

## MINUTES OF LINK BOARD'S MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2014 IN PERTH

PRESENT Trustees - Helen Todd (Acting Chair), Simon Jones (Acting Vice Chair), Tim Ambrose (Acting Treasurer), Ian Findlay, Mike Robinson, Beryl Leatherland, Charles Dundas, Paul Walton  
Staff members: Jen Anderson, Andy Myles, Alice Walsh, Hugh Green (for item 6 only)

### INTRODUCTORY POINTS

Helen Todd welcomed all to the meeting, which had been rescheduled from October. Deborah Long had handed over chairing in September to Helen, now Acting Chair pending the AGM and in Deborah Long's absence on sabbatical.

Difficulties Trustees were encountering with Huddle were again noted.

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Trustees Deborah Long, Craig Macadam, Mandy Orr. Also from Ross Finnie (President).

### 2. MINUTES OF 21 AUGUST MEETING

These were approved as an accurate record of the Board's August discussion.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING & REPORTS BACK

#### 3.1 Member contact

A summary report on the recent round of contact meetings with members during 2014 was noted, including proposals for topline campaigning by LINK which would need further discussion. A few further meetings were anticipated and staff would give an overall report on outcomes to January's Board.

Trustees went on to consider the decision of JMT to withdraw from LINK at the end of the financial year in March 2015. Stuart Brooks (CEO) had recently contacted LINK to outline reasons for this decision. LINK Trustees were aware that with different views in LINK on windfarms, some members might feel undermined by others' stated positions and as a result, the Board had been emphasising that members should talk and work together so as to use that diversity as a strength. The meeting reiterated that it is not possible for LINK to always achieve resolution about a member's concerns and that a degree of disagreement is integral to the way in which the network has to function. Trustees were surprised too that the Trust had not found more of its engagements in LINK to have been helpful. Overall trustees regretted that disagreement in the network was precipitating withdrawal by JMT, without further discussion, and asked Helen and Jen to encourage a meeting with JMT at Board level to ensure mutual understanding at this stage, albeit respecting their trustees' decision. Staff were asked to invite members to offer to take over Stuart Brooks' role as LINK delegate on IUCN UK, in time for late March.

#### **Actions:**

**LINK to write to Stuart Brooks in response, proposing a meeting**

**Members and TFs to be notified of the JMT's decision**

**Members to be invited to offer for IUCN UK delegate role**

#### 3.2 Ex members, non-members and LINK work

The meeting briefly noted that both MCoS and JMT were involved in LINK's Hilltracks campaigning, MCoS because it had been one of the instigators of this focus. Helen indicated that the Hilltracks group would review the make-up of the group, going forward, so as to observe LINK protocols on working with non-members. There were indications that the NPTF wished to involve MCoS in a meeting with the new owner of Cairngorm funicular and LINK staff would advise organisers of the meeting about LINK protocols.

It was understood that the LTF was interested in bringing the Landscape Institute of Scotland on board TF work. LIS was not eligible for membership so this would not be appropriate and staff were asked to advise LTF that LIS could not take part on a regular basis in the TF's work.

**Actions:**

**Hilltracks group to review membership**

**Staff to contact George Allan NEMT regarding the funicular meeting**

**Staff to contact LTF regarding LIS involvement**

3.3 Business supporter

The meeting noted that Scotrail's new proprietors, Boots, Calor and National Grid were current targets. Alice outlined the gist of her discussion with National Grid's rep, whose suggestions would make demands on LINK, additional to the intended package of benefits for business supporters. The Board supported staff's instincts that LINK must adhere to the benefits package outlined on the website rather than be encouraged to stray from that for any business interest. This was important in terms of LINK capacity as well as for reasons of influence.

3.4 LINK's use of its international affiliations

A paper would be brought to the January Board on the overall situation.

Meantime, the meeting noted that EEB had not yet responded to LINK's post-referendum letter suggesting ways in which to enhance the UK's overall input to its work. In addition, the UK position on the EEB's board was now open for nominations and Helen and Jen supported Andy's proposal that LINK should nominate Andy, as much for the expression of interest from Scotland in better UK input, as anything more. Better eNGO influence on Europe had been an aspiration of the Joint Links discussion in October. Andy reported that through membership of EEB LINK has access to its working groups, and more importantly in his view, through attending the annual conference and meeting, LINK can ensure a greater understanding among EEB, of what is happening in UK and Scotland. Jen reported that over previous years, Anne MacCall and then Fred Edwards had performed a similar role to that which Andy was now playing. LINK had also considered whether Scotland Europa would be better value for money than EEB several years before. The meeting generally agreed that it is appropriate to be looking and to be seen to be looking beyond the UK in our work, capacity permitting.

**Actions: Andy would follow up with EEB and prepare a paper for January**

3.5 Strategic Liaison

CNPA – Convenor and CEO wished to meet LINK before Christmas if possible. Helen, Paul, Beryl and Tim volunteered. Housing and hilltracks were two obvious items to cover with CNPA reps.

**Action: Staff to coordinate date and venue**

SCVO – A meeting had been held between Helen, Mandy and Jen with Convenor and CEO of SCVO, which had been useful in reminding both of the roles and structures of the other. SCVO was reviewing their 'service' to networks as opposed to individual organisational members, aware of this duality in their membership structure, and that the network members perhaps gain less.

Smith Commission – LINK had submitted views and the Governance Group would continue to keep an eye on developments here.

SNH - The informal consultation on the Agency's next corporate plan had been circulated to LINK trustees and was discussed. Concerns were expressed that SNH's root business / statutory purpose was being lost, that emphasis on SEG, helping people and a number of other contextual themes was overdone, and that the paper said little about relationships with voluntary sector bodies which can help deliver SNH's statutory duties. A meeting with the Minister and efforts to secure scrutiny by Parliament of the delivery of statutory duties were proposed though with liaison

with SNH's board member Simon Pepper, first, and to determine the need to escalate concerns, after that discussion.

**Actions:**

**Staff to organise meeting with Simon Pepper, and then a LINK response to the paper  
Mike Robinson to discuss with SPICE staff**

3.6 Environmental narrative – Andy and Paul agreed to develop a draft ahead of strategic planning as a basis for further development. The meeting agreed this remained a high priority for the network.

**Action: Andy & Paul circulate draft to members in November**

3.7 LINK positions on carbon bubble and wildlife crime - Trustees took note that LINK's papers on these issues would be critical of the status quo. They were at this stage due for publication in November or December. The Penalties review was briefly discussed.

*JA note: Wildlife crime publication timeline now January/February*

3.8 Wider policy community targets – No further targets were added to the Board's current schedule. Strategic liaison with the NFUS had been agreed as a priority and was being discussed with the ATF.

3.9 Beavers – NFUS and SLE positions which did not favour the expansion of beavers, were noted, including their 'ask' for funding for long term management.

#### 4. PROGRESS AGAINST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

##### 4.1 Strategic plan revisited

The meeting went through the circulated paper. The following points were agreed:

The membership is generally happy with services LINK delivers and LINK does tend to know when there is membership concern. Surveys of satisfaction happen every three years, and if issues arise the Board makes efforts to address these as and when. The final report on the contact meetings held in 2014 would be circulated to all members with an encouragement to keep in touch with trustees where concerns of any sort do arise, and invitations to seek contact meeting with a trustee would be offered annually in future. The meeting felt that it might be useful if one of the trustees were to contact the NP Task Force convener to discuss what the TF members might expect of the TF.

Helen Todd would start a review with trustees of their engagement on the Board in 2015.

**Actions: Helen and Jen to coordinate communication to members**

##### 4.2 Evaluation overview based on TF reports

The meeting considered LINK's means of gathering data with which to evaluate network impact and influence. The process had been developed 18 months ago, with fairly detailed questions going to Convenors twice yearly. Feedback indicated that whilst most convenors did their best to respond, and that feedback was sufficient to give trustees and members a sense of the direction of travel, some Convenors could not find time to answer all questions, and some questions were too daunting. The Board's view was that LINK should continue direction of travel with a lighter touch, simplifying the KPIs, and rendering the overall task for Convenors and staff less onerous. Consultants would be invited to advise on appropriate KPIs, with a view to putting a refreshed and simplified procedure in place for April 2015.

**Action: Staff**

##### 4.3 Robustness of the network as a strong voice

Developing on points in the paper which had been circulated, the meeting covered the following ground in this review of whether LINK is sufficiently robust as a network:

*Is the environment robust enough? Do we have ambition enough? And should LINK lead that challenge, being an umbrella with only consensual level of agreement possible and members' mandates being a further issue. We generally get good hearing from Government, don't create hiatus or feed opposition.*

*Do we fear upsetting the existing government? Potential downside of LINK is that we create one manageable load, perhaps an easy to pacify movement. This is ever a problem for us: but we don't annoy sufficiently and tend to be too nice.*

*We are not particularly challenging, though we challenged over SEG vs. SD, perhaps took Govt by surprise, and did our reputation no harm. We could mirror the topline negotiating tactics of SLE who start with asks likely to be beyond agreement and negotiate back from there; instead, we thump the table with our reasonable (already willing to compromise) positions. Topline asks have to be part of our approach: on hilltracks we could have asked for an outright ban, and not started with 'in the planning system'. This isn't easy, especially when others in the policy community will use any excuse to criticise or undermine, but it is important to our end goals.*

*Do we fear a reputation of being a pain and therefore not pick enough important fights? When picking fights we need to think about the issues/angle of issues where the public support is likely to be strong, eg wildlife crime where the evidence is there, as opposed to CAP which is generally less understood and too complex.*

*We need to know and utilise the radicals amongst us tactically and this should be a prompt from Board to Task Forces. Does LINK offers coherence to arguments for partner bodies to do advocacy in their own way.*

*Tactics and advocacy plans are needed for more of our asks, in which members involved are identified to play to their particular strengths.*

*Woodland Forum would need to get others on board; at present these others don't see LINK doing anything for them on this front. This is an example of living the benefits of having had the fight (Forest for Scotland, Flow Country, and demise of NCC with SNH as its successor in Scotland)*

*When developing positions we should use our Hon Fellows more to up the ante somewhat.*

*Speaking truth to power*

*Board to encourage TFs to have evidence base and develop robust advocacy strategy built on that base, bearing above points in mind. Board to offer support.*

*TFs should be asked to strengthen up and think of tactics – what change do they want to see, how can they achieve that, how should they ask for it tactically, what negotiating strategy from start to finish, and how do different TF members play their parts.*

*Keep our reputation as a reasonable broker, get better at choosing right moments to say when things are going well and when 'good' is not good enough, and learn to know how to use different players for different aspects of the strategy within the TFs.*

*Also need to bear in mind operational impact on staff, and capacity, and expertise.*

It was agreed to encourage TFs accordingly, and to include in the forthcoming invitation to members to ask for contact with trustees, a question on how these members feel about the robustness of the environment sector generally and of LINK's robustness within that. The paper prompting this discussion would be shared with members, too.

**Actions: Helen and Jen to follow up with Members and TFs**

## 5. OPERATIONAL MATTERS

### 5.1 LINK TF plans, wider aspirations & prioritisation for 28/11

The meeting looked at the draft network plan and noted that contact with members had thrown up requests for LINK to ensure even greater prioritisation and to focus on 'doing less, better'. Trustees looked at the challenge in three senses:

- a. Encouraging prioritisation is challenging in LINK's permissive ethos where members choose which task forces to engage in, task forces are free to set own agendas and the Board does not have authority to constrain that member-lead. Trustees did not feel it appropriate to suggest that task force A or B should go into abeyance, and agreed that the challenge to do less (as LINK) has to lie with the members at strategic planning and networking discussions, where they need to apply prioritising limits on their ambitions for collective work.

- b. Doing better: Trustees agreed this the environment is a big agenda, so LINK must prioritise doing better, since we don't as LINK have authority to insist that the network does less. At networking and planning meetings LINK needs to consider how do to better – what we can drop (eg forum with business, if it doesn't transpire via the ETF route), where there is unnecessary bureaucracy (simplify our reporting proformas), where we may raise expectations (eg Congress planners try not to, but inevitably there are expectations that LINK will follow through on conclusions from Congress)
- c. Managing the workload falling to staff from network ambition: As the LINK staff is small, and successive Boards have agreed that to be sustainable it should not grow unduly, this is another key reason why LINK must manage expectations and prioritisation. Would more 'ubergroups' help - the Board felt these would add extra layer rather than limit other groupings' action, in general, though LINK should encourage TFs away from any 'serious silo-isation'. The proposed land use and management workshop planned for December was an example of cross-TF discussion.

Topline campaigning – The meeting returned to the suggestion from various members that LINK was missing opportunities to rally under broad campaigning themes which could nudge the environment forward. Themes which members could broadly support over a year, which were concrete messages to our audiences and not just awareness-raising ploys, and in general outward looking (building on that aspect of our proposed narrative work). Those who had suggested this would be invited to make a case for campaigning on a theme, to strategic planning, within these broad parameters.

**Action: Jen**

## 5.2 Joint Links working

The Board heard reports on the recent Joint Links gathering in Glasgow, well attended, and sharing interest in future joint working on a federal basis across the UK and potentially with Republic of Ireland too. The REFIT agenda had been a common concern at the Glasgow meeting and this had helped the sense of 4 Links working together, and this might continue for a year or two. There had been the suggestion of developing a Joint Links strategy, of jointly fundraising (eg to UK trusts, to EU sources), and of all 4 Chairs meeting each year – all of which the Links Directors were taking forward.

Trustees moved on to consider WCL's draft strategy. In the light of the trend to greater devolution, and of Links' discussions over years about the most effective ways of working together, the meeting agreed that Scottish LINK should strongly encourage WCL's Board to ensure that its strategy and constitution are clear and explicit about WCL's actual geographical scope in the post-devolution reality. They advised Scottish LINK should press for the federal model discussed by the Links in Glasgow to be consistently implemented as the right approach to joint work. Strategic alliances across the UK and with Ireland would rely on strong mutual understanding in all four (or five) five countries that each network is one in four (or five), needing to liaise federally, to achieve a collective position. The meeting thought that media strategies across the Links would help, with name checks to reference the other Links in the UK. The meeting also noted WCL's draft strategy's handling of the concept of Leadership is rather different from that in Scottish LINK but agreed it was not a relevant issue for Scottish LINK comment.

**Action: Jen and Helen to coordinate a letter to WCL**

## 6. FINANCIALS

### 6.1 Half year outturn to 30.09.14

Hugh Green reported that the year's forecast had been revised in a couple of areas, so that the year-end was likely to be £4-5k stronger on income. This was largely because of the growth of members' income, generally. The meeting noted that JMT's departure from LINK would reduce the subs stream by £6k next financial year. The income forecast had been reduced in relation to Gannochy Trust (bid to be submitted for next financial year) particularly. Income was on track. There were no questions.

In expenditure, movement was down generally, though up in relation to IT hardware and Cloud migration. The overall situation looked healthy and a surplus of £14k was forecast in Unrestricted Reserves for end of year, at around £115k. Restricted likely to show a deficit owing to spending out of marine funds on a different financial year from LINK's core year.

The forecast for projects including 11 funds was reported, and the meeting noted that £6k of the year's discretionary fund remained unallocated. It was agreed to carry forward the allocation to 'LINK local' beyond the year-end, and to liaise with the Agri TF to spend out its allocation or refund this. Levels of cost recovery for marine, economics and SEW were noted.

### 6.2 Reserves

Trustees considered whether or not the current higher than usual level of unrestricted reserves was a cause for concern; the annual report had specifically quoted the Board's current policy. The meeting felt that whilst PKC had noted these and awarded less, and the level might be an issue for Gannochy Trust, larger funders such as SNH and SG understood that the reserves were linked to LINK's longer term anticipation of a reduction in some income streams, in difficult times. LINK was on a path to being in deficit by 2017, if traditional sources were to diminish and new sources proved very challenging to secure.

### 6.3 Fundraising

The report by staff was noted. In terms of core funding, effort continued to identify new trusts, though there were no obvious winners and some trusts were not accepting applications at this point. Eyes were being kept on potential new members to bring into the network (BTO, SGF, BFT). On the project front, the Planning TF had plans for a campaign around equal rights of appeal supported by a project officer, and the Wildlife Forum hoped to proceed with an application for funding for an officer to help take the Species Champion work into the youth and business sectors. HLF might be a route to consider for the latter. The meeting noted that both TFs might wish to seek DPF funding to secure help with fundraising. It was also noted that for any proposed LINK posts, the overseeing TF should share job descriptions and budget with the Trustees in advance. Lessons learned/applied in the marine situation, including a memo of agreement amongst all players, should be shared. The 'ask' of LINK staff time especially for financial admin and HR, was again noted, and would be part of the staff functions review.

**Action: TFs to share budgets and job remits with Board**

## 7. AOB

7.1 Beryl reported progress in exploring LINK's responsibilities for Equal Opportunities and Data Protection. She would want to meet staff about this in the coming months. The meeting thanked her for this support.

7.2 The meeting noted that on top of and related to slashes to biodiversity funding at Scottish Government level, the Hutton Institute planned massive cuts which would impact the biodiversity staff resource. Wildlife Forum were aware and considering action.

## 8. NEXT MEETING

Thursday 29 January 2015