

Note of LINK Network meeting held 28 January 2016, Edinburgh.

Present: Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Aedán Smith (Planning Group, RSPB), Beryl Leatherland (Trustee, Landscape, SWLG), Charles Dundas (Vice-Chair, Woodland, WTS), Calum Duncan (Marine Group, MCS), Eddie Palmer (Wildlife Crime, Scottish Badgers), Tom Leatherland (Freshwater, SWLG), Craig Macadam (Trustee, Wildlife,, Buglife), Helen Todd (Chair, Land, Ramblers), Vicki Swales (Land Group, RSPB), Matthew Crighton (Economics Group, FoES), John Thomson (Land Group, SCNP/APRS), Lucy Graham (Trustee, SWT), Rea Cris (RSPB), Paul Walton (Trustee, RSPB), Sheila George (RSPB), Deborah Long (Land Group, Wildlife, Plantlife)
Staff - Lisa Webb, Alice Walsh, Jen Anderson, Daphne Vlastari, Phoebe Cochrane

Apologies: SAGS, Mary Church, Sam Gardner, Paul Kirkland.

1. Bedding in of new structures, discussion of progress

The Board had earlier discussed relations with SNH, specifically the issue of grants reduction (anticipated at 30%), which will have knock-on effects on biodiversity, and what action LINK should take. It was agreed to write as the Board, preferably with sign up from CEOs of member bodies affected. The biodiversity discussion is also happening within the Groups. .

Helen thanked everyone for their help in getting the new structures and prioritisation process bedded in; though still a work in progress, this was positive so far. This was the first network discussion opportunity since Strategic Planning in November. The focuses for each Group were tabled. All were asked to think further about how these interact with each other and inter-relate with subgroups.

The Land Group, with 9 relevant Subgroups, had considered all Subgroup aspirations and agreed top issues (in the table). Vicki Swales and Deborah Long would co-convene for 1 year. Subgroup leaders had yet to consult with their members, and activities would continue very much as before within the Subgroups, with outputs coming through the Land Group.

Governance Group had agreed that the governance aspects of Protected Areas and REFIT should be on its agenda, assuming that the day-to-day effort would be ongoing through the Wildlife Subgroup.

Helen reminded all that reducing the overall workload and doing less better is the goal. There remained consultation to be done with Subgroup members; eg, the National Parks Subgroup needs to decide where it sits; eg, whether a Land Use Subgroup will be needed depending on the outcomes of the ScotGov consultation, etc, across the Subgroups. Issues would arise where decisions at the higher, Group level need to be made on whether to proceed as LINK or by individual members.

We will retain expertise and not lose threads of where work has come from, retaining named individuals for Subgroups as long as these continue, and this will be reflected on the website. Information/consultations/invitations coming to LINK on Subgroup issues will be fielded to Subgroup Leaders as well as relevant Group Conveners.

Communications between Subgroups and Groups will be very important and rely on Leaders and Conveners having dialogue, being up to speed with Subgroup plans, being able to assess strategic value and being willing to say 'maybe not'.

Groups will have more staff support: Land, Governance and Planning will have one member of the core staff to help administer; Economics and Marine are supported by dedicated staff; all Groups will have access to advocacy support (DV).

By the time of the May network meeting (19 May) it was felt that the Subgroups would have had opportunity to meet and consider their relationships to the Groups, and have been in touch with Group Conveners to discuss their thinking.

1. Priorities emerging from Groups/

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Land Group' key priority within those in the table was Sustainable Uplands.

Economics Group plans, as in table. It will produce an overall purpose or objective to be of use to LINK - aiming to move Scotland's economy to being more circular, to have a lesser global footprint, to be more sustainable. It will advocate how to make things better in the real world. The circular economy may be a hook with a radical spin on the government interpretation; less consumption, including carbon, water, energy. The Group will speak outwards more, and looking to raise funds for a further phase.

Governance Group priorities as in table. It has yet to review which Subgroups inform its work. There is no Vice-Convenor yet. Helen reported that the Board (earlier) had concerns that investing time in a civic forum could be a resource-eater without definite gains. This concern would be discussed with Governance. The meeting was asked for views on a civic forum. Eddie, with experience of the previous iteration, felt this was a big job if people were not totally committed to it. John felt it would be more useful to press for more effective stakeholder forums in areas of our interest; as government has retrenched, some of these spaces for dialogue need to be buttressed or reinvented. Eg, in relation to the proposed Land Commission, what is there to inform it by way of an advisory group? The meeting heard that the Rural Affairs Food and Environment (RAFE) board would have an advisory forum, invitations for which would be coming soon; LINK members will want to engage. Vicki noted that we could be more challenging of the way government engages with civic society and communities eg CAP, where environment gets 2 seats among 30 farming organisations. There may be other areas like health which are more democratic. **Action: Governance Group**

Marine Group is highly functioning with 2 staff attached and great support within member bodies. It has been busy, not yet discussed LINK's new structures. Its February meeting will look at linkages with other Groups and Subgroups. The Group is working collaboratively with the other Links, some issues are Scottish specific, others UK level. Also working with Links on raising funding for phase beyond 2016. A key lesson has been the need for constant pushing from LINK and allies (including communities) to make sure the fine words in legislation translate into effective delivery. Wildlife and Food Subgroups have an interest, also energy work, and potentially National Parks. Advocacy around science and research was noted as important. **Action Marine Group**

Planning Group has not met or discussed new structures yet. Anticipated priorities in the table. There is also a wider need to join up marine and terrestrial planning system, and the built and non-built terrestrial planning systems. Planning is the spatial expression of how to make Scotland sustainable and is influenced by government's economic priorities rather than vice versa; the National Planning Framework should be more instructive of the economic strategy rather than the opposite. How we get these 3 documents to be better joined up and to be more central (lot of good stuff in all of them) : meeting agreed this merits a specific strategic discussion, led by Planning Group, with Land, and Economics. **Action: Planning Group**

A meeting to consider how LINK progresses its aspiration to connect to the Social Justice agenda was held in December, subsequent to which there was a good LINK response to the Fairer Scotland conversation, supported by 19 members with encouragement for these to follow up with their input. There is a clear lack of capacity. The Board (earlier) had identified this as an important gap in LINK's resourced priorities, and was considering how to take forward, perhaps by commissioning external work to inform. Even that would need a small Subgroup, including board involvement and read-across with the Economics work. The network meeting confirmed that RSPB (Rea) and FoES have an interest in engaging though cannot lead. John noted that if we want to dethrone GDP we need to define what we want better – ie visioning to some extent. There was clear agreement that we need to make progress on SJ. It was agreed that the March meeting of those who met in December should include conveners of Land, Planning and Economics and some board members to consider next steps and scope a project. **Action: staff to organise**

At the Board's request, Groups were asked to identify their top priority by April, to enable us to think through where there may be a campaign or headline issue the whole network can get behind for later 2016/17 if that is possible or desirable. **Action: Groups for 5 April**

There was discussion about this – whether multiple messages are not important too (reflecting diversity- not limiting our value), whether a uniting theme would of necessity be very generic, whether our audience (mainly policy community) is appropriate for themed approach. It related to how we talk to and who wants to talk to us. It remains important to focus on elements of consensus we can promote more effectively (eg, on energy) and also on identifying (as groups, as Board) who we want to talk to and getting out there to do so (LINK's policy mapping relates).

Clarification of LINK rules: Organisations need to be LINK member bodies to take part in Groups and Subgroups though there is no bar on working with other (non-members) in other ways.

2. Themes for Congress 2016 and SEW 2017

The intention was for Congress and SEW to be a means to progress network priorities rather than to seek new themes annually. Some ideas proposed last year included environment and social justice, linkages with the health agenda, how we measure change, how we use science in our advocacy, global citizenship, planning for future scenarios. All had merits though strongest support was for a justice theme. Congress worked best when it stimulated thinking for future action, informed through external speakers, bringing the sector together. The proposal to change the order of conference and strategic planning would be revisited; the importance of the overnight part of the event was confirmed. The March meeting on social justice would take account of congress as a vehicle for progressing this strand. **Action: staff**

SEW 2017: Possibilities including Scottish and UN 'years of'. **Lisa to canvass ideas in March**

3. Updates

LINK Land Use Strategy response was going in Friday, please reply to Sheila
Ministerial meeting 1 Feb – LINK and G6, broad agenda covered
Board plans to arrange meeting with new head of COSLA in spring/summer.
Meeting with SEPA Chair and CEO is planned.
LINK have requested a meeting with Bridget Campbell Head of Env't Dct.

Member updates:

RSPB plans a joint hustings with Nourish in April, finalising dates (see next LINK bulletin)
LINK national environment hustings 13 April (evening, Edinburgh), chaired by Joyce McMillan
SG pollinator strategy for Scotland coming soon (see latest AMR)
Wildlife subgroup will meet Scot Gov't shortly.
FoES flags the moratorium on fracking is only a moratorium, and needs more action from members
Ramblers and others' SEF seminar on 4 March on active health with Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health attending
APRS and MCS organised successful event in Parliament on the Bottle campaign

4. Next network meeting

Next network meeting takes place 19 May, venue tbc