disquiet among members at the consequences; noted the capacity issue for engaging with councils (SNH has agreed its approach with Cosla), and asked for a summary of the rationale to explain the position better to members. If SNH had examples where its advice was blatantly ignored, NGOs could help to publicise this. On national and international obligations, SNH wanted to give clarity of information to the minister for managing risk, to enable his/her decision making, and not as instruction to be the scapegoat for lack of development. The issue of building capacity with councils was key, as currently generally planning committees were informed only of the level of objections, rather than advice. **Action: PTF and SNH to liaise.**

Health and Wellbeing: SNH staff were keen to meet members and HZ to progress this agenda. HZ reported that we now have a LINK rep on the HEN steering group. **Action: staff to arrange meeting**

World Heritage Sites: Two additional natural sites were under consideration and it would be useful to have a consensus with NGOs to submit to the DCMS review before 25 February. Peter Rawcliffe was leading for SNH on this.

AW 28/1/09