



MINUTES of a meeting of LINK's Board, held in Perth on 18 August 2016 in Edinburgh

PRESENT

Trustees - Helen Todd (Chair), Charles Dundas (Vice Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Craig Macadam, Mike Robinson, Beryl Leatherland, Ian Findlay, Lucy Graham, Paul Walton

Staff in attendance – Jen Anderson, Alice Walsh

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Sam Gardner, Trustee.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Draft minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2016 were approved as an accurate record.

3. MATTERS ARISING & REPORTS

3.a. Matters arising

Brexit July stakeholder meeting – The meeting heard that Daphne had represented LINK at this meeting led by Roseanna Cunningham at Battleby. The Minister had been upbeat and the focus had been on what would be best for Scotland. This had included discussion and support for redrafting land management funding so that it is directed to the public good.

Environment Links UK Strategy – Trustees approved the draft joint Links strategy circulated in the spring hearing that this also had the approval of the other 3 Links boards in England, NI and Wales.

LINK transition from TFs to Groups – Trustees heard that work across the 6 strategic groups continued to bed in, with Subgroups relating to and through the most relevant overarching Group. Land was the most challenging area where the Group had 3 priority policy areas and coordinated with up to 11 Subgroups or erstwhile TFs. There were no major challenges to consider at this stage, annual reports would come to the autumn Board and Network meetings; the area of social justice remained a work in progress, where capacity had to some extent been bumped by attention to Brexit issues.

European Environmental Bureau 2017 conference – EEB is an EU network of NGOs of which LINK has long been a member and with other members has promoted the holding of EEB events around the member states. The meeting heard an update on plans by LINK and EEB for the EEB's next annual conference to be held in Scotland (Edinburgh). The current concept note for the 2017 event was tabled and the meeting discussed the likely strong level of interest from within and beyond LINK, the high

profile opportunity it would offer for Scottish, UK, European and international speakers and considerations. Issues worth discussion would include how to ensure Scotland/UK in future would retain the thrust of and enhance the EU nature legislation. There would be scope for LINK members to play a part, for exhibitions on their work. Whilst SG Cab Secs would be involved, the lead would remain with the ENGO sector. The Board suggested that some members might wish to add site visits on to either end of the formal programme. Staff would book venues and accommodation as soon as theme, budget and dates were agreed by EEB's board in October. LINK Board strongly supported the proposal to use the Edinburgh International Conference Centre. Beryl, Paul and Craig offered to be part of any steering group. **Action: Staff keep Board and members fully informed**

LINK Local – Jen reported that the online website-cum-database had launched in April. Karen had taken on the coordination of this work, with the help of intern Syd Chandler (contract ended May). Registration of local groups was happening, albeit slowly, and numbers stood at around 40. Karen continued to promote news and new joiners via social media. KSB had recently evinced interest in the database in relation to their own ambitions to encourage activism on the environment and it was also possible that other bodies including Flora and Fauna International (marine-related activism) would see opportunities. LINK Board thought it premature to consider whether to 'port' the initiative at this point, agreeing to continue with the plan of reviewing a year after launching. Some trustees had not noticed any publicity and advised further proactive promotion, eg., via email signature lines, re-tweeting, cross-referencing, publicising via all LINK briefings and publications, re-encouragement to LINK members with local groups which might join, and use of a case study/case studies to encourage fresh interest.

Action: Staff review promotion; Board review in 2017

Membership

- Helen had recently reminded Diarmid Hearn NTS of the opportunity of discussion with trustees about NTS' relationship with LINK; meantime, the NTS internal review continued apace.
- LINK had recently shared its consensus position on climate and energy, in confidence, with MCofS and JMT, as previously agreed. Both organisations had acknowledged this, noting its contents; neither wished to re-join at this stage. It was understood that MCofS planned a new staff post focussed on alliance-building though renewed relations with LINK were not priority; JMT had noted the value of discussion about Brexit at some stage. *JA note: JMT were invited to attend LINK's 6/9 meeting on Brexit and will be invited to attend Congress.*

3.b. Reports back

Air Passenger Duty – Mike Robinson reported. The consultation results had been reported by Government as 50:50 in favour of change when in fact the detail indicted an 80:20 result against change. Following devolution of new powers to the Scottish parliament APD would then appear in the Scottish budget; there are concerns at this direction including among the Institute of Accountants, Transform, Virgin Rail and others, though no LINK member or ENGO coalition position on APD. In addition, it was understood that SNP had not decided a position on the extra runway at Heathrow, though were minded to support.

REFIT of Nature Directives – Paul Walton reported. This Links UK level action had been fast moving with very joined-up and effective action to date. Situation to be reviewed in autumn in relation to an EC working document which would be produced for October destined for EU Parliament and Commission, though the focus on the Directives might wane given attention on Brexit. The Links conference in

Cardiff would consider this further as part of its Brexit plenary, including how UK domestic legislation could take the best from the directives and build on these in future.

4. LOOKING AHEAD

Brexit - It remained unclear as to when the UK would look to trigger Brexit and what the shape of an exit deal would be. LINK had organised an extraordinary network meeting on 6 September to give members an opportunity to consider and share thinking. The value of considering governance and HR angles was noted, as LINK had usefully done in a session ahead of the Scottish referendum and to bear in mind that there were various options for our exit from Europe. It was felt that SG would want the budget to look healthy in the lead-up to a second Indyref so max. 1-year funding arrangements were likely to continue; also noted that SNH was not willing to engage in grant discussions until early 2017. The sense trustees had from discussions with colleagues in England was that the south anticipated an imminent second Indyref as a result of the June outcome. Brexit would be part of the Environment Links UK conference programme in Cardiff in October.

Congress 2016 – The meeting agreed it would be useful to address Brexit implications, in more than bland terms, using the opportunity to inform on alternative relationships, trade agreements, workers' rights and the environment. As well as scenario-planning in terms of social justice. Ian, Mike, and it was hoped Matthew Crighton, could contribute to any steering group.

Marking LINK's 30th birthday in 2017 – The meeting discussed the most appropriate timing to mark LINK's 30th during 2017, including during SEW in February, or EEB events in October/November. The preference was to hang the celebration onto the EEB events with a reception for members and 'partners of these years', to which the EEB audience would also be welcome. The possibility of commissioning and publishing a brief resume (video/publication) of what has been achieved in the 30 years was discussed and use of some budget was agreed. A stand-alone ceilidh at a different point in the year was a further possibility.

5. FINANCES AND FUNDRAISING

5.1 Fundraising - The meeting noted that despite investment of increased staff time in fundraising (Alice, some of Jen's time, also support from WWF's fundraiser with marine) for core and projects, questions remained over both the marine and economics projects futures. Despite a strong bid and delegation to JRCT we had not secured their support for our economics work; outcomes of project bids to EFF and Friends Provident were awaited. There was a high degree of aspiration for project funding across LINK groups in the increasingly challenging and competitive market for Trusts support. Fundraising successes for core work were modest and occasional. An exploratory meeting with the William Grant Foundation was planned in September.

5.2 Cost recovery

- The meeting considered the ethical challenges of cost recovery in relation to funded projects where members and LINK are collaboratively investing in project administration, line management, hosting, even fundraising. In such cases, trustees agreed there is a moral duty to share available cost recovery and any reductions in cost recovery fairly with these partners, rather than favour LINK or particular partners above others.

- It was felt that cost recovery is a balancing of risk, of a project not going ahead or of project financial considerations causing LINK or project partners serious problems. Whilst funding bids might seek recovery of full costs, grants secured may often provide less than full recovery, and it is appropriate for a project to go ahead on that lesser rate, if the project is deemed sufficiently important and partners can accept the decrease in recovery; however, a degree of cost recovery is important, and the more so to any smaller organisations which may be involved in a project.
- **The meeting then assessed the** situation for the marine project, where fundraising effort to extend into a fourth phase from October 2016, was ongoing. Pending decisions by EFF and other trusts being approached, WWFS had given the project an injection of funds and breathing space, this spring. At that stage, calculations indicated this would take the project to June 2017 and on this basis decisions had been made about viable 'terms' for recruitment to both posts (one a maternity cover for Esther, and the other a successor to Nick). Should other monies not be secured and the project therefore have to close, in that scenario little cost recovery would be available for line managers, hosts or LINK; alternatively, if fundraising were successful, cost recovery targets for the period to June 2017 would be met. The other parties involved were aware and had accepted these terms. LINK trustees noted the difficulty of maintaining important momentum in a major and staffed project through the point when its funding future hangs in the balance. The meeting agreed to this potential waiver of cost recovery to LINK (c. £6k) in the nine months from October 2016. Since this decision could not be a precedent, however, the Funding Subgroup was asked to advise on how to manage 'staging' of projects in future. **Action: FSG**

5.3 Financial outturn and outlook

- The meeting noted no surprises in the first three months' outturn and were very pleased to note that the new Edinburgh premises which Karen Paterson had found during the search, were likely to cost much the same to lease and run as Gladstone's Land. For the financial year, LINK was budgeting a deficit of £32k, which Tim noted might seem a lot but which in tough times the organisation could afford, at this point, though not year on year in future.
- LINK's 5-year financial trajectory had been updated in the light of what was known or anticipated, and showed continuing annual deficits were likely, unless new income was secured. Few sizeable organisations were missing from LINK's membership other than those recently departed (Sustrans) and continuing to ensure that members felt the benefit of membership was important. That LINK is not 'flush' as it bit into reserves was an important message for funders.
- It was agreed to keep a closer eye on the trajectory from 2017 and, depending on public sector decisions then, to consider how LINK should adjust to a context of decreasing funding and increasing reliance on reserves, and what the minimum level of reserves must be.
Action: staff to update 'contingency' element of reserves; FSG monitor

5.4 Discretionary funding bids

- A bid from the Legal Strategy Subgroup of the Governance Group for £1600 was approved towards costs of a December event with legal and environmental experts aiming to raise profile on the need for and benefit of an environmental law centre in Scotland. The Board suggested the legal strategy group consider the benefits of a modest charge/tiered charges.
- *JA note: The Deer Subgroup has subsequently been granted £1000 towards a report to be commissioned on necessary changes to regulations to achieve sustainable deer management.*
- This left the DPF balance at £5,600.
- The meeting acknowledged that the proposed study on 'Scotland outside EU' was likely to require £2000-3000 in commissioning costs.

6. GOVERNANCE

6.1 AGM preparation – The circulated paper set out decisions which the Board required to ratify ahead of the AGM on 21 November. The meeting noted that all elected trustees would be standing again and a note would circulate to members explaining this and outlining that if they were re-elected, there would be no vacancies. In line with the lawyer's advice of 2015, Mike Robinson, a co-opted trustee, would be standing down in November. The meeting did not feel there were areas in which skills levels would be 'wanting' to the point of needing to be highlighted to members. Trustees approved proposals for recommendations to members on: office bearers (same team, continuing for a further year); financial examiner (Geoghegans); subscriptions for 2017-18 (at a rise of 3% instead of 5% on current rates, and a change for the lowest Band to £125 per year, as recommended by the FSG); appointment of Joyce McMillan as President for a second year (of a normal term of three years); and of Sarah Boyack and Alan Fox as proposed Hon Fellows. Noting the possibility that Sarah Boyack might in future return to active political life, it was agreed to check charity law on this area and if the need arose, to ask Sarah to step back from Fellowship during any active period in politics. Trustees noted that the draft narrative to the accounts for 2015-16 would circulate for final comment shortly. **Action: Staff**

6.2 Draft LINK policies on data protection– The meeting formally approved two draft policies for (i) LINK Members, Supporters and others; and (ii) for LINK and its employees.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 Website entries Trustees were asked to check the [revised biographies](#) on LINK's website and let Alice know if changes were in order. **Action: Trustees**

7.2 Accredited Living Wage In recent fundraising for economics work to Friends Provident, LINK had been asked to provide its policy on the living wage, as discussed by the Board in 2016. The meeting noted that LINK should refer to the Scottish Living Wage accreditation in such discussions.

8. BOARD DATES 2016 INTO 2017

Next Board Thursday 27th October, morning, LINK office, Perth

2017 Board Thursday 26 January 2017, Ramblers office, Edinburgh
Thursday 27 April 2017, venue tbc
Thursday 24 August 2017, venue tbc
Either Thursday 26 October 2017 or Thursday 23 November (dep. timing EEB 2017)

2017 Network meetings

Thursday 4 May 2017

Congress, to be replaced by EEB 2017 Conference

AGM & Strategic Planning – Date tbc once decision reached on EEB event