

The LINK Newsletter

The quarterly update from Scottish Environment LINK
Winter 2009



A new challenge for LINK? *by Helen Zealley, LINK President*



Looking back on a full year with LINK, I want to say a huge 'thank you' to everyone for making me so welcome – the Task Forces, the member organisations,

the Trustees and the staff. And what a year! Flooding, marine issues and waste have all moved forward in the political world; for me the highlight has to be the Climate Change (Scotland) Act – with the UK Climate Change Act a close second.

But behind the hard work and achievements we have been living with the fall-out of the 2008 financial crisis – jobs have been lost, grants have been cut and we grow anxious that environmental issues will be overlooked by cash-strapped Councils as they review their Local Plans and Single Outcome Agreements.

Against this backdrop we have the even more daunting task of ensuring implementation of key environmental legislation. Daunting because it will require much, much more than government policies, business initiatives, technological developments and the trading of international carbon credits: it will require a major culture change – a new way of thinking and a shift from the current obsession with 'growth'. A materialistic obsession that is filling our homes with more and more 'stuff' that we do not

need while denuding the planet of irreplaceable resources.

Just as excess growth in humans leads to obesity, we have to recognise that the obsession with 'growth' in the rich world, has led to an era of excess and inequality – and finally to the financial crisis. That is not to say that the economy should grind to a halt – far from it. But its drivers should be social and ecological; the benefits should be shared more fairly; and the environmental costs should be recognised and addressed.

If we are going to embrace a new challenge, it might be helpful if we stopped for a moment and asked 'why'? Why has the pursuit of 'growth' assumed an almost religious quality? Initially, of course, growth was important to enable everyone in a growing population to have the shelter and food they needed for survival – and still do in the poorer nations of the world. But in our developed western consumerist economies pursuit of 'growth', as an end in itself, has become an all consuming hedonistic treadmill. We are all encouraged, by clever advertising and product placement, to believe that more and more 'stuff' will bring us happiness – often landing ourselves in debt and causing high levels of stress in individuals, tension within families, lack of trust within neighbourhoods and ultimately the global financial crisis.

Yet the politicians and economists still focus on economic activity, 'business as usual' and 'growth' as though GDP represented the only important index of human activity

– rather than simply representing the recorded monetary value of all recorded goods and services in a nation – irrespective of whether these are of true value, or not. Thus GDP includes the wages of people who make and sell cigarettes and the doctors who treat lung cancer as well as the forest rangers who offer healthy alternatives to smoking. On the other hand GDP does *not* include the time of volunteers leading walks for disadvantaged young people or the time families and neighbours spend caring for elderly or disabled relatives.

Fortunately GDP is increasingly being recognised as a crazy measure of 'progress', and there is growing evidence that, beyond a certain level of average income, growth adds very little to the true 'prosperity' of a nation. Indeed, in the past 20-25 years, while the global economy has doubled, measures of 'life satisfaction' have remained stable – or even slipped backwards for some groups. On the other hand, income inequality has risen dramatically along with increasing drug and alcohol abuse, obesity, suicides and mental health problems.

In response to these observations, a few economists and a few politicians now recognise that 'business as usual' cannot go on. The Sustainable Development Commission recently published the results of a comprehensive review *Prosperity Without Growth*. The review identifies that current patterns of growth are unsustainable, particularly when linked to continuous demands for increased productivity; but, at the

same time, it recognises that 'de-growth' is unstable if it leads to unemployment and less money in the system to pay taxes for public services. The Report argues that, while this is a profoundly serious dilemma, the economic crisis provides an opportunity to address financial *and* ecological sustainability together; an opportunity to develop a vision of 'prosperity' in which humans can flourish while reducing their impact on the environment.

Members of LINK organisations will have no difficulty in recognising that human well-being is more readily enhanced by remaining in harmony with nature – walking in wild places, tending an allotment or simply sitting in a park listening to the birds. Of course a new vision of prosperity will not be easy to achieve; but neither was 'the right to roam', or acceptance of biodiversity duties or action on climate change – but all of these (and other) environmental achievements will be at grave risk unless we can achieve a change in our collective way of thinking about – and measuring – progress.

So, if we want to achieve our environmental goals, I'm afraid we need to look outside our comfort zones and learn more about this dilemma and its possible solutions:

- continual 'growth' is unsustainable; but de-growth is unstable
- de-coupling economic growth from an increase in the consumption of the planet's finite resources could help but only if it can be achieved *without* shifting the 'saved' resource to be used for further growth (e.g. if we produce less carbon to create a given unit of power, we must avoid an increase in the overall use of power because this

would negate the carbon saving we have made.)

- if increased 'productivity' continues to be a goal, unemployment must be prevented while at the same time ensuring that the manpower or time 'saved' is not used to produce additional 'stuff' created from finite resources. Instead the time/manpower saved could be used for leisure and recreation or to provide better resourced caring services.
- at the same time, and this will be particularly difficult, we need to reduce demand for more and more material goods ('stuff') in populations that have become hooked on the concept of novelty to give themselves status and a feeling of self-worth. To do so we will need to reduce the supply of money in the system by reducing debt and encouraging saving.

Is it possible to shift our collective societal goals from extrinsic displays of material goods to activities focused on human interaction within families and communities? Yes it is; but only if the whole macro-economic culture supports it – and this will not (cannot) happen while GDP is king. We have a big task ahead.

Alternatives to GDP are being developed. An interesting one, the 'Happy Planet Index' has been developed by the New Economics Foundation to measure the ecological efficiency by which we achieve long and contented lives. The index comprises a simple ratio where 'happy life years' (life expectancy x life satisfaction) are divided by the ecological footprint required to achieve them. This - and other possible alternatives -

were the subject of lively discussion at the recent LINK Congress.

So what might all this mean for LINK, for LINK organisations and for the members of LINK organisations? It is going to need a joint commitment to get to grips with, and improve our understanding of, macro-economic systems. While this may seem a million miles away from promoting and protecting our precious environment and ecosystems, we must recognise that they – and all our achievements – are at risk if we cannot shift the culture away from an obsession with 'growth' to one of '*Prosperity Without Growth*'.

We must try hard to develop a sufficient understanding of the macro-economic system that drives the 'business as usual' agenda and which has failed so spectacularly in both financial and ecological terms. Then – and here is the real challenge – we must try and help others to understand and join us in demanding that politicians move from GDP to an alternative measure of progress which takes account of human flourishing as well as the implications for the planet. This would then have significant implications for future political decisions, ensuring that a greater focus is given to social and environmental benefits, with 'the economy' playing a supportive role.

And will we be more prosperous if we are less materialistic? Yes we will.

A big 'ask'? Yes it is. But the future for our children depends on it; and LINK has never run away from 'big asks' in the past.

"We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children"

Living with the Land: Proposals for Scotland's First Sustainable Land Use Strategy



On 2nd December LINK launched a new report [Living with the Land](#) outlining proposed content for a Sustainable Land Use Strategy (SLUS) which Government is obliged to introduce by 2011 under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act. The report, commissioned by LINK and written by John Mayhew was informed by wide consultation with members including a seminar held in September. Peter Peacock MSP, who moved the relevant amendment to the Act, hosted the launch at Holyrood. He welcomed LINK's paper as a valuable contribution to the development of truly sustainable land use policy.

Scotland's Climate Change Act has been described as world-leading. This provision gives Scotland the potential to have a genuinely world leading SLUS, which is badly needed; although several strategies already exist for various types of land, these are largely for specialists, and there are too few connections between them. This encourages a sectoral mentality and a single purpose for each piece of land, rather than a wider view of the multiple benefits which are the reality in most parts of Scotland.

Although its main purpose is to tackle climate change, the SLUS provides real opportunities to deliver other public objectives. It has potential to support landscape and wildlife protection, to ensure more co-ordinated planning and delivery between agencies, to reward multi-benefit land use and

to resolve conflicts between different land uses. To do this effectively it needs a long-term vision, strong principles, clear definitions and as broad a scope as possible. Critically, it needs to be based on the internationally-accepted definition of sustainable development, in which environmental and social goals genuinely have equal status to economic ones.

Living with the Land has already generated strong interest and LINK is looking forward to discussing the proposals with all interested parties. LINK is very grateful to the Craignish Trust for a grant to assist this work.

Marine Bill

The task force continued to engage with the progress of the Scottish Marine Bill, providing [oral and written evidence](#) through Stages 1 and 2, and releasing a scientific report commissioned from the

Scottish Association of Marine Science.

Recovering Scotland's Marine Environment makes a

strong case that Scotland's marine environment is in a far from pristine state. It outlines the impacts of human exploitation and gives examples of where the ecosystem has recovered. The TF used the report's findings effectively in its advocacy work around the Marine Bill, with several MSPs referring to it during the [Stage 1 debate](#) in Parliament at the end of October.

[Stage 2](#) has now finished and the Task Force was very pleased that the Committee voted for a duty to

establish a network of marine protected areas, a key ask of LINK's Marine Campaign. Stage 3 will take place in December.

The TF's application for funding to continue the marine project into the implementation stage of Marine legislation was boosted by a positive response from the Tubney Trust in December. A response is awaited from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation from whom matched funding was requested.



More network News

Agriculture The Task Force responded to [Brian Pack's Inquiry](#) for Scottish Government into future agricultural support for Scotland and the EU Budget Reform Inquiry, promoting the principles outlined in LINK's [Beyond the CAP](#) document.

Planning Several of LINK's major concerns about the draft new Scottish Planning Policy were addressed in the revised proposals (Nov) which had much improved sections on climate change, sustainable development and flooding. The TF [welcomed the revision](#) and considers there is scope for improvement. More affirmative wording throughout, eg 'must' or 'shall' instead of 'should', would remove the risk of stakeholders interpreting policy requirements as being optional.

Single outcome agreements

The impact of changes to local authority funding has been of interest across the network in relation to how a range of environmental and sustainability issues will fare under the Single Outcome Agreement process. LINK members are particularly interested in outcomes relating to Scotland's commitments for: biodiversity; climate change; footprint and consumption; education and volunteering; historic and built environment; landscape; physical activity and health; recreational access; transport; water and flooding.

LINK will shortly publish preferred outcomes and indicators for these 10 key issues and will monitor how they fare. The network is keen to support local authorities and the Improvement Service in developing the SOA process and Local Outcome Indicators (Version 4, Nov 09) and would like to work with volunteer authorities to identify best practice and any real difficulties in delivery. LINK members are also concerned that delivery of certain outcomes does not run counter to delivery of others, and would like to explore how environmental and sustainability outcomes and indicators can be integrated with

other goals, for example in education, health, transport.

Members' Congress More than 80 LINK members and guests braved challenging weather to take part in the 2009 Members' Congress on the theme *The Environment and Economics*. There was a mix of presentations and debate with smaller group discussions enabling delegates to engage at several levels with this broad overarching issue. The discussion on Alternative Economic Indicators was very well attended with consensus in the plenary debate that the environment sector should do more to promote alternatives to GDP (see page 1).

LINK is grateful to the speakers and facilitators who volunteered their time, and to the Scottish Churches House which provided excellent hospitality over two days. A report on Congress will be on the website shortly.

Liaison meetings There were two regular meetings with the Environment Minister over the period. In September the Wildlife & Natural Environment Bill was uppermost, LINK making the case for statutory, rather than voluntary, deer management; supporting the proposals to control invasive species; and concerned about the abuse of Permitted Development Rights with regard to bulldozed tracks and deer fencing. Discussion of Marine covered Special Areas of Conservation, clarity of responsibility for marine archaeological sites, and LINK's ask for an overarching sustainability duty to be included in the Marine Bill.

December's meeting discussed LINK's contribution to the [Sustainable Land Use Strategy](#) and Government plans for this. The meeting discussed working towards sustainable development through Single Outcome Agreements. The Minister was also interested to hear of LINK's work with SNH, Health Scotland and other agencies sharing experience on the health and environment agenda, and offered to put in a request for a

Parliamentary debate on the matter.

A useful meeting with SEPA chair and senior staff was held in September where sustainable economic growth, climate change, flooding and zero waste were among topics discussed. It was agreed to hold such meetings more regularly.

New website LINK's new website went live at the end of November. The content is similar though the presentation has improved, and you can be alerted when new items are added. [Please take a look](#) and tell us what you think.

New members LINK was delighted to welcome three new member organisations since July. Living Streets joined in September (see page 4) and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland joined in November. RZSS was a former Associate Member with engagement only in the Biodiversity task force until LINK discontinued this category of membership in 2008. We are very pleased that RZSS are able to engage more fully across the breadth of LINK's work programme. An application by the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland, just approved by members, will add to LINK's expertise across the Freshwater agenda.

Scottish Environment Week 2010

Preparations are underway for Scottish Environment Week from 22 to 26 February. Events within the Parliament are planned by LINK members in conjunction with Historic Scotland, SEPA, SNH and others, which will celebrate Scotland's environment and demonstrate its value to people's health and wealth.

Staffing Adean Lutton left in mid October after three years as LINK Information Officer. We wish her well in her new post with Scottish PEN, and anticipate her successor will start work in the new year.

News and Views from Members

The following are articles from LINK member bodies and guest contributors

LIVING STREETS

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Introduction to Living Streets,

Keith Irving, Scotland Manager

Over the past 80 years we have seen a massive increase in the number of motor vehicles in Scotland. There are now around 2.6 million, an increase of a third since 1997 and this has inevitably had a huge impact on our streets. With the increase in traffic volume, our street design has become more focused only on ensuring motor traffic can get from A to B quickly, often neglecting the needs of pedestrians. In many places, we've effectively designed pedestrians off the streets and transformed our once vibrant neighbourhoods from social hubs for the community, into spaces considered no go areas for children.

Living Streets was formed as the Pedestrians Association on 13 August 1929, to combat the growing dominance of the motor car on our streets. The volume of traffic on today's streets, in addition to our chronic levels of physical inactivity and the breakdown in our local communities make Living Street's 80th anniversary a prime time to look at what our streets are designed for in today's society. We're focusing on two major areas which have the potential to rebalance our streets in Scotland: stripping our streets back to basics using a 'naked streets' approach and reducing the speed limit where we live, work and play to 20 miles per hour.

As the volume of traffic has increased, so too has the number of traffic lights, guard railing and road signs cluttering our streets. Drivers are given so many instructions they are no longer expected to think for themselves. But this cluttering process can and should be reversed, and we are keen to see more Local Authorities taking a 'naked streets' approach to design. To give one example, Southwark Council in London successfully turned Walworth Road from an unloved and traffic dominated corridor into an attractive community hub with wider pavements and narrower carriageways, attractive and well-designed street furniture. This has led not to more congestion, but to smoother journeys for buses and traffic and created a "boulevard" feel with the removal of guardrails, addition of cycle parking, loading facilities provided for local shops and improved lighting and tree planting.

In addition to stripping our streets back of clutter, we also want to see 20mph be the norm on streets where we live, work and play. A recent study found that three quarters of people support 20mph limits and a number of Local Authorities such as Portsmouth, Oxford and potentially, Glasgow, are already delivering a comprehensive 20mph approach.

Where cities have 20mph speed limits, they are transformed "from being noisy, polluted places into vibrant, people-centred environments" ([Study of European Best Practise in the delivery of integrated transport, 2001](#)).

We believe the Scottish Government should introduce new guidance to ensure the speed limit on all residential streets and high streets is reduced to 20mph. Local authorities should proactively seek to deliver this. All new streets should have a design speed of 20mph, removing the need for road humps to slow traffic.



To find out more about our 'naked streets' and 20mph campaigns, to sign up for our monthly e-newsletter or help us campaign for safe, attractive, enjoyable streets see our [website](#).

PAW Scotland fund for fighting wildlife crime

Stewart Pritchard, Scottish Natural Heritage

Money is available for new and innovative approaches to tackling wildlife crime in Scotland. If you have a proposal you can apply for funding from the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW Scotland). SNH operates the scheme and has £200k (additional funding from Scottish Government) to award. Projects may be at local or larger scale, concern species or habitats and anybody may apply.

There is an upper limit of £20k per year, but no lower limit. Projects must be completed by 31 March 2011. The next application deadline is 15 February 2010. A group of PAW Scotland members – from Advocates for Animals, Association

of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, RSPB, Scottish Rural Property and Business Association and the Scottish Government, advises SNH on new applications.

To discuss a proposal, please contact Stewart Pritchard on 01738 458649 or email stewart.pritchard@snh.gov.uk. Scheme details and application form are on the [SNH website](#).

The fund is now supporting satellite tagging of red kites in an area where their population is believed to be suppressed by poisoning; a wildlife crime investigations officer in the National Wildlife Crime Unit; events to raise awareness amongst

police wildlife crime officers and procurators fiscal of legal trapping methods. Grants have been offered to support projects tackling badger and bat crime, roadside deer poaching and hare coursing.

PAW Scotland comprises organisations involved in wildlife law enforcement. Its main aim is to promote the enforcement of wildlife conservation law, particularly through supporting the networks of Police Wildlife Crime Officers and officers from HM Revenue and Customs and UK Border Agency. More details are available on the [Scottish Government](#) and [Defra](#) websites.



Growing up with Trees

Dianne Laing, Scottish Native Woods

Growing up with Trees is a learning programme for primary school children run by Scottish Native Woods and it is a great way to provide structured learning centred on our native woodlands.

Through the programme children learn to become involved in their countryside, whether that is a local estate of many acres or a small area of their own playground. Through regular visits from and field trips with Scottish Native Woods staff they learn about the importance of conservation, how trees and plants work, which habitats certain wildlife species prefer, how trees can help to combat climate change and how trees can become timber and then houses or furniture.

Practical tasks like collecting seeds and growing them on to little trees help children develop feelings of responsibility and nurturing alongside the wonder of nature. They take pride in their achievements when the sapling trees are then planted either back in a wood or even to an area in the playground. Chris Childe, the Community Education Officer for Scottish Native Woods, has been working with over 25 schools in the Fife area, following a successful programme in Highland Perthshire. The schools went to local woodlands to collect and store seed. In spring the seeds were potted on and in summer one or two schools built tree nurseries with the remaining schools intending to build theirs in the coming months. The young seedlings

will be transferred to the nursery where they will stay for the next two to three years before being planted out in a local woodland, or being used to create a mini woodland in the school grounds.

For information or to volunteer for this or other projects contact Chris Childe, Community Education Officer, 01337 832619 and email: chris.childe@scottishnativewoods.org.uk





Ghost Orchid declaration: saving UK's wild plants today

PLANTLIFE

Deborah Long, Conservation Manager Plantlife Scotland



On 29 October 2009, Plantlife held a reception to mark the launch of the Ghost Orchid declaration. This report is a call to arms for politicians, policy makers, eNGOs, and the wider public to start to act to save our native plants. One in four of Scotland's wild plants are threatened with extinction. This is because:

- a. wild plants are the poor relations of the wildlife world, "the wall flowers at the biodiversity ball." More than half of the priority species in the government biodiversity programmes are plants: yet a tiny proportion of

resources are dedicated to their conservation and the number of experts able to identify these species is declining dramatically.

- b. The UK's protected site network is unable to conserve threatened plants and fungi effectively: in 2006, more than 45% of plants and fungi were in unfavourable condition on the UK's A/SSSIs.
- c. Today's farmland and forests are hostile to native plants: the majority of the UK's threatened plants are found in productive landscapes: over one third of upland species and a quarter of arable plants are threatened with extinction in the UK.

Plantlife has put forward a number of actions at a number of levels, aiming to reverse this decline and

have started by putting plants first. For example:

- We are asking politicians to create an offence of reckless destruction of a protected plant's habitat, bringing the protection levels for plants in line with those for animals.
- We are asking policy makers to ensure that all government funded programmes act to conserve plants or at the very least, do not contribute to their decline.
- We are implementing the UK's Important Plant Areas programme, conserving the UK's very best places for plants
- We are asking the public to garden for wildlife.



Cairngorms New Town Crisis

Gus Jones, Convener Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group

The clock is ticking on a live application for an entire new town in the Cairngorms National Park, an IUCN Category V Protected Area. The controversial An Camas Mor proposal is a huge development issue for a national park authority to consider.

On Rothiemurchus Estate near Aviemore, it is entirely within a National Scenic Area. It would impact on land on the Ancient Woodland Inventory and naturally regenerating native Caledonian woodland and moorland, and is near the River Spey Special Area of Conservation and other designated sites. Inevitably it would add significant disturbance pressure on sensitive areas.

A substantially smaller proposal on the same site in 1994, called Cambusmore, was opposed by Scottish Natural Heritage (and others including the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland and Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group). SNH's expert view then was that 'the landscape in the area has very limited capacity to absorb development, and that a development of the scale proposed would seriously damage the landscape character and quality of the NSA' (Local Public Inquiry Reporter's report).

Now, SNH has raised no objection and has passed responsibility for landscape advice to the National Park Authority. BSCG has

requested this Cairngorms National Park Authority advice.

SNH's biodiversity advice states that wildcat, a European Protected Species may be impacted upon. However, astonishingly SNH only recommend that construction should halt "within 50 metres of the den" as further works may require licensing.

We note that SNH-endorsed guidelines for forestry operations give a 200 metre exclusion zone. For other holts at An Camas Mor SNH recommends a 250 metre exclusion zone.

LINK Further Information

For information about reports and initiatives referred to in this newsletter please visit the [LINK home page](#) Task Force outputs are listed under 'Work Areas'.

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