

LINK NOTE FOR INTERNAL USE WITHIN LINK

LINK-SNH LIAISON MEETING, 18 FEB 2014, SNH STIRLING

Present

SNH - Andrew Bachell, Ian Bray and Stewart Pritchard

LINK- Trustees Deborah Long, Helen Todd, Craig Macadam, Beryl Leatherland, Charles Dundas, Paul Ritchie. Jen Anderson from LINK staff.

This was in part the annual requirement between funder and funded body. Andrew Bachell had asked to meet with trustees.

1. Update on Corporate Priorities & Key Developments

LINK - refreshed strategy with internal consultation and external perspectives, 3 objectives maintained to 2015, priorities from that and from annual strategic reviews are: SD (in fora, through alliances, engagement and in demonstration by example), improving advocacy, building stronger network (ie diversity, communications and engagement in LINK), focussing on strategic objectives, horizon-scanning effectively. KPIs apply and LINK seeks a diverse funding base.

SNH - corporate strategy also runs to 2015 with 4 high-level aims of:

- High quality nature and landscape that is resilient to change and delivers greater public value.
- Nature and landscapes that make Scotland a better place in which to live, work and visit.
- More people experiencing, enjoying and valuing our nature and landscape.
- Nature and landscape as assets contributing more to the Scottish economy.

SNH replacing its programmes with work-streams under these aims and developing new corporate plan this year for 2016 onwards; this is in the absence of the customary knowledge of the forward 3-year spending package; however SNH are aware of a 3.5% reduction anyway; will know no more till after the independence referendum; best guess in govt circles in current circumstances is 'flatlining budgets', even though SNH may seek more than that.

SNH grant-in-aid is now complemented by other sources of funding than from Scottish Government, including £15m for peatlands over 5 years, £50m (a bid at this stage) for green infrastructure through EU and other Scottish programmes. Such avenues may become as important as grant-in-aid which is currently c. £54m pa, esp. if SNH becomes more adept at spotting and bidding. They wish to do this in partnership and with public and political support, feel this should be of interest to LINK member bodies and in due course would find support useful for the principle of SNH having more leverage on outcomes of agri-environment budgets and the SRDP for example; SNH won't be talking with SG till next year so no immediate hurry. **Action for LINK (ATF)**

SNH's new Chair Ian Ross from 1 March would like to meet stakeholders; he is likely to take a different approach to partnership from Andrew Thin's, his starting point Andrew Bachell felt is one shared with the Board. **Andrew would pass invitation from LINK to meet Ian soonest (spring/summer)**

2. Update on Financial Position 2014

LINK – reasonably stable now and over last few years based on making reasonable assumptions and planning around these; grants from SNH and SG (now together) are a significant stream as are subscriptions which LINK has pushed above the inflation rate over several years, whilst also keeping costs flat or downward. LINK is aware that SNH is under pressure and that this could impact what the Agency can do for the network.

SNH - Glad to know LINK was weathering the storm; felt the situation remains severe. SNH have contacted fundées recently; are not in crisis but the usual underspend is no longer happening after several years of tighter budgets, tighter project management and less slippage in project timescales, more eating into the slack

traditionally available. Result is that SNH must identify work to pull or defer; have made some progress though will spend above budget this year; SG appear relaxed about the overspend which is within the 2% max and there's no sign of clawback being needed next year. The planned 3.5% decrease continues into next year and the salaries bill for 14-15 is not as low as SNH had anticipated given the additional staff needed for MPAs and renewables and other specialist areas. SNH Board soon needs to decide whether to aim for further staff reductions during 14-15 (losing more posts and switching staff); SNH staff are aware. The budget for everything is therefore tight for next year and public pay decisions could affect this further if restraints are lifted. SNH will be very clear about what is wanted of funded work, informed by the priorities in the corporate plan (at 1 headings above). It is now likely that they will stop doing certain things making straight choices between areas of work, relative to hitting targets. SG won't necessarily support such decisions. Examples might be managing protected sites vs. developing volunteer activities where SNH may prioritise former (a statutory duty) though SG could prefer the 'engaging people' agenda. Fundées including LINK and member bodies should speak soon to their grant contact. **Actions: Members/LINK**

The support Scottish Govt would have given LINK (though channelled via SNH) is not affected by the above situation within SNH; that money remains SG's and LINK needs to talk with SG about this support (for which earlier KPIs remain protected). **Action: LINK**

As result of budget, SNH is likely to pull back further from areas where they advise (mainly LAs); they are aware that LAs are depleted in numbers and expertise and that this pulling back could be serious, but needs must. Again, SG won't make these decisions and will put this down to SNH's independence, but budgetary squeeze drives this. So, there are hard decisions for SNH Board through the corporate planning process ahead. Useful for voluntary sector to make noise about environmental spending across the public sector to Govt and Ministers. SNH also interested in having discussion with LINK about where the SNH budget could be trimmed. **Actions x 2 for LINK (one in context of reviewing our budget cuts paper perhaps)**

3. Update on Protected Areas

SNH is reviewing PAs policy. PAs remain very important and take up large proportion SNH budget, are recognised as a tool to influence management and a framework to inform allocation of resources. But they are big spend in an era of declining budget. Review started a few years back. In sites managed for people: biodiversity is declining / not recovering; there are ongoing and new threats; resources have decreased; there's growing interest across Govt in public spending delivering public benefit; other strategies need to relate (land use, biodiversity); there's a desire to engage land users and managers more with the environment and in PA management. The questions being asked in the review are: Are PAs doing what they should, are they the right tool? what's the best approach for future?

Review's first stage focusses on PAs for Nature (SSSI/NK2K/NNR) via sub projects. Review is using consultants, looking outside the box, linking to behaviour change too. Using feedback from PA managers and others; Clive Mitchell is working on wider network areas. Will involve workshops with staff and others [using AD research analysts] in coming year and an expert panel in late May [26th to 28th possibly] chaired by S Pepper interviewing various players (inc from LINK, invites to follow to various members), looking at social and environmental and economic issues. JNCC is also reviewing PAs so there is a joint project to get wider EU input / inspiration. Ideally would like an overview of what the 25-28 PAs for Nature contribute to public life. In part this work is to defend against the criticism about public benefit, even felt within the Board. However some sites may score redundant through this ecosystem-approach. The role these areas can play in future is crucial. Need to look more creatively in future. There are new and emerging threats to nature and landscapes. Is public spending achieving enough in terms of ecological services? All sorts of stakeholders; SG are nervous. Change is a long way off, and would need legislation but it's not too early to think, hence this review and the work with JNCC; the international context is key, as EU countries under same pressures and there is fresh and invigorating thought out there. The need to be aware of ramifications was mentioned eg landowners' perspectives.

Actions: SNH internal briefing to be revised for LINK. Recent JNCC paper on PAs - Next steps flagged

How the review fits with SBS? Not yet meshed; the SBS PA grouping which Andrew chairs is looking at favourable condition/features/targets and will need to complete that before looking wider. To look wider will need changes to group membership, he agreed, and noted LINK's interest. Andrew thought probably end of

2014 for a start to the wider focus and suggested we prompt him if nothing appears to be happening – he'd find it helpful to have that pressure. **Actions: SNH and LINK on membership changes / clamour for action**

LINK was not surprised to hear about the direction of the review; Deborah indicated members would indeed have concerns about losing the baby with the bathwater; while we would agree there is a wider role to consider there are also concerns about aspects including international developments. Discussion followed about pressure on SNH to protect this and that because of this and that threat; they are up against managers wanting clarity (though not liking lines on maps) and the need to link to SRDP and look at delivering different models of land management.

WRT Wild Land Mapping Helen flagged useful LTF meeting with Brendan Turvey on perception of capacity for development, potential of spread to west, SNH diminished capacity to comment, and asked in this scenario what role has the map? Andrew said the map was not a designation but was supported by policy. SNH will pull back from cases where they feel there is no national interest to defend and where local authorities can defend local interest. At present SNH might put in supporting advice but may have to pull back from doing that. So some risk of poor development slipping in; however there is generic advice and he felt there are signs of PLI decisions being determined on the basis of that. Re spread west, AB felt difficult for developers, speculative, likely to peak soon because costs would be prohibitive.

Helen asked about the SNH analysis of responses to the WLM, noting JMT's already produced. Andrew said SNH's paper is due to go to the Board soon and to SG by April. There were no serious new challenges in the responses to the methodology or the map which might unsettle it.

Beryl asked about Section 36s – were SNH comments at the scoping stages taken on board? Andrew felt developers know they are daft not to take SNH comments on board. IB added that the big cases are the tip of the iceberg that SNH remains involved with while it's the many cases further down where SNH can add very little to LAs' or SEPA's or Marine Scotland's input, where SNH is looking to pull back. SNH will carry on inputting in nationally important sites and engaging upstream of application.

4. Scottish Government Policy Agenda

LINK – Reported briefly on White Paper discussions with Ministers around our disappointment of WP not promoting role of environment more. Continue to promote referendum challenge to campaigns which are hard pressed to respond. Have engaged in RR Bill and disappointed at outcome which gives SNH duty for SED rather than SD which LINK supports. responding to Pack review proposals around a single agency and about to publish own discussion paper on forestry governance options for Scotland. Working on deer, native woodlands, see obvious links between the two issues. Have tried to comment on Land Reform in terms of land use but aware that subsidies drive this and the links to land ownership need to be addressed. Also working on wildlife crime, hilltracks where things have again gone quiet and SNH thoughts welcome (LINK and FCS are fairly close on their asks in this respect).

SNH – In response to these areas AB indicated that SNH could not officially comment on WPaper. WRT the duty to support SED he said SNH already has balancing duty and has experience of working with this since the gos, so sees little changing, have put natural capital on the table. Feels the situation is not threatening though SNH will have to think how to respond when challenged in public fora on SED. Agency already talks up non-financial values and will continue to do so, though accustomed to justifying why decisions fall on one side or the other; he noted that no wind farm case proved so significant to economic development that this trumped the environmental concerns – and that SG supported Lewis decision. Asked about potentially difficult moments, he said if pushed at PLIs SNH will need to think how to defend positions in that kind of circumstance.

EnFor Review – Andrew indicated this internal Govt review has looked at various options including single agency for land management, joint board to plan strategically, with no particular outcomes, and that there is no appetite for serious change ahead of the referendum. If a 'no' vote occurs, decisions would be made between 2014 and the 2016 elections. Single agency route proves very costly as Wales can testify. SNH will continue to

feed in to discussions, and would strongly support the proposal for a single strategic planning board: the various bodies involved have a lot of agendas in common where it would make sense to coordinate spending.

Deer – Andrew said RACCE Inquiry outcomes were useful to SNH and gave hooks, allowing things to be said now which weren't say-able earlier. SNH are subsequently stocktaking and will work up position in context of 5-year review of the Wild Deer Strategy, this year. SNH are much closer to Govt and policy & position statements need a steer from Govt; had 'independence and no influence', and now have 'no independence and a lot more influence', in which Andrew Thin has played a real part.

Hilltracks – Andrew said Govt has SNH's view. If asked SNH will restate. A mechanism is needed to ensure good guidance is followed, so political statement would be helpful. LINK's paper is very good he thought.

5. Joint Session on Horizon Scanning

Deborah reported that LINK's recent scanning had flagged among other things: carbon bubble; pressure for de-regulation; effective stakeholder engagement; recession-driven quick fixes; non-implementation of legislation (previous LINK pub refers).

SNH responses on these were :

Recession and fixes – Renewables drive is one such area (growth), and SNH looks at cases on merits.

Deregulation – SNH's lessened capacity is an issue. And as the economy picks up they will not be able to be ready. The Board is aware though has no answer to the challenge. **Action: Issue for subsequent meeting** (putting role of looking after / not doing bad things in society's plate since society is to benefit from the funding – a joint workshop on 'engaging people')

Stakeholder engagement – SNH are developing stakeholder strategy. LINK is a key stakeholder, very useful to have the network.

Carbon – SNH's principal carbon focus is on peat; will be interested in our paper.

People-state relationship – SNH think about this in terms of communicating with people about what the Agency does for them/society. LINK explained their focus is around 'boundaries'; Andrew noted the odd situation of government bodies offering memberships indicating that on various occasions SNH Board had agreed it would not support that route to funding. LINK outlined its interest in lobbying legislation and meeting with Ministers ahead around proposals for a Scottish Bill; Andrew said this had not crossed SNH desks.

6. Future liaison

Andrew invited LINK to come back on any points for thoughts or advice, noting the lack of a horizon-scanning group within the Agency now.

We remembered the practice of a decade ago when NGOs and Agency met informally to do this and agreed that LINK would consider whether and how that kind of exchange could be resurrected. **Action: LINK**

Meantime SNH would set up a meeting for Ian Ross, Ian Jardine, Andrew Bachell and Simon Pepper to meet with LINK. Deborah indicated this would probably be with LINK President, Chair, one or two Trustees, and a staff member. **Action: SNH**

Andrew indicated SNH would review its public meetings schedule and perhaps change to larger-scale and more occasional gatherings in which it would be very useful to see environment vol sec/LINK reps there. Deborah undertook to pass this on. **Action: LINK members encouraged to attend in due course**

Contact lists – LINK to let Ian Bray know for any event to which SNH invited, who SNH invitees are so that they can communicate and ensure attendance internally **Action: LINK staff and convenors per events**

TF contacts – SNH will be ensuring better up/down comms internally about contact with LINK TFs. On occasion LINK TFs may want to check they are in touch with the right person at SNH. **Action: Convenors/Staff to keep under review.**

JA for LINK/18.2.14