

Approved Minutes of LINK Board meeting held 26 October 2017 at Ramblers Scotland's office, The Gyle, Edinburgh

PRESENT:

Trustees - Helen Todd (Chair), Charles Dundas (Vice-chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Beryl Leatherland, Sam Gardner, Craig Macadam, Paul Walton

Staff - Jen Anderson (Chief Officer), Alice Walsh (Development Officer), Daphne Vlastari (Advocacy Manager, by phone for item 4.1)

Helen opened the meeting welcoming back Tim, now recovered.

1. APOLOGIES

Received from Ian Findlay and Lucy Graham.

2. MINUTES OF AUGUST 2017 MEETING

These were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING AND REPORTS: for information, some items for discussion.

3.1 Membership satisfaction survey

- Trustees had access to a spreadsheet with reports back and to a 1-side summary about the survey. Helen thanked all trustees for carrying out interviews with members, noting this was a useful exercise and inviting comments. The meeting noted that member bodies were generally more than satisfied with LINK, and that various interviewees considered LINK essential.
- Concerns covered in the discussions had been about the constant funding challenge (shared by virtually all interviewees to date) or technical issues of accessing meetings by phone/skype. HWDT's engagement from Mull in Marine meetings was a case in point. Meeting noted that teleconferencing technology did not currently provide solutions, use of multiple technologies complicates further, and etiquette while important was not the solution. Staff were already exploring options including better equipment, though there were no straightforward solutions and Groups might need to hold more meetings nearer to remote members; some reps left home at 5am to make meetings in central belt. While there were more meetings held in Edinburgh now, which was helpful for many members, this was not inclusive for others; meetings held in Perth (or north/west) might lose some Edinburgh players but could gain others. In general, LINK should not have barriers to being inclusive.
- The Board agreed the survey of members was valuable. Helen proposed running this between June and November annually (per previous agreement to increase this from a three-yearly cycle). She asked Trustees to hold conversations with remaining members and to report by the end of November.

ACTION: Trustees to survey and report on remaining member bodies

3.2 LINK Deer work and JMT

- Several members surveyed (above item) had expressed regret at the continuing absence of JMT.
- In the wake of the August Board, Duncan Orr-Ewing, consulted about JMT's role in the Deer Group, had respectfully asked for current arrangements to continue, as it would be challenging if the ENGO sector appeared divided, at the current stage of advocacy on deer management. The meeting noted that JMT's involvement in deer work had been noted in the Landscape Subgroup where the Landscape Institute for Scotland was once again attending meetings regularly. LIS rep Rebecca was a board member of APRS, however.

- Previous Board meeting had agreed that LINK should continue to encourage JMT to re-join. Helen had contacted Andrew Bachell to open dialogue. *JA note: A meeting with Andrew Bachell JMT is set for early January*

3.3 Climate and energy consensus statement

- The meeting was reminded of the commitment to annually review the statement.
- Member survey feedback indicated that two or three interviewees found it less than useful and the meeting discussed whether it had been a pointless exercise. Among the Landscape Subgroup there had been some frustration about scope for publication of the onshore wind energy statement, though this had been published on the website.
- Some trustees felt the statement had influenced some members' thinking and was a useful prism through which to address energy issues in these organisations; they took the view that if more members had been involved in its development, they might have shifted their perspectives. The process had been as important as the product and the value of the statement came in members using it and cross-referring.
- The meeting concluded that there was zero appetite for a review at this point.

3.4 LINK's prioritisation

- Strategic planning on 7 December would include discussion on whether LINK could prioritise more for greater impact. In preparation, the meeting discussed whether LINK was having maximum impact through its choice of priorities and the nature of its advocacy work. If the purpose of LINK's voice objective was to be a voice to achieve change, the network should review whether it was having that impact over a period of years, in terms of whether Government clearly saw what LINK sought and responded, and whether LINK could point to a track record of success around its aspirations. If the conclusion were a sense that LINK could have greater effect, then decisions were needed on what should change to achieve even more impact; for example, this might involve identifying one top priority where resources including DPF could be directed, below which other activity continued.
- The meeting considered whether tighter prioritisation of this sort might result in some members finding their interests were losing out and it was noted that LINK's 2015 restructuring had raising the strategic approach of the Subgroups involved in the Land Group. It was suggested that the December review should consider whether that combined activity under the Land heading was securing a meaningful shift in environmental policy, and if not, what should change.
- There was support for the view that LINK was making as good progress as might be expected, with its process of strategic review combined with the revision of structure, having the effect of encouraging members to look backward and forward. Whilst even greater prioritisation was a plausible goal, the greater challenge was noted for an umbrella group to deliver value at individual member level from collective campaigning. Because anything LINK chose to do relied on alignment with members' agendas, it was difficult to force opinion from the centre. Cases like the recent REFIT campaign had happened naturally, with all agreeing on the need to respond, as part of a wider EU voice, to a threat.
- Environmental consequences of Brexit might be the key context at this stage for the environment movement. Besides being a policy and public affairs issue for LINK, ELUK and GUK, Scottish Government needed to hear a strong environmental agenda, projected out to the public, about consequences, of the nature which would stand up to counter arguments from other sectors on key issues including fisheries and food & farming.
- Trustees heard that LINK, ELUK and Greener UK were trying to arrive at a shared position on complex issues including frameworks, governance gap, agriculture and fisheries, which would be needed to

inform any campaigning and that all involved across UK were aware that Gove needed to hear this stronger voice. In terms of simple messages, the ENGOs were not that far away.

- The meeting agreed that development of a public engagement strategy was an urgent requirement to voice key messages, with greatest possible impact, which would fortify Ministers to say the right things environmentally, despite serious pressure from other interests. Decisions were needed on a mandate for LINK to do this, agreement on something all can sign up to, whether LINK has the expertise inhouse or needs to spend (and potentially raise) funds. It was agreed that funds could be found to support campaigning if the membership decided to proceed. LINK Governance Group, meeting the next day, and Strategic Planning in December, would give further consideration.
- Discussion noted that meaningful change in public policy is not the only indicator of LINK success and that the health of other complex and challenging things the network does well should be celebrated, alongside the impact of its advocacy.
- The meeting noted frustration, led by the Wildlife Trusts, among certain members of Greener UK which were also in WCL, about aspects of the WCL/GUK relationship. In discussion, LINK Trustees felt it unlikely that this would affect the other Links. It was noted that the Links shared info and experience and that each Link engaged as worked best with Greener UK – for SEL via Governance Brexit Subgroup.

3.4 LINK Articles and guidance in relation to membership matters

- Meeting noted how LINK's articles and guidance had been used in cases where member organisations had changed, e.g. in status, or had acted against the interests of the collective. It was agreed that the necessary provisions were in place for action to be taken when needed.

3.5 AGM Preparation

Fellows Stuart Housden, approached regarding Fellowship, was honoured to be asked. The Board's recommendation for his appointment would go forward to members for the AGM.

President The meeting discussed the proposal to invite Joyce McMillan to do a 4th year (2018/19). The precedent had been set when Ross Finnie had served a 4th year. The meeting noted that a search for a new president would take time and agreed that Joyce should be approached, particularly as she fulfilled the criterion of having political credibility in a non-environmental capacity. The brief for President could be amended to allow appointment for a 2nd term of 3 years (the role was anyway subject to annual re-appointment by members). It was noted that securing Joyce had opened the door to a wider pool, as LINK's brief intended, and that the Board should discuss this further if need be, keeping James Curran in its thinking whilst considering other possibilities.

ACTION: Jen to take forward with Helen/Charles

Draft trustees' narrative for the annual report Meeting suggested the foreword more clearly acknowledge the passage of time since the end of the reporting period. Reviewing the draft section on public benefit, the meeting felt this was fine, noting that LINK can't speak in detail about the individual work of member bodies but rather their collective work through LINK. A recent FOI by Scottish Gamekeepers' Association for data on SNH funding of LINK bodies (see next item) was noted in relation to the public benefit of LINK's work on land management; the meeting concluded that this FOI was a predictable facet of the current public review into the benefit of landowning.

ACTION: Trustees to send comments by the following week

3.6 FOI on SNH funding of LINK bodies

- Paul reported that RSPB had been made aware of a request by SGA for details of grant and other funding from SNH to all LINK bodies (not to LINK *per se*). Paul had forwarded to LINK the information which SNH had provided, relating to 19-20 members in receipt of support. RSPB anticipated this would prompt an attack on RSPB Scotland but felt it appropriate to alert members. The meeting noted that this was not a first, and agreed to let the organisations know they were the subject of the FOI to be prepared if stories came up in the media.

ACTION: Jen to alert the organisations

3.7 LINK's 30th birthday

The meeting noted progress with video, reception and line-up of speakers for eve of 7 November.

3.8 LINK's use of memberships of IUCN and EEB

- Noted LINK's membership of IUCN for most of its 30 years, represented by various including most recently Stuart Brooks (UK committee) and Jonny Hughes (Regional Cllr). LINK had used mechanisms to achieve resolutions on Cairngorms and on super-quarrying which had supported advocacy in Scotland. Membership of EEB for 20 years. These forums would become more important as the UK left the EU and LINK would need intel about them.
- LINK Governance Group would be discussing also. Needs someone to use these as networks of contacts as well as to proactively to spot opportunities for LINK and keep LINK informed. Perhaps ideally this would be someone involved in and reporting back to the Governance Group.
- There was more cause to liaise on Berne Convention and in relation to Council of Europe now also.

4. OPERATIONS

4.1 Political Strategy Report Autumn 2017

- Daphne joined by phone for this item and spoke to the autumn PSR. Reported that much effort was going into making ENGO structures workable across UK one Brexit, to ensure effectiveness, that we were now in much better position than in spring. There had also been more movement at Scottish Government too, as result of elections, to deliver on manifesto commitments and bring forward a more ambitious Programme for Govt in terms of climate change and planning bills.
- LINK expected a meeting with Roseanna C before the year end, had quite detailed discussion with her staff, esp. around EEB conference, and SG planned positive announcements there. RC had reiterated environmental commitments. LINK was in dialogue with M Russell, sought a further meeting with him. Also meeting with Lord Duncan. Advocating points on rural economy portfolio was harder given limited access to Fergus Ewing, and LINK was continuing to apply pressure via Scottish Parliament (RC not keen on getting involved; any pointers useful). LINK was also reaching out to crofters.
- On biodiversity, much afoot with Species Champions programme, gaining more MSPs, aiming to mobilise their working around post-legislative scrutiny etc. Many MSPs champions have flagged their roles in connection to other areas of parliamentary business.
- The meeting thanked Daphne for a very good report. Questions were raised as follows:
- Reflections on Prog for Govt and extent to which it reflects LINK priorities? – We did not achieve all asks and there are some wider commitments we can build on, using commitments on ambition for climate change to ensure there is something for biodiversity; economics group capacity permitting, we can engage in areas of Just Transition Coalition and National Investment Bank, and pursue our ambitions on the National Performance Framework. We are getting more general wording on agriculture, and making farming work for the environment, and can use this as a hook; there are similar

commits on marine. The Programme includes easy wins, like deposit return, rather than more difficult things like National Environment Network. LINK should make it a goal to have a better Programme for Govt in 18/19 in terms of nature conservation and consider how that focus could help address challenges in the Cabinet – e.g. a NEN focus if wildlife subgroup works with SNH to progress. Agreed to ask Groups and Subgroups if there are things we want to see in next PFG.

ACTION: For discussion at strategic planning with Groups, Subgroups

- Inclusive growth: Noted as current way to continue talking about social justice, including Conservatives. Should we put more effort into SJ/Fairer Scotland? Is certainly something we could address as a response to the social justice agenda, in relation to the NPF outcomes and around the idea of growth being within environmental capacity of the country/planet.
- Campaigning around Brexit: Referring to earlier discussion it was noted that ENGOs were reasonably close to getting some simple messages out in terms of SG's role in the Brexit negotiations and there had been ad hoc discussion about media outletting. Media would attend EEB conference and we hoped the Cab Sec would be robust. Expectation was that SG would take forward the position that they will not give legislative consent if environment is not properly covered. Conference moderator Lesley Riddoch would write a piece, also Holyrood magazine. A Greener UK media manager has been appointed recently. Guardian environmental article picked up by Mike Russell on Twitter. We are liaising with Joyce McMillan, Richard Dixon and others on media contacts. Agreed a joint meeting of Brexit and media people in LINK would be a good idea to generate ideas which are hard-hitting on reactive stuff from fisheries especially (we have been more successful on agriculture in terms of having a position that is not contentious), highlighting that we want something different, and that leaving EU must not create a free for all - and at how take forward a strategic public engagement campaign.

4.2 Half-year report on Operational Plan

- Meeting noted the latest report indicated improvements and some 'very goods' though trustees were invited to question assumptions. The report built on previous reports and aimed to demonstrate where there was progression over time against all three of LINK's strategic objectives. The evaluation also informed on LINK's public interest benefit and was therefore of interest to funders.
- A study commissioned early 2017 by Scottish Government from Evaluation Support Scotland, of intermediaries' impact, had found LINK structures and measures to be impressive, comparatively.
- Group/Subgroup returns had improved over the last couple of years but there was continuing a capacity issue in terms of submitting plans and evaluative reports.
- Could LINK use traffic light system to distinguish between activity and outcome, green or red against outputs and outcomes?
- Inevitably things are qualitative and subjective, and there will always be things we can do better. LINK can't be pushed to do more than it will do.
- Areas we could work more on, however are: inter-group comms, group/subgroup advocacy strategies, and identifying and working with allies outside LINK (particularly academics).
- LINK forward work programme and updates were impressive.

4.3 LINK forward plans in draft at autumn 2017

- The meeting noted that the draft work programme for 2018-19 was quite short term at this stage and would be developed by the December strategic planning discussion. Also noted that the document did not relate directly related to LINK strategic objectives, though groups and subgroups were encouraged to couch their forward plans in the context of the objectives.

5. FINANCIALS

- Tim spoke to papers circulated, reporting that at six months into the year there were no bad surprises and some good news. The WGF funding received for three years had been applied from October and would run through four financial years to 2020/21. LINK's anticipated deficit was as budgeted around £17K, which was not ideal but neither disastrous.
- Looking ahead, LINK did not face disastrous deficits in its 5-year forward scenario. In one or two headings, there was slight optimism in the forecast figures, e.g. that EFF would fund LINK and at a cost recovery rate of £10k per £40k received. On the other hand, most WGF funding was budgeted mostly as income. LINK was now anticipating break-even budgets over the next 4 years. This compared positively with a year ago when the Board had anticipated bigger deficits because of fundraising challenges, concerns about continuation of level grant support from government. Tim had reviewed the changes in the 5-year forecast between autumn 2016 and 2017 and confirmed that these were reasonable. LINK was in a better place at autumn 2017 and could look ahead with a fair degree of confidence. Importantly, LINK could maintain its DPF which gave critical support to collective work, enabling LINK to make a difference; it was important that LINK's beneficiaries were aware of this. Overall, LINK was in health but could not be accused of rolling in monies and not using these.
- The meeting recorded thanks to Alice for her very good work on fundraising, and to Karen who, though not well at present, very reliably and reassuringly kept on top of the complicated LINK finances.
- The meeting noted that the year's DPF stood at £4,400, with no known bids in the pipeline.

6. AOBs

6.1 Nominations for Board

- The meeting asked if the call for nominations had elicited interest and noted that Clare Symonds was considering nominating, Susan Matthews had expressed interest, Mary Church and Jenny Mollison could not commit, and that Sarah Dolman and Sarah Robinson had not responded to Helen's contacts. Sarah Dolman had indicated interest the previous year though might be fully committed with WDC work which took her on field work and across UK and beyond.

6.2 LINK Perth office

- The meeting heard that staff were of a mind to remain at Shore Road in what would be approx. half the space, as landlords seemed willing to contribute to costs of separating the heating. *JA note: The decision to move was made subsequently, as the landlord's offer on heating costs was limited, Marshall Place premises were cheaper, and provided more space day-to-day and a meeting room.*

6.3 Helen's last meeting

- As the meeting closed, Charles recorded a vote of thanks to Helen Todd on behalf of the Board. Having observed how much Helen had put in to the role of chair, he noted this might be difficult to follow, and he thanked Helen for that commitment over the years. Helen reported that the last few years had been interesting and enjoyable, and though standing down from the Board in December, she would be glad to continue to engage and take an interest in LINK and its work.