



LINK Strategic Planning meeting held in Birnam Arts Centre on Friday 23rd November 2012

PRESENT

Deborah Long – Chair

Members:

Fraser Wallace – JMT; Jon Wordsworth – Archaeology Scotland: Jim Densham, Julia Harrison, Aedan Smith, Lloyd Austin, Lisa Webb – RSPB; Mary Church – FOES; Calum Duncan – MCS; John Mayhew – APRS; Mandy Orr – Trustee;; Christiane Valluri-Nitsch – SWLG; Lillian Kelly - Soil Assoc Scot; Roger Powell – SCRA; Gus Jones – BSCG; John Thomson – SCNP; Davie Black – Plantlife; Helen Todd – Ramblers Scotland; Diarmid Hearn – NTS; Angus Yarwood – Woodland Trust; Jonny Hughes, Bruce Wilson – SWT; Alistair MacKinnon – SAGS; Dan Barlow – WWF; Susan Tierney – Scottish Badgers

In attendance:

Ross Finnie, President

Helen Zealley, Honorary Fellow.

Jen Anderson, Sarah Archer, Rea Cris, Andy Myles, Nick Underdown, Alice Walsh - Staff

1. Introductions

DL opened the meeting pointing to the challenging funding environment, the benefits of using network diversity more intelligently, and of identifying how to respond in a climate of short-term thinking. She encouraged the meeting wherever possible to look to a 2014 and if possible longer-term horizon.

2. LINK Strategy Report and discussion

The refreshed corporate strategy was tabled. DL reported on the process.

LINK had reviewed members and externals in early 2012 with generally very positive feedback. LINK was considered to be important collective network carrying out valued work. Proposals for the future were: Ever stronger strategic planning; Tighter integration; more Opportunities for forums for discussions for members to hear where e/o are coming from, know where there is divergence is and the rationale for that; for greater Understanding that members don't always agree on things and recognition of this as positive rather than negative – diversity is our strength. Also proposed were promoting a perception of LINK as community as interest; clearer prioritization; stronger strategic voice; becoming more sophisticated about the way we negotiate; reviewing LINK's business model – putting in place active plans to operate with smaller core staff and more into fund raising and develop sponsorship; making choices about what needs to be done, what would be nice to do and what we cannot do. DL indicated that it would be important to hear from members about what they considered to be the priorities. In the day's discussion she suggested it made sense to look at process outcomes as well, and that we should discuss how we measure outcomes.

3. Strengths and Weaknesses' review of the year past

Weaknesses

Need to be more critical of government (consistently too nice)

Beware over-estimation of our influence and power – some don't understand or deliberately overstate this; reputation management!

Too obsessed with public policy as a fix – is this right balance strategically? Eg, food: rather than focus on government work more with supermarket? In that context need to be mindful of what we have the resource for

The disconnect between national policy and what happens on ground – We don't have capacity to engage with each LA. Are we necessarily deploying the resources we have in the right way?

In the resource-constrained future do all member bodies make best use of their membership as well as their staff for engagement at local level? Could we incentivize local memberships to engage as volunteers? The increase in retired people available for volunteering was noted.

Ask what is actually shaping the agenda and who are the big players that we should be targeting

Many local groups are not connected to the network – how can we link up with these groups (not member's members groups) for which there is no real gateway? Bear in mind economic barrier for smaller local groups and creative ways we think of getting around that

We must recognize our capacity re: economic work we've been doing – there has been limited engagement from members and this is a challenge.

Criticism from government that specialization is too broad – some topics are so narrow and would be good to get involved in them

Taskforces/forums tend to run with very small number of people doing all the work – how to engage more of the TFs' membership in the effort? All action goes through the Taskforce convener – so reminders that people are encouraged to step up in taskforces where they have the skills, are important.

We are not quick in responding to press enquiries because we are a big group, but there is opportunity there, we do it with consultations; can we couple that with press releases (we don't do this enough)?

Worth reviewing LINK's online presence esp for uninitiated or new audiences – this could be developed to be clearer about what LINK does in all its complexities.

We must include adaptation across all taskforces as part of work plan.

Sustainable Economic Growth – other sectors also affected.

Our corporate planning – can be hard to process the detail; streamline more.

Strengths

LINK report 'Environment and Economy- Helping Scotland to Flourish'

Our focus and reach (much wider than government)

Rolling Manifesto

Parliamentary Monitoring Reports

Political Strategy Reports

Corporate / operation planning very detailed – *sometimes a weakness*

Strategic planning: Overarching themes on our agenda. Eg. We've opened some new doors as a result of economics and governance focuses – and have other stakeholders interested in us

Marine work – tough discussions on priorities with some positive outcomes

Taskforce and Forums, LINK staff roles, dedicated Taskforce Conveners

Expertise and commitment of staff

Large number of people dealing with a vast agenda – working hard and working well, ability to cover broad agenda (flip side is reliance on a few for leadership: there is a need for more players in the network to step up)

Governance work – bringing together common issues

Access to Justice work (supporting a FoES lead) – an eg that LINK is more than sum of parts

Referendum Challenge – where some sectors have struggled in the active debate our position is also a shield

4. Environment, politics, policy – Our approach as LINK

Business strategy is to anticipate decline in some traditional sources of funding from 2014, with more emphasis on fundraising to various sources; we will seek more project-based sponsorship and allow lead-in time for this. We will defend our independence, making case for continuing central govt support, whilst considering options including business supporter (Board will bring proposal to members in Spring). Membership funding funds core business – project funding would be separate to this

Political strategy Now in 4th year of political strategy reporting, prepared twice yearly to provide common ground for network on political environment/horizon. (Autumn PSR circulated) Gives thorough way of deciding which important issues to tackle and which to avoid. For member's the opportunity to input is there and is good.

5. Policy Approaches

Governance:

- A LINK event will be next boost for this slow-burner – would be helpful to have more members to help and engage with this.
- A database of bad and good examples of governance (similar to Planning Democracy) would be valued if members and volunteers can feed these to Lloyd or Andy without expending too much resource. Any larger scale inventory would be beyond our resources though academia could pick up.

Local Authorities:

- How much authority do local authorities actually have – we are aware of local policy that counteracts national legislation. Can we 'educate' LAs more?
- LINK Local Governance Taskforce has just closed, after three years concerted activity: it may be important for members to revive this area?

Media:

- Experience with Marine TF has been instructive– not the quickest process to coordinate responses from members but the MTF has agreed an approach.
- Where it would be nice to have media staff in LINK, we don't; it has been discussed in the past; members and board feel it works well for TFs to generate own press work.
- TFs should agree this and identify which member body(ies) are best placed to do this work in relation to the issues involved.
- Draw on members' media officers, and use them more.
- LINK should not compete with the members.
- Consider what is 'media worthy'
- Collective thinking – needs translated into member organizations' aims and viewpoints.
- If we want corporate liaisons, there is value in considering widening profile (funding a media officer) to attract more investment from range of investors
- If LINK has a media person – could this resource be available to members? Avoid duplication of effort – clearing house for access to resources.
- It was still felt that this should sit in TF rather centrally in LINK.
- the idea of creating a wider forum that talks about corporate sector and where there might be synergies (yesterday's point from Congress) was again noted.

Taskforce:

- Be exciting and be relevant
- Skype options for meetings – use where we can – save money and time

Sustainable Economic Growth:

- Challenging the government's GDP model seems unanimous for LINK membership – but we have no economist across the network
- Could we duplicate Marine project for Economy project?
- Need to find capacity without competing with our members.
- Needs very focussed outcome – influencing that narrative – does make it more difficult to tackle.



Reputation Management:

- Messages we could all use in terms of managing the serious perspective on the kind of power we have.
- Need to be able to get those facts/messages together, bearing in mind audiences we engage with. Care about remit, and different ways of illustrating. Could be put together in different media for different purposes. What range of facts should go into the fact sheet?
- More helpful to have information about cases we haven't succeeded with government to illustrate – don't want to give impression we can be disregarded.
- Linking it with negative association – example plastic bags – careful not to look like we want a share of the pie from other charities like children.
- Going back to the point that we are being too nice – Frustrations in marine, biodiversity and climate change.

6 Policy Gaps

Transport:

- Active travel groups getting together – we could add *such* a value that is currently missing (climate focus)
- They do policy work not campaigning (because of government funding)
- How do we communicate to the wider public
- We seem to look at policy rather than behavior change – issue we have struggled with before and we shouldn't forget about it

Land Reform Review group:

- Pendulum swing too far to recreation last time. Huge issues in implementation. Does touch on a lot of interest Opportunity to express the public's interest in land.
- We need mechanism to respond to advisory group. Arrange scoping telecall early Dec to decide how; initial deadline for evidence is January 11th 2013 though there are opportunities to input, beyond then

Reorganization of Government Agencies

- Forestry Commission and Forestry Enterprise UK becoming four national bodies. In Wales, becoming part of single statutory agency. Discussion on the horizon about reorganizing all the agencies in Scotland. Scottish land and forest needs to be dealt with.
- Angus Yarwood's 'thinkpiece' to be circulated as basis for further discussion and potentially positioning, within LINK

7. Horizontal networking

International:

What could IUCN do for us?

- We could influence it – boomerang advocacy. Better position than we've ever been to do so. Two British people on the council – increasingly high profile in UK Committee.
- Use ideas that circulate there in our work and approaches
- Raise awareness of key issues through World Conservation Congress – bigger framework issues we could take there as motions. We don't use that process to our benefit; there have been no motions from UK recently, where there is in fact huge voting power that we're not using.
It's the right thing to do – in same way we would encourage LINK membership, we should be members to international organization.

European:

- LINK are members of EEB – a 'Link' of all the Links in Europe. A continental organization looking at environment issues, covering scope of of European Union. A good source of information
- Inputting to EEB – good work of Scottish bodies should be profiled; we could engage with EEB working groups at TF level. Cost-effective way of lobbying.
- LINK also a member of CivilScope - not as well establish as EEB

UK Level (Joint Links):

- Every 2 years conference on life in devolved UK, challenges, tactics, scope for working together at a UK level
- LINK secretariats talk every four months re organisational issues. Meeting of parliamentary staff in Links to be organized 2013 (Scotland). We can help our colleagues on things we have in Scotland (certain Acts), and can learn from them for outstanding issues or problems they have dealt with.

Scotland Level:

Public Sector:

- Ensure better communication with SNH, SEPA, FCS, National Parks.
- More relationship with Historic Scotland (HS & Marine S are government under a brand name). HS a difficult organization to engage - worrying
- Governance agenda is huge call for members to engage GovTF reiterated, even if just to submit ideas

Civic Sector:

- SCVO (Andy Myles on Policy Committee). Serious structural deficits there and Andy has fed back concerns to LINK Board. Arts, Sports and International aid organizations are feeling marginalized and SCVO needs a big reform.
- Scotland lacks forum where different areas of policy community can come together – 3rd sector, business, faith groups, media, unions, etc. A gap we need to address in our advocacy. From Congress it was suggested LINK create space (forum of forums) – is that a good idea for us and our resources, how quickly? This idea would meet resistance, it's something we would need to push. A Civic Forum should be an ask of government that Parliament should set up. We can build on energy at Congress, start with business and what is achievable this year; develop at Board level and see where we go and how we replicate with other sectors, but remember we don't have capacity to do it all (or at once)
- LINK has been branching out using a recent policy mapping, and taking a broader view, meeting with CBI Scotland. Economics work will involve meetings with others in the sector.

Local Level:

- Engaging local groups – a gap currently. LINK has members who have local groups and others who don't. Local groups have no point of contact of getting in touch with one another. They are working in isolation from one another and from us and EEB and IUCN – a dis-functionality that we have to address.
- It could be LINK's job to facilitate this gateway but we have few resources. We could have an online portal, which allows us to put these groups in touch with one another or bring them together if needed. We could tap into huge amount of activity going out there. Personal stories that MSPs are very interested in.
- Lots of local groups are funded by government but not happy with government, but don't have access to national discussions on policy – if we can link into it and help them with access think it would be a great help and resource to our taskforces.
- Scoping exercise for this would be very fundable. Use of discretionary funding to scope out – although could get money to do the scoping as well and then funding

resources. Worth scoping, but do we see this thing to be that strategic to our core business?

- Government accuse us of not being connected to ‘real communities’ – communities of interest and place, but this would also allow us to connect with communities of place and would be a serious response to government. Look at long term and maintenance of this as it’s not a short project and need to consider resources. No point of developing it if you can’t maintain it.
- Planning Democracy doing something similar with database of community groups – worth speaking with them.
- ‘Tennis match’ for local groups when trying to implement something at local level between local authority and MSPs.
- Separation from policy and project and local groups: is it a facilitation tool for communication but our policy is independent of them?

8. Policy Priorities and Approaches

Priorities in terms of policy / approach

Policy Priority or Approach	Member Votes	Key
Governance Next Steps Need more member engagement Data on good/poor examples	6 6	Key Activity Nice to do Low Priority for 2013
Educating/encouraging local authorities to deliver national policy locally	8 2	
Identify and act on more opportunities for media work	3 6 1	
Skype for TF meetings	4 5 3	
Forum for forums creation as a place for important dialogue	2 5 2	
Encouragement to TFs to pursue funding as per Marine TF experience	6 1 1	
Moving out into wider areas makes a difference	2 2 3	
Shared economist/economy service to be explored by Economic Forum	5 5	
Manage our reputation Use key data and share with members? Cases where we’ve not succeeded commission of facts and apply through remit	3 5 2	
Ensure all TFs consider adaptation and risk	4 8	
Transport	4 1 6	
More on public awareness-raising via broad communications – re: behavior change	3 6 1	
Land Reform Review	2 9	
Changes to Forestry Commission across UK and impacts and options for Scotland	2 9	

Priorities in terms of being a strong voice and achieving real change

Strong Voice and Achieving Real Change	
Overall Priorities for Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening via our work on wider alliances • Clarity about what is agreed (broadcasting key data) • Ensure we have best information possible • Be sure we have best information • Offer upskilling on basic economics thinking • Get economics read-across through broad alliances (even SCVO) and get support with environment message (dev bodies are recognizing concerns) • Identify quick wins on issues for when we go into meetings • Be relevant to measurement of success agenda (our report) • Distill our economics report as aide memoire for TFs • Need to be better informed with support of trusted economist advice
Central Priorities for Staff and Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff filtering job re: which alliances and how to shape message (reactive, proactive, type of paper, etc) • Advocacy/ negotiations skills bringing in outsiders (e.g. Energy & Landscape facilitation was useful skills transfer opportunity)
Communication Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clearer about audience and be very credible with them • Tailor various reports into 'nutshells' for audiences (simple) • Presentation and language (present negatives as positives) • Consistency over key points even if presented differently to various audiences • Quick highlights at network meetings on things members are working on • Cross-referencing between TFs about existing positions • use Youtube, PowerPoint, Slideshare (TFs and comms people)
Complementing Member Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eg for messages from LINK food forum Soil Association has dedicated person who can promote these • Plugging ijkey points agreed in our forums

Priorities in terms of building alliances

Building Alliances	
Overall Priorities for Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians, civic society, media, agencies (FC, SEPA), regulators, civil service • Business which deliver public goods • Education (Real World Learning Alliance is the forum) • Unions - NFU and trade • Think tanks • COSLA • Faith groups • Professional organizations (including env lawyers) • Universities/ research institutes
Central Priorities for Staff and Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a focus on why we are protecting: we have clear outcomes • Possibly drop frequency of some established meetings (not all agreed) • Business affiliates • Unions (NFU and trades), political parties, funders (potential) • COSLA • Onside business ambassadors • Business umbrellas • Scottish Communities Alliance? • Forum or Forums could replicate some of above
Communication Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use LINK comms to update (bulletin) • Scenes (if it pays) some combination between NC x sectors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TFs do some of this according to their agenda • Workshop e.g. Climate Adaptation – useful for alliances also • UK links – NGOs & government (also through member bodies) • MTF report, peer reviewed by SRUC • TFs with counterparts across UK – educational/learning. • Network meetings to build understanding of each other issues.
Complementing Member Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members have shared experience regarding environmental justice • Coalition for Access to Justice (UK) • Business team building/volunteering via NGOs (backdoor to business) • NFUS – CAP Reform, RSPB and others • Biological records centres • Some members don't do it, rely on LINK and value that aspect • Church of Scotland /Soil Association on food • NEF + 4 members, works stream making economic case for marine protection • universities • Agencies, parks, FC

Priorities in terms of achieving consensus

Achieving Consensus	
Overall Priorities for Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rare occurrences – wind farms • Identify lowest common denominator to agree on • Maintain open communication and nurture good will • Provide focus for negotiation • Maintain perspective • Agree to disagree • Focus on & highlight areas of consensus • Resist media pressure to be reduced to black & white, not allowing external organizations to exploit differences • Being clear to external audience that LINK does not always equal a unified voice (and can live with its own diversity) • Balance between majority and minority view: approach in understanding of how negotiations work (both sides need to feel they have a say)
Central Priorities for Staff and Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On contentious issues, need staff 'honest broker' and taking time to understand positions • Use of external facilitators where required – rare occurrences • Use of trustees at early stage to mediate • Providing access to negotiation skills
Communication Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify need for member seminars at an early stage • Maintaining open dialogue • TF conveners – feedback to board staff and network • Info and experience sharing on tactics • LINK wide shared position statements – rolling manifesto – proactive • Reactive key issues drafted at TF level • Mechanism to distribute around LINK
Complementing Member Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to keep abreast of other member plans • TF meetings can be helpful, newsletter and networking • Acts as forum for debate • Identifying substantive issues via members plans at early stage and issues where collective LINK voice will achieve more • Where issues gap occur, sectoralise that issue – e.g. transport, planning, land use, ad-hoc groups • Encourage organizations to lead TFs on key issues • Working more closely with transform and plug any gaps // SCCS

Priorities in terms of governance

Governance	
Overall Priorities for Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary Scrutiny • Civic Forum • Enforcement lacking/Resources lacking • UK issues – Crown Estate • Silo-ization • Rules governing Community Councils • Lobbying Transparency • Consultation methods • Stakeholders Groups – rules? • Environment Courts
Central Priorities for Staff and Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance Conference / Event – cross-sectoral • Funding • Finding Partners • Set an example (links to non-siloisation point below)
Communication Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-siloization re TFs – is this an issue? • TFs to be asked to give good/bad examples • Local Government TF? – a Planning TF role? • Wide communications across policy community
Complementing Member Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FOES access to environment justice campaign • Finding test cases – e.g. MCS and Client Earth

9. Measuring our impact ahead

The meeting noted that some of the KPIs in the refreshed strategy are more outcome focused than before. Members had felt LINK should capture a sense of our impact. Measuring these will need more information coming from conveners on what they feel the impact of the TFs' work is, or what they hear the impacts are, from externals with whom they are in touch. This will allow us to track performance. Current reporting proformas will be adapted to capture detail. It will be useful to use people's experience in developing the KPIs and improving these as we go. In some cases we will need to measure difference we make by doing baseline surveys, benchmarking and then measuring the distance from there. That may need extra £ks in fundraising to allow professional input. In area of advocacy it is very hard to tell what impact you have had – hard to measure and assessing these things – but instincts and qualitative assessment will be useful. Members' may find it useful to promote LINK membership to their members. Marine project reports to funders noted, which include purpose outcomes, which have been useful to the TF's thinking. To use our corporate strategy to communicate to externals would need some translation and simplification.

10. Outcomes of the day and next steps

DL summarized key outcomes as: ensuring we address Governance matters, Land reform review, Forestry structure/ agencies changes, including adaptation into taskforce work. Also sharing negotiation skills and tactics, ensuring we identify key issues at early stage and air at taskforce and board, ensuring consistent messaging between taskforces. identifying easy key messages, identifying alliances and maintaining relationships, maintaining visibility of environment in government policy and implementation. The 2013-2014 action plan would be circulated to members early in 2013.

The meeting thanked Deborah for her excellent chairing; the meeting closed before 4pm.