**Note of the meeting of LINK Land Group meeting held on 14 March 2018.**

**Attending:** Vicki Swales, Convener (RSPB), Helen Todd, Hilltracks (RS), Beryl Leatherland, Hilltracks (SWLG), Bruce Wilson, Wildlife (SWT), Eddie Palmer, Wildlife Crime (SBT), Diarmid Hearns, Vice-Convener (NTS), John Thomson, Land Reform and Land Use, Landscape (APRS, SCNP), Alan McDonnell, Deer (TfL), Charles Dundas, Woodlands (WTS). Staff: Daphne Vlastari, Alice Walsh, Calum Langdale.

**Apologies:** Pete Ritchie, Food and Farming (Nourish), Craig Macadam, Wildlife, (Buglife), Liz Ferrell, Wildlife depute (Bat CT).

1. **Welcome, purpose and aims of the day.**

Vicki welcomed everyone. This Group has an overview and integrating function for its three priority areas (Food and Farming, Wildlife, Land Reform & Land Use), and other subgroups report to it; on deer, hilltracks, wildlife crime. This meeting would review the work of the last 6 months, updates, identify linkages, and priorities for the next 6 months, adjusting workplans as needed. The updates and forward plans to be invited from each Subgroup in turn.

**Wildlife**: Bruce updated on the lack of progress with the National Ecological Network since last year. The action is with SNH now, though it has little capacity to move on it. We need to put some pressure on. It is a target in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. We are broadly happy with the vision.

LINK would meet SNH CEO on 29 March. The meeting was called at their request to discuss funding sources for biodiversity, chiefly with RSPB, SWT and NTS, to avoid competing for the same pots. It has been difficult otherwise to get a LINK meeting with the CEO, and there will be other biodiversity related issues, (key for us at the moment) at this meeting, implications for the NEN can be discussed. This will be an opportunity to push the need for SNH support of it. **Bruce will bring a briefing** to the meeting. We also need to put pressure on SNH about the Land Use Strategy. To clarify the NEN sits below the LUS. It is a way to join up action at regional level. Key points for Wildlife on the Route Map: it is SNH’s focus, rather than members. We need to guard against a simplified approach to ecosystem services. ***More consultation needed before this meeting*** to ensure all relevant points are made, eg with Food and Farming on agri-environment and climate funding to go ahead (**Anna Brand has since provided points)**. Same issues also for the **next meeting with Roseanna Cunningham** on 27 April.

Are we pushing for NEN to be in the National Planning Framework? Bruce would like to, even if it is knocked back again. The Planning Bill is such a mess we need to get that improved first. Best case scenario is to get commitments to follow through on it.

**Ahead:** LINK was invited to contribute evidence on the Biodiversity Duty, our issues from December were picked up. ***Let Daphne know if you want to contribute to the next phase of evidence***. We seek support from others, including SNH. For the NEN we need to **revitalise the initial group** which met in spring 2017.

Post 2020 context, the subgroup is in early discussions about a campaign about nature similar to the EU nature directives campaign. With additional funding we could develop a robust programme that fits in with our international and EU targets, and Govt’s commitment to do a review. Timing would be summer/autumn.

**Species Champions**: we are now at 100, some MSPs have more than one species. Now looking at marking this to boost the initiative, eg 100 days, 100 actions, things MSPs can do for their species in different ways, culminating in a celebratory lunchtime event at the Parliament. The objective is to get more MSPs onside, and deeper engagement. Also exploring links with young people, including via the Youth Parliament. This fits in with the year of young people, and our objectives, and the YP’s objectives, one of which is environmental awareness.

The **consultation on beavers** is now closed. SWT’s action to counter input from some land manager groups was hopefully successful. Decision is expected by end of 2018, likely to be that they can stay, with controls.

**Food and Farming**: workshop held, we developed post Brexit policy and held the roundtable. The idea to work with SLE on joint principles has stalled as key person at SLE has gone, though can be picked up. Good discussion held at meeting a few days previously on the results of the public polling. We met F Ewing in Dec where he acknowledged that we have won the arguments around public money for public goods. He offered ongoing liaison, which will be pursued. His jibe that we are signing up to Gove’s lines was countered by Pete at the time, though poses questions in terms of our wording. We need to use Scottish policy - our Land Use Strategy, the Good Food Nation, much more to counter this. There has been engagement by some members with ELUK and GUK on Brexit, very time consuming, and not much gained, and events are moving faster on agriculture at Westminster. It is tricky for us in Scotland, on the one hand to use what is happening in England to influence Scotland, and not favouring the power grab. The common view is that Scottish Government needs to come up to speed quickly. The Food Coalition had a big meeting in November, trying to build momentum on the Good Food Nation bill. That consultation did not come by end February when it was due, and still no word. The Food Coalition is doing lots to keep up momentum, with kitchen table talks, to feed into it when it does come, and have various other ideas.

**Ahead:** Agreement at Monday’s Food and Farming meeting to get the results of the polling into the public domain though media, hopefully BBC, to show the Minister that there is an appetite to move on this. There are various liaison meetings with stakeholders to hold alongside

Climate change and agriculture: LINK/SCCS have been working on an open letter to get Cab Sec F Ewing to do more about this part of the agenda. NFUS will sign up to it, and others are being asked. It is for member bodies to sign, rather than LINK – so ***respond to Phoebe’s email***. We are also seeking coverage in the Sunday Herald. This will be a good focus for further work. Will continue to pursue liaison with NFUS and others to show unified voice and counter inertia within Government. Potentially we will hold event to bring stakeholders together to drill into what is in Scotland’s rural areas paper. SNH is interested in joint work on it. Possibly may be requests to others to help fund this. It will take time to organise and deliver. As SGovt is not doing anything, we need to put on more pressure. The future is very uncertain. We are coordinating with ELUK on the Defra Agriculture bill. If LINK is to comment, it will need to be with a view of what would or would not work for Scotland, and be directed to SGovt. There are sections on trade and frameworks, the rest refers to England only. Our view is to have a shared ambition across the UK, which very quickly moves into constitutional issues. In summary, Scotland missed the deadline to submit its amendments on Clause 11 (the power grab), and submitted them for the House of Lords stage. Question of whether it will be by consent, which Scotland wants, or consultation, which it does not. Useful [SPICE briefing](https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/2018/2/2/Common-UK-Frameworks-after-Brexit/SB%2018-09.pdf) has more info on the frameworks

There is also the RSA enquiry into food and farming, which Soil Association is co-sponsoring. It is quite London-centric. icki and Pete were at the Scottish launch, and did not consider it very applicable to Scottish context.

Neonics: More to be added to the forward plan.

**Land Reform and Land Use**: On both land reform and LUS, relatively little has happened within LINK in last six months. On Land Reform, the Land Commission is getting its plans together, will be looking at community engagement, which landowning eNGOs are watching. Sheila contacted the new head of LR in SGovt, Pauline Davidson and is keeping a finger on the pulse. We will contact Hamish trench and others in the LC to make sure we have a liaison programme planned. One emergent area for them to investigate is Land Value Taxation, that they have been asked to investigate. **Bruce will raise this with the Economics Group.**

Virtually nothing has happened on the LUS, no capacity within SGovt and its not a ministerial priority. We need to press on this. Sheila’s document explaining the LUS is on the members part of [our website](http://www.scotlink.org/private-docs/delivering-sustainable-land-use-and-management-in-scotland/). The summary briefing document will be finalised by the end April. Then it will be used to galvanise SGovt into some action. Will raise at the Cab Sec (R Cunningham) meeting. We should press SNH, whether they plan to do anything. We need to meet Bridget Campbell before raising this with the Minister. ***No date yet, but will pursue for before 27 April***. If Govt recognise that more action was required, they could instruct SNH and the LC to do it.

Uplands vision: Nothing more since SNH gave its advice to SGovt in 2016. There was concern that the Moorland Forum would take it forward which would need to be countered. This could be linked with the LUS too. SLE is supportive, but capacity is an issue. An NTS meeting with SLE indicated that Moorland forum was not taking it forward.

**Ahead**: planning conference in the autumn to bring together people with an interest in land use strategy, some from Europe, to focus that at one time, Scotland was at the forefront, Govt could have kudos as international leaders in this area, if they moved ahead with it. **Bruce to check** if funding for the event may be available through the Natural Capital forum.

**Landscape:** Activity is going on beyond LINK, with JMT involved, and the Landscape Institute Scotland. They are considering a landscape coalition wider than the LINK membership. Been rethinking objectives; how far to continue to push the Landscape Charter, how far we might want to adopt a different approach. Have parked the idea of a series of events, which Diarmid was leading, while getting to grips with this broader agenda. Had good input from Brendan Turvey (SNH) on renewable energy. May revisit our thinking on wind energy - he sees the industry moving into 2nd generation, bigger turbines, and detects some willingness of the industry to look at regional planning. John to reframe the forward work programme in relation. The hilltracks and national parks elements carry on.

**SNH liaison meeting** between the Land Group with Roddy Fairley by telecall in February was useful; there are many shared concerns with SNH across the work of the 3 groups. Roddy flagged up forestry as an opportunity for getting the LUS back on the agenda. To consider at our workshop on 27 March. He thought there was more attention to biodiversity funding at senior level, how to make the shrinking pot go further. All Subgroups should be talking to SNH people in various roles and guises as much as possible.

**Woodland:** busy time with the Forestry Bill now at Stage 3. The Bill team is Charles at the moment. The Bill is mostly structural, on forestry governance. We have had some successes at Stage 2. The Scottish Forest Strategy is statutory; input is inclusive where before it was only open to invited stakeholders. New amendment to say there must be a strategic policy on acquisitions and disposals. At stage 3 will get a reference to native woodland in the planting targets. At very least, the strategy must make reference to how these go forward. This will not be on the face of the Bill, but there will be a target. LINK has no position or agreement about governance structures, with differences between members on taking the regulatory element back to SGovt. Some interesting amendments the previous day from Labour and SNH, that rather than mainstreaming the work under the SGovt directorate, that it remains much like what we have now, with separation between the regulator and the practitioner. Amendments to ensure there is cognizance of the deer management code are in. There is a general reluctance to reference other policies in bills, but some are there and some are not. The real work begins with consultation on the Forestry Strategy, first draft expected by the summer, before the public consultation. All structures must be in place by April 2019. We have concerns about the projected loss of biodiversity expertise, there will be fewer people overall, with knock on effects on environmental staff. The response is that all will be fine because this expertise will be mainstreamed through the new organisation! That is unsatisfactory and we will contest it. Anything LINK can do as a collective will be discussed on 27 March at the members workshop. The agenda is to identify issues and then what to do about them. In the run up to the new Land agency, there will need to be a corporate plan, vision; these are opportunities to undo some of the ‘bads’, and put in some ‘goods’. Capacity within Woodlands is an issue – the issues are relevant to many organisations that are not actively working on them.

Diarmid flagged analogies with the Crown Estates that flag some correspondences and differences with these processes, with some parts of Govt looking at diversity of landownership and others at monolithic Land agency. NNRs are in the mix. Powers will allow take over of management of ‘other’ land - a catch all. There is the potential to embarrass Govt on this. Something to think about in longer term, as that agency is set up. Needs thinking beyond the woodland group – **to discuss at the workshop.**

The **Scottish Forestry Strategy and where it sits with the Land Use Strategy**, also for discussion at the workshop. Eg, CNPA is preparing its woodland strategy. Why not its LUS?

**Deer:** cautious optimism with developments since the end of 2016, and the ECCLR committee enquiry, where our evidence went down well with all its members, and Cab Secs response was to set up an independent panel which Simon Pepper chairs. Debate is now on the voluntary principle of deer management, we need more security on delivery, and what enforcement is possible within a voluntary system, without actually policing. Some Deer Management Groups are starting to respond, others are not doing so well. Year ahead is mostly wait and see. The Panel will speak to us as individual organisations or as LINK. Deer Subgroup will meet SNH in next few weeks about how the current system is being implemented. Sporting rates? ADMG is unhappy, relevant to the Land Value Tax discussions. Deer affect everything, across all the Land Group’s agenda. [Briefing](http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/link-parliamentary-briefing-for-deer-management-debate-020517/) on the website explain the issues for the non-expert.

**Hilltracks:** evidence is still coming in on all sorts of tracks. The report is in draft, coming on well. Have met SLE, will meet Confor; latter are concerned as we are still asking for forestry tracks to be included (**add to discussions on 27th**), will meet LLTNPA, and Hamish Trench as part of the Land reform meeting, and also Simon Brooks, SNH (both as part of the other meetings mentioned above which John is organising). We are trying to link the advocacy around the report strongly with the land reform agenda. There are many problems with prior notification. The Grouse Moor Licensing panel steering group has met, they decided to take hilltracks out of the scope of their review, though we will submit the report to them. Advocacy plans are in place. Subgroup is meeting early April to discuss communications plan, and will keep Daphne in the loop

**Wildlife Crime:** Bat Conservation Trust is more involved, high number of bat related cases. There are issues more generally with developments, which seem to be getting worse. Main action was response to SGovt’ wildlife crime report 2016 at Graeme Dey’s request.

SNP has a commitment to a Scottish wildlife crime unit. The national unit doesn’t do much, focus is on CITES. There is little coordination across the police force. It is very difficult for the public. Idea is for a dedicated group of about 6 officers, would make a huge difference. Subgroup put its energy into the Crown Office over the year, there is a difference between what they and Police Scotland say. People involved in development are committing wildlife crimes mainly out of ignorance, and get off with warnings. Big firms have better compliance. Police Scotland have cases for months which are not progressed. Subgroup is battling on (meeting 11 April) after which the plan will be amended. Plans ahead mentions strengthening links with the Wildlife Subgroup. If we wish to get some commitments from the Cabinet Secretary, we need to discuss this first with civil servants.

**Action for leaders: Check the forward work plans and amend, and complete reports.**

**Other issues.** Coul Links application is still live. There is additional information from developer. PQ on the level of protection to RAMSAR sites in Scotland, of interest given Govt commitment on environmental protections. Also important in relation to the Biodiversity Duty; VisitScotland wrote in support of the development with no recognition of their duties re the environment.

**Planning Bill**: Very tight timeline, MSPs are very upset with lack of detail in the Bill. Lots of opportunities for consultation are removed for streamlining. Lots of discussions on the solution, which is not well defined, and resourcing for it. Also environmental implication of simplified planning zones. Protected Areas are outwith its scope. Some appetite among MSPs to look into right of appeal, not quite equal, but more level. We are considering drop in sessions with community groups at the Parliament. Coul Links grouping could be brought in, also local officers of our member bodies. Other issues are the purpose of planning, linking to sustainable development, and the requirement for Parliamentary scrutiny of the NPF. **All are encouraged to do the** [e-action](https://act.foe.scot/help-plan-better-scotland) **and spread the word.**

**Continuity Bill:** Introduced 2 weeks ago. We are the only sector to submit amendments - about environmental principles, the important parts of the EU Directives, and the governance gap. We wanted a commitment that they would retain these, and have got it. This is good for Scotland and also, if issue with clause 11 is resolved, potential to get these commitments into the UK Withdrawal bill. We are working with parties for Stage 3. In parallel, the ECLLR Committee has launched an inquiry into it, at which Roseanna Cunningham and Mike Russell will give evidence.

We have members on the Roundtable on environmental governance. They have plans, key is that government commits to them. We are speaking to EEB, BES, UN, SAC to submit to it too, to have backing from others beyond eNGOs. Useful to have these there for the future. If Scotland is not to consent to the Withdrawal bill without these principles, that would be good. Also speaking to SULNE and the Human Rights Consortium.

**Lobbying Bill:** See Lisa’s briefing. Any questions come to staff.

**Next meeting 13 September pm**, following Land Reform, Land Use meeting in the morning.