

## **Note of the meeting of the LINK Land Group held on 1 March at the LINK office in Edinburgh.**

Present: Vicki Swales (RSPB), Convenor; Charles Dundas (WTS, Woodland Subgroup, Deer Subgroup, Governance Group), Vice Convenor; Bruce Wilson (SWT, Economics Group, Wildlife Subgroup); Pete Ritchie (Nourish, Food & Farming Subgroup Leader); John Thomson (SCNP, Land Reform, Land Use, Landscape Subgroup leader); Beryl Leatherland (SWLG, Hilltracks campaign); Alan McDonnell (TfL); Diarmid Hearn (NTS), Alice Walsh (LINK Staff).

Apologies: Craig Macadam (Buglife, Wildlife Subgroup leader); Duncan Orr-Ewing (RSPB, Deer Subgroup leader) Helen Todd (RS, Hilltracks), Tom Leatherland (SWLG).

### **1. Welcome**

Vicki welcomed everyone. This function of these meetings is for overview, to report back on the progress with priority areas since October, look at plans ahead and any integration needs.

### **2. LINK's 3 priority areas, reports back, plans ahead, advocacy plans and integration needs.**

*Land Reform and Land Use:* John reported on that morning's meeting which discussed LINK response to the consultation on the Land Rights and Responsibilities statement. The draft statement does not much advance on the situation to date, it needs to do better in terms of the principles in relation to sustainable land use. The Subgroup will respond by Friday week and will seek an early meeting with the Land Commission which begins to function from 1 April. The letter will go from the Land Group, reiterating the need for the statement to be strengthened and that land reform needs to be linked with a range of other policies, including the Land Use Strategy. The meeting will be mainly for the Subgroup's concerns though can be widened if others have relevant items to raise. Nourish will respond too, linking to the Right to Food agenda. The LRRS is not expected to have any overarching role, or to provide a frame for future agriculture subsidies. The LRRS has no legal status, is not binding, so is not worth investing too much effort beyond what is planned. Its scope could be raised with the Land Commissioners. We should be amplifying principle 4, a code of responsible stewardship, which though non-statutory, would have a bearing on what land managers do, beyond legal minimum requirements.

Progress on the Land Use Strategy has stalled. One area of interest is the proposal for Regional Land Use Partnerships, but there has been no progress, no momentum, although there is supposed to be a report by end 2017. There has been just one response to Sheila's survey to staff in the local authorities to find out relevant activities in relation to the proposed RLU Framework (to which no resources have been allocated by ScotGov), or initiatives that would potentially feed into it. It was agreed that LINK should continue with its plan to develop some guidance on RLUFs, highlighting the benefits, and provide hints how to take forward. Sheila aims to have something ready within a month. Then the Subgroup has to decide how to promote it. Plan to meet Scottish Land & Estates, where support is likely, and potentially NFUS, though probably not so productive.

The Landscape Subgroup met last week, met Simon Brooks of SNH, several consultations out where LINK views are sought. He raised the Planning Review, which is the Subgroup needs to engage on with the Planning Group.

There had been discussion about whether LINK should produce its own version of the LUS,

highlighting what needs to be integrated across the board. This has merit, and has interest within the Subgroup, but needs resources to produce something short and useful. It is a possibility for later 2017 and would also link to an advocacy plan. There is clear interest, though lack of capacity, so for discussion at the May Networking meeting to see if the proposal has support from other Groups. There is the opportunity to tie some things together in terms of what government is trying to do, though is not putting in place anything to deliver it, lack of alignment or couching in terms of sustainable development. For May meeting and consideration of other routes, eg individuals, academics.

*Food and Farming:* Pete outlined the opportunity to get some traction for agricultural support that is less scheme based or farm based. The Subgroup has been working on its paper, the approach is based on Retain, Reshape and Renew. There is agreement that funding allocated to Agri Environment should stay there, but radical change is needed on what it is spent on over time. By some future point there should be no support for merely owning land, there will need to be some public benefit. The paper paints a picture of a renewed rural development sector, that the future is in other initiatives beyond food production. Next meeting on 4 March will finalise it and agree what to do with it. WCL's latest press release has some differences in emphasis; subgroup is encouraging the case that funding should stay in the system if you are going to do something useful with it. The politics of it are difficult for UK wide messaging. ELUK telecall later in March will discuss joint approaches. Our paper dodges some issues, and is based on the premise there will be some devolved powers to Scotland. It doesn't talk about UK frameworks. The political situation is fluid and tricky, and members are contributing as UK bodies to the Greener UK discussions.

The Good Food Nation bill consultation will come in the autumn. It is possible to connect these discussions, depends on how stretchy this bill can become. It will be odd if there is no mention of agriculture, but large doubts if there be a robust enough framework in place. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food is coming to Scotland shortly, and Sgov is putting a right to food on the face of the bill. It is more than just food poverty, would mean the Bill looks at all aspects of sustainable food system. There is a lot to play for - how to play it. There are some indications of frustrations with NFUS from the Cab Sec (F Ewing).

SWT will launch its land stewardship policy for consultation next week. It is complementary to the LINK paper, looking far ahead. It looks at a 3 tier payment structure, natural capital maintenance payments, enhancement payments and natural capital restoration, very targeted outcomes. Vicki noted that this connects to payments for sustainable land management. It speaks to part of the broader agenda (payment structures), not all of it. In external communications it will be useful to make the SWT and the LINK vision complementary rather than looking like two quite different approaches. SLE will have more to say soon. Roger Crofts paper on stewardship is relevant too, lots of ideas are coming out to stimulate discussion. Pete noted we are still facing the conundrum about stripped down pro market regime in East Lothian, high value nature farming in some parts and uncertainty about the fate of those in between – for discussion by the Subgroup. Pete was in London last week at a meeting to discuss a potential Food bill for England.

*Wildlife:* Bruce reported on the Species Champions work, now 83 MSPs recruited, a successful Parliamentary event in November held. Eleanor had done good job in taking that forward; also the wildlife proclamation work, targeted to local elections, and is seeking

feedback on the project so far. Feedback encouraged from Land Group members. It's a really good initiative, a bridge for people to talk to MSPs, albeit a fair amount of work attached to it for members too. Keeping abreast too of SC initiatives across the rest of the UK.

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and how to keep wildlife prominent in it - Charles will ask Craig for a progress report and plans ahead. There will be a Biodiversity debate in Parliament on 9 March. The Subgroup may circulate a briefing. In view of this being a surprise, and wider discussion about how this government is managing, agreed we need to follow up on SG's process. Andy Wightman's PQ on NFUS secondments of interest. While not one way traffic (cf Sam Gardner on Climate) it is a matter of balance. At an SCVO meeting on the Lobbying Bill we raised the NFUS example, as not being picked up in its regime.

All to be thinking about plans going forward, being clear on capacity to do the work. These Subgroup leaders were reminded to complete their 6 monthly reports within the deadline to enable Charles to gather the strands together for the Land Group report. **Action: Subgroup leaders, and Charles**

### 3. **Relevant crossover with other LINK Groups and Subgroups.**

National Ecological Network Working Group. Bruce outlined the history, started with the SWT conference he organised in 2013, followed by a joint submission from SWT/RSPB to the National Planning Framework 3 consultation, and a separate one from Plantlife. NEN is bigger than CSGN which was in the NPF. There was a strong commitment to NEN in the text of the NPF, and it is established in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and delivery strategy. NEN is an established tool within Europe. Description:

- Same level of strategic planning for our green/blue infrastructure as our grey/digital
- Its about making a range of, not necessarily physical, connections across land and water
- Emphasis on restoration and enhancement of habitat
- Works along-side landuse strategy to provide badly needed strategic planning
- Helps marry up bottom up actions and top down policies to provide greater overall benefit
- Fosters collaboration, crucially involving non-usual suspect groups
- Allows the consideration and integration of natural processes into the design of policies, proposals, funding streams and resultant on the ground landuse choices to deliver a balanced range of public benefit
- Even more important now given Brexit implications for rural funding and completion with other budgets e.g. NHS

Currently under pressure from SNH to develop our thinking on what a NEN is, following ECCLR Committees rap over lack of progress, and Cab Sec's pressure on Deborah to deliver, resulting in some internal discomforts about reworks of the 2013 draft.

We now have a draft the Wildlife Subgroup is broadly happy with, a 2 pager, need to take it next to Land Group for approval and then wider membership for support including logos, its urgent to get it to SNH asap. We now have the opportunity to shape SNH's thinking. The James Hutton Institute meeting on 15 March is an opportunity to discuss; there has been some confusion about whether their proposal is a NEN. It is not, could be a project within it.

Our asks of SGov is to articulate a vision and deliver (with our help); to include the NEN as a national development with NPF 4; to create an expert group to steer the process and for Parliament to issue a statement regarding the need for the NEN with current policy objectives in mind.

Discussion covered ability to assign roles within it – Yes. It must not be pointless. It can help where budgets compete. And keeping in mind for proposed LUS work discussed earlier. Its important when communicating to externals that these are linked, complementary, not contradictory. We don't yet know the timetable for NPF 4, it will be after the Planning review, part of which is about increased role for the NPF, which currently does not get enough scrutiny. It is likely that members present could support it, even within a curtailed timescale.

**Action:** Daphne will collate more comments on the draft, put it round Land Group members for approval as it has wide reaching relevance, and then to the full membership for sign up.

**Wildlife Crime:** has met, will meet Police Scotland tomorrow. There are no particular integration issues to flag. Lots happening.

**Woodlands:** responded to the consultation on the Future of Forestry, with good sign up. Public responses are now published, and expecting Sgov reaction soon. Will meet on 4 March to discuss engagement with the Forestry Bill process that's going through Parliament. Key aim for that Bill is to update the definition of forestry. There is scope to make links to the LUS and will continue to press for more strategic integration with the rest of the policy initiatives across Scotland. This is not controversial, the commercial sector is more progressive than the Cab Sec. Noted that the definition of forestry fits with the SD Goal, ties into aligning LUS etc. There is more we can join the dots the better. Agro forestry is also a part of it, a key area of opportunity for growth. The new body will be an agent for change, owning 12% of land area. Needs political commitments and duties etc.

Any need for more integration? Woodland has WTS, RSPB, Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife, Trees for Life, SWT, NTS and SWLG on the list, some more active than others. SWT will get more involved. Likely to form a bill team, with more of a governance element. Woodland members are core and wider Land Group will have chance to comment and sign up. Charles will feed back on Friday the wider interest beyond core Woodland interests.

**Deer:** busy time, since Sept, watching ECCLR committee evidence and contributing to that, now waiting for Graham Dey to write to the minister with the recommendations of the Ctte, and what it will say. Outcome of review was not enough progress being made to protect the environment. Committee is determined that something will be done, there will be a tangible outcome, not been happy with SNH, though it needs to be properly resourced, otherwise cannot expect it to deliver much. The ADMG is still very cooperative, keen to make the voluntary system work. Indications are that Sgov wants NGOs and landowners to get together to agree without its intervention, a big disconnect. Deer are looking at time limited working group to come up with shared vision on land use through a deer lens. They are willing to be robust.

**Hilltracks,** good news on the funding for monitoring support.

#### **4. Land Group priorities for 2017, leadership, next steps.**

Are there any further issues emerging, other things to think about, things we are not dealing with that are necessary. Agreed that it feels pretty full on, a mix of reactive and proactive,

much that is responsive to circumstances, Sgov programme and Brexit. We need to keep challenging ourselves on what to drop, or to take on.

Pete raised the Climate bill, and the opportunity to move to talk about actual emissions, the need to lock in more to get to zero carbon, where the LUS comes back in. Collectively where we could be paying a bit more attention. There is broad agreement that SCCS is the main network leading on it, and that land use bits of it could be supported by LINK more. Jim Densham is on the SCCS steering group, is keeping it on the agenda, and working up the advocacy plans for the climate bill. Various discussions have been had on whether LINK could or should do more – needs capacity. Pete suggests that the Land Group members collectively have more to say on it. Opportunities to talk up a stronger climate message within other arenas. Strategy as a whole seems to be sidelined. James Hutton doing interesting work too.

The meeting agreed that the way the Group was working was helpful in providing the overview, in finding out what is going on, and integration. Members were very happy for Vicki to continue as Convenor, and she was willing.

Next steps is for people to send in their reports.

**5. Date of next meeting.**

14 September, to review progress, discuss forward plans to 2018, what's on the horizon.