

Minutes of the Scottish Environment LINK Annual General Meeting held on 15 June 2007 at Falkland (Festival of Stewardship) in Fife

PRESENT

President	Fred Edwards
Honorary Fellow	Simon Pepper OBE
Trustees	John Mayhew (Chair), Ian McCall, Dan Barlow, Ian Findlay, Andrew Fairbairn
Member Reps	Drennan Watson OBE Cairngorms Campaign (Honorary Fellow), Clifton Bain RSPB, Duncan McLaren FoES, Craig McAdam Buglife, Jenny Mollison SAGS, Roger Powell & Niall Loble SCRA, Carey Coombs SAS, Dave Morris RAS, Gordon Gray Stephens SNW, Jonny Hughes SWT, Beryl Leatherland MCoFS, Cally Fleming HWDT, Helen McDade JMT
Staff	Jen Anderson, Alice Walsh, Jane Herbstritt, Hugh Green, Alex Hopkinson, Ylva Haglund, Alan Wells
Guest	Sam Gardner SEPA

John Mayhew (JHM) opened the meeting and welcomed all participants.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Eila Macqueen (Trustee), David Downie (Treasurer), Michael Scott (Honorary Fellow), Deborah Long (Vice Chair), Sena Mackay (Saltire), Patrick Milne Home (BRISC), Bill Wright (APRS) and Paul Kirkland (BCS).

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 20 June 2006

Corrections were: Dan Barlow represented WWF, not FoES, and Fiona Allan had not represented SNW. The minutes were otherwise considered an accurate record of the discussion and were proposed by Beryl Leatherland, seconded by Dan Barlow and approved by the meeting.

3. Annual Report & Accounts for the Year 2006/07

JHM reported that the narrative format and the accounting record followed that required for Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) purposes, inviting comments and reporting that staff wished to know whether members considered there was a need for a more promotional leaflet to back up this document. No comments on content were made on the narrative; inconsistencies in page numbering were noted; JHM invited comments on errors to Jen Anderson by 30 June. The meeting did not consider that a promotional leaflet was needed as LINK had other vehicles for promoting its work.

Hugh Green explained that the £90,000 unrestricted funds balance at the year end included fixed assets and some allowance for contingency, as explained in the narrative, leaving

around £30,000 in free reserves. JHM reminded the meeting that the new SORP discourages contingency reserves as such, though it remains good practice for trustees to ensure that charities are in a position to meet their outstanding obligations including redundancies in the event of closure.

The meeting recorded thanks to grantors of LINK's important core funding (besides membership subscriptions) - namely Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Executive, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and WWFS.

Thanks were recorded to Ros Pearson and Susan Warren both of whom had left the staff during the year (from roles of Information Officer and Campaign Coordinator respectively).

Andrew Fairbairn proposed and Beryl Leatherland seconded the report and accounts and these were approved by the meeting.

4. Appointment of Independent Financial Examiners

Jen Anderson reported the Board Funding Subgroup's recommendation that LINK continue to use Morris & Young in Perth with whom LINK liaised over production of the management accounts and end of year finances. JHM proposed, Andrew Fairbairn seconded the proposal and it was approved by the meeting, which recorded its thanks to David Downie, Andrew Fairbairn and the Funding Subgroup for its work over the year.

5. Annual Subscriptions for the year 2007/08

The meeting was asked to approve rates for the final year in LINK's three-year schedule to 2008, comprising six bands for full members and four bands for remaining associate members. JHM reminded the meeting of the decision of the EGM (November 2006) to close the category of associate membership to all new organisations from December 2006, and then to close this completely from 2008. There were no questions or comments. Carey Coombs proposed, Beryl Leatherland seconded and the meeting approved the proposed subscription rates.

6. Election of President, Board of Trustees, Office Bearers & Honorary Fellows

6.1 Trustees JHM reported that three trustees were due to retire and all three were willing to be re-elected. The Board wished to co-opt Ian Findlay for the coming year given Ian's knowledge and experience of governance. This created a vacancy. One nomination had been received, from SWT, proposing Jonny Hughes. There were no further comments. John Mayhew proposed, Duncan McLaren seconded and the meeting agreed the proposal.

6.2 Office bearers John Mayhew (Chair), Deborah Long (Vice Chair) and David Downie (Treasurer) were willing to continue for a further year and the meeting was asked to formally re-elect them. Helen McDade proposed, Dan Barlow seconded and the meeting approved the motion.

6.3 President JHM indicated, with regret, that Fred Edwards was standing down after three years' tremendous service to the network. On behalf of those present and of the wider network of members and task forces he thanked Fred for all his work; Fred's support and assistance had been much appreciated and had far surpassed what had originally been asked of him. Fred indicated that he was standing down at the end of the three years which he had elected to commit; the time had gone swiftly and he had enjoyed every part of it very much.

JHM indicated that the search for a President to succeed Fred had not concluded though the Searchgroup hoped to identify someone to recommend to the network in the next few months.

6.4 Honorary Fellows John Mayhew proposed the motion that the meeting elect Fred Edwards and Jill Harden as Honorary Fellows for life. Andrew Fairbairn seconded this and the meeting agreed the proposal.

7. Delegates on external forums

The recommendations were that LINK continue to be represented on IUCN UK Committee (by Mark Huxham), on the Scotland Advisory Group of the MOD Liaison Committee (by Beryl Leatherland), and on the Integrated Land Management Advisory Forum for the Cairngorms National Park Authority, with a change of delegate from Helen McDade to Hebe Carus. These were proposed by Helen McDade, seconded by Niall Loble and agreed by the meeting. Helen McDade could act as an alternate for Hebe Carus if needed.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 Staff On behalf of the network JHM thanked all the staff for their work over the year.

8.2 Convenors and Trustees The meeting recorded thanks to LINK's task force convenors for their support and leadership and for ensuring a degree of inter-connection amongst the policy areas and with the wider work programme. A vote of thanks was also recorded to LINK's trustees for their support on the Board over the year.

8.3 A strong coherent voice/LINK 2020 work A draft version of the report to LINK by Michael Scott was distributed to those members present. The meeting noted the 2020 steering group's proposal to print a revised version for dissemination to all members and external audiences, and for a PDF version to be available on the website. A fuller version of the report, for research purposes, existed and would be referred to on the inside cover of the published report. Jen Anderson reported on LINK's 2020 project: the steering group had commissioned Simon Pepper to explore the potential crossover with other networks to promote behaviour change; Simon's work would inform further action, such as a report or conference.

LINK had lodged a request with the First Minister for an anniversary reception at Edinburgh Castle.

8.4 LINK liaison with the Environment Minister Dave Morris proposed that all LINK meetings with the Environment Minister in future should be sought by LINK, with LINK deciding number and range of members participating; this would be an appropriate alternative to the system devised by Ross Finnie which gave LINK one place within a wider circle of CEOs selected by the Executive (the 'G6') which Dave felt diminished LINK's value. He asked the AGM to indicate views for the benefit of the Board.

JHM reported briefly on a recent meeting with John Mason (Greener Scotland Directorate) who had indicated that Environment Minister Mike Russell was keen for greater engagement with the NGO community, through LINK, through individual organisation liaisons, and through the 'G6' (involving FoES, RSPB, SWT, WWFS, LINK Chair/delegate and now understood to include BTCV - no longer a member body of LINK). The Board envisaged that the LINK place at these meetings could be fielded to a TF convenor, trustee or other rep, depending on agenda.

Helen McDade supported Dave Morris's proposal and reported disquiet within the Landscape Task Force at the proposal that LINK continue to participate in the G6 series.

Clifton Bain reminded the meeting that over the last few years, opportunities for the climate TF and other task forces, with various ministers, had been good, irrespective of the G6 arrangements. JHM advised that LINK should continue to seek the opportunities which it needs in this way.

Drennan Watson suggested that the ongoing liaison between Government and the G6 bodies listed above, whilst perhaps the chosen arrangement from a civil service viewpoint, might not be best for the wider interests within LINK. He cautioned that the organisations which Government was not identifying are also important in terms of their function in the range of knowledge and services.

Fred Edwards believed LINK had secured the meetings it needed with the range of responsible Ministers over recent years and advised that LINK should take the opportunity of Mike Russell's being keen for dialogue to clarify, without confrontation, why we need to shape meetings more in future.

Duncan McLaren believed the network might well lose opportunity for influence if LINK did not continue to make use of the G6 as part of a portfolio of opportunities which it developed. He felt this was especially important in relation to the new-look Executive.

Andrew Fairbairn hoped that Mike Russell would not see these 5 bodies (above) as the environmental mainstream and urged that LINK stand on its own.

Simon Pepper suggested that LINK probably needed to inform the Environment Minister on breadth of the network's agenda.

Dave Morris agreed that both Ministers and officials were possibly now unaware of the history of the current liaison – which had developed under Ross Finnie – and felt it would be appropriate to establish alternative arrangements, in place of LINK's role in the G6.

JHM advised that LINK should not dispose of the G6 opportunity and asked for the mood of the meeting on this point. Gordon Gray Stephens supported retaining the option for a LINK place in the existing series, fielded as appropriate to convenors and/or other LINK members. Dan Barlow advised that LINK continue to seek the meetings it needs and hold on to the opportunity of the G6, fielding the appropriate rep to the latter depending on the agenda. Fred Edwards counselled that this was a time to negotiate a new arrangement with officials without stating a particular course of action.

JHM summarised the options for the meeting to consider as: to continue with the status quo; to discontinue with the LINK place on G6; to explore our case for a new series of meetings with officials, using the LINK place on the G6 meantime to inform the Minister about the LINK agenda.

Ian McCall argued that since Scottish government funds LINK to be the liaison body for the eNGOs, the G6 arrangement undermines rather than presents a sound opportunity. Helen McDade felt that G6 does not offer LINK opportunity to select an appropriate line-up and agenda.

Duncan McLaren supported Fred Edwards's view. He indicated that the G6 bodies were not keen to increase their liaison to monthly (as indicated by the new administration recently); the G6 meetings were an opportunity to demonstrate solidarity across the wider LINK membership, hence the importance of maintaining a LINK place.

JHM moved the meeting to a vote on two opposing motions:

Helen McDade moved that the LINK Chair decides, with polite notification to government about the reasons, not to participate in the G6 as LINK feels it better to make network representations in future through separate meetings with the participants selected by LINK. There were 5 votes in favour, 8 votes against, and 3 abstentions.

Duncan McLaren moved that, for the time being, JHM accepts the invitation on behalf of LINK to participate in the G6, and uses this and all other available channels to argue for a separate series of meetings with frequency and agenda agreed between LINK and government; that if it proves difficult to secure a new arrangement and the judgement within LINK is that our participation in G6 is an obstacle, LINK then chooses to decline the G6 place; there should be no binding JHM at this meeting. There were 10 votes in favour, 5 votes against, and 1 abstention.

Noting that the view of the meeting was that LINK should continue to accept the place on the G6, JHM indicated that he would make the case for an alternative arrangement too for LINK at the next G6 meeting; he would make the same points separately to officials in coming weeks. He advised that LINK should continue to seek other meetings with ministers as needed and ensure best possible delegations per agenda. In this way the network would be reflecting both of the views covered in this discussion. If government was not willing to negotiate he would bring the issue back to LINK members.

Drennan Watson welcomed the consensus view reached on a difficult issue. Simon Pepper reiterated the opportunity with the new administration for fresh departures – LINK should not feel burdened by what has been the pattern to date. Beryl Leatherland emphasised the importance of briefing the new Minister on the historical perspective and ensuring that he understands how LINK works together.

JHM declared the meeting closed and encouraged members to enjoy the 20th anniversary supper and ceillidh.

Drafted by JA, July 2007

Comments by JHM 26 May 2008