

MINUTES of LINK Board's meeting held on Thursday 17 April 2014 in Perth

PRESENT

Trustees Deborah Long (Chair), Helen Todd (Vice Chair), Paul Ritchie (Treasurer), Beryl Leatherland, Mandy Orr, Craig Macadam, Charles Dundas

In attendance (President) Ross Finnie
(Staff) Jen Anderson, Andy Myles, Alice Walsh. Hugh Green joined the meeting for discussion of item 5.

1. WELCOME, INTROS AND APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Trustees Ian Findlay, Simon Jones and Paul Walton.

2. MINUTES OF THE JANUARY MEETING

Deborah (DL) invited points for clarification; none were raised and the draft was approved as an accurate record of the discussion.

3. MATTERS ARISING AND REPORTS

3.1 Reports back

DL invited indications of reports to be made. Jonny Hughes was unable to attend to give an update on European and IUCN matters. Andy Myles reported that an EEB staff member had recently observed that after the independence referendum EEB might see more of Scotland in Brussels. There were no other reports.

3.2 Matters arising

a. Membership: Adding to the report circulated, Jen reported on recent communication between the Association of Deer Management Groups and LINK's Deer TF. The DTF was not keen to co-opt the ADMG, who were interested in greater contact. The general view among staff, supported by the Board, was that ADMG were unlikely to gain a majority vote among LINK members, assuming it could demonstrate that it meets LINK's membership criteria, and it was noted that LINK should consider how best to take things forward with ADMG. **Action: Deer TF**

b. Organisational Supporters: Alice had now invited Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh and Creative Carbon Scotland to join; replies awaited.

c. Business Supporters:

The meeting was reminded that BS applications do not need membership approval – in terms of potential concerns amongst members about business supporters (companies) the responsibility for decisions rests with the Board. DL encouraged trustees to consider appropriate businesses and to forward suggestions to Alice who would circulate these for endorsement. **Action: Trustees**

Scottish Power's application had been approved (by email) among the Board and staff were now processing the company as LINK's first Business Supporter.

Mandy and Andy awaited a date with Pagoda PR to explore the latter (a PR company)'s suggestion of Scotrail and Boots as Supporters. From a recent discussion about biodiversity communications, Andy also reported that Scottish Enterprise might be interested in LINK's species champion initiative being extended to business.

d. Proposed changes to Memo & Articles:

The small changes proposed by the lawyer in response to the Board's request were approved along with the staff proposal to hold an SGM to get members' approval for these in the summer. Jen confirmed that the lawyer would provide wording for the special resolution and that, depending on the constitutional requirements for a quorum, the meeting might be held electronically. **Action: Jen**

e. Succession planning:

President: Ross left the room during discussion of this item. The Board considered the subgroup's proposal that LINK avail of Ross's willingness to continue for a year, start an open recruitment from the autumn, advertising the position to reach a wider audience, and allowing enough time for an interview process and handover with Ross, and if necessary, to revert to the traditional method of finding successors. Given the degree of turnover in all the other offices, the meeting agreed that it would be important to have the continuity which would be afforded by Ross's continuing into 2015. Helen explained that the recruitment would be handled with care; the subgroup had experienced positive results from public advert for similar positions in their own organisations and strongly recommended LINK try this route before applying the traditional method. Ross returned to the room and responded positively to the Board's proposition that he continue for a further year to 2015. **Actions: Recommendation of Ross's reappointment to AGM 2014; Subsequent Subgroup coordination of recruitment for his successor**

Chair: DL would be on sabbatical in October and November and Helen would step up at that stage to the Chair. August would be DL's last meeting as Chair.

Vice Chair: This change would leave the VC position vacant; DL was talking with several trustees and would keep the Board informed of conclusions. **Action: Deborah to confer with trustees**

Treasurer: Paul Ritchie had recently indicated his intention to take a career break, and would be leaving SWT in June. LINK had written to various member bodies with personnel who fulfilled criteria for LINK's treasuring role, encouraging an interest in the opportunity. Jen suggested following this up with phone calls to obvious 'suspects' from May, and Paul indicated that he could do this, adding that whilst he was keen to stand down sooner, he could if necessary continue in the role for a maximum of a further year. **Action: Paul to contact potential players**

Elected trustees & nominations: DL ascertained that no other trustees present at the meeting had plans to stand down; of the three trustees required to stand down by rotation, her own and Paul's retirements would be two, and Helen Todd was due to retire though eligible to stand again. With regard to inviting nominations Paul Ritchie advised consideration of perspectives, alongside skills sets, which could be informative, including for example a business perspective. Jen confirmed that the constitution provides for LINK to draw elected trustees from as wide a 'pool' as it wishes, wider than the membership (*JA note: these need to be nominated through member organisations*). The Board agreed that a subgroup (DL, HT and JA) should consider skills gaps to inform the call for nominations and that the group would ensure this kind of assessment. **Action: Subgroup to assess needs/gaps; Staff to invite nominations**

Honorary Fellows: Helen spoke to her brief report on her discussion with Mandy about aspects of honorary fellowship flagged in Board discussions over the last year. They proposed that LINK touch base with existing HFs to check expectations, seek brief biographies as well as endorsements from HFs which LINK can make use of in public ways; also that TFs be kept aware of LINK's complement of HFs and the range of skills these people offer; and finally that LINK maintain a database category of 'warm contacts' who could in future be strategically involved in the network's activity. **Actions: Helen to draft letter for HFs; Staff to keep TFs informed & open DB category**

f. Strategic liaison:

SEPA: The Board agreed that despite some frustration with the nature of this liaison, LINK should continue to meet SEPA Chair and CEO annually, with national performance framework issues and implementation of the Regulatory Reform Act as agenda items this year. Ross Finnie and Mike Robinson were available and Lloyd Austin and Matthew Crighton would be asked to engage.

Action: Alice

Scottish Government: Jen reported on a recent meeting with officials to consider future funding where SG had been in listening mode, though had asked if LINK felt other networks mentioned were of comparable size and remit. LINK would follow up with some further research into funding (state and membership) of other voluntary sector umbrellas, public benefits delivered by these, and request for increased amount of funding. SG had taken the opportunity to explore issues to do with regularity and agendas for the regular meetings with the Minister and to ask about the rationale for LINK submitting consultation responses alongside member responses; on these points LINK would look to sharpen up its practices.

Actions:

Staff to pursue the grant discussions with further research and figures during spring

TF Convenors to routinely clarify rationale for LINK and member consultation responses

LINK eye on agendas for Ministerial meetings (re: overlap with G6 & re: length)

Keeping Trustees informed of LINK asks: The meeting agreed the value of keeping trustees informed of current asks of TFs on a fairly regular basis (ie., what LINK wants of 10-20 key organisations). Staff would put heads together and come up with a means of providing this kind of heads-up regularly. **Action: Staff confer over means and provide to trustees quarterly**

g. Extending our dialogue

DL reminded the meeting of the mapping of Scotland's wider policy community carried out by trustees and staff in 2011 to identify where LINK most needs to build relations and seek to influence; in a number of areas work was in progress and she invited thoughts now on new priorities.

Helen Todd updated the meeting on relations with Scottish Land and Estates over LINK's hilltracks work, where the atmosphere was less than cordial, although LINK had suggested a meeting awaited a response; Helen thought it best not to press further at this point.

DL and staff had suggested approaching NFUS; as a strategic level tactic, separate from the TF-technical level negotiations around CAP, this proposal was endorsed and Ross would lead, conferring with TF colleagues and identifying players from Board and beyond. The TF's vision document was mentioned in relation, and might be a useful point of discussion, though the goal would be log the ENGOs/LINK with NFUS as a legitimate, and useful, player in the policy arena, to acknowledge areas of agreement and disagreement and in doing so, to open the door to building stronger relationships. **Action: Ross & staff**

h. Representation

Mandy confirmed that she had indicated willing to attend the Joint Programme Monitoring Committee (spending of EU funds in Scotland). The meeting welcomed this. Mandy would attend the JPMC May meeting to assess the benefit to LINK of engaging and would subsequently advise the network on whether to continue to do so. **Actions: Staff to confirm to JPMC: Mandy to report back**

4. STRATEGIC PLANS AND NETWORK PROGRESS

4.1 Report on progress with LINK strategic plan

a. The paper circulated in advance reported progress against objectives. DL invited questions at the end of the meeting. Meantime, specific issues noted were:

Narrative - Andy Myles reported that Paul Walton and he had met to develop January's discussion of pulling together a brief and succinct narrative on the environment. They would start from the viewpoint of how to present concerns around environmental development persuasively alongside calls for economic and social development, so as to put environment on equal terms with competing demands. Andy and Paul would circulate their draft to Board and TF Convenors in a few weeks for comments and fine-tuning, and proposed to organise a seminar around communication of messages thereafter. Funds had been allocated in January. **Action: Andy & Paul W to circulate draft in May**
 EEB – Andy would invite Elizabeth Heister (staff, EEB) to a LINK network meeting. **Action: Andy**

b. TF evaluation against strategic emphases and KPIs: The paper circulated indicated a very good response rate from TFs this time, with no change in relation to 2 of LINK's KPIs, but positive progress against 9 KPIs. The next report would include colour coding. The meeting was pleased by this better feedback rate and hoped task forces would also find the overview useful and appreciate affirmation of the value of their work, when there is sometimes a sense of effort being pretty much uphill.

4.2 Political strategy report at spring 2014

Andy spoke to his report which had received comment from Parliamentary Forum colleagues prior to its circulating to Board and Network. The Board meeting welcomed this noting its value to members, and perhaps particularly to some UK bodies who have no other access to this overview. The Board responded to specific questions in the PSR as follows:

a. Use wider opportunities to influence than (now expensive) party conferences? There was general support for engaging in these wider opportunities, rather than focussing just on political parties, though trustees observed that even events such as Cosla and STUC conferences were subject to similar challenges and constraints. **Action: for Parliamentary Forum discussion**

b. Investing some staff resource in following up Regulatory Reform Act? The Board heard that changes in the Freshwater TF had depleted the LINK's small 'team' working on this (now Andy Myles and Eva Groeneveld). However, as RRA was integral to LINK efforts around the National Performance and Planning Frameworks the Board advised that LINK could not afford not to pursue this to some extent, asking Andy to continue to invest some time alongside others interested and within manageable limits. **Action: Andy to discuss with Eva & others**

c. Governance Group proposals on limited further work relating to profiling environment in the Scottish independence referendum debate? The Group's thinking was endorsed, including its proposal to run a second member discussion day in January 2015. **Action: Governance Group**

d. Working on UK energy market and policy? The view of the Board was that the constitutional debate was not conducive to Scotland's making a persuasive case to the UK at this point and that unless other partners with capacity and able to commit to the work could be identified, LINK should avoid setting this hare running. It was agreed to test support for collective action with the Joint Links at their proposed conference in the autumn, on the back of work which LINK was about to commission on the carbon bubble, and to reassess the situation thereafter. **Action: Jen**

4.3 Network plan 2013-14 final report

This had been provided for information in line with the Board's decision, when developing the strategic plan in 2013, that trustees needed to see the network plan and staff should flag network issues which needed discussion at Board level. Jen noted that the report illustrated the wide range of very good work going on within LINK. Ross felt the report reflected the strength of the organisation though observed that the Board should rightly continue to monitor capacity in relation to aspiration. There were no detailed questions.

4.4 Exploring Local Links

DL reminded the meeting of LINK's aims for this work, ie, for the consultant to assess any gap in networking and whether that could be addressed to strengthen alliance and broaden the environmental voice. Elizabeth Leighton had reported in March and the subgroup established in January (Helen Todd and several of the staff) had summarised Elizabeth's findings in the paper circulated to the Board recently, with some assessment of the cost of the options, and advising discussion with the network ahead of any action.

DL noted that the proposed options each posed opportunities as well as risks (in terms of expectations, reliance on busy members and TFs, financial and more) and she recommended that the Board establish a broader subgroup to comprehensively analyse and assess costs, benefits and risks and bring a recommendation to the August Board, to take to the network.

Trustees supported a precautionary approach. Paul Ritchie advised LINK include the option of taking no action, given that any option was likely to need several years before it demonstrated effect, in which time expectations could be established of a service that would last; given current continuing uncertainty over LINK's future public support LINK was not in a position to start such processes.

AW reminded the meeting of Planning Democracy's current assessment of how democracy at the local level could be 'capacitated' in relation to planning issues - outcome awaited.

Andy Myles urged the Board to beware of a developing gap which was potentially as important as gaps in our networking at UK and European levels would be; politically, he thought the trend to localism was one LINK should not ignore. Ross encouraged clarity in that scenario about LINK's responsibility vis-à-vis that of member organisations and Andy reported that he had identified member organisations with local groups as a possible route to developing stronger networks.

The meeting agreed to follow DL's proposal and Craig, Charles and Mike offered to join the subgroup. Simon Jones would be consulted. **Action: Subgroup to assess & bring recommendation to August board (Jen)**

4.5 Congress 2014 theming

Ideas had been invited from members and honorary fellows as well as trustees and staff. The meeting discussed the various proposals summarised in the paper circulated, agreeing on a theme of landscape-scale initiatives and re-wilding, and advising consideration of the urban dimension within that, and interpretation that goes beyond biodiversity. The Board felt that support and interest would be strong across the membership, and that many of the other topics were being addressed within LINK now in other ways. Mike, Craig and Beryl volunteered for the steering group, and Paul Walton was volunteered in his absence. Alice would organise a telecall to start planning. **Action: Subgroup to convene to plan (Alice)**

5. FINANCIAL

5.1 End of year outturn for 2013/14

Hugh Green joined the meeting and spoke briefly to the papers circulated, reporting that the accountants (Geoghegans) had now confirmed the figures in the outturn for 2013/14. Unrestricted reserves were up by £12k on January's forecast as a result of receiving higher income from cost recovery and further cost savings. The meeting heard that Geoghegans advised a revised statement on reserves perhaps identifying the need to carry between 6 and 12 months' operating costs, rather than 3 months which was LINK's current contingency commitment. It was agreed that the Funding Subgroup should bring its recommendation on reserves policy back to the Board. **Action: Funding Subgroup to recommend LINK line to Board shortly**

5.2 Budget for 2014/15

This had been approved by email during March, as agreed at the last meeting. However, Hugh informed the meeting of two changes: the balance carried forward was slightly higher in view of the healthier end of year position (see above), and membership income had increased as a result of The SCAPE Trust's admission to LINK from April.

5.3 Discretionary project fund bids

On behalf of the Economics TF which had been asked to oversee the carbon bubble contract for LINK, Jen reported that the Board's estimate of £1,000 (January) would not be sufficient and that bids indicated that a

further £800 was needed. The meeting approved this additional allocation given the prioritisation of the work, by the network.

The meeting thanked Hugh for the clarity of the accounts provided and approved his request to adjust the categorisation in the management accounts (at Geoghegans' advice) to correspond to the SOFA and SORP. Mike Robinson advised at least one year of historical data be included for comparison.

Hugh left the meeting.

6. AOB

6.1 August agenda DL encouraged trustees to flag if there was an issue worth discussion at the August meeting which would not normally get a significant allocation of time. **Action: Trustees**

6.2 Trustee contact with members Around one third of members had responded to the Board's offer of contact meetings with a trustee (and staff member if appropriate), most of these expressing interest. Trustees were asked to indicate their availability. Helen would be available in the summer though heavily committed from the autumn. **Action: Jen in liaison with trustees**

6.3 Carbon accounting Helen reported that Ramblers' Scotland had now published carbon accounts.

6.4 Scotland Against Spin The meeting noted that, having asked to attend LINK's festive reception in 2013 and spoken with members there, it was possible that SAS reps' thinking on benefits of LINK membership had changed. No application had yet arrived and no further contact noted.

7. NEXT MEETING

The August Board and Network meetings would be Deborah's final meetings as Chair, before going on sabbatical in October. As she could no longer make the scheduled date, trustees agreed to **reschedule the next meeting to Thursday 21 August**.