

## MINUTES OF LINK BOARD'S MEETING HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2015 IN PERTH

PRESENT Trustees - Helen Todd (Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Ian Findlay, Beryl Leatherland, Charles Dundas, Craig Macadam, Sam Gardner  
Staff members: Jen Anderson, Andy Myles, Alice Walsh,

### INTRODUCTORY POINTS

Helen Todd welcomed all to the meeting, with a particular welcome to Sam Gardner, new to the Board in the wake of November's AGM.

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Trustees Simon Jones (Vice Chair), Mike Robinson, Mandy Orr, Paul Walton. Also from Ross Finnie (President) and Hugh Green (Staff).

### 2. MINUTES OF 10 NOVEMBER 2014 MEETING

These were approved as an accurate record of the Board's November discussion.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING & REPORTS BACK

#### 3.1 Strategic Liaison

Ministerial - The meeting noted current discussions with officials about future liaison in context of managing the Minister's diary better. The eNGO agenda was to not lose access as a result, to secure more in the way of non-formal time with the Minister, to secure (currently unavailable) access to the Cabinet Secretary. A meeting on 16/2 would be used as an introductory opportunity to around 12 players from LINK, with some overlap to G6 though not at CEO level, some discussion of issues of interest across the piece, and some informal discussion. Advice from officials that the eNGOs could toughen their 'asks' of the Minister would be noted. LINK Board also agreed that opportunities should be found to invite the Minister/s to a high-level dinners

Scottish Government - Bridget Campbell, taking over the Environment Directorate from Bob McIntosh on his retirement in February, would review strategic alliances including with the Agriculture Department. LINK had recently asked if Bob McIntosh could set up an early meeting with Bridget.

Launch of draft clauses of Smith Commission, Edinburgh - Charles reported that the Secretary of State for Scotland and the UK PM had been present. The event had sought thoughts on the draft clauses. At this stage there was little of relevance to LINK other than CEC (covered in miscellaneous non-legislative implications in an Annex of the proposals). Discussion had covered the relationship between the two Governments and Scotland should be represented in negotiations at EU. Work going on via a joint ministerial committee had been referred to, which Charles had hoped would be open and transparent.

LINK Board noted that eNGO interest in the CEC issues would start once the CE was transferred to Scotland, though noted that the wording in the Bill was about 'management of the CE' and not the setting up of a separate body. It would be important to see the political landscape following the 2015 elections before considering detail further.

SNH - At the recent liaison meeting Andrew Bachell had recently acknowledged LINK's letter on their proposed strategy though with indications that the final version would not be greatly changed from the early thinking. SNH had encouraged a presentation by LINK trustees to an SNH board meeting with a view to informing BMs more about the nature and goals of the eNGO sector. SNH's paper reviewing protected areas had been flagged, on which SNH suggested a workshop. LINK Board discussed concerns over SNH's delivery of its statutory duties, the importance of the Agency acknowledging the role of the eNGOs and continuing to value that. It was agreed to seek a meeting with Susan Davies, who was Acting CEO during

Ian Jardine's secondment to Europe on REFIT matters. Also to raise with the Minister the need for continuing support for the voluntary sector to be covered in SNH's grantinaid letter.

Cameron McNeish - His recent criticism of LINK had been noted, unhelpfully pejorative. No action was proposed. Sam suggested that swift personal response to issues blogged, are the best course.

Wider policy community targets - No further targets were added to the Board's current schedule. Strategic liaison with the NFUS had been agreed as a priority in 2014, though had been overtaken by the NFUS' launch of its farmed environment forum which invitation had been accepted by the LINK Agri TF.

### 3.2 President search

Helen Todd, Ian Findlay and Sam Gardner offered to act as the subgroup, signing off materials and carrying out direct contact and interviews. Simon Jones was also involved (from 2014).

### 3.3 Relationships between the Links

WCL had not yet replied formally to LINK's 2014 letter about the geographic scope of 'English' Link. Meantime the Joint Links REFIT work was following federal principles, and a small steering group had been established to keep an eye on process.

### 3.4 LINK local pilot project

The project signed off by the Board last summer was moving ahead now, with the help of a volunteer who would gather data for the data base on local and community groups. Andy felt good evidence of the need for national-local links had been seen in the lead up to the moratorium in Scotland on fracking and unconventional gas extraction (announced the previous week).

## 4. STRATEGIC PROGRESS

### 4.1 Business strategy review

Staffing - Jen spoke to the circulated paper flagging that a broad look at staffing/staff functions was afoot and would come to the Employment Subgroup for discussion before thinking was brought to the full Board. In the meantime, necessary recruitment was going ahead to replace Hugh Green's part-time Finance and IT role with a full-time Finance and Office Manager role. This was designed to provide some support (on offices and project admin) from the Chief Officer role and to take full responsibility for some areas currently of necessity shared between three part-time staff.

Supporters and business sponsorship - Progress in rolling out promotion of Business Supporter was discussed: the meeting noted that both Boots and the new proprietors of Scotrail had now been discounted by Mandy. Criticisms levelled by JMT about LINK's approach to sponsorship and about the BS package were then considered (JMT had particular concerns about Scottish Power, which had voluntarily signed up as a LINK BS). Trustees revisited the thinking behind LINK's BS package which was still in the roll-out phase - that it should bring in some income whilst helping to open the way for dialogue with the sector, that it should aim for multiple small subscriptions which did not offer companies opportunity of greenwash or influence rather than any larger payments which could be seen to imply that degree of control, and that the decisions on eligibility should be taken at Board level rather than by members though with members continuing to be kept informed of plans and progress. The meeting concluded again that this was an appropriate way of helping to make connection with the business sector which members clearly wanted (an earlier Congress had concluded on the need for more shared space with business). The meeting hoped that capacity could be found in the months ahead to roll the package out more actively and encourage a diversity of Supporters also noting that LINK's Species Champions work wished to use the scheme. **Actions: Staff allocate capacity to BS promotion; amend webpages**

Membership subscriptions - The meeting noted that Archaeology Scotland had requested review of a potential special case status for the coming year, which the Funding Subgroup would consider. Also that a Funding Subgroup review of appropriate subscription rates for 2016/17 would be needed in the summer, ahead of the AGM and once more was known about the forward funding climate for LINK and its members. **Actions: Hugh to liaise and arrange with the FSG**

#### 4.2 Report on contact with members

Jen spoke to the paper circulated.

Just over 32% of members had used the opportunity of contact with a trustee in 2014 and these discussions had indicated that NGOs' experience of engaging in LINK is mainly very positive. An early 2015 meeting with JMT, critical of LINK, was covered of which a full report had been circulated to Trustees.

The Board in November had decided that in future contact opportunities should be offered annually to all members, and an invitation would be circulated shortly.

Various points on LINK processes, wider opportunities, covered in the paper were discussed as follows:

- Where is it not appropriate for LINK to accept opportunities to give evidence – taking opportunities because they are there may on occasion reinforce an impression that LINK is something which it may not be. In this respect our guidance can perhaps be tightened.
- Prioritisation of horizon issues – the meeting discussed how the process of agreeing actions proposed by the Political Strategy process works; this was distinct from TF-led work where a group of members voluntarily comes together with the expectation of taking that responsibility; PSR action may be important to network reputation but places a demand the network which needs to be addressed in terms of leadership, capacity and follow through if it is to be effective. Some further thinking, care, guidance would be useful.
- More consideration in the planning stages of how initiatives such as Congress will conclude, how conclusions will be led forward are needed in relation to network capacity to act on/deliver expectations.
- Smaller organisations clearly appreciate having connection through LINK to other strong voices on a range of issues which they themselves cannot address but which are germane; large organisations tend to appreciate the value of supporting voices; there may be times when organisations are somewhere between these positions and don't feel the need / benefit of community
- TFs should be clearer where they have completed a task and will continue as an info exchange mechanism only, in which cases LINK will not expect workplans or reports or the associated liaison with SNH leads for these areas

**Actions:**

**Chair encourage members to seek discussion with trustees, enclosing report on the recent meetings**

**Staff revisit guidance on where LINK should be represented and bring draft revision to Board**

**Steering groups for Events/Congress to tighten up consideration of follow-through in planning events**

#### 4.3 Brief round-up on political strategy

Andy reported that a full PSR would circulate in early April and would take on the Board's thoughts on the need for any subsequent actions to be supportable through the membership; he hoped that LINK would continue to find a way to take decisions on the 'big issues'. **Action: PSR to circulate for late March**

Sam spoke to the value of the Report but noted that it has brought differences to the way in which LINK works with significant consequences for the network as a whole, other than where the Report's advice is for TFs to be taking particular actions. The meeting agreed that in some cases the process of digesting the Report and discussing it at Board and Network meetings is as important as any concrete action being taken, with members hearing about the issues and points of view. Trustees agreed that LINK should ensure a clearer mandate around actions from the PSR and around the implications of how such actions

are to be followed through by the network. **Action: Staff & Chair consider how to guide choice of actions from PSR in terms of lead, capacity and follow through**

Andy reported that a 2015 manifesto for LINK was about to circulate to members for comment and that work was beginning on a 2016 manifesto where there was more chance of making an impact. Both followed the Referendum Challenge approach of setting out what we want for Scotland since the debate across the UK was still in constitutional mode.

#### 4.4 Strategic priorities

Jen spoke to the paper circulated, which carried the quarterly report against the emphases of the strategic plan, and in which she had highlighted points for discussion.

The meeting discussed as follows:

- LINK needs to offer TFs more support in developing better advocacy strategies in the context of LINK's ambition to present a clearer red line to decision makers and others. In the form of annual negotiations training workshop to help build skills of network players for engaging in our politics of negotiation. **Action: Staff to develop proposal**
- LINK protocols on working with non-members, ex-members, and not-eligible-but-relevant-organisations are exercising some TFs (landscape, deer, marine). Do these support our ends in terms of environment, or shoot us in the foot? The Board discussed whether LINK should leave it to members to decide whether they wished to keep relevant TFs going under a LINK umbrella without the expertise of non-members, or whether they should engage on a wider platform outside the LINK umbrella to pursue the environmental goals. It was noted that such groupings would not have access to LINK staff support in advocacy or other terms. Should our mechanisms be loosened and if so, what is the consequence in terms of membership/subscription loyalty. Could the DTF be a special case in the current political climate where Government shows signs of being willing to take a tougher line, and the TF is in danger of losing Mike Daniels' considerable expertise on the issues as JMT leaves LINK in March. **Action: Helen would indicate to Network that the Board is still considering and will discuss further**
- External relationship building needs a clearer strategy which identifies key targets and does not extend us too far, relating to network advocacy goals; also to know where we must and how we can maintain relationships over time.
- Internally, it would be worth inviting Reps to keep LINK informed on their LINK-related dialogue with colleagues, so there are no surprises.
- Continuing to make time for members to inform one another of own work and ideas is important - always a constructive part of our discussions.
- TF workload burden keeps coming up as an issue: the paper asked whether LINK could develop a sense of rota as part of its protocols.

#### 4.5 Energy review (Paper F)

The meeting discussed the proposal for an internal review of positioning, based on the decision reached by members at strategic planning in November. This proposed a timescale, method and allocation of discretionary funds of £5,000. Sam asked for greater clarity around purpose and value of this altruistic cost to LINK. Beryl advised an evidence based approach to the work, with annexes and references. The meeting agreed that energy is a major issue on which the network should come together, and where the process of discussion is itself a big part of the purpose and benefit. **Action: Staff to revise the proposal**

#### 4.6 Use of our international memberships (Paper G)

Discussion was postponed.

## 5. FINANCIALS

### 5.1 Outturn to end Dec/ Year-end forecast/ Draft budget 2015-16/ 5-year plan

Tim led the meeting through the papers circulated.

Broadly speaking LINK remained in good financial health for the current year, with a net surplus of £10,000 forecast in unrestricted funds. The actual position on subscription income was different from that given, which indicated what had been invoiced as opposed to what had been received.

The discretionary fund was standing at £7,500 (unallocated as yet).

Restricted and designated figures related to different financial years from LINK's own, although the finances were in all cases under control. Marine spend matched income; this was the big spender among LINK projects, had funding to November 2016 even though spending commitment only runs to September 2016; there was an incentives package (from core) in place for project staff, and the possibility that the Marine TF would seek further extension funding. The Flourishing project too was under control.

#### The budget for 2015/16:

- took account in subscription terms of JMT's decision to leave LINK
- assumed that we would hold on to current Supporters
- assumed that SG and SNH would fund again at current levels
- took on board that there would be no further EFF support for core
- relied on a further £10,500 being found either from Trusts or via Supporters (of which Gannochy Trust funding just confirmed formed part); Gannochy had confirmed funding at £5,000 per year for two years: this was less than Alice's bid, but still a very positive outcome of her work, the meeting agreed.
- in expenditure terms, took account of the new Finance and Office Manager post being advertised as well as a 2% allowance for staff increments and inflationary rises
- in terms of bottom line, aimed to break even (possible surplus of £1,000) and would not reach LINK's KPI of 55-60% of essential costs being met from subs income, owing to JMT's resignation (Tim noted that JMT's loss in wider terms is even more a matter for sadness).

#### The 5-year forecast:

The meeting considered the 5-year scenario adjusted recently to take account of current knowns and of realistic judgements about the period.

Tim flagged the anticipated decrease of 20% per year in public sector funding noting that this was a conservative guess: in fact, things might drop faster and more steeply; the sector could give no clear indications.

In 2017, Tim pointed out that income from projects was forecast to drop as funding for marine and flourishing work might then cease. There was no provision for any discretionary funding from 2016/17, at this point. The forecast targets for new income were increasingly significant across the period in terms of whether the bottom line deficits would be larger, sooner.

The Board agreed this was an appropriate longer term forecast at this stage.

### 5.2 DPF status and bids

The meeting considered two requests for funding as follows.

- (a) LINK's Wildlife Forum had applied for between £2,100 and £3,000 for a fundraising phase to secure monies to extend the Species Champion scheme. The Board agreed to offer £3,000, noting the absence of other TF bids to this year's fund (which would close at end March). The meeting also asked that the responsibility for fundraising, and for project planning and activity, should not be placed on core staff, given the modest size of the core team and the breadth demands on

these staff players. Trustees assumed that the members of task forces would carry out this work. This would be communicated to all TFs planning projects of a funded nature. **Action: Staff to contact Wildlife Forum now and keep other TFs in this position informed**

- (b) The proposal for a review of energy positioning anticipated costs of around £5,000. Subject to Board approval of a revised proposal as discussed at item 4.5 above, the meeting gave its 'in principle' approval of an allocation of £4,500. **Action: Allocation dependent on endorsement of revised proposal**

## 6. AOB

### 6.1 Challenge Fund

Elizabeth Leighton had flagged that LINK may want to input informally or formally to a review of the Fund, which can be done through SEFF.

## 7. NEXT MEETING

**Thursday 23 April, 10:00-12:45, Perth**

Followed by Networking Meeting with TFs and Members.