

Note of the meeting of the LINK Land Group held on 6 October 2016.

Attending: Vicki Swales (RSPB, Co-Convener), Deborah Long (Plantlife, Co-Convener), Helen Todd (RS, Hilltracks SG Co-Leader, LINK Chair), Eddie Palmer (Wildlife Crime SG Leader, Scottish Badgers), Ellie Stirling (Scottish Badgers), Eilidh Nicolson (NTS), Bruce Wilson (SWT, V-Convener Economics Group), John Thomson (APRS, SCNP, Land Reform, Land Use SG Leader, Landscape SG Leader), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG, Hilltracks SG Co-Leader), Charles Dundas (WTS, Woodlands SG Leader), Christiane Valluri-Nitsch (SWLG), Daphne Vlastari (LINK Advocacy Officer), Alice Walsh (LINK Development Officer).

Apologies: Pete Ritchie (Nourish, Food & Farming SG Leader), John Mayhew (APRS), Alan McDonnell (Trees for Life).

1. Welcome, purpose and aims of the day

Vicki welcomed members to this Group overseeing a broad and challenging agenda. The aim was to review progress and look at what is ahead with regard to the 3 priorities.

2. Review of progress and work ahead on the 3 priorities

2.1 Land Reform and Land Use: A lot happening, less so on the issue of Landscape which needs more thought on how to stimulate action. The Subgroup met ScotGov colleagues in May and earlier today. Focus has been on the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement and what it could potentially achieve for environmental sustainability. We gave strong messages that it needs to contain environmental responsibilities and that guidance should be promoted to land managers, particularly beyond SLE. Civil servants are reasonably sympathetic, though question of Ministerial follow through. LINK will comment on the consultation.

Land Use Strategy, question of how worthwhile to pursue, given disappointing LUS 2. Case for is that Regional land use frameworks are potentially so important for future policy and targeting decisions, particularly with Brexit, so we should be pushing hard, and have made efforts to do so, not with great results so far – given the current timetable it will be years before there is any national coverage, so job ahead to push it. We should develop guidance ourselves to help local authorities and others who may go ahead on it. On the Upland Vision, have met SNH to discuss its scope, had a useful discussion. The consultation is out and LINK will respond to it.

Subgroup to date has relied heavily on Sheila George who has less time, 2 days a week on Land Use. RSPB will be discussing internally its engagement on Land Reform. This Subgroup's capacity is very stretched to deliver what is needed. Agenda ties into post Brexit policy on land use more generally and is hugely important for LINK interests. Sheila had done draft response for SNH's Uplands strategy. Bruce noted [SWT's Upland Vision](#) circulated previously.

Regional Land Use Frameworks could tie into National Ecological Network thinking, which Wildlife Subgroup members (mainly) are working on (meeting on 27 October morning, at SWT), and we need to ensure we are joined up here. Sheila had done a pro-forma template on what RLUF might look like. LINK Marine Group are developing something similar on Regional Marine Plans which could be a focus for local election work – Governance Group is supportive.

Landscape needs to focus on Ministers beyond environment, including tourism, as an important part of the resource, and Health, wellbeing and recreation. Also considered

how to follow up on the landscape and energy statement, possibly via a Friends of the Scotsman slot.

It was difficult to look too far ahead. The short-medium term approach is defined above. Longer term likely to be wrapped up in Brexit agenda.

Upland Vision had previously been discussed as a potential project. Given lack of clarity from Government was agreed not the best way to proceed.

Actions:

John to liaise with Sheila and circulate draft response to SNH's Upland consultation and keep Duncan Orr-Ewing (for Deer) informed.

NEN Subgroup to liaise with Marine Group and Land Reform & Land Use Subgroup. Deborah, John.

John liaise with Daphne on Friends of Scotsman article.

Strategic Planning meeting 22 November to include Land issues within Brexit discussion.

2.2 Food & Farming Subgroup: A useful meeting on the future of Scottish Agriculture and what would succeed the CAP in Brexit context was held on 29 September with broad agreement to take a wider rural economy and development perspective for future financial support. The meeting got some way forward including identifying potential allies. There is a big job ahead to make our vision the credible policy option and to mobilise support from other rural economic interests beyond NFUS. Pete Ritchie will take the document forward, working with what we have already got, our vision has not much changed. The Subgroup will meet on 27 October to work further on it, discuss tactics and longer term policy. There are meetings ahead which Vicki will attend, including the National Programme Assessment Committee on which we have observer status, and the NFUS Environment Forum which is meeting on 27 October for a Brexit discussion, Vicki chairing.

There is a link between what might replace CAP and regional land use frameworks, some local authorities are interested. We could be working with them. Timetables not clear. Assuming a great reform bill comes forward Defra is planning a farming bill, could be Spring 2017. Scotland will be different but we could be very soon into the devil of detail. We will carry on with our plans. Members are looking for a clear statement from Scottish Government following that the SRDP schemes will continue. Nourish, RSPB and Soil Association are involved in the Scottish Food Coalition, major work ahead is the Food Bill to drive more sustainable food production.

Very little to report on other action over last 6 months.

Actions:

Food and Farming Subgroup meeting 27 October.

Alice to provide forward plan, pro tem.

2.3 Wildlife Subgroup – Biodiversity: Focus to persuade Scottish Government to deliver on their biodiversity commitments via Species Champions initiative and keeping an eye on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and delivery mechanisms. Species Champions has been launched and there is an event in Parliament on 10 November. Funding for Eleanor Harris (paid intern) ends in March. There will be a capacity crisis as Eleanor is doing all the legwork.

ScotGov published its progress report, largely NEN work, meeting all of the interested LINK organisations on 27 October to share information on all of the projects and come up with a link, joining up green and grey infrastructure, ecological connections. There is potential for national coverage, both physically and across policy, with intentions of embedding in the planning system at some point. This could tie in with the Land Use regional frameworks, we need to be careful the approaches join up and do not conflict. Whoever is pulling together our guidance on regional land use frameworks needs to be fully tapped into this. SNH, James Hutton Institute and James Curran as Honorary Fellow all involved. Progress will depend on resources. Very positive that we are getting to this point.

Maurice Golden MSP would be supportive of an event linked to this at Scottish Environment Week. Claudia Beamish MSP also very keen.

Actions:

LINK NEN meeting on 27 October – Deborah to check if Sheila George can attend.

Post 27 October, NEN and Land Reform, Land Use meet. Deborah, John to organise.

3. Other Working Groups reports and plans (taken together)

Wildlife Crime: Eddie provided a report and forward plan. He had a steer from Roseanna Cunningham that she was unaware of LINK reports Natural Injustice 1 & 2. He and Ian Thomson have taken 7 of the 24 recs from the report to produce a less controversial set of proposals members can support for a meeting on 29 November. There are better relationships now with the Police, as no issues with front line. There is close interest from several Lanarkshire MSPs, and planned Members debate before the year end. Relations with the Crown Office are still an issue, we are not seen as a stakeholder. Keith Connal still of view that our reports were discredited. WC subgroup will proceed very diplomatically, not going over old ground, and ensure the new doc gets to contacts direct. Graeme Dey MSP also supports a stakeholder meeting.

Action: Eddie will add advocacy approach to Forward Plan.

Hilltracks: has sent report and providing forward plan asap. Monitoring of 14 local authorities and Parks continued, Beryl screened all and some letters have been sent on LINK's behalf. It was clear there would not be a review this year. We don't have enough evidence yet and will continue monitoring for another year, potentially buying in some support as monitoring is very time consuming. If there is capacity will include tracks for hydro schemes, which are fully within the planning system; some are as bad as the worst Hilltracks. We have recommended that Government updates its guidance. They have no time for this so have done it for them, and will send to planning authorities. The forward work plan will depend on level of capacity for ongoing monitoring.

Woodlands: held 2 meetings with Forest Enterprise Scotland, and telecon of members on the future of Forestry consultations; 4 members are developing draft response which Charles will combine into LNK response, and circulate for wider sign-up (excellent short meeting!). The future of the Forestry Commission is happening now, will involve a LINK bill team.

Action: Charles ensure Land Group members can sign up to consultation response.

Deer: Meeting regularly, met with SNH. Simon Pepper being funded by DPF to draft its advocacy strategy. Work ahead as SNH report comes out, responding to it. Pattern continuing to 2018.

All will be included in the wider work plan being prepared for the Board and Strategic Planning meetings ahead.

Anything else? Bruce noted that discussions ongoing within the Economics Group on the ethics of payments for ecosystem services in relation to Natural Capital (concept note in progress on the potential benefits and dangers) has cross-over with Land Group discussions which all relate to payments. It was agreed that it would be useful to have a joint Economics and Land Group discussion in the Scottish context. Understanding could be helped by Land Group representation at the relevant session of the Economics Group seminar on 28 November with externals, with a slot on the Natural Capital approach and the scope it has as a 'tool for transition' - What can it do to help us transform our economy, what are its limitations etc, invitations to come shortly from Phoebe.

Action: Bruce to keep Land Group informed of progress. Keep option of joint internal seminar.

The Land Reform and Land Use Subgroup had talked about National Parks, now becoming live again politically, being in the purview of the Planning Group. It would be helpful to have some LINK support if the bandwagon starts to roll. Agreed that LRLU Subgroup is the appropriate place to keep a watching brief as APRS and SCNP are leading on it.

Social Justice: We have our Grouping though this needs to be mainstreamed across our Groups. The same issues arise in different discussions, eg Food and Farming discussions, and all Groups have some overlap with it. Congress on 21 November will be discussing Brexit and convergence of environmental and SJ issues with input from non-environment sectors.

4. How are the LINK structures working for all? Any revisions needed.

The Land Group is the most complex Group and is coordinating where its Subgroups need to take action to deliver on priorities. LINK needs to know what all Subgroups are doing, though Land Group Co-Conveners cannot be in control of their outputs. This system requires trust that all the Subgroups are working away, not bringing LINK into disrepute. If Leaders feel something may be contentious, they should flag it early, not relying on LINK staff to spot or solve.

Bringing all previous taskforces under the Land Group was also for prioritisation. We need to keep asking what to drop as other issues arise, a question for these meetings and also for the Strategic Planning meeting.

On nomenclature, it was agreed (after discussion) that The Land Group has its 3 Subgroups (Food & Farming, Wildlife, Land Reform & Land Use) and the other groupings will be referred to as working groups (NEN, Deer, etc) rather than sub-subgroups.

The Land Group will continue to meet twice yearly, next meeting is on Wednesday 1 March, with Land Reform and Land Use Subgroup meeting in the morning. It would be best if the Subgroups had met beforehand to inform the March meeting.

SNH liaison by Groups with named leads required to exchange plans and discuss mutual approaches. Deborah and Vicki will meet Roddy Fairley before end January 2017.

Actions:

Circulate meeting date: Alice

Meet Roddy Fairley: Deborah/Vicki