**LINK Networking Meeting
Thursday 21st August 2014
Perth**

Present

Members:

Deborah Long (Chair, Plantlife),Vicki Swales (RSPB, SLU), Tim Ambrose (SWLG/CC, Treasurer), Chrissie Valuri (SWLG) John Mayhew (APRS/LTF), Sheila George (RSPB), Aedan Smith (Planning TF/RSPB), Helen Todd (Ramblers/Land Group, Trustee), Eddie Palmer (Scottish Badgers/Wildlife Crime TF), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG, Trustee), Craig MacAdam (Buglife, Trustee), Calum Duncan (MCS/MTF), Paul Walton (RSPB, Trustee)

In attendance:

Jen Anderson, Alice Walsh, Andy Myles, Rea Cris (notes), Phoebe Crochrane - Staff

Ross Finnie (President)

Barbara Stutz (Nourish Scotland/Observer)

1. Apologies

Guy Harewood (SCRA), Mandy Orr (Trustee), Simon Jones (SWT), John Thomson (SCNP), Sam Gardner (WWF), Helen McDade (JMT), Diarmid Hearns (NTS).

2. Updates from Board

* Local Links: The Board has approved a one-year pilot including development of a communications strategy, a database and organising several seminars on selected topics.
* Member contact meetings: Board members have met almost ¾ of those members who have requested a meeting. These have been positive. Issues arising include tighter prioritisation by LINK, the scope for top-line messaging, and sharing workload across the taskforces. Once the meetings have all been held the report will go to October Board and will be available to members.
* Discretionary Project Fund: Circa £5,000 available in the fund. TFs are invited to put in bids for support with work which is complete-able by end March 2015.
* Taskforce structures: Board is aware of issues that exist within TFs about capacity and need to share workload. The Board’s strong advice is that each TF should have Convenor and active Depute and 3 to 4 members actively engaging in the TF’s operations. Though there is not a single model to fit all, the minimum requirements need to be met.
* AGM & the vacancy on the Board Skills gap analysis has flagged up equal opportunity, disability awareness and property management, though other skills will also useful, and nominations will be invited from members by early September.
* Risk register:This will be made available on the members’ pages on the website from within the next couple of months onwards.
* Strategic Planning 28th November. Reports will be requested soon from TFs on the last six months’ work, and forward plans for as far ahead as possible, to collate into a network plan (2015 onward) for consideration at Strategic Planning.
* Ministerial meetings: Opportunities have been offered for LINK to meet Paul Wheelhouse on Land Reform Bill, Wildlife Crime, and concerns on Marine recovery. And in addition the next routine meeting takes place on 4th November, whose agenda will include post-referendum issues and the carbon bubble report. TF Convenors with other timely items are asked to please contact Jen.

3. Information items

Carbon Bubble Report The draft report was discussed by the Economics TF the previous day, which now proposes some development and a post-referendum publication in the next 2 months, overseen by Andy Myles and ETF.

Appropriate Assessment Workshop

11 member groups were represented at the August workshop, of which notes and presentation are on LINK website. Some actions: to quantify evidence as first big job (Beryl undertaking this). Europe Natura Directives under review, requiring coordinated response from our sector. Review starting towards the end of the year. There has not been discussion with the other country Links, though opportunity to do so at the joint conference in October.

Meeting noted that UK bodies, including RSPB, will respond from UK HQs.

Beryl will speak with Lloyd before the Governance Group meeting on 4 September, about the mechanics of a LINK response. **Beryl**

Climate Adaptation Taskforce - This TF has completed its task, following publication of the Scottish CA Programme and TF’s production of briefing material for other TFs. All TFs are asked to read the appropriate briefing and consider how to pursue, within the agenda of their next meeting. **All TFs**

LINK narrative work - This short comms document to articulate what it is we want collectively has proved difficult to progress; looking to move language away from preservation to improvement and include the intrinsic value of the environment. The next action is to head-hunt individuals (with comms expertise) from across the network to draft a short and visionary document that the network can support. Timing to have rough draft paper for Congress and a finessing meeting in December. **Andy & Paul for rough draft; Paul and Jen to coordinate meeting**

4. Land use management and ownership in Scotland

Land-use issues are important across most TFs. The process for getting the next five year LU plan is starting and SGov seeking LINK input. The Land Reform Bill will be taken forward, and there are overlaps with the environmental interest, especially on economic drivers; no members are directly engaged in this, and we need to look at mechanisms to input on key issues as LINK/environment community.

Feedback from DTF (Mike Daniels) was noted.

It was proposed that:

Vicki will convene a meeting of the Sustainable Land Use TF members to assess interest and capacity in contributing to the review and monitoring progress.

Land Group will keep watching brief on the Land Reform bill. Land Reform Review Group report has good proposals, though how far these will be taken is unknown. We should articulate the public interest in land.

Public interest in land – haven’t clearly articulated public interest in deer management, hill tracks, land management etc. Need to be clear about what our objectives are. Need to be clear of the language of the debate – currently very focused on Andy Wightman land ownership debate, though LINK member interest runs wider than this, around how land is managed for public interest.

Staff will organise a wider meeting of TFs (across the sweep of terrestrial ecology headings) with Marine TF participating for interest in the seabed. Timing - autumn. Could use LINK’s ‘Living with the Land’ as springboard for discussion. **Jen to circulate Doodle.**

5. Nourish Scotland

Barbara had come along as an observer, pending membership of LINK which had been applied for and was in process. Currently food and farming systems are the main driver of environmental and habitat degradation. Nourish are holding the Nourish Conference in October in Glasgow (What would a better food system look like and what steps to get there in 10 years’ time) to which all welcome.

Vicki welcomed Nourish’s application; lately CAP has been the major focus for ATF, but the TF members were looking forward to having Nourish on board, which along with Soil Association will increase the TF’s capacity to achieve a standing aspiration to push for better food and farming. The meeting noted a marine interest also in the discussion of sustainable food (farmed salmon as Scotland’s major food export, for example).

6. Network Plan Updates

Wildlife Forum – continuing with Species Champions mainly and maintaining momentum with initiative and develop funding bid to employ coordinator and some form of youth engagement through schools and longer term business engagement. Annex Two is list of Species Champions with no acknowledgements in Government Biodiversity Strategy.

Inputting into all biodiversity strategy groups we’ve been invited to attend. Marine and Protected Areas are closed groups to which LINK is not invited.

Invasive Non Native Species: Scottish Group is implementing the strategy now.

State of Nature Report (NGO initiative) progressing in each part of the UK – in Scotland will be done as part of the Wildlife Forum, with same people involved.

Peat – benchmark – two targets to see – annulment of rights of horticulture peat extraction and peat use by public bodies. Information of Freedom request and they are starting to come in; no one using peat at the moment. SNH consulting on Peatland Plan – Jim Densham and Clifton Bain working on draft LINK response. **Members advised to contribute own responses to this consultation**

Wildlife Crime - TF’s commissioned report still in draft and will be published late October.

SEFF - Responded on Landfill Tax secondary legislation, recommending spend on biodiversity.

Planning – NPF3 published in June; TF pleased with what has been published, now turning attention to new areas. Joint meeting with Legal Governance TF on access to justice issues; the planning area is hard to challenge with no third right to appeal. TF want to reinstate a debate/campaign on appeal in the planning process, under heading Equal Rights of Appeal. Planning Democracy to lead, but the work will be done in the TF under LINK banner; paper going to Board wrt. funding application for project officer to support this, working towards Holyrood 2016 elections. Ross Finnie flagged up current role of councillors, which is sometimes understood to be representing the voice of 3rd parties and the need to address this within the LINK work. **PTF paper to Board**

Hilltracks Group – SG decision on hill tracks just announced – baby steps forward and only slight improvement in TF’s view – prior notification. TF convening final meeting, though will monitor progress as this goes forward, input to the arrangements for prior notification and continue to ensure means of evidence collection of bad hill tracks. Taking the long view, it is a minor victory. Meeting discussed appropriate response by LINK to this decision, with differing views expressed on whether this is and should be responded to as a positive step by Government or as ‘crumbs from the table’.

Parliamentary Forum - Meeting 4th September 2014 – to discuss post-referendum phase, party political engagement, fringes. Economics TF proposes fringes at party and other conferences on the Nat Performance Framework briefing which LINK & others signed off in March 2014. **More engagement from members encouraged in the Forum**

National Parks Taskforce - Has not met for some time, meeting currently being organised by new Convenor Charles Strang with Alice’s support.

Marine TF - Recap – historic announcement in July after 14 years we have 30 new marine protected areas additional 12% of Scottish seas included all best options and Europe’s biggest MPA. Commitment to consulting further on 4 MPAs for marine mammals as well as 14 special protection areas for seabirds. Quickly moved onto management – Cab Secretary saying they are not ‘paper parks’ but not reviewing current damaging activities, only future ones, so way to go to convince decision makers. Big issue is fishing gear, pressure from MCS down south – review of European sites at risk of fishing plus inshore MPAs to be considered at workshop in early October. Esther pulling together everyone’s input to coordinate input to stakeholder meetings on management. Some communities were disappointment with MPA announcement: there needs to be a lot of expectation management. We reflected this in our response.

National Marine Plan – had opportunity to further improve text but lots of contradictions but won’t see final or announcement till post-referendum. Small LINK conference steering group to reenergise people on marine planning and be aspiration as something to deliver environmental improvements.

Study being done looking and socio-economic impact of moving trawling/dredging three miles out – looking in tangent with MPA planning and spatial management.

MTF work links to planning and food /agriculture issues, as well as industry (fisheries renewables, etc).

Helping encourage the groundswell around not wanting paper parks, Nick has commissioned animation to go viral to paint picture of Scotland’s seas getting busier, hence need for good MPAs.

Landscape
Recent meeting focussed a lot on hill tracks. Have a strong new ally – Landscape Institute Scotland – similar objectives, eg a wider Landscape forum andmore endorsement for Scotland Landscape Charter. Invited LIS to observe taskforce meeting. Network meeting noted that for LIS to be co-opted needs them to become an Organisational Supporter (not eligible to be member).

SNH new guidance on wind farm visualization and siting and design of smaller wind farms & SNH officer coming to next meeting.

Presentation heard from Cockburn Association – concerned about erosion on green belt across Edinburgh. Might come to Planning TF as well, at the moment Edinburgh focus though may be support for a national campaign around green belt issue.

Landscape and Energy statement – has gone through many drafts, now in a table format with original comments, all comments received since and proposed final text. In summary, the TF is happy to accept some comments but not all because these would alter document to become a climate change mitigation report. John will review and finalise for TF sign up and subsequent discussion at Board as to whether this is issued as a LINK statement.

Land - Nothing to add to previous discussion above. Meeting with Minister to be organised after Referendum: **Action Andy, Helen**

Governance
Meeting 4th September – principal item is the referendum. Impact on the referendum debate has been considerable and at meeting will discuss post-referendum options. The proposed workshop on structures for governance (including Forestry Commission) – not advanced. In January 2015 LINK has organised a discussion day for members to look at post-referendum options and directions.

Economics
Carbon Bubble Report – as discussed above.
National Performance Framework – plan some advocacy around that briefing.

Broad economic policy, paper on the different policy areas and how these affect LINK and TFs, is in draft, shortly go to convenors for their meeting agendas and discussion with TF members – so as to support TFs in engaging with economics and in their advocacy. **Phoebe is a resource to other TFs and will be in touch with convenors**

Workshop for Members February 2015 being planned – focus on Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services – explore various applications and use alongside other tools and assess origins and where useful and where avoided.

Community Empowerment Bill makes mention of National Performance Framework – need to keep our eye on it. Useful SWT work and LINK’s previous work on Single Outcome Agreements – may provide makings of quick and dirty response. **Andy & Aedan to propose how LINK inputs to this**

Freshwater – Has been dormant since spring. However, there will be discussion among players who were engaged to see if there is a continuing need. **Craig Macadam, Sheila George**
Deer – also covered at 4 above. RACCE Committee having looked at issue is a step in the right direction; voluntary code is being given until 2016 before revision. Meeting noted good work by Deer TF.

Climate (See also under 3 above) - TF in hibernation having completed its task and provided briefings to the other TFs.

Agriculture - Focussed on influencing implementation of CAP in Scotland. Targeting of agri-envt schemes, still opportunities to influence guidance. Await Europe approval of Scotland’s Rural Development Plan. Next steps are to think about where TFs goes next including widening out focus.

Congress, 27 November - Draft programme is out. **Members contact main Rep for details or log in to LINK website and book there**

Scottish Environment Week 2015 - Steering Group meeting late August, theme to be set then, though most popular is ‘Sharing Scotland’ (with other species). Reception and Pub Quiz remain part of proposed programme; drop-in sessions where members have stands is a popular idea, as is a debate in the chamber on a theme to be agreed by LINK; there is scope in the programme for seminars if member bodies wish to organise these.

Joint Links Conference – 22-23 October 2014 in Glasgow, with plenary and workshops and an overnight opportunity to network with colleagues across UK. **Members encouraged to sign up now**

New topic-focussed alliances of potential interest Meeting noted new alliances, more appropriate for individual members to get involved in, than LINK or LINK staff. These are the Low–Carbon Community and the Anti-Fracking alliance.

A.O.B
The meeting recorded a very big vote of thanks to Deborah Long for her contribution as Chair over four years – guiding, supporting, leading and representing the network. Deborah was presented with a gift of Tiso tokens and a map of the area in Nepal where she was going on sabbatical during October and November.

The meeting noted that Helen Todd would take over as Acting Chair from late September.

Notes – by Rea & Alice, for LINK, August 2014