

Note of the LINK Land Group meeting held at the LINK Office, Edinburgh, 13 September 2018

Attending: Vicki Swales (RSBP), Convenor, Sheila George (WWFS), Alan McDonnell (TfL), Craig Macadam (Buglife), Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland), Eddie Palmer (Scottish Badgers), Bruce Wilson (SWT), Diarmid Hearn (NTS), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG), John Thompson (APRS/SCNP), Daphne Vlastari (LINK AM), Alice Walsh (LINK DO).

Apologies: Helen Todd (RS).

1. Welcome and aims:

Vicki welcomed everyone, explained the overview purpose of this meeting, reporting on progress and discussion of forward plans collaboratively, with scope for flagging up integration needs between subgroups and other groups, and assess capacity and support needs.

2. Progress on Land Group priorities.

Land reform, Land Use, Landscape Subgroup (John Thompson). Until this morning's seminar on the Land Use Strategy with LINK members and reps from other stakeholders including SGovt, there was not much to report. It was a productive meeting. Sheila had been in touch with Katriona Carmichael now responsible for the LUS, keen to run with it, and who volunteered to come with colleagues to the meeting. She, John Brownlee, Susa Turpie, Simon Cuthbert-Kerr, with David Barnes who arrived later. On the surface at least, she quite open to some of our ideas of taking forward the LUS, and taking forward some pilots, and that it should be used to inform the design of future agricultural support. It is unclear how much political backing there is, this was officials. We will follow it up, keep up dialogue and work with her to ensure something happens on the ground. Building on existing forums and initiatives, and links with other things going on, planning system, economic development partnerships, forestry strategy. One suggestion was learning from Wales, inviting someone up from there. There is a lot of enthusiasm for getting relevant datasets out there generally, so people have the information to start. She is keen on **regular 6 monthly contact** with us.

Sheila: some amendments went in from LINK to bring LUS elements into the Planning Bill. In absence of the LUS, include it in the National Planning Framework. The Planning Bill is also missing regional elements. There does need to be engagement between the Subgroup and the Planning Group. There has been discussion on the National Ecological Network with Aedán Smith (Convenor of the Planning Group), to link to regional land use frameworks. We need to keep tying things up. Katriona Carmichael had been talking to Fiona Simpson, Assistant Chief Planner. They are keen for the connections too. NEN discussed later in the agenda.

Lot of next steps ahead. We discussed what it means for the work of the Land Group, how to take forward in terms of capacity; loss of Sheila as deputy to the Subgroup. John hoped that now the payback might be more, volunteers might come forward. Now that the LUS is picking up some pace, SWT might; to be confirmed (Bruce). It was agreed to send a note round the network about where this is going – for information and recruiting, about where this morning's meeting has got us to and how it can be helped by the wider network promoting a consistent message. **Action: John to provide note for circulation.**

That is the main work area for the Subgroup. On the Land Commission, there has been a call for evidence on landownership concentration and scale. There will be a code of conduct for landowning. This is quite challenging for the Commission, to get to the nub of beneficial ownership, so have to go through all charitable ownerships. NTS is following it. Next step will be to go to SCVO, as it will affect charities who have premises such as shops, not just rural land. And then OSCR will

have an interest as sector regulator - not necessarily an issue for the whole Subgroup. John offered to liaise with Hamish Trench in terms of how the Commission's agenda is shaping up, and its outputs of the LC, a general watching brief. Also useful to have contact with its Head of Research Shona Glenn – thanks to John for pursuing this.

Landscape: watching brief mainly. Not picked up on it in the Subgroup though it has met SNH and raised issues at the meeting with its CEO. Beryl reported on discussions in the Landscape Alliance (LINK bodies plus others). There has not been a lot of progress. Landscape Institute Scotland had a cross party debate at end May, which prompted some dialogue, which Stuart Brooks (NTS) has been pursuing. The Environment Strategy consultation did mention landscape, which was encouraging.

Hugh Dignon's team at SGovt (Head of Wildlife Management and Protected Areas) is increasing from 5 to 14. Part of the Brexit dividend. We should flag the need for an updated organogram. **Action:**
Alice

Food and Farming Subgroup: (Pete Richie) There has been a lot of activity. A June meeting at Battleby. SEPA's new ecologist is more engaged in the Food and Farming agenda, looking at how goals for subsidy would reflect the SDGs/performance framework. Subgroup has attempted a more extensive briefing on what public goods are in short supply, and are working these up. Scott Leatham (SWT) has been really helpful. This builds on the original March 2017 paper which set out broad ideas of future policy, for people to take them away, have conversations, and put more detail on them. To use when the time is right. Scott was also feeding in for the Subgroup on the public goods issue at UK level.

Scotland didn't feature in the UK Agriculture Bill. The Cab Secretary remains fixated on the money question. RSPB used the opportunity to flag its time for SGovt to come forward with its own proposals, with the environment at the heart of it. Transition is all about payments, there is a much more detailed policy paper imminent. There is no equivalent of regionalisation or regional frameworks for defining public goods; all disconnected.

The Subgroup responded to the consultation on Stability and Simplicity, which in short proposed that carry on till 2024 with less red tape! We are calling for some money to put into pilot phases, for a mechanism that could get us to a better place. If we leave the EU without a deal, beyond 2020 funds could be used as Govt wishes. If there is a deal to end of 2020 hands would be more tied. There is not much money needed to get on with pilots, it could come from somewhere else.

We want to keep the money in the system, spend it on different stuff. Before today's Land Use meeting there was no sense that SGovt was interested in a dialogue. The Cab Sec has firm views of who he needs to talk to. If this process continues that helps to take agriculture out of its box. Dissolving of silos is one of the Brexit benefits.

Good Food Nation bill, was omitted from last week's Programme for Government. Trying to get it back in. There is a lot of support for it. Its another route to get farming out of its box.

Plans going forward. Timetables are really uncertain. The Subgroup continues to do as much as it can. There are opportunities to re-engage with the policy people, and the common interest in looking forward and getting something to work.

Wildlife Subgroup: (Craig Macadam) Species Champions was one of the main thing over the summer. 100 day challenge finished with a high proportion of the 100 MSP Champions active on something. LINK gave evidence on the biodiversity duty to the Public Audit Committee. Currently getting information from members on CBD reporting on a UK level, and making sure that what UK is

saying reflects the reality of what is happening in the 4 countries. Most targets in Scotland are off track though SNH reckons we are doing well. We have written to the Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham. We have got onto the Protected Areas working group with 2 places; Stuart Brooks (NTS) and Susan Davies (SWT). We have responded to their vision and strategic objectives - looks good. The other big issue is the National Ecological Network. Initially we got far ahead with our ideas, which SNH supported and adopted, then it was knocked back by Govt on the basis of the line stating that NEN should be a 'material consideration' in Planning. Its not clear where the objection is coming from. There is a lot of work ahead: on what a NEN looks like, so we are coming up with examples. The Subgroup struggles for capacity. Now into a period where the SBS finishes, where we would like to see the NEN being the framework for delivery of the strategy post 2020.

This would work very well with timeframe for the National Planning Framework. Would mean those two things are happening around the same time, a chance to tie them together. Sally Thomas is seeking NGO sign off on the SBS; a meeting ahead, they want our ideas. Looking to do some case studies of what it might mean for invertebrates, peat, etc. On the point of targeting Agri environment spend, we need to keep consistency about where things sit - the hierarchy.

Planning for 2020. SEPA is funding a post on conservation finance for SWT, bringing together projects to be invested in. That highlights the need for a NEN at national scale.

Some good news in the Programme for Govt, there is a £2m biodiversity fund for key species and habitats. Unclear if it is new money, or annual. A PQ has gone in, or Clive Mitchell would know. They want to talk to us about their species prioritisation tool.

Freshwater; responding to a Scottish Water consultation which has gone around members for comment and sign up.

SEPA liaison meeting is ahead (February). Agriculture should be on that agenda. Note sector plans are in development, with an invitation to LINK to input to these, via Rebecca Badger.

3. Progress and plans from Subgroups.

Wildlife Crime (Eddie Palmer): last year fruitlessly expecting a specialist wildlife crime unit for Scotland. Not happened. There is an experiment in the Cairngorms, special constables which are fishing gillies and gamekeepers. Some problems are still occurring. Lot of keen young policemen expected to put 90% of time elsewhere. They move on. National wildlife crime unit decided they are only tackling organised and serious crime. Much frustration. Unwillingness to prosecute. No one under 21 will get a prison sentence, though generally start much earlier. Subgroup is revisiting the two wildlife crime reports, now 5 years old. Will interview the police and the Crown Office, to avoid the previous backlash. Difficult to get figures from the police; most crimes are going unnoticed. Hare coursing - police and landowners are keen on stopping it. Bat crime, no enforcement. Looking ahead, it's the systems and resources that are wrong. More MSPs now asking why things are not happening, some very good PQs. Thanks to Dilraj and Daphne for help.

Deer (Alan McDonnell): still holding breath, 8/9 months to go till the panel reports. Duncan, Ian and Mike Daniels met SNH. Unclear what the working groups are doing, clearly brewing up something that will go to the Minister in April. Will coincide work SNH are doing on deer management groups and what they are doing; revising criteria. Unsure how this will help. Looking at compliance with the Deer code and evidence around it. And revised the Wild Deer natural approach and guidance that goes with it. Will be a report after the panel report comes out. Roseanna Cunningham should have all the information next Autumn. Meantime SNH are doing more and getting firmer with deer

management groups. Subgroup is waiting to see what happens, keeping up pressure in the background.

Considering taking board member Angus Campbell to visit member run sites, to show the difference.

Woodlands (Charles Dundas): Little action since the Forestry Bill, waiting for the Strategy (since out). Capacity limited to WTS and TFL for some time. Woodlands will meet soon. Bob Frost, of FC has been round a number of organisations, has a one page overview, Charles was pleasantly surprised there is an environmental element in it, also community and access, as well as industry. It was agreed to have a meeting of members wider than the Woodlands, as held in March, to get clear LINK lines and messages, before inviting him to meet us. Forest Policy Group on which Charles and Alan sit, will also be interested.

Consultation is out on the felling regulations, secondary legislation on the back of the Forestry Act. WTS sanguine about that, others were not. Focussed on continuity and what was there before, some changes, some protections for ancient woodland. We can do a bolder response to it, to go beyond the status quo. Charles will engage the Woodland Subgroup.

One of the key things we are asking of the Environment Strategy is how strategies are nested, how different policies and strategies speak to each other.

Hilltracks (Beryl): Will launch the report next week, in print and online. We tried for traction in the Planning Bill, A Wightman MSP is putting in amendments. Continued to monitor, with 4 regular volunteers. Have consulted with all; SNH, NPs, Confor, SLE, NFUS etc, and were advised early on by consultees to drop forestry from the ask, we lost previously because of pressure from Confor. Charles thought this was okay as tracks should be covered by forest plans. Pushing hard for agriculture tracks, which encompass intentions for sporting uses. There have been Lots of problems with the prior notification system, and the justification of use is a stumbling block. Many said that was their major issue. The first report highlighted the issue, the democratic deficit, the damage caused. This one is a critique of implementation of the PNS. We have recommendations to be produced later.

4. Priorities for the next 6 months.

These were mainly covered in 2 above, and integration needs were mainly covered too.

DPF funding obtained for a year, to November 2019 to continue Calum Langdale's employment as Species Champions coordinator.

Daphne updated on progress of the Environment Campaign, for LINK as a whole. We want an Environment Act as well as the Environment Strategy, to put in place principles, address the governance gap and put in place policy goals, and the right to a clean environment, rights reference group, as outlined in our response to the consultation. What is needed, pitched in the context of the NEN as a useful approach. As we discussed how the forestry strategy would fit in, and others - the type of framework we seek.

Bruce flagged that UK colleagues may push for a UK Environment Act, with risk of Scottish eNGOs being challenged by MSPs. It was felt that there has been a lot of discussion with Greener UK, with Lloyd, Daphne and Sheila on the GUK devolution group, and a good working relationship. We are ready to refute if needed. We have good grounds to be robust, respecting the devolution settlement.

Our campaign will be launched alongside the consultation on governance, plans should be finalised next week. We know what the questions will be, so what our answers will be. Will be coming to members with dates to have publicity photos. There will be a stand on it at the SNP conference. SCCS will focus on the Climate Bill. We have liaised with SCCS, the argument for zero target would be boosted with a stronger wildlife and environmental angle. Worthwhile to put in evidence, and to commission some research into the effects of climate change on biodiversity. For a possible DPF bid (nb WWF is funding this).

Convener of the Group: All very happily confirmed Vicki as convener for a further year.

Next meeting Thursday 14 March 2019.