



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Strategy 2020 – 2024



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment

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Preface

The context in which LINK is operating today is very different to when the network was established 30 years ago. Today we have a devolved government, who have since 1999 been proactive and world leading in many ways in the legislation that has been brought forward. While Scotland's legislation is progressive and forward looking, there has been less success on its implementation¹, which is where LINK's focus needs to move. Ten years on from LINK's report, From rhetoric to reality², not much has changed.

In the last year, Nicola Sturgeon has made two important announcements that should impact how Scotland develops in the coming decades: in April 2019, she announced a climate emergency, and confirmed in a letter to LINK that the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis were of equal importance in shaping the Government's way forward³. In July 2019, she also outlined her views on measuring success and moving from GDP to wellbeing, measuring, in her words, 'what matters'⁴. Recognition at Government level that GDP limits our success because it only measures outputs is extremely welcome, particularly in these times of environmental stresses. Defining what it means to be a successful nation needs to go way beyond pure finances:

the challenges of the current climate emergency and biodiversity crisis mean that our nation's wellbeing must fundamentally be based on a healthy environment where nature and people thrive.

In policy terms this shift started in 2007 with publication of Scotland's National Performance Framework indicators, including access to green spaces, a halt to biodiversity loss and carbon reduction. Society is ahead of politicians on this: the climate strikes demonstrate quite literally the strength of feeling and demand for real action on climate change – not just at individual level but at national and international levels. People are demanding transformations in what we do and how we do it, in order for future generations to enjoy what current generations have taken for granted.

The environmental context in which we work has also changed: in October 2018, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) outlined what would need to be achieved by 2030 to avoid a global temperature increase of more than 1.5°C, and what a failure to act would look like⁵. The Scottish Government responded by declaring a climate emergency in April 2019⁶, acknowledging the need for action⁷. In May 2019, the International Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

¹ <https://www.scotlink.org/publication/scotlands-environmental-laws-from-rhetoric-to-reality/>

² <https://www.scotlink.org/files/publication/LINKReports/LINKEnvLawsRhetorictoReality.pdf>

³ <https://www.fightforscotlandsnature.scot/news/nicola-sturgeons-letter-underlines-commitment-to-nature-now-lets-see-a-scottish-environment-act/>

⁴

https://www.ted.com/talks/nicola_sturgeon_why_governments_should_prioritize_well_being?lang=age=en

⁵ https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-48077802>

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/global-climate-emergency-scotlands-response-climate-change-secretary-roseanna-cunninghams-statement/>

(IPBES) published a report on global biodiversity trends which highlighted that nature is deteriorating worldwide⁸. This was mirrored in October 2019 by the publication of Scotland's State of Nature report⁹, which illustrated the ongoing declines in Scotland's biodiversity.

This strategic plan identifies what LINK will do in response to these reports and in support of the transformative changes required in Scotland and beyond. LINK cannot do this alone however: it is vital that we work with other stakeholders and partners in wider coalitions to maximise the expertise, and resources we can all bring to tackling these global, world changing issues.

⁸ <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment-report-biodiversity-ecosystem-services>

⁹ <https://www.scotlink.org/publication/state-of-nature/>

Where do we want to be in 2030?

Having enabled and invested in transformation at local and national levels, Scotland's environment is protected, restored and enhanced and everyone in Scotland has access to a clean and healthy environment that is able to provide for people and species.

LINK's role:

LINK facilitates change: we build collaboration, support and enable partnership working to add value for the environment through leadership and engagement. As the voice for Scotland's environment, the LINK network exists to support our members in making change happen on the ground for a healthier environment, healthier societies and a healthier planet. We do this by:

Amplify	We amplify member messages on Scotland's environment
Build	We build and support multi stakeholder partnerships
Campaign	We work together to achieve positive change
Challenge	We use evidence to challenge decisions affecting the environment
Coordinate	We coordinate national solutions to global issues
Create	We create public support and political space
Enable	We bring members together to create capacity
Inspire	We inspire transformational stories about a better future
Provide	We provide evidence based, trusted knowledge
Speak	We speak on behalf of nature and the environment

LINK will achieve much more by working in partnership with other stakeholders, as well as members, both within and outwith the environment sector. We will extend our hands to other networks and stakeholders who share similar and parallel objectives with us.

Our priorities are defined by our Working Groups, who engage across 15 priority policy areas and who are supported by the staff team, board of trustees and 2 overarching groups on funding and communications. Priorities are defined on an annual basis by the groups and are assessed in terms of delivery success and need twice annually. All priorities contribute to LINK's vision and objectives, which are shaped themselves by the challenges and context within which we operate.

In 2020, at the very start of the decade of ecological restoration¹⁰, our focus is on the implementation of nature solutions to climate change. This approach delivers on climate change and biodiversity loss, while building healthier ecosystems in Scotland and across the world through land management approaches and building a circular economy. 2020 is the year when priority actions and targets will be identified at global level through the Convention on Biological Diversity and reporting on past targets will be used to inform future roll out. LINK will make the most of

¹⁰ <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/new-un-decade-ecosystem-restoration-offers-unparalleled-opportunity>

these opportunities to identify appropriate actions across policy areas that, if delivered, at the right level of spatial impact required within the time scale of the climate and biodiversity emergencies, will ensure Scotland is a world leader on nature based solutions to economic, social and environmental needs.

LINK's 2050 vision

Scotland's environment is Connected | Restored | Resilient |
Our society and wellbeing have nature at their heart, benefiting people, communities and the planet.

LINK's place in today's world

Our mission is to secure sustainable development within and beyond Scotland, where all aspects of the country's environment are valued to enhance the quality of life for all.

LINK provides a trusted conduit between environmental NGOs and policy makers in Scotland. We provide insight based on scientific evidence, expert opinion and strategic assessment.

LINK's audiences and our value proposition

LINK has two main audiences:

LINK's members

LINK provides:

- Access to expertise, networks and other multi stakeholder partnerships
- A shared endeavour providing solidarity and a place to find common ground
- A critical mass to influence standards and practices
- Amplification of members' voices

LINK members have also come together as LINK to reach out to the public in Scotland in time limited campaigns, under Fight for Scotland's Nature and Save Scottish Seas. The value to LINK's members of coming together under these campaigns has been such that members are keen to retain and build on this success in building public support to create political space for action.

Policy and decision makers, and other coalitions with shared aims

LINK provides:

- The home of credible and trusted knowledge and opinion on Scotland's environment
- The collective representative for >0.5 million people in Scotland
- A unified voice finding and providing consensus on complicated issues
- A citizen-led voice for the environment

LINK's Objectives

A sustainable Scotland

Where Scotland's nature, land and seascapes are healthy and resilient, supporting thriving communities and flourishing people.

A strong voice

For the environment, nature, land and seascapes so they support a prosperous future.

An effective network

Communicating effectively, working together and achieving more.

Transformations required:

1. A move from rhetoric to reality.
2. Environmental leadership from the eNGO sector and government.
3. Land use that is nature and climate friendly.
4. A circular economy with net zero emissions.
5. All major infrastructure projects, as part of National Planning Framework, deliver for biodiversity, climate and society, through environmental audits that together map cumulative impacts
6. An Environment Act that provides underpinned principles, an independent watchdog, targets and funding.
7. Implementing the four environmental principles across all activities (see point 6).
8. Adopting a Green Deal approach to ensure a just transition to a climate and nature friendly world.

This plan is the result of a 6-month process involving stakeholder input, member and Board surveys, meetings and events.

An executive summary of this plan can be found here:

<https://www.scotlink.org/publication/link-strategy-2020-2024/>

Who is LINK?

Membership and staff

LINK has a membership of more than 35 member organisations, who represent collectively more than 0.5 million people. Members work together through LINK towards our strategic objectives in working Groups, each led by a convenor and vice convenor drawn from member bodies. Staff provide linkages between groups, maintain consistency and flag opportunities. Staff also maintain reporting and administrative functions on behalf of the network.

Board and Honorary Fellows

LINK is supported by a Board of Trustees drawn from the membership, an Honorary President and Honorary Fellows, who advise LINK and LINK Groups on their own areas of work and expertise. The Honorary Fellow role complements that of LINK's President and enables LINK to retain contact with exceptional leaders who have contributed to LINK's development in the past and are in a position to support LINK and to promote LINK's vision. They are asked to offer their expertise and input to LINK's work, to help develop the network's external relationships and facilitate LINK's wider connections across civic society and the policy arena.

How does LINK work?

LINK provides a forum for its member bodies, enabling informed debate and cooperation within the voluntary environmental sector. Central to this are information-sharing, discussion and concerted action.

LINK assists communication between its member bodies, governments and other parts of civic society. Acting at local, national and international levels, LINK aims to ensure that environmental sustainability is recognised and delivered across public policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

LINK is a dynamic network, helping members to achieve collective goals. We do this by sharing knowledge and information; encouraging discussion on key concerns; building consensus and taking action together.

Working through LINK allows member bodies to build collectively on their individual strengths and act smartly together. Mechanisms for collaboration include:

- Horizon scanning to inform changing environmental priorities.
- Ensuring the network is well informed about current political, economic and social contexts.
- Prioritising collective work and resources to have greater impact or influence.
- Developing actions around priorities through groups of members working together.
- Providing delegates to relevant national and international stakeholder forums who can represent the case for environmental sustainability.
- Holding events to raise awareness, encourage debate, make the case for change and influence direction on key issues.

LINK's risk appetite

LINK is a member led network and our appetite for risk is set by our members. After 30 years, while LINK has had many successes, there are many challenges ahead and nature is still not in a good state. Over the last 50 years, more than 60% of species in Scotland show negative trends in both abundance and distribution since 1970s (State of Nature Scotland 2019), above the global declines of 50% reported in WWF Living Planet 2018. Globally, IPCC and IPBES both show that we have just over a decade to limit the impacts of climate change (IPCC 2018) and reverse

biodiversity declines (IPBES 2019). The pressures on our environment, of climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and overconsumption have all increased and contributed to ongoing loss and degradation both in Scotland and across the world.

Today, the need for organisations to work together and with government and Parliamentarians to act effectively on the knowledge we have and the will society is showing is ever more urgent. Together, we can inspire action, create political will to live within our environmental boundaries to build a prosperous and resilient society.

The biggest risk therefore is that LINK does not achieve its objective of a sustainable Scotland. This is the biggest risk not just for the organisation but for the planet. LINK's appetite to risk therefore has of necessity increased with the increasing pressures on the environment which are still not addressed.

Our new strategy places the environment at the heart of policy making. It builds on over 30 years of bringing conservationists, access specialists and legal experts together. Building effective policy in this way conserves and restores nature, promotes and enables people to access nature and builds a successful society, based on a circular and truly sustainable economy. LINK's commitment is to pool our resources and to work together to achieve significant change in policy and on the ground.

Making an impact for a Sustainable Scotland

Objectives	
A strong voice for Scotland's environment	An efficient and effective network
A resilient environment with thriving nature A voice strengthened through joint messages The environment is at the centre of policy making Increased campaign impact through LINK and LINK members Stronger and wider coalitions	More common ground within the network Common ground resourced through aligned priorities and more efficient resource use Greater focus on key issues Stronger and sustainable network achieved through membership
Activities	
Campaigns and projects on key agreed issues Develop & maintain strong coalitions in Scotland, UK, EU.	Clear & measurable targets at group level Measure impact through evaluation plans Coordinating different lenses of members to holistic whole Creating space through events / reports etc Reports to funders, board & audiences reflect impact, positive outcomes Using reporting templates KPIs are grouped & relevant to each group ERCS is documented as model going forward Prioritised action & non-action

LINK's programmes of work:

Areas of work		
Our Seas	Our Land	Our Society
Groups		
Marine Aquaculture	Deer Food and farming Hill tracks Landscape Land reform, land use Wildlife Wildlife crime Woodlands	Brexit Economics Governance Legal Strategy Planning
Group Outcomes		
Sustainable fish stocks Ecologically productive habitats Flourishing coastal communities Wild seascapes	Ecologically coherent landscapes Inspiring landscapes and nature Productive sustainable land use Healthy ecosystems	Equal rights for communities A circular economy Effective environmental legislation Environmentally aware planning

Knowledge management: knowledge, data & information

LINK, as a network, is a huge and significant repository of expertise and knowledge on the environment, species, habitats, land and sea, people and their access, use of and dependency on nature, on land and at sea. The expertise within the network relates to on the ground implementation of conservation and recovery for example, restoration and community building and data gathering, as well as policy making, and implementation. This expertise and knowledge is freely shared amongst network members through LINK's Working Groups, all convened by an expert member. In addition, LINK has access to the expertise offered by LINK's Honorary Fellows, who contribute to the strategic direction of LINK and to Groups.

LINK retains very little data beyond the publications and information on LINK's website. Publications and resources are available to all, except for member only information including updates and templates. Members have access to a monthly bulletin updates for LINK as well as weekly Advocacy bulletins.

Resource management: our resources

Human resources

Staff: LINK has a core team of 5, in 2019, 3.9 FTE. In addition, LINK has 5 project staff, in 2019, 3.3 FTE. Project staff deliver time limited projects, in line with member priorities and funded as discrete projects.

Board: LINK has 10 trustees and the option to co-opt a further 2 trustees. There are 3 Honorary Positions: chair, vice chair and Treasurer. Trustees serve a term of 3 years and retire in rotation, serving a maximum of 3 terms. Trustees are all drawn from the membership. Co-opted trustees are brought in on advice of the board and with support of the membership. In 2019, there are 2 Board subgroups for funding and employment.

Fellows: LINK appoints Honorary fellows whose expertise adds capacity to LINK in meeting our objectives. Fellows are invited to contribute to LINK and to contribute as much as they wish. They fulfil specific tailored roles as required. Fellows are appointed by the membership on advice from the Board.

Members: members are key to LINK's work and work together in Groups. Member reps lead LINK groups as Convenors and vice Convenors. Each Group draws up a Forward Plan in Autumn for delivery over the following year. Progress is reported at a Networking meeting in May. Reporting against Group objectives enables LINK to track progress against the network's objectives and to report back to funders and supporters.

Financial resources

LINK receives core funding from charitable trusts including Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and William Grant Foundation, Scottish Natural Heritage (NatureScot from 1 May 2020) and the Scottish Government. Time limited projects in 2019 are supported by John Ellerman Foundation, Friends Provident Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, WWF Scotland, RSPB Scotland and LINK members.

LINK maintains a Discretionary Project Fund (DPF), available to LINK Groups to support specific work, from which match funding can be gained or for discrete pieces of work for which funding is not available. These funds are subject to a competitive process within LINK and awards are agreed by LINK's Board. The amount in DPF varies with levels of core funding and as a result, the amount per year is not necessarily maintained.

The way forward:

LINK has developed a theory of change to help map the way forward from 2020. See Appendix 1 for details.

LINK has an operational plan to deliver this strategic plan. The operational plan matches LINK's priority themes against our strategic objectives, identifies core, or ongoing activities to achieve those objectives and developmental activities required to build on successes to date. The operational plan 2020 – 2024 is currently in development and will be available here when complete.

Both the strategic and operational plans provide the context for LINK's annual work programmes, developed by the network on an annual basis. Progress is reported every 6 months. LINK's work programme 2020 – 2021 is in Appendix 2.

Get in touch

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Appendix 1: LINK's Theory of Change



