

LINK Board meeting 31 January 2019 held at the WTS office, Edinburgh.

Present: Charles Dundas (Chair), Craig Macadam (Vice-Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Beryl Leatherland, Lucy Graham, Clare Symonds, Paul Walton (by phone), Sam Gardner, Deborah Long (CO), Alice Walsh (DO). Daphne Vlastari(AM).

1. **Apologies** Helen Senn

2. **Welcome**

Charles welcomed Deborah who had started that week. She reported that it is going well. She will be in Edinburgh for a good proportion of her time, meeting people.

3. **Minutes, matters arising and reports.**

Charles thanked Craig for chairing the October meeting in his absence. The actions are on the agenda or covered in the Matters Arising paper. The minutes were approved. Issues in the MA paper (circulated) did not require discussion.

4. **Operations**

Items were rejigged as Sam and Daphne were delayed.

4.2 Development of the Thought-space paper (Paper D). This had originated from the networking dinners which involved senior people within the network and some Fellows. There had been two dinners, in October and November, with the purpose of horizon scanning and taking a step back view of what needs to happen in Scotland. Three key issues were international relations, thought leadership, and the gap between rhetoric and reality in applying Scotland's environmental laws. Thought leadership was the focus of the November meeting. Shaun Speirs of Green Alliance attended, as there was interest from GA in moving into Scotland, and they had contacted SGovt for funding for a staff member based here. It was agreed there that LINK was best placed to bring forward those discussions. There is a need for a thought leadership event to bring in people from other sectors. It was now up to the Board to decide how to progress this. James Curran had proposed a 'Bilderberg' style event, by invitation. It was thought it might appeal to the Scottish Futures Forum and senior politicians. Charles invited views of whether this was an interesting and worthwhile direction for commitment of LINK resources.

Clare thought it fitted our strategic objectives and gave a clear purpose for advocacy work. It would need consideration on framing the issues and the kind of advance information to be provided. She recommended exploring the 'deliberative forum' process, as distinct from the Bilderberg model, with other democracy focussed organisations. There are analogies with the suggestion for the planning conference; how to bring in other voices and manage the discussion. The key question is clarity on desired outputs. Skilled facilitation and operation would be required to manage discussions.

Charles invited thoughts on the outputs. Paul thought it should not result with more issues for LINK to advocate, as there is already many, some articulated in the FFSN campaign. We should be careful of adding to the load on the Advocacy Team. He would like it to be an interface with Govt, to rearticulate our messages which don't have enough traction, and be part of making our voice louder.

Charles agreed it would be good to have others owning and promoting our ideas. Deborah agreed too; the gap is the lack of strategic long-term thinking. She felt it was right to use the space to build thinking on environmental policy, and bring external partners along. It would not be easy, but we are in a good position. Clare noted it would help us to prioritise as we are currently very reactive to

Govt's agenda. Paul supported keeping LINK at the core of it, avoiding creation of another entity. Tim fully supported, noting that we are currently in a good position to help seed fund, and that it will raise the profile of LINK and its members. **Action: Daphne and Lloyd to continue to develop the pitch to the Scottish Futures Forum. Deborah, Sam and James Curran would develop thinking on the model.**

The theme of the next dinner on 19 February would be on the gap between government rhetoric and reality; the biggest of the three issues first identified. It was agreed that Francesca Osowska would be invited. **Action: Deborah to draft invitation for Charles to sign off.**

Alice asked if the LINK Congress might be aligned in some way, now it was decoupled from Strategic Planning? It was not considered to be the right kind of event. Deborah would bring Congress options to a later meeting.

4.4 Programme for LINK strategic liaison 2019. Deborah asked for suggestions of meetings she would seek on the basis of being new to the role of CO. She already had some meetings in the pipeline, with Govt contacts, SEPA, SNH, NPs, SCVO, CE. This is a time limited opportunity.

Paul suggested Deborah attend the proposed meeting (yet to be requested) with Francesca Osowska. We want strategic engagement with the Biodiversity process. FO had undertaken to update LINK after the Sharm El Sheik meeting in November, though none was received yet. **Action: Paul to draft the letter for Charles to sign.**

There was a process set up to develop a shared vision with SNH. A LINK meeting was held on 13 January. Daphne would produce a first draft before meeting a subset of SNH Board.

Other suggestions for liaison were HIE, Business in the community, SCDI, NFUS, SLE. More suggestions welcome. **Action: Deborah would circulate the list for the Board's additions.**

4.1 (b) How to make greater strategic use of the LINK Discretionary Project Fund. Sam raised this at the Strategic Planning meeting. A paper on historic use of the DPF had been circulated. Deborah noted allocations were for three chief areas: specific tasks that groups need to carry out; building sector capacity; and building influence across sectors from a LINK perspective, not limited to groups. This started off mostly funding group work, and now getting on for 90% of strategic use. It was incomplete as not all was allocated for this year. She considered this was more about whether it was being allocated to the right strategic priorities.

Tim noted that the DPF is reactionary, people apply for it. It is reactive. There have been no refusals in recent times. It takes energy to spend money productively.

Beryl had been surprised at how easy it was to get funding for the Hilltracks campaign, suggesting we should ask people to link to our strategic purposes and outputs. She also thought people only ask when they really need it.

Charles said from point of view of the Board we are not exercising strategic judgement, as there has not been the need to balance demand.

Sam had raised the issue because of a perception that we spread ourselves thinly across a broad range of projects and the collective effect could be to dissipate impact. He was not sure it all added up to sum of its parts. He asked if we should put in a minimum of £6k, to be spent well, or, as there is no financial drive for the groups, or to go a completely different way, to generate a response from groups to have a productive externally facing work programme. There were merits in giving groups a

budget at the beginning of the year. There were merits in having a fund too for smaller type initiatives, eg fringe event at the SNP conference.

Deborah considered the gap was not being proactive enough at strategic level, the issue to solve. She noted it would need to be as easy as possible for the groups and not an onus on staff. She thought we do need to think about being more proactive, and strategic, and was not convinced setting an upper limit was a good way.

Craig noted that much of the allocations were via the Wildlife Subgroup. Budgeting at the start of the year was possible in some instances, eg Species Champions support, but not for issues that arise between times, like the Climate work and NEN proposal.

Tim noted that historically it has been different as it has increased this year due to the EFF grant, and will not last longer than three years. He was strongly against the idea of giving groups advance budgets.

Clare agreed a strategic element was important, though noted that smaller organisations don't have the ability to be so long term in planning, eg DPF funding for the SNP fringe was more opportunistic and vital.

Alice explained the origins of the fund, as a means of being clear to the network what funds were available in the coming year, aside from core needs. This was partly to avoid pressure on the centre to find resources for emerging ideas at short notice. The formal structures included scrutiny of proposals by the Fundraising Subgroup of the Board, and strategic oversight by the Board.

Lucy commented it was useful to know these were in place, though the Board has not been following them fully, and that probably some of these things should be foreseen.

Charles considered we should keep it at same level as it has been historically, and take the EFF windfall out of it, for better strategic consideration from the Board.

Beryl agreed the funds have to deliver good value, and appreciated the flexibility of the small pot for urgent needs. She agreed with using a larger sum for the bigger strategic needs, and keeping a smaller fund for more minor expenditure.

Paul agreed with Tim, noting the flexibility of the fund being part of its value. He thought the reason we haven't rejected bids is that they have been strategically right, so little deliberation was required. We should not make a wholesale shift, though keep a different kind of strategic eye because of the increase in size. He felt we should be careful about tinkering with it, as small amounts have allowed a lot of strategic things.

Sam considered on reflection, it comes down to the perception we are not making the greatest impact. Now we should test whether the DPF is working for this larger budget. Another thought is to generate a greater sense of competition within groups so there is a requirement on them to come forward with proposals at the beginning of the year, to inject a sense of purpose to it. Every year the groups sit down and consider their plans, and forward planning is being done with an eye to the resources available.

Paul raised SNH's wish to make the State of Nature report for Scotland part of the biodiversity evidence base. This year the SoN will be a UK document, and producing a dedicated Scottish document will cost several thousand pounds. The Wildlife Subgroup intends to make a DPF bid to support the production of it, which was unforeseen.

Deborah summed up. **The Board agreed to keep the DPF as it was, and review at the year-end how it is going. We will implement the procedures we have in place, to have the Funding subgroup check, and identify strategic needs, and add to gaps. The Boards strategic overview should be in its second meeting of the year.**

5. Governance.

5.1. Discuss LINK's role in supporting policies-compliant member communications. This item relates to assurances sought by the John Muir Trust's Board, in coming back to LINK, that the Board would intervene in certain instances. Deborah and Charles would be meeting JMT shortly and was keen for the Board to consider how this would be managed.

To recap a reason JMT left LINK was because some members were being outspoken about issues without sensitivities to others, on energy and windfarms. The development of the energy consensus statement followed. This was shared with JMT. How can it be used proactively to reduce conflict?

From Sam's perspective the process of producing the statement has been more useful than the product. He was not aware of WWF being in breach of the statement over the last 3 years, though could think of instances where other organisations had. It is possible too to abide by the statement and offend another member. The agenda has moved on from onshore wind which will reduce the risks in this case.

All members signed up the statement three years ago, in itself unusual. JMT should be mindful that it is the status quo.

Trustees agreed that every organisation has the right to pursue its aims, and LINK cannot and should not stop this. There is a section of the Operating Principles which are relevant (section 9, Disputes between member bodies), which sets out what LINK will do when the reputation of the sector is at stake.

The statement is 3 years old, so needs to be checked, and members reminded. The Board is happy to intervene if there are breaches. **Action: Deborah**

Tim raised a specific point on subscription rates, relating to JMT's situation as a UK body mostly operating from Scotland. Its subscription will be based on turnover specific to Scottish activities, currently being discussed between Tim, Karen and the JMT Finance Officer.

Craig noted that Bumblebee CT were in a similar position. The principle was that subscription income was based on the work being done in Scotland and the relevant overheads attributable to that work. Any member with concerns was welcome to discuss them with Tim.

(Daphne joined the meeting).

4.1 A. Brexit strategy options paper. Daphne explained that much of the context had changed though in terms of LINK strategy it was still relevant and some of the scenarios remain valid. The Backstop includes all the good environmental measures, so it was important for us to keep a watching brief on the binding nature of it. Of the three possible outcomes; Remain, leave with no deal, or leave with a deal, the first would need an extension of article 50; no one wants No Deal, and we would expect the basis of the withdrawal amendment to be passed. In relation to the Backstop, we need to ensure our environmental provisions are not watered down. In terms of advocacy we remain on point, based on the need for a transition. On No Deal, raising awareness and the risks which are threefold; existing EU law won't have been adequately embedded, so incomplete, losing the protection of the principles and we have no governing mechanisms. We are increasing pressure

for getting measures from Government to address those gaps. Govt is preparing for No Deal, and does not want engagement with eNGOs. We want confirmation there will be measures in place after 29 March. If departure is postponed it would be for a People's Vote, a General Election or a change to the red lines. It makes sense for us to focus on the GE and PV. We would want manifesto commitments, would liaise with Greener UK, coordinate with them on asks and governing mechanisms. There is agreement that LINK could pursue an evidence-based approach on the PV. The Brexit Subgroup considered we could be clear on the safety of remaining. Some members may not wish to sign, but would not prevent others doing so as LINK.

On EFTA membership, the Brexit Subgroup's internal assessment concluded protection is not enough, so we need to continue with LINK's campaign. In a remain outcome we would still want a Bill to create more coherence with EU law, also for the future ambition of the Environment Strategy. LINK's campaign was being future proofed regardless of the Brexit outcome. Tone and messaging depended on scenarios. Trustees thanked Daphne. She did not need any further direction from the Board and the Brexit Subgroup would proceed with its plans. She reported on a productive meeting of the Brexit Campaign subgroup, which has identified action for next two months, and a plan for next 6 to 8 months. The responses from members have been very helpful. Miriam Ross, recently in post, was competently coordinating. An upcoming policy seminar will flesh out precise asks on the third aspect of the campaign, for which we have the LINK response to the environment strategy consultation, thoughts from colleagues across the UK; and the SBIF review being taken into account.

Paul asked if there was anything more that we could do that cuts across all scenarios, specifically on CAP. Regardless of scenarios there will be a form of land management support, and without pressure the environment will be pushed backwards.

Daphne said expectation was that within the Environment Act there would be funding for land management. The Food and Farming Subgroup has made good progress. The starting point was difficult with the Cab Secs views well known and the Environment CS not willing to push him. The Gove narrative is difficult in Scotland, while helpful to colleagues in England. Scottish Conservatives are very hesitant to commit to it too. We are making some progress in that Mr Ewing has agreed to introduce a Scottish agriculture bill, expected Autumn 2019. There is a parallel process about the future of agriculture policy from which to date we have largely excluded. We would expect that to change. We don't have certainty about costs. The key question was to prove that under a scheme of public money for public goods farmers would get the same money. There was an SNH project which LINK could help with, to improve the evidence base. We would be meeting the CS in March. Daphne was now slightly more optimistic. The F&F subgroup had a good advocacy strategy, which could be shared with the Board, and she welcomed any ideas for strengthening our voice. The hope was to create better tools. It boiled down to whether farmers' income can be assured, and convincing the Mr Ewing that food production in itself was not a public good. Our advocacy included delivery of Good Food Nation aspirations and Climate targets. Scotland has a higher amount of natura sites which we have previously used as an argument for more funding.

Sam was pleased to hear of the momentum and engagement, the more that is embedded and normalised the better. He asked if there were plans in place to broaden the voice beyond LINK members, which there are. On the scenario of the People's Vote and the evidence base for remain, he wished the Board to be aware of possible implications. RSPB and WWF have been cautioned by the Charity Commission. He advised getting clarity from OSCR to ensure we are not breaching rules. Daphne said the Brexit Subgroup were aware of the problems. We would lead on the green tests or standards, in line with our aims as environmental charities. The promises outside of the EU don't come close to what is sufficient. It is a balance of risks.

Beryl asked about progress with the Scottish Environment Strategy, which John Mayhew attended for LINK. Daphne replied we have been keeping quiet as the delay works for us, so that it can take account of the other things we wish to see in it. We could ask for a meeting between Deborah and Govt (Susan Turpie) to catch up.

4.3 Standing item on the Environment Act Campaign was covered above.

5.2. Standing Item: policies for approval / to note.

(a) Approve Succession Plan for Office Bearers and Senior Staff (Paper E) This was approved. A line about Honorary Fellows would be added. A skills audit for HFs was unnecessary. It was agreed to add Jen Anderson and Jonny Hughes to the list of Fellows, to be elected formally at the AGM.

(b) Note Policies Review due summer 2019 led by Deborah and Karen. The topics would be divided among trustees as before.

5.3. Update on plans and timeline for President search and recruitment Charles considered that the last meeting's agreement to approach previous contenders, would reduce options too much. He recommended setting up a small search group. Deborah agreed, considering that we need someone connected beyond the environment to increase public profile.

Daphne said we have not succeeded in using Joyce McMillan's contact and profile effectively for advocacy and connections to new audiences. That was the appeal of going outside originally but it has not happened.

It was agreed that, despite this experience, we should look beyond our current Fellows. **Action: Charles and Beryl volunteered to be on the search group.**

Paul recommended Ann Glover, whom we had considered inviting to become a Fellow.

6. Financials

6.1. Budget outturn to 31.12.2018 and Adjusted 5-year Projection (Paper F). For noting. Tim said it was anticipated that that the year will end as forecast. Looking forward, the next 3-4 years look satisfactory. LINK is fortunate to have the EFF funding. There is no assurance yet from Scottish Govt.

Daphne reported that Greener UK was applying to EFF for funds for UK wide Brexit activity. She would inquire further as to how this activity would include Scotland.

6.2. Draft budget for 2019/20 for noting and comment. A break even budget. There is £38k in the DPF, as always at this time of year SNH and SGovt grant is uncertain. Membership income will rise if JMT does rejoin.

Sam proposed a line for the Environment Bill campaign, as a strategic priority which will need resources. The £20k from WWF cannot be repeated next year. As a strategic priority the Board should commit to it, ringfencing funds, not a blank cheque. We should also have an eye to the next Scottish Govt elections and funding needed. Daphne agreed it would be important to retain the campaign role.

This can be included while still having a healthy DPF. Sam recommended a quarterly review, reforecasting at the October board. Charles agreed. Tim would prefer we look at what we want to do and cost it. Daphne is doing this already with actions up to April, double checking figures for the actions we know need to be done. Though we can still go to members for funds, and have

benefitted very much from WWFs contribution, no other member could do that. If we had the plans and the security this would allow members to be able to see what is happening and support.

This was agreed in principle. The figure would be confirmed later, to be circulated by email. **Action: Staff**

It was proposed to include £5k in the budget for the Thought space work.

Clare asked about the reserves and what they are for, beyond salary costs. Tim said we have done some thinking on this. We operate on a year's contingency. Even so we have more than this at present. It is a cushion and can be used if necessary.

6.3 DPF bids for approval The Wildlife Subgroup's request for funds to cover the shortfall of the Climate report was discussed. It cost more than anticipated for design and printing, as it mattered to make it look good. The consultant needed extra time to deal with last minute request for information to be included. It has been very well received, was well covered in the media, awareness within the Parliament, and was a good investment. This was approved.

7. Any Other Business

Beryl reported on the Landscape Alliance which has been set up informally, to include JMT and some other external organisations. It started from a Landscape Institute Scotland cross party event in Parliament in 2018. Recreation wild land groups attended, and were concerned about the presentation. LIS and NTS have since worked up some outline proposals, shared at a meeting on 30 January. Various activities are planned. The aims are for public benefit. Organisations include NHS, Regeneration Forum, Central Scotland Green Network, Architecture and Design Scotland, Scottish Geodiversity Forum, the World Commission on Protected Areas. SNH as an observer. LINK was mentioned several times, and the members present were concerned about the crossover with LINK.

8. Meetings

Next Board meeting 25 April. Venue to be confirmed.

Spring Network – Thursday 9 May, Edinburgh

Scottish Environment Reception, 5 June, Holyrood.

Strategic Planning, AGM and Festive reception, Thursday 12 December, Edinburgh (changed date)