

## Note of LINK Network meeting held 12 August 2020 by zoom

### Attending

Alan Caldwell (facilitating) and Galina Toteva (tech support)

Members: Matthew Crighton - Economics Group (FoES), Aedán Smith (RSPB), Sheila George (WWF), John Thomson Land Use, reform, landscape (APRS/SCNP), Calum Duncan, Marine Group (MCS), Helen Todd Hilltracks (Ramblers), Alan McDonnell Woodlands (TFL), Lloyd Austin, Governance Group (HF), James Curran (HF), Allan Bantick (SB), Naima Todd (WTS), Liz Ferrell Wildlife Crime (Bat CT), Beryl Leatherland Hilltrack (SWLG), Keesje Avis (Nourish), Lewis Bloss (KSB), Craig Macadam, Wildlife Group (Buglife), Paul Walton Wildlife Group (RSPB), Rebecca Millar (NTS), Andrew Stark WWFS, Diarmid Hearn (NTS), Denis Mollison (HWDT).

Staff: Deborah Long, Lisa Webb, Vhairi Tollan, Alice Walsh, Dilraj Sokhi Watson, Miriam Ross, Phoebe Cochrane, Juliet Caldwell, Karen Paterson.

Apologies: John Mayhew (APRS), Charles Dundas (LINK Chair), Clare Cavers (Fidra), Kevin Lelland (JMT), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Bruce Wilson (SWT), Sam Gardner (Trustee), Mary Scott (Trustee), Arina Russell (WTS), Rebecca Hughes (APRS), Esther Brooker (MPEO), Shivali Fifield (ERCS), Ian Cowan (ERCS), Douglas Peedle (SWT), Andrew Bachell (HF).

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### Summary of key points raised at networking and next steps:

1. Acknowledge up front the massive capacity challenges that are unlikely to go away soon. Thanks to members, for input and quick responses, we know how tough it is.
  2. In terms of addressing capacity, a suggestion is we can be more effective if we match our strategic actions with topic actions. Eg the nature based solutions that Woodland and Wildlife and Deer groups are working on – more coordination will be beneficial. Regional Land Use Partnerships, work of Land Use Group, Food and Farming group and the Planning Group, something we can do to tie these together better.
  3. Need for consistency and alignment on messaging. Being more innovative with our communications, using films, blogs on ours and others' websites. Using influencers, celebrities and activists on social media.
  4. Being blunt about what we don't want to see come back, those industries that should decline, being honest about job losses there, and how environmental restoration will be paid for, matching public and private investment.
  5. The golden thread through this is the huge importance of the Manifesto work Vhairi is leading on, has to identify hard action, and start to address the rhetoric to reality gap which we have been aware of for years and will have to revisit.
  6. Tactics, working with local communities and how to improve our links with them so what we say and what they say match better, we have work to do there. We have a long list of other sectors that we have links into that we need to start to work more closely with, to get our messages out of the environment box.
  7. Scottish Govt wanting to be in the lead, world leading, better than England, aligned with the EU, so we can work with that, making the most of relationships we have across the UK, GUK and Green Alliance, all aware we have to work together. There is bit more we can do there. Scotland is not going to be part of any EU delegation in the COPs.
  8. The Indy referendum, how we tackle that and how to make the most of it.
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## Detailed note:

**1. Welcome and introduction to format/timing/Zoom:** Alan welcomed everyone, explained how the meeting would be run, covered the zoom functions we would use. The meeting would be recorded (though not the breakout sessions). All were happy.

**2. High level update on today's context; activities and priorities to date at strategic level on working with other stakeholder and networks; green recovery; strategy implementation and roll out.** (Deborah)

We have been working hard to tie together the massive impact of the pandemic with the pre-existing climate and the nature crises. We are aiming for a well-appointed, well-targeted response (as opposed to headless chicken!). To do this we

1. Identify our priorities.
2. Need to adapt, and have enough spare energy to adapt as we go along
3. engage other people in our fight.

Priorities and activities to date (Group plans are covered later).

The Green Recovery, the phrase of the moment. We are reframing all of our work within it via our short-term Green Recovery Group. We aim to disband this in December, hoping that GR activities will by then be clearly embedded within Group workplans. We need to ensure the green in the GR is our version of green.

Our vision for Scotland's environment to be Connected Restored Resilient.

How we achieve our outcomes, what we want to do, how we want to do it, is laid out in the Group plans, brought together in the [spreadsheet circulated](#) (on members website). These were mostly developed before the pandemic and have been shifted because of it. We need to retain our focus on what our priorities are.

Looking up from the coalface: We are organising three webinars before Christmas to help horizon scan, as we did at the launch of our strategy on 6 March. LINK's board has been running a series of strategic workshops under the 3 themes (sustainable Scotland, strong voice, effective network), and there will be the annual strategic planning meeting on 11 November.

How do we have an impact? We cannot do it on our own – its too big, too much and too urgent. We need to engage others and where relevant appropriate their resources to get our messages out. There is a lot of noise (eg transport, aviation). We need to be able to cut through to be heard.

## Discussion:

We are trying to define what we mean by a Green Recovery at the same time as Brexit, and an election year. Its even more important to be clear what we mean and not be distracted by what other people are calling for. Yes.

We have no indications that the Green Recovery will be green. At what point do we call this out? If labelled green that will not play well to our agenda, not being fun, nor green. We need to discuss as organisations and collectively how we deal with this.

Real risk of ScotGovt and the UK Govt in an even more extreme way carrying on with positive green rhetoric and absence of delivery. This applies to Brexit, the watchdog, keeping pace powers with the EU and GR. Talking green and trying to get back to business as usual. We need to call it out.

Political polling indicates its likely we will have a majority SNP Govt, so vital to have positive measures in the SNP manifesto in particular.

We may need to do some calling out before the election or else we will be making angry noises afterwards that will be ignored. It's not just a matter of resource, we have to be really inventive. Video seems to have more traction, and there are other ways of putting our views forward.

We need to be quite blunt. We want to see some sectors like aviation and parts of retail run down, recognising the implications of that. Where are the jobs going to come from. What we want to see is going to have to be paid for by the public purse, so we need to see a reversal of reduction of public spending as a proportion of GDP. We have to be honest about the rebalancing of the economy, not just for the environment, also social care. How we put this across tactically is the difficult issue.

Using different mediums to get the message across is really important. Bella Caledonia articles are quite powerful.

### **3. Update on Parliament priorities going forward: manifesto and elections, legislative priorities, Brexit implications, independence as a possibility.** (Vhairi)

Parliament returned from recess yesterday will have a mix of virtual and hybrid sessions. We are 9 months away from the election. The recent poll shows SNP may get 74 seats, a big majority

All groups have fed into LINK's manifesto. Vhairi is finalising the text version which will be circulated to all members for sign up. She will then be sharing it with the parties. A glossy version will be prepared for early new year and we will be campaigning on it.

Legislative priorities are currently the **Continuity bill**, which incorporates 2 out of 3 of the FFSN campaign asks. We submitted written evidence to both [ECCLR](#) and [Finance](#) Committees, and next week will be presenting oral evidence. There is much activity over August and September, the bill will be passed by Christmas.

The **Agriculture bill** is due for final vote within a month. Our interest is getting a purposes amendment into it. We are working with the parties, RSPB, SCCS and the Food Coalition.

Green Recovery, briefly we have been feeding to Govt our view of what the recovery can be. We have sent a briefing on landscape scale projects and funding.

Brexit: the situation is changing in ways difficult to predict. The Internal Market consultation, looking to standardize trade across the UK is worrying in several respects, on environmental standards, could be a race to the bottom across the UK. We have been critical, and will submit a [response](#). It is an emerging topic over the last month with implications for the Continuity bill. We have a press release going out through FFSN campaign, and are keeping tabs (Governance Group)

#### **Questions:**

*What communications are we having with WCL on these issues?* Most of it's through Greener UK, we are in the loop on discussions through the members we have in common. GUK will organise a meeting in September, that is the moment for the 4 Links to come together to discuss perspectives. We are all approaching this as the opportunity for Govt *not* to roll back on environmental standards.

*Are we on top of the role in which WCL and GUK may have on the Scottish elections, how they are dealing with it?* Several of the UK organisations (WWF included) with Scottish arms are putting pressure on UK colleagues, concern that they won't be saying much at all. Trying to steer them towards the standards. There are also elections in Wales. How we can leverage those. Have not been thinking too much. GUK will look at the Internal Markets bill, will rely on us to steer through it. There will be a lot falling on Vhairi/LINK here.

#### **Part 2: Report back from 4 breakout sessions.**

Two on Green recovery: priorities for LINK to build on member action / priorities.

Two on Governance in relation to Brexit, UK relations and independence.

**Green Recovery Group 1, Phoebe:** RSPB, HWDT, Ramblers, Nourish, NTS took part. Ramblers and NTS are looking at health and access. NTS is looking at tourism and the wider impact, spreading the benefits of it more widely. HWDT, value of jobs in peripheral areas of tourism.

Bring on board: community groups, no ways other than through members and partners we already engage with. Nourish is work on the right to food. Can link those issues into the GR.

Priorities:

1. Using the [poll published last week](#) to show the support for GR and nature conservation as a part of it, and use it in manifesto campaigning.
2. The [5 tests](#), RSPB will be looking at the proposals and commenting. Use them for party manifestos.
3. Tying the GR into the health and wellbeing agendas in rural Scotland. Studies show that health is a key concern in rural Scotland as well as broadband. As well as jobs integrate the health angle into our GR proposals.

**Green Recovery Group 2, Deborah:** we identified initiatives in many of the member bodies. Foes, APRS, TfL, KSB. There are a whole range of other organisations it would be helpful to talk to, and people, including business, community groups, other alliances.

Priorities:

1. leveraging private investment and how important that will be going forward. Some initiatives we are aware of are Abundance, Natural Capital alliance.
2. Importance of corporation reporting on environment to encourage companies to wise up.
3. Importance of local communities, ensure the national ambitions we are talking about match local ones, and one way we can do it is through KSB.
4. Tourism, moving from fleeting experience to a more immersive one, to refocus what the tourism industry is doing.

We identified a long list of organisations we need to talk to, and talk to them better, to be constantly threading our issues of nature, landscapes, CE, alongside climate change and alongside their concerns and messages.

**Governance 1, Lloyd:** capacity issues to bear in mind. One way to do that is to make best use of the LINK resource. Also highlight and make better use of the linkages between the strategic work on governance and GR and the topic groups.

Partners, try and maximise, and if prioritising maximise diversity and political resonance, looking for social, economic and community groups that are listened to and that help constitute a more diverse and representative group. Few examples are signatories of the FFSN letter, Black Environment Network, Coastal community networks, Global Justice Now, and economic players - the more, eg Nature Friendly farming network. There is degree of that going on already, other areas we could explore more.

Manifestos: Challenge the parties to acknowledge the difference between talk and action, and ensure their manifesto commitments relate to the latter.

Scotland's attraction to being 'world leading' or 'better than England', feeds into in each of our policy areas we can describe how they can be either or aligned with EU. Our ability to encourage a race to the top. Outlined Governance Group thinking on Indy to date, until things are clearer to adopt a Referendum Challenge approach as we did in 2014.

On the GR, remember the Werritty report on grouse moor management, and delivering on it as part of GR. Also delivery on wildlife crime is important for parts of the public sector like the police, so include in the GR.

**Governance 2, Vhairi:** focused on the people needing to be reached out to, including the renewables sector, CBI, food groups and how their perspectives might change after Brexit happens. Other groups to be in touch with on the manifesto, Just Transition Commission and the Climate Emergency Summit. Celebrities and how to work with them, eg Holly Gillybrand. (Sam Butler Schloss – Alan)

Benefits for members in being involved. WTS flagged usefulness in speaking with one voice on the Continuity bill, and WWF the use of capacity.

How to make sure we are all pulling together on messages on the election. The importance of the party manifestos to have the GR embedded in them and in ours.

Alan - useful report <https://www.rsgs.org/informing-policy>

#### 4. Updates on activities across LINK from all Groups.

**Wildlife** Craig: International biodiversity process, COP 15, the Edinburgh Declaration, a statement by sub national governments to be published shortly and delivered at the COP in May 2021.

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy process - we are still excluded from SGovt discussions and pushing at cracks in the door.

Two strands of work are progressing on targets; what we want in the Environment Act, and future UK targets to feed into global targets, through Environment Links UK.

A briefing on [nature based solutions](#) was published. We have commissioned a film on nature networks to be ready in draft by early September. We will work out how to use it in advocacy, and what we can do with Species Champions in run up to elections and beyond.

Craig is resurrecting the Freshwater group. The next round of River Basin Management Plans is coming, and there are other things we can push on, around pollution and free flowing rivers, and peatlands.

James noted (in chat) there is an opportunity to link "governance" and "green recovery" . Government, in its response to the economic recovery advisory report, states formation of a performance monitoring framework. Whatever that means the green NGO sector should be part of performance monitoring.

**Wildlife Crime** Liz: Three Priority Areas. The group have been tied up with the Animal and Wildlife Bill as it made its way through parliament. From now until March priorities, subject to Covid disruption are:

1. Advocacy work around final LINK manifesto
  - a. Establishing a fulltime Wildlife Crime Unit within Police Scotland.
  - b. Implementing Werritty recommendations on grouse moor licensing.
2. Review and update of Natural Injustice reports: these are 2015 LINK reports which reviewed the success of enforcement of wildlife Protection legislation in Scotland and the suggestions for how to eliminate wildlife crime in Scotland
  - a. Perhaps link up with Governance and Wildlife groups – in terms of highlighting funding needed to tackle wildlife crime?
3. Werritty Review (dependant on Scottish Government movement on the matter, COVID-19) Published in 2019 this review looked at the effects of grouse moor management on Scottish wildlife and the countryside. Group need to have advocacy for the implementation of the recommendations

- a. Letter to be sent to Rosanna Cunningham, but on hold just now
- b. link to a GR.

**Woodlands** Alan McDonnell: Group has developed a set of [principles](#) for Net 0 for trees and woodlands. Working on a draft strategic vision, the key benefits of trees and woodlands and develop actions around that. Restoring damaged woodlands, and expansion. What should expansion look like and how it should work. Current issues are around deer, bridging to the Deer Working Group report, and natural regeneration, challenge some existing land uses, interfaces with them and how they work, how to channel constructive dialogues, hold the space on native woodland and nature friendly forestry, tied to the GR agenda. A transition to a different mix of forestry to remove the polarized split, that makes more sense for the environment and local economies. Carbon, and not just about trees everywhere, has big implications, to feed into more sophisticated conversations. Alliance for Scotland's rain forests, to have a cohesive voice for native woodland. Urban canopy cover, what woodland can offer to urban populations.

Keesje: quite a few members on the COP 26 coalition civil society network are massively anti nature based solutions. Is the Woodland group thinking on how to counter this, see some tension in civil society groups. Nuances we might need to explore. Nourish is doing a lot of work on agro forestry, and the benefits for local economies.

Alan: interested in how its developing. Need to look at how woodland expansion will affect local communities and how they can use the assets, will be key to how the dynamic plays out. Also the integrity of the carbon units process.

Matthew: is this because it appears that Govts are making it a way to deal with the crisis without taking tough decisions? It is because they are international discussions, displacement of the two conversations using the same terminology.

Matthew (via chat) followed up: We have to be very careful with the use of the term solutions - making it clear that nature-based measures which we propose are only part of the whole package of measures which we need, and not allow it to be seen by anyone that they are presented as in opposition to tougher economic decisions which are needed.

Paul: recent Confor report saying sitka is great for biodiversity landed well with decision makers in Govt. Is the group planning to do anything to respond to it?

A WTS briefing has gone to MSPs. Alan will share it. Could it be more useful as a be a LINK briefing? Decided not to give it oxygen, but may need to. **Action: Woodland and Wildlife Groups to discuss.**

**Deer** Alan: looking to respond positively to the Deer working group and its recommendations, getting good support from Scottish Forestry. Have a meeting with SG ahead. The DPF funded research has been useful.

**Food and farming** Sheila: Priority is Post Brexit rural support. Agriculture Bill, finished stage 2, a wasted opportunity as it stands. Trying to secure an amendment for a purpose clause, for what we want this funding to do for the interim period at Stage 3. Parties all brought forward their own purpose clauses and none of them came through. We are working with SLE on a clause.

Group [briefing](#) Renewing Scotland's Rural Areas (draft version) fed into the Farming and Food Production Future Policy Group, which Deborah sits on, looking at future of rural support, alongside others' reports. The FFPFG's report will be out before Christmas.

**Land Reform, land Use, Landscape** John: lots of activity on Regional Land Use Partnerships and Frameworks; what partnerships might look like, have a good relationship with the Scottish Land Commission on the first, its advice to Govt to go next month, we will try and strengthen the case SLC is making against some of the landowning interests. There is a link between that and Food & Faming

groups work on rural support, should be rooted in priorities identified through RLUF. Also a link to be made between these and Planning; Regional spatial strategies, and NPF4, important to maintain integration. Keeping eye on the land reform agenda, important to land owning member bodies and more generally. There has been a lot of turnover at SGovt, so need to re-establish contact before the election. Landscape remit, and Group: Main thing to report is the wider Scottish Landscape Alliance we helped to kickstart, has come up with a high level statement on landscape and the contribution it can make in a variety of ways. Likely to go public in Sept/Oct. Hoping for a Parliamentary debate in November. Conscious within the alliance the need to maintain close liaison with LINK bodies, most of whom are on it, to set out an agenda. Two themes there, back to onshore wind energy resurgence which will spur us to think on how far we should be pressing for a more strategic approach to it, not managing to liaise with the industry here. Aviation lighting is one of the issues. The other is protected landscapes, not just National Parks, also NSAs and local parks, woefully neglected and in need of review. Thinking of a conference on this in autumn 2021. **Action: close integration with Planning, Food and Farming groups.**

**Planning** Aedan: Not personally involved any more, some points are; Working with the Hilltracks group to remove development rights for hilltracks. Energy developments in the right places. Equal rights of appeal in planning decisions. Engaging with NPF4 and its objectives, better protection for Greenbelts, aligning with the LUS, inclusion of the NEN, housing, principles for positive affects for biodiversity, policies on peat extraction, on wild land, and community engagement with the system.

Q. in light of deregulation in England, and internal markets are the Planning group going to look at that in more detail. **Action: for agenda of the next meeting.**

**Hilltracks** Helen: consultation on the PDR postponed indefinitely from March. Following up some of the Prior Notifications, mainly Beryl and George, still a need for casework, have reminded CNPA we are still here, and pleased to have Hilltracks included in LINK's manifesto once again.

**Economics** Matthew: *Circular Economy for a Fairer Footprint* project is in its last year. Legacy will be the CE Alliance and how we help it sustain if we cannot do it ourselves. A big part of what we have been feeding into Just Transition, GR, and also feeding into other work on the need for a new economic strategy, Green New Deal. We are asking for a new CE bill and more concrete proposals on extended producer responsibility. While CE is not a waste issue we want better standards for waste and recycling as in Wales, which feeds into GND. Looking forward to the Climate Change plan, it is important that CE gets into all sections of that, not just waste. Member groups are also pursuing work on the Just Transition, the National Investment Bank, the £1bn project. There is much we don't get time to do, monitoring business and working with it, getting them to report on environmental aspects. We are not really attending to the economic issues of the F&F and Marine groups, due to capacity.

**Marine** Calum: 5/6 of Scotland is the sea! Furlough is contributing to capacity issue, Esther is meantime supporting the Group very well. Some funding to the MPEO post until May, and fundraising for beyond. Preparing a vision, Ocean Recovery Plan, looking for the environmental targets we are asking for, 30% of seas protected, and new fisheries legislation, and innovative funding. This inputs to LINK's manifesto and will also underpin focussed advocacy going forward. We commissioned a video to push this vision and the vitalness of the LINK role. Members did not support parity with wildlife crime on marine conservation orders. Will be responding to ECCLR's call for a marine enquiry. Members are engaging in fisheries pillar on the UK bill, power grab issues, a strong devolved component, and some input to that process.

**Governance** Lloyd: 3 headlines. Brexit, elections and other. Brexit mostly covered previously. The Continuity bill is the big thing until Christmas, the principles

and watchdog in some form, working to strengthen that. Will try and flag up nature targets in that debate, though more likely post-election. Work was commissioned on targets, and the importance of statutory underpinning. Joining with ELUK as to how UK targets are derived and fed into international process. Fisheries bill, Agriculture Bill, Trade Bill and Internal Market bill, feeding into all of those through GUK.

Manifestos' Vhairi has covered.

Other: we had a massive agenda set by our [Governance Matters](#) report, and not done the half of it. Lots of things we could do and do as opportunities arise. Lobbying Act review, to which members were invited to sign up.

Legal strategy Group: most importantly built the foundations for the ERCS which now exists as a SCIO and will be its own entity by the end of 2020 and may be a future member.

The non ERCS work may revert to Governance, eg advocacy on environmental courts. The other is how, and if, and if so what we do around the Indy debate. Will be the GG's job to coordinate, where the debate will happen within LINK.

**Green Recovery** Deborah: 4 priority areas.

1. Live project spreadsheet collates all the projects members are working on that would help a GR. Out of that have come some reports, one on landscape and seascape published and gone to Ministers.
2. Submitted evidence to ECCLR.
3. Five tests, and looking to apply them to the response by Govt to the Higgins report.
4. Public poll, results released on Friday, we [press released](#) the helpful results of massive public support for nature measures, so encourage all to use as you can. **Action: all members and groups.**

Aedan: how great it is to get the ERCS up and running, will be a powerful ally, a massive success. Also the survey, a powerful advocacy too.

## 5. Summary of next steps.

Deborah summarised the key points that have come up that we should take forward. Above.

Finishing with a huge thanks to everyone for participating, and it feels that the more we do the more we have to do. We appreciate all of your effort. Please make the most of us, capacity wise. Do keep communicating with us. Our next big meeting is **11 November**. It may be online, so fill in the survey please (Lisa sent this after the meeting). If it works well it's a good way to go forward to be more inclusive. Thanks to all and to Alan and Galina for their help.

Paul thanked Deborah and staff in particular for the incredibly useful support work she has done around Covid, it has been massively helpful, a big thanks from RSPB and sure others will agree. Hear hear!

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