

Scottish
Environment
LINK

Annual Report Summary

April 2020 to
March 2021

A message from LINK's Chair, Charles Dundas

The last year has been challenging for all. But LINK has risen to it. With lockdown starting in late March 2020, this year's annual report reflects an entire 12 months, working in very different circumstances than before. During this time, LINK shut its offices and all staff have been working at home. LINK Groups all moved their work online, supported by LINK subscriptions to new software that made that move easier and as a result, participation in LINK Group meetings has been higher.

The Spring and Summer of 2020 were marked by a change in focus for LINK and our focus was on the links between ourselves and nature, local communities of people and wildlife and the benefits that being in touch with nature could bring to us all. As Government began to emerge from an exclusive focus on the pandemic and managing its impact, LINK kept a watching eye on priority policy areas for a green recovery, the impact of Brexit and resilience in Scotland's communities, organisations and society as a whole.

LINK's staff, members and supporters are the real strength behind the network and this has been amply underlined by the pandemic and the way in which, despite the huge challenges thrown up by Covid-19, Scotland's environment remains at the top of government and society's priorities. As a network, we will be building on this platform going forward, to deliver on our joint objectives to build a sustainable Scotland for people, communities and the planet.



A message from LINK's Chief Officer, Deborah Long

2020 started with the nationwide lockdown response to Covid-19 and ever since LINK, along with everyone else, has been adapting to a new way of working. There have been benefits: new ways of working are always excellent stimuli for new ideas and new perspectives. But there have also been downsides, as staff and members' staff have struggled to maintain a lively interest in their work while coping with homeworking and schooling, furlough and uncertainty of the highest order.

Nature is still very much at the fore of what we do and 2021 will be the year when we build on the foundations we established in 2020. LINK has played its part this year, using our strategic plan, launched right before lockdown, to guide the network priorities and help us sort the urgent and the important. Members worked together, supported by LINK staff, to develop and communicate positions on what makes a truly green recovery, why nature and climate emergencies must be tackled together, how a circular economy can be transformative, the increasingly urgent need for ocean recovery and the future of Scotland's food production systems, to pull out just a few.

We will continue in our role to coordinate and create, inspire and speak out. We will continue to work with other networks, alliances and partners, building an even stronger voice for the environment at the start of the Decade for Ecosystem Restoration. By amplifying our members' voices, by building and strengthening relationships with others, we are bringing nature to the heart of society and the well being of people, communities and the planet.



The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 1 – A Sustainable Scotland

Before the Covid 19 pandemic, and the first lockdown just days prior to this reporting period, the intertwined nature and climate emergencies were rising up the Scottish Government's agenda. By April, plans for Scotland's economic recovery from the pandemic were already starting to form with appointment of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery taking evidence and reporting to Government in June. To contribute to this process we formed an overarching [Green Recovery Group](#), to bring together expertise from across our sector, developing ideas and policy recommendations to contribute to this and other conversations on a green recovery, and to ensure that nature, climate and broader environmental aspects would be central to a recovery plan.

A green recovery must be fair, enabling individuals to make effective consumption choices and moving away from growth towards sufficiency. This chimes with the public mood too. We commissioned a [survey](#) in May 2020 that showed the [public want a less wasteful economy](#) with lighter demands on the planet; where products are easy to repair, businesses are responsible and the Government leads the way.

In September we [welcomed](#) the Programme for Government's plans for green jobs and training as part of its green recovery programme.

LINK contributed [five key tests](#), a variant on those adopted by the Green Investment Bank, by which actions should be judged if they are to contribute to a green recovery from the multiple emergencies we face. We [applied these](#) tests to the Government's Recovery Plan, and believe there is work ahead to increase ambition for transformative action towards environmental, wellbeing and fairness outcomes.

The pandemic had a massive impact on our sector. From April 2020 we were making the case with governments, funders and the agencies about the need for more pandemic support for our sector. We surveyed members in April and again in October to assess impact and compiled a live list of 'shovel-ready' projects that were begun or about to begin.



A thriving third sector is crucial for delivering cost effective projects involving thousands of volunteers that contribute hugely to Government's biodiversity strategy. We published the report, [Still Delivering the Goods](#) in February 2021 to demonstrate the extent of restoration led by our sector in Scotland. This highlights the clear need for a step change in funding, an effective policy framework and partnership working for biodiversity conservation.

In Spring 2021 we held a very well attended discussion event with the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital: **Scotland's natural capital – land-based opportunities in a green recovery**, with the widely shared [infographic](#) that followed outlining key opportunities and enabling actions.



The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 2 - Strong Voice

With no face to face contact and with several public policy focusses delayed due to the pandemic, our groups met online, responded to consultations, liaised with other interests and held online events. We published a total of 11 reports, 24 briefings, 20 consultation responses and seven written evidence to Parliamentary Committees, supplemented by oral evidence. We took part in a wide range of external stakeholder groups; the member representatives and staff acting on behalf of the sector. We wrote to Ministers, publishing nine of these letters on our website. We also published 20 press releases, 54 blogs and commissioned five films. These are all shared via social media channels [Instagram](#) [twitter](#) [facebook](#) and [You tube](#).



From January the Fight for Scotland's Nature campaign steering group moved onto planning the next phase of the campaign, to run from May to September 2021, to set [clear, legally binding targets](#) to halt and reverse the decline of nature.

A [summary version](#) was published in February 2021 of LINK's [Manifesto for Holyrood election](#), with all groups contributing to the proposals, and excellent sign up from member bodies. We were pleased to see many of these good ideas reflected in the parties' own manifestos, many with broad cross party support.

The Planning Group coordinated a [comprehensive response](#) to the Scottish Government's Call for Ideas on the next **National Planning Framework 4**. Key to transforming Scotland's planning system to deliver public benefits, meet net-zero goals and contribute to the recovery of biodiversity, will be Nature Networks:



we commissioned a [short film](#) to explain the concept more clearly, as there has been a lot of resistance over concerns on its impact on development.

We published our agenda for the next decade of marine recovery in a new document, An [Ocean Recovery Plan for Scotland](#), which alongside a [short film](#) setting the scene, was launched in December.



Year in summary: Strategic Theme 3 - Effective Network

With many of our member representatives for LINK groups on furlough or otherwise deployed to deal with pandemic related impacts in their own organisations over the year, the LINK staff resource was vital to keep work plans to deadline; to take a lead on generic issues such as the impact of the pandemic on our sector and to move all operations online without affecting the service to members, all of whom were working from home.

Members took part in internal meetings and workshops including the Spring and Autumn network meetings. In addition to the regular group meetings, member seminars were held on The Four Capitals Approach; A Human Right to a Healthy Environment; and the 30 x 30 Target.



LINK's festive reception was held online to say thank you for members and featured a new film for the network.

[2020 LINKing to nature and the outdoors](#)

There was excellent progress with development of the **Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland**, which we have incubated from its beginnings in January 2019. ERCS registered with OSCR as a new Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and became fully independent of LINK in July 2021.

LINK in numbers

Work Programme supported by 14 staff members:

5.7 core staff* 3.8 project staff*
*Full Time Equivalent

With support from our network of 30
Honorary Fellows

Oversight was provided by
11 Trustees

49% core costs supported in member fees and in kind support



5 films and 54 blogs



82 consultation responses, briefings, reports, position papers and media releases



8 webinars organised

Fight for Scotland's Nature



campaign supported by 39 LINK members, 31 other organisations and 7,200 individuals.



Species Champions
105 MSPs in the Scottish Parliament standing up for **111** species



6 Organisational Supporters received the highly-regarded Advocacy Monitoring and attended LINK events



172 meetings held with ministers, politicians of all parties, and colleagues in the statutory agencies and civil society organisations

Voluntary Engagement
within the network equalled
1,340 days' work or **£371,000**,
in financial terms

40 member bodies took some part in our:
17 Groups,
and **9** member events.

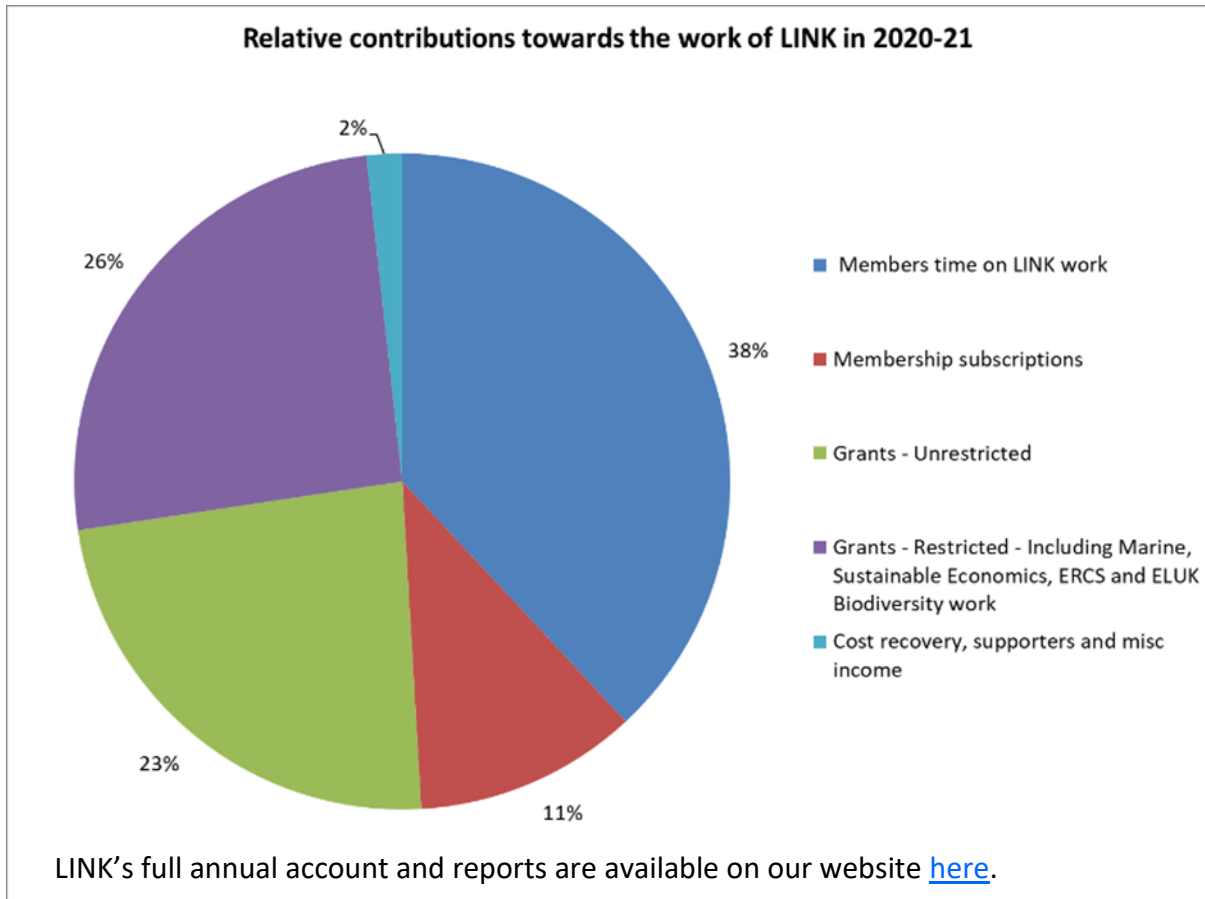
LINK was engaged across **41** external stakeholder groups



Circular Economy
Circular Scotland coalition of **39** organisations supported a strong Circular Economy bill

100%
of members engaged in at least one work area

Finances in summary



Looking Ahead

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted massively on the eNGO sector in Scotland. LINK's two member surveys, in April 2020 and October 2020, revealed consistent messages as unrestricted funding sources were severely impacted. However, the long tail of covid-19 is proving significant and longer than first estimated. Restricted income levels are expected to remain low. LINK and our members will continue to work closely with funders, including with our partners at Environmental Funders Network, to maintain close understanding and cooperation and to build mechanisms that enable ongoing delivery despite very challenging circumstances.

Beyond the impact of Covid-19, work across LINK will continue to reflect the start of the Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, with opportunities brought through CoP26 in Glasgow and CoP15 in Kunming, with the Scottish Government led Edinburgh Declaration. The focus in LINK will continue to be on raising awareness of the scale and significance of the ongoing nature and climate crises and to finding innovative, inclusive and effective ways to make progress towards a truly green recovery.

Building relationships and partnerships beyond the eNGO sector is a key focus as we strive to work more closely with those operating in wellbeing, sustainable business, land and sea management. We will also be looking to provide support for member bodies on equality, inclusion and diversity across the network, following our member survey in February 2021, which provides us with a base line for future progress, as we all journey towards total inclusion, equality and diversity throughout the network.

LINK's strategic plan is now 12 months old and continues to guide LINK priorities and help the staff team and the network identify priorities we all work towards our agreed strategic objectives:

Scotland's environment is connected | restored | resilient |
Our society and well being have nature at their heart, benefiting people, communities and the planet

Thanks to LINK members



Thanks to LINK Funders

All of our work is underpinned by member and supporter subscriptions, additional financial contributions and voluntary time from members, supporters and honorary officers, which together account for over 50% of total contributions. We are very grateful to all LINK's funders.

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Craignish Trust, Friends Provident Foundation, NatureScot, Scottish Government, Tay Charitable Trust, William Grant Foundation.



Thanks to LINK's supporters

Many organisations support [Fight for Scotland's Nature](#) and the Circular Scotland coalition: thank you all.

And to our Organisational supporters:

