

Report on the Joint Links Seminar 2010

September 15th-16th, University of Chester

Purpose of the event

Following the devolution-focussed seminars in November 2006 and October 2008, this year the focus is on the new UK government, changing political landscapes, ongoing effects of recession, and things European. The seminar is also an opportunity for some of our Task Forces/Working Groups to share experience, ideas and potentially identify topics for future joint work and information sharing.

PROGRAMME

Day 1 Agenda – Wednesday 15th September

- 13.00 Arrival, lunch and registration
- 14.15 Welcome and introductions (Paul de Zylva, Chair of Seminar)
- 14.30 Discussion session relating to:
- UK government, changing political landscapes and implications for devolved UK
 - Public sector cuts & effects on NGO sector and statutory partners
 - European / international issues and Links engagement
- 15.45 Tea / Coffee
- 17.15 Closing remarks (Chair of Seminar)
- 17.30 Close
- 19.00 Dinner
- 20.15 Roman Chester (Presentation by Dr John Doran, University of Chester)
- 21.00 Informal networking

Day 2 Agenda – Thursday 16th September

- 09.20 Welcome & scene-setting or Day Two (Paul de Zylva)
- 09.30 'Break-out' sessions for members to share ideas and make links:
- Biodiversity
 - Climate change & energy
 - Marine
 - Planning for green spaces
 - Sustainable land use
- 10.45 Brief resume of key points / agreed actions from each break-out group
- 11.00 Seminar conclusions and next steps (Paul de Zylva WCL & Jonny Hughes SEL)
- 11.15 Tea / Coffee
- 11.30 Field trips to Ashton Hayes and the Dee Estuary



Seminar Delegates

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Jen Anderson | Scottish Environment LINK |
| Jodie Bettis | Wildlife and Countryside Link |
| Lee Bruce | Woodland Trust England |
| John Clark | RSPB Cymru |
| Paul de Zylva | FOE England |
| Wendy Dodds | WWF Cymru |
| Calum Duncan | Marine Conservation Society |
| Susan Evans | Wales Environment Link |
| Joanna Fisher | Wildlife and Countryside Link |
| Rory Francis | Woodland Trust Wales |
| Tony Gent | ARC |
| Susan Guest | Scottish Environment LINK |
| Madeleine Havard | Wildlife Trust Wales |
| Jenna Hegarty | RSPB |
| Karen Higgins | Wales Environment Link |
| Russel Hobson | Butterfly Conservation Wales |
| Jonny Hughes | Scottish Wildlife Trust |
| Peter Jones | RSPB Cymru |
| Sean Kelly | Northern Ireland Environment LINK |
| Paul Kirkland | Butterfly Conservation |
| Fiona Llewellyn | Wildlife and Countryside Link |
| Paul Miner | CPRE |
| Andy Myles | Scottish Environment LINK |
| Lindsay Roberts | Scottish Environment LINK |
| Alan Wells | Scottish Environment LINK |
| Laura Wilkinson | Wales Environment Link |

Acknowledgements

For this third, biennial, post-devolution Joint Links Seminars, the continuing financial support for Joint Link activities from WWF-UK is gratefully acknowledged.

The Links also appreciate the excellent site visits, to Ashton Hayes and Blacon with Professor Roy Alexander of Chester University, and to the RSPB Reserve at Burton Point Farm on the Dee Estuary with Reserve Manager Colin Wells.

Thanks also to Dr John Doran of Chester University for his excellent introduction to Roman Chester and to Robin Gallie and conference staff at Chester University.



DAY 1 DISCUSSION SESSION

Apologies were presented for Jonny Hughes (SEL) and Paul de Zylva (WCL) took the chair.

Paul observed that Joint Links concerns discussed in 2008 were coming true. Issues flagged then had included:

- The Links as a safe forum for discussion esp of tricky issues
- How to add 'best value' and make sure we deliver
- Campaign planning to allow follow-through esp on legislation
- Post climate change debate and expectations on NGOs/roles
- Value of information and skills sharing
- Where unity can be wielded (spreading lessons amongst small secretariats)
- Role of Europe
- What's our biggest stick?

The meeting heard post-election updates from the four countries, touching on the coalition government, impact of spending cuts and European level engagement, summarised below:

England (Paul de Zylva) – WCL's strategic review concluded early 2010 in readiness for any government; 2010 is also International Year of Biodiversity and members feel biodiversity is mainstreamed but wonder 'what next'. The challenge is to adhere to strategy, which is to be more proactive, less 'passive', to spot and flag trends and opportunities for members, to be more discerning about what to take action over and why – recognising that not everything in the garden is rosy and that message needs to get out, but equally that Link can't do everything. It requires more cohesion among working groups, more joint drawing together of themes, collective agreement over tactics (sometimes 'heavier' than before) with collective understanding of rationales. One new area is legal enforcement – seeking implementation of legislation, commitments and duties; it's a huge area; there's a large chance of failure. One priority was celebration, celebration of marine legislation in November 2009 and of WCL's 30th anniversary, in the Lords in July 2010, with a Minister none too happy at WCL's publicised views on austerity countryside. Presswork for WCL is itself new territory, part of the 'speaking truth to power' aim of holding Government to its promises. Post-election, WCL's focus has been around spending cuts and things that must be defended. A Natural Environment White Paper (England) is out for consultation on which members are working closely together.

Scotland (Andy Myles) – Establishment of Holyrood has meant greater power-sharing by politicians, with NGOs and other civic sectors significantly stronger than before and hereditary 'lobbies' weaker. SEL supports member body advocacy, facilitating engagement with Parliament. Members have secured a number of environment 'asks'. As a Links discussion last September (London) noted, coalition government allows more scope; there will be opportunities for joint work in relation to our UK coalition government. SEL tries to maximise opportunities, watching the political horizon closely, keeping abreast, staying out of party politics, with the environment as its concern, not party or constitutional issues. Scotland is focussed, post-election, round the challenging financial and related global considerations likely to last at least 5 years. SEL has taken a 'SpendingCuts' paper to Scottish Environment Minister and other parties, seeking to influence manifestos for elections in May 2011, linking environment to health, housing, social policy, jobs, and arguing that Scotland can be more sustainable in 5 years' time even in austerity. SEL agreed in 2009 that: European work levels depend on members' capacity (LINK follows EEB); local government must feature more on our agenda; achieving legislation has distracted us and we must assess implementation (Congress 2010 on Environment and the Law, November will start this process); we must work influence political strategy via manifestos; we must continue to work with allies such as Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, talk more to the voluntary sector, learn from others (eg the Links).

Northern Ireland (Sean Kelly) - Funding situation and public sector cuts are key for NIEL: 92% of activity funded by the block grant; public spend is 63% of GDP (UK average 43%); public sector is 33% of workforce; cuts of 25% will have big impact on small country. All Government departments



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preparing priorities for CSR; ring-fencing would endanger environment as education and health account for 70% of expenditure; efficiency savings including project costs (some with NGOs) now under scrutiny. NI government aims to meet EU commitments. NIEL task forces will continue and policy priorities are being progressed including elections (2011) work. NIEL has commissioned independent research for late October mapping the environment sector to evaluate for government work afoot, gaps, overlaps, inform NIEL's contribution to the spending debate and support its advocacy for a strategic approach. NI does not engage much with Europe; a NIEL seminar for member bodies and Assembly Members in 2009 raised awareness of how to influence EU policy and NIEL secured EU funding to bring NIEL and Stormont committee members to Brussels, with useful networking amongst members, AMs and EU officials. NIEL would like to press for an all-party Assembly group on EU legislation to scan/influence/discuss implementation/monitor progress in NI. The log-jam in the Assembly on policy affects NIEL work; a draft Regional Development Strategy is awaited. NIEL sees little scope to work with LAs at given the extent of uncertainty for local government about the future. Environment sector suffering already.

Wales (Madeleine Havard) – Elections next year when good Environment Minister stands down, whose legacy 'A Living Wales' proposes new ecosystem approach to the environment. Sustainable development enshrined in Government of Wales Act and there is some progress. The Labour-Plaid coalition produced 'One Wales' strategy document and the 2009 SD review was entitled 'One Wales One planet', so there is good continuity. SD not embedded in all departments though 'A Living Wales' should make Wales value its environment (monetarily of course, but hopefully otherwise). The draft covers:

- evidence base/gaps/innovative proposals
- valuing ecosystems for people, society, carbon sequestration
- refreshing regulations and management approaches (ie smarter use of existing legislation, reference to plans ahead for more legislative powers for Wales)
- refreshing partnerships/ways of achieving a living Wales
- refreshing institutional arrangements (single agency looking the best option for delivery though cost benefits to be assessed)

Good policy dialogue in Wales amongst Ministers, officials, WAMs with NGOs, LAs, research and academics, inputting actively. Focus now on how to engage people in debate over what will be big cuts. Public sector is a big employer; mergers are tempting but could cost a lot and if so, won't happen. Wales still receives EU Structural Funds and the end of Programme 2 in 2013/2015 will impact capital environmental activity (and may spur lateral thinking on alternative funding). WEL has not done much on EU, tried for a fact-finding trip to Brussels, and will look at this again.

Following these updates key points were noted as follows:

- How to address local government & localism
- Is there a common view of the important environment agenda? We should beware linguistic traps and be mindful of semantics (language, tone) and appropriate tactics with our respective governments in the lead up to, and after, the Spending Review (CSR)
- It's appropriate to continue to blend proactive with reactive work
- The Links need to acknowledge different audiences for their messages; public engagement matters so as to explain relevance of environment at a time when people's jobs and services are squeezed; people value their environment but will need to be reminded why it too should be defended
- The Links have to get better at following through on work esp legislation
- We should consider opportunities for closer working, as Links, esp given current squeeze, and pressures on NGOs to engage at time of cuts
- Is 'ecosystem services valuation' useful, or is this a distraction from the real issue?
- Environment NGOs are part of the wider voluntary sector – 'third sector' which is – and needs to prove now – its real value for money

Delegates discussed appropriate NGO tone and messages leading up to the Spending Review, ie:

- There is a right role for government as well as wrong roles, functions governments cannot abandon, things governments cannot do
- Good government looks ahead well beyond 5-year terms though these are important too

- Environment underpins many (all?) social & economic goals & delivers good value for money
- Good NGO engagement and right 'Big Society' role can prevent detrimental action; there's a right role for 'big society': like government it cannot do everything
- Articulate right role for eNGOs already on small budgets and doing a good job; they may be seen as cheaper option so government needs to understand NGO ways of working compared with, say, the health sector? Flag up what we do and profile how we work.
- If government is minded to offload, ensure they use eNGOs in the right way, not presuming on NGO roles, or on issues of cost, and not co-opting
- Additional individual comments:
 - Learn from Denmark and other countries where NGOs deliver environmental targets for government
 - Maintain independence and 'voice'
 - Understand government's views of its obligations and other drivers, assess adequacy, redefine their bottom line
 - Consider possibility of Public Bodies Bill turning government depts./agencies into direct competitors to NGOs

Going forward from the Spending Review delegates agreed the context would likely be:

- One of fallout from budget cuts, with implications being felt over time
- One of "how to do more better on less"
- One where eNGOs should keep an eye on how the post-CSR situation compares with the pre-CSR circumstances bearing in mind that the UK was not excelling even before recession. If basic targets are not being met it is eNGOs' role to flag and pressure for improvement.
- One where, irrespective of cuts and of a 'small government' agenda, there will still be a right role for government(s), esp given 'greenest government ever' thinking
- And one where eNGOs will still need to focus on what needs to be achieved
- Additional individual comments were:
 - Be realistic about the Links' capacity
 - That marine designations are already 50 years behind terrestrial, counters industry claims of MPAs being lower priority

Options identified for eNGO action in the lead-up to and beyond the CSR, were:

1. To assess immediate CSR issues/effects, and whether Links can share more on 'enforcement' issues. To prepare on the basis of "how to help governments save face" rather than "we'll see you in court" and to avoid suggesting things to cut and focus on why protection of the environment will benefit later rebuilding. The meeting agreed that potential 'show stoppers' should also be part of the messaging.
2. To work out longer term implications, positive and negative, and unintended consequences in the long term, including drawing up a 'how to' guide on dealing with the 'semantics' issue mentioned above. Government, post cuts, will want to be saying positive things.
3. To develop scenarios (for March 2011 perhaps), positive and negative, along with timelines of what will/may happen. Bearing the timelag in which the EU would 'chastise' recalcitrant governments, to indicate when things will become critical. Since existing environment spend is anyway small, the case should stress preventing the loss of decades of good work.
4. To develop eNGO narratives for how the statutory agencies need to work now "better with less" and an agreed view of what "proper environmental governance" looks like. Ensure ongoing dialogue with them. Government lead will be needed with clear distinctions retained between government role, role of 'quasi- government' bodies, and roles for NGOs.
5. To identify what may/must be reversible, even if cut in short term, and how to recover, via financial and other mechanisms.
6. Additional suggestions for action from individual delegates were:
 - a. How we see post Nagoya implementation '2020'
 - b. England work with devolved countries on positive agenda for Natural Environment White Paper, Living Wales and similar documents across UK
 - c. Key to SD is living within environmental limits: pool expertise on what that entails

The meeting briefly considered what a timeline with implications might look like, eg:

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|-------------|---|
| Short term | Water pollution controls? Policing of eg wildlife, CITES? Legal obligations met? Services cut, eg, fisheries protection vessels Annual climate change targets met? |
| Medium term | Species protection Lack of expertise at local government level Earth Summit 2012 Marine Acts – minimal implementation? Not achieving ecologically coherent network of MPAs? UK SD strategy: saved, refreshed, reviewed? 2013 EU budget/CAP reform On/off track for 5-year carbon budgets? Infraction proceedings/fines re Water Framework Directive? |
| Long term | Impact of lower environmental spend on CAP reform proposals Poor implementation of Marine Acts / failure to meet Marine Strategy Framework Directive targets And so on |

Other issues touched on - with delegates' additional comments noted under each heading - were:

- EU level engagement
 - Using any of the UK's MEPs
 - On green (wise) fiscal policy
 - Beyond the EDP agenda
 - Using the Brussels-based eNGOs to raise our concerns
 - Considering how useful EU is as source of funding for eNGOs?
 - If EU Directives being infringed our EU engagement will be the more important
 - Or should we leave briefing the EU to others as cuts bite?
- Landscape networks
 - Need ecological network of landscapes and protected sites: green belts play a role?
 - Engage LAs on environmental stewardship: their environment too and their duty.
- Local government and localism
 - This level of engagement is unwieldy for NGOs but with much devolved power
 - Remember LA budgets will also be cut
 - Do we know how local governments in UK are being handled?
- Remember follow-through for legislation and campaigns
- Climate & wider agenda vs biodiversity-focussed agenda or both?
 - For some Links the agenda is already wider, eg including health, transport, energy
 - There's no conflict between CC and biodiversity if looked at under AVSD umbrella
 - To achieve results our proposals must deliver on both climate and biodiversity
 - Ecosystem valuation: how to cost goods and services?
- What are we prepared to stop doing, as the cuts really bite?
- Share experience on environment and the law
 - WCL hope to set up advisory group of legal experts to help assess implementation failures which may be potential tools
 - SEL commissioning report on how Scottish environmental legislation/commitments are faring for autumn 2010 conference

The meeting noted that the 'Celtic' countries could benefit from continued 'megaphone diplomacy' by WCL, eg, through opportunities such as the Natural Environment White Paper.

In conclusion, Paul de Zylva reminded the meeting that the Links had been aware this was coming and could in future be more prepared for eventualities.



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DAY TWO BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Delegates took stock of the previous day's thinking, agreeing to take the 'framework' into the morning's breakout groups. Five groups then met and reported back to the plenary as follows.

Breakout Group Reports

Biodiversity

The breakout group represented all four countries and talked through biodiversity duty, funding, the EU role and the UK BAP process.

Duty - Considered different administrations' work, how monitoring and reporting are faring (not positive); Scotland and NI have legislative plans to strengthen the duty; there is poor enforcement and accountability overall.

Funding - Innovative sources being investigated by most countries. Development levies are being debated for England and Wales but these are compensatory, not improving/restorative; NI has no such levy and no good access to EU funds (as other countries have); suggestion that the NGOs convince their administrations/UK government to access the plethora of EU (LIFE) funds for those EU commitments. Who to approach in each administration needs confirmed. NGOs are nervous about sharing fundraising strategy.

EU - Ways into/contacts in EU are not strong enough and many NGOs may be missing opportunities to influence (though the large ones are active).

BAP process - Was this dead to all intents and purposes, the group wondered. Morale is very low in the 'expert sector' (NGO and statutory) and there is a groundswell across the UK to replace the system. There are attempts to do so though difficulty in agreeing a vision. Over bureaucracy pertains throughout the UK, the process is out of date in NI where there is no reference to climate change. An action plan process is needed, given the international obligations, though timelines make reporting and monitoring difficult. Need to find an alternative.

Proposed actions:

- (1) Joint Links discussion about approaching government to secure EU funds
- (2) Joint Links sharing of visions for BAP and what's going on
- (3) Joint Links to consider a Brussels fact finding trip for members

Climate change & energy

Two countries were involved, Scotland and Wales. NGOs in both countries work closely with Stop Climate Chaos (Wales/Scotland). Good progress with renewable energy in both countries, noted.

Noted Welsh Climate Change Commission's role to advise government on strategy and transmit messages to sectors of society. The CCC had difficulty in identifying how to achieve even 3% cuts - of which only 1% would be within Welsh Assembly Government competence. And CCC members advise that 9% cuts will be the necessary minimum. CCC is also doing adaptation work, identifying that livestock reduction is needed and various biodiversity actions/messages.

Noted Scottish process less inclusive though politicians are keen for support with public participation strategy in achieving 42% target in CC Scotland Act. The Scottish Government report on plans and programmes to achieve target, in the wake of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act, does propose radical measures including reduced speed limits, road pricing, but these will not be popular.

Noted the challenges of effecting behaviour change. Some change in attitudes evident since climate change topped the agenda, but behaviours are the next step. Though a UK government report indicates recession is driving emissions reductions anyway, NGOs and others involved in the debate know that change must happen for its own sake.

The group agreed that if eNGOs can't help to effectively address climate change then their efforts to halt biodiversity loss will be in vain.



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Actions proposed:

- (1) The Links should press for development of alternative measures of success including SD, wellbeing, stressing the faults of GDP esp in the current resource crisis. eNGOs have not been good at this, yet they are crucial players
- (2) Links to advocate and encourage public engagement over the long term to shift behaviours. Again, eNGOs not good at this; Governments have been hopeless in taking a lead. Governments need supported; promote the low/zero costs of behaviour change via policy and PR campaigns.
- (3) Ensure a meeting of players from each active Link to share information and discuss where collaboration is possible/useful for (1) and (2) above.

Marine

The workshop group represented 3 countries (NIEL not involved).

With many of the Links' marine project staff newly into post, this was a good catch-up opportunity.

Looked at implementation of the Marine Acts and noted the Wales and NI status in relation.

Compared progress on Marine Conservation Zones, considering how social and economic factors are played off against science.

In Wales sites are largely designated now but may have additional zones within, more highly protected. Scotland has not made as much progress. England.....

Looked at policy work in the different administrations and had concerns – at the UK level – that the marine plan is not sufficiently directive.

Discussed the importance of ecological coherence for the network of Marine Protected Areas and considered issues of cost, monitoring, resources and budget cuts.

Action – date of next Joint Links marine discussion to be agreed by email

Planning for green spaces

Two countries were represented, Scotland and England.

Considered how to secure more greenspace and whether there is the possibility of a national ecosystem network supported by various organisations. Felt there was opportunity to pursue via the Natural Environment white paper route in the south and that the recent CPRE report is relevant.

Also conscious of the need for better quality green spaces, noted idea of conservation credits, economic arguments for good development (ie that it saves money longer term), felt there is political parties support for this.

Discussed protection and improvement of existing greenspace, note that green belt has wide public support which, if harnessed, could bring enthusiastic public involvement to the issue. In this respect London could be used as a model, big population, good access to countryside roundabout. Noted that land use planning is a big factor.

Considered the NGO role in this new climate and felt this was about working more closely with LAs; whilst this is less convenient than national government it is essential to work locally to influence and hold LAs to account for their decisions.

Also looked at spatial planning, briefly, and noted that NGOs and others could plan their purchases of properties in relation to the greenspace planning debate.

Did not agree actions other than to circulate the CPRE report referred to.

Sustainable land use

The group represented three countries (NIEL was not represented).

Considered why sustainable land use does not already go on and whether current SD effort will deliver it. Felt that for many people it is too 'distant' a notion and that evidence of existing decline



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of resources, because of a lack of sustainable land use strategy, needs to be presented more effectively.

Considered incremental or cumulative impacts of laxity 'in small ways': there is significant wider impact evident.

Noted that planning tools such as strategic environmental assessment are not being used as intended, in some cases are not the right tools to deliver sustainable land use. Surmised that there are better policy tools, even IT solutions, to evidence existing decline in resources evident now.

Noted that sustainable land use needs to be linked to targets and that there are complexities involved in making that work.

Agreed that whilst there is good practice at both the national and local government levels, there is also bad buck-passing between the two levels of government in this respect.

Discussed how to promote sustainable land use in ways that are attractive. With reference to Society of Civil Engineers' visioning work, wondered if the NGOs/Links could not do similar.

Noted SEL's report, and conference on 8 November, on sustainable land use strategy for Scotland, during Scottish government consultation on same (as result of Climate Change Scotland Act's requirement).

Actions

- (1) Exchange the various reports referred to during the discussion
- (2) Ask Joint Links to take the conclusions back to their land use/planning groups and ask how these fit with what they are doing

In conclusion

Paul de Zylva encouraged delegates to consider the various proposals and to discuss these within their Links and as Joint Links once the note of the meeting circulated.

Jonny Hughes encouraged the Links to focus on what they can achieve as NGOs and networks, to ensure a sharing culture of cross-border exchange with regular contact and routine exchange of papers, and to be aware of what can be achieved by working at the EU level – where joint working could add value. He proposed that the Links reinstate the meeting with the UK Minister ahead of EU Environment Council meetings, working together on briefings for that through a group made up of an EU contact for each Link.

The meeting closed prior to site visits to Ashton Hayes and Blacon, and the Dee Estuary.