**Note of the LINK Land Group meeting held on 19 September at the LINK Edinburgh office.**

**Attending**: Vicki Swales (Convenor, RSPB), Craig Macadam (Buglife, Wildlife Subgroup), Charles Dundas (WTS, Woodlands Subgroup), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG, Hilltracks Subgroup), Diarmid Hearns (Vice-Convenor, NTS), John Thomson (SCNP/APRS, Land Reform, Use, Landscape), Hebe Carus (JMT), Vhairi Tollan (LINK AM), Andrew Midgely (RSPB), Deborah Long (LINK CO), Alice Walsh (LINK DO).  
**Apologies**: Alan McDonnell (TfL), Bruce Wilson (SWT), Helen Todd (RS, Hilltracks Subgroup). Sheila George (WWF).

**1. Welcome, purpose and aims of the day.**  
Vicki welcomed everyone and recapped on the purpose of this overarching Group: to coordinate the activities of its 3 priority subgroups and other subgroups under its umbrella. This was one of two annual meetings to review progress over the last 6 months and look ahead to the next 6 months, examining the linkages and crossovers between themes and issues and any further action to be done. Most of the substantive work is through the subgroups.

**2. Updates on priorities since last meeting (March) and impacts of this effort, and opportunities ahead.**

**Land ownership and use** – influencing land reform to integrate principles of sustainable land use & promoting the LUS.

John: resources were within the subgroup, and welcomed Andrew’s future participation On LUS, little action from Govt following the useful seminar in September 2018 involving members and other interested groups, agency and Govt reps which had generated enthusiasm and optimism. There has been staff turnover and restructuring within Govt, and very little happened until mention in the recent Programme for Govt, and a firm commitment to rolling out the LUS in climate legislation. A similar event is planned to try to map a way forward, what the process should look like, taking in the pilots, and RSPB’s work on carbon and conservation, the work Scottish Forestry is doing, and some others. We will have speakers to talk of those initiatives. We will update a briefing note on how we see LUS planning operating, and opportunities for publicising that, including a blog/Friends of Scotsman article towards the year end. **The Subgroup will meet in November to plan this event in January or February 2020.**

On Land reform, the Scottish Land Commission produced its report. Interest in other aspects from landowning NGOs, some good parts and some less so. Some members have been involved in workshops over the summer. The SLC conference in October will report back on them. Charles will attend and report back. John and Deborah met Hamish Trench in May, and will follow up that, will maintain constructive dialogue, see how the feedback from Hamish marries with more formal session that Roseanna Cunningham will attend. Hoping to work with the SLC to push forward how the LUS process will work.

It was agreed it would be really useful to emphasise how important the National Ecological Network is to the LUS, to have it firmly embedded, and incorporate this is the January/February seminar. This is not new, but needs momentum. There is a growing realising it can be useful to Govt to tackle both climate and biodiversity emergencies.

There are some good examples of NEN type activities, eg in the Forth. And international examples where the democratic process for how land is used intersects with property rights. SLC is saying they will rethink what is needed to own land, there is a limit to private property rights, though still at ‘what if’ scenarios.

A key thing is what Govt is willing to support with taxpayers’ money, a more comfortable starting point (rather than proscribing). What the subsidy is used for. That depends on the strength of the drivers, ie flood mitigation, requires mandatory action upstream. The proscriptive direction. More generally the approach will be soft.. Similar thoughts in NEN work, there is a document in circulation which expresses some of these things. The rationale behind SCL is more proscriptive for the hard case large landowners. This is an important shift in their thinking, cc provides a powerful driver, is big enough to make people rethink the fundamental rights and reasons.

The NEN currently has recognition in the National Planning Framework that is coming up for revision next summer, we are trying to highlight linkages between the regional land use processes. Need to **link with the Planning Group**.

Regional Land Use partnerships is an element of the LUS. Have we thoughts on the rest?   
The partnerships will be how the LUS is delivered, all else is high level and principles. Govt will have to revise the strategy for 2021. We will see where we get to in the Climate bill, in pinning down commitments in the PfG, keeping pushing. Getting the principle into practice is key now. The LUS itself doesn’t need much revision. There has been no ownership by the Agriculture Dept, or by Roseanna Cunningham, who has been unwilling to fight for it.

Pete suggested we often made progress by getting funding for work, maybe the South of Scotland Enterprise Board could be a source to employ LINK to do some of the thinking of the baseline work for the revision of the LUS? John, through his involvement in the biosphere initiative has plugged for funding for a regional LUS. He thought there may be ways to extract some funding not so explicitly.

**Group to take this back with our conversations in the subgroups, consider whether we need to do anything above and additional.**

**Future of Scottish Agriculture** – Influencing the future of rural development funding.

The main development is the Scottish Government new **Food and Farming Production Future Policy Group**, announced at the Highland Show, on which Deborah sits, along with Anne McCall RSPB and Aoife Behan Soil Association. Defra’s new Agriculture bill, narrowly focussed on moving money from pillar 1 to 2, is now in long grass. Defra was ahead of game for 3 years. Scotland will be in *Stability and Simplicity* territory until 2024, and very little process to be engaged with until recently. The Subgroup kept repeating the 3 Rs – Retain, Reshape, Renew. Very positive about that and retaining the level of funding. There is also the **Farming 1.5 enquiry** with NFUS, it is getting beyond technical efficiency to the bigger changes needed that are more difficult. There is a new Govt directorate, Sustainable Land Use and Rural Policy, headed by Andrew Scott, to bring forward policies. **An organogram is needed**. REC Committee keeps going with *Steps for Change*. Some officials have moved from Bridget Campbell’s unit to merge with some from agriculture. John Kerr is head of policy. The production group was set up to help determine future policy beyond 2024. There is some action in the Stability & Simplicity package, a mainly internal govt group, with no environmental interests, and not transparent, we hear about it anecdotally. Thinking of pilots, test and trials, changes to greening on which £130m goes, which are not meaningful in environmental terms. So this change is potentially positive, difficult to know how much, and whether the proposals will be good or bad for the environment.

The Agriculture bill in the Programme for Govt is a 2 line bill to enable the changes resulting from Brexit. Another one would follow. The convergence money discussion is now resolved; SGovt to get £160m of back pay, and more for the next 2 years, but where does it go now? Who decides? A modernisation fund is mentioned in the PfG. What does that mean?

Andrew said those conversations are well advanced between NFUS and Govt, a closed shop. Diarmid noted that agriculture was high up in the public research launched at the Highland Show, so the productive sector needs to come up with their arguments.

If there is something to get the NFUS to agree to on the environmental side, it’s a small win.   
We have argued for the funding to go to the Scottish National Investment Bank.

Have we been clear and vocal enough on the shorter-term opportunities, set out headline points for discussion with other stakeholders? Anna Brand was leaving RSPB, so there will be less capacity until her replacement is in post. If there was more capacity, we could have picked up on more. Long term is the biggest win. Other gains may be small. For the **agenda of the next Food and Farming meeting**.

John: on modernisation fund, we need a generation of farmers and land managers with a different attitude, so thinking how far to put some funding in education and training, could be a worthwhile investment. Might chime with the Govt’s wider ambition. The South of Scotland Enterprise agency has been putting in money in the short term to education. This is live topic, education and training and enabling young farmers to get access to land.

Pete: next round of the Govt’s Research programme will be important. Slightly less than the £50m previously. Will be wider than the usual contenders. Nourish wrote to chief research scientist, to say focus it on the things that matter, and were dismissed. We could try again, to keep the conversation going. Useful to know of any stakeholder groups on RESAS.

Feeding the Future Production policy group is the subgroup’s main focus. There are issues from it to come back to the Subgroup for answers.

Pete: COP coming to Glasgow. Idea of high-level meeting about the issue of sustainable food systems and moving global governance of it forward. It can’t work if countries do it on their own. If it is all export driven, it won’t work.   
  
There are broader conversations that LINK is having in terms of COP. Deborah is consulting with members on what they want. RSPB will be doing some work on it.

**Mainstreaming Biodiversity** – through Species Champions advocacy and pursuance of the National Ecological Network and the post-2020 advocacy

**Post 2020 advocacy**: lots going on. Scottish strategy is no more than rearrangements. The previous day a biodiversity coordination group meeting was attended by Paul Walton. Governance is being rejigged and NGOs being more marginalized. The key group is Govt and agencies, with critical friends the SGovt officials. Below that agency specialists, and below that a stakeholder reference group for everyone else.

**Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2020**: Prep for their CBD event and subsequent COP on Biodiversity in April 2020. A UK wide event, and SGovt given a role to do what they want.

**SBS 2030:** what we do to then, led by SNH. A project on the evidence base, again SNH. And mainstreaming biodiversity across SGovt. Also to influence SRDP funding under Stability and Simplicity.

A lot is going on and we are getting pushed to one side. There is a suggestion we may be asked to contribute to the 7 projects referred to above, and we are considering is it worth doing? Previous experience of this had no good outcomes. The State of Nature report will be published on 4/10.

**NEN:** doing a lot on it, not getting far, a major blockage is civil servants (KC) because it is seen as a restraint on development. The ball is currently with SGovt, there has been very little progress by either SNH or SGovt. The Subgroup has been working with the Landscape Scale group at SNH, getting the document finished which will be published from that group and the Habitats and Species group. In the last week some people have changed their opinions. It is about explaining what the NEN is, so fits in well with the Land Use Subgroup’s planned Jan/Feb event.

LINK met SEPA earlier today and are proposing a meeting with SEPA, SNH, the National Parks and Keith Connal about it.

**Species Champions:** Calum Langdale did a review of how it has gone, what the lessons are, and would produce some outputs with metrics to demonstrate the benefits of it. Also case studies to show what Champions have been doing and a protocol for all involved. Looking at building an engagement timeline from first engagement onwards, to bring them on their journey. A paper will come to the LINK Board in October, showing how much value members place on it, and how to use it as an advocacy tool, ie on Climate bill and Wildlife crime, to explore how to make more of it.

Was there any discussion about taking it out into business, community groups etc. could be exciting to an external funder. A movement of people who care about nature? Yes, there are over 100 MSPs involved and some LINK members struggle, and if we open it up to business it puts a burden on them. Another route could be influencers, media personalities. Could think about that with people with a public profile. What we have done so far is to use it to get beyond the blockages of officials. There is lots of potential, the problem is capacity.

**3.     Updates from other Subgroups (Deer, Hilltracks, Wildlife Crime, Woodlands) and plans ahead.**

**Wildlife Crime**: Diarmid gave a brief update. The subgroup put in a submission to the consultation on a Wild Mammals bill. There is an awareness raising event on 1 October in the Parliament, with hopes that Police Scotland, SNH and MSPs can come together, in preparation for that bill.

**Woodland:** Charles updated. The new forestry agencies and new forestry strategy started on 1 April following the Forestry Act. We have to see how they will operate. Forest & Land Scotland, the successor to Forest Enterprise, consulted on its corporate plan, which was not great, and we were forthright in our response. Simon Hodgeson (its head) was defensive and corporate, is not interested in the agency being the exemplar of best practice. We expect a consultation on the plan for the policy and regulatory side soon. The CEO, Jo O Hara is stepping down at Christmas. We expect much the same from that consultation. The Forestry strategy came into effect on 1 April, minus the action plan and monitoring framework which was too difficult to do in the timescale, with instruction there would be a separate one starting by 1 April 2020. There is a lot of interest in this, where the detail will be set out. Vicki attended the first Stakeholder reference group a few weeks ago, it is a blank sheet. Key members of the subgroup have been coming up with ideas. Discussions will be extended to the other members of the subgroup, to get some solid and ambitious asks into that work programme. It has to be done by April 2020. The criteria by which Govt will judge the actions are affordability and reasonableness.

We asked SEPA on its sector plan. It is very industry focussed. It is on the subgroup’s agenda, the fight is between commercial and native species.

Pete: BECS, and wall to wall sitka in Scotland. Where it will be, how it will be stored, any talk about that? And on the COP, thinking about offsetting the carbon footprint by planting a forest in Glasgow, possibly repurposing a golf course.

All is business as usual. When Climate emergency was announced Charles wrote to the First Minister with suggestions. The reply from Scottish Forestry, to say they are doing xyz, we are already doing enough. That is not acceptable. The planting targets are in the PfG. There are some big challenges in the Cttee on Climate Change report. On dividing up intensive agriculture for England and growing tree crops in Scotland. What is our vision for forestry in Scotland? We have some ideas but not nailed it clearly, looking ahead to 2030 and 2045. It is quite challenging. Organisations and the science are at different places. Imagine there will be difficulties within LINK.   
  
Should we be thinking about setting out the stall? **There is a meeting ahead**.

We should be taking about a billion trees or million miles rather than hectares which are difficult for the public to understand. And use the NEN to decide where they should be.

**Hilltracks:** Beryl reported. We failed with the amendment in the Planning Bill as expected. The Minister said its place is in the Permitted Development Rights review, so we will pursue that. Subgroup will meet to discuss. They continue to monitor at a reduced level, maintaining a dbase of case histories. Some success with Cairngorms National Park resulting in a proposal for a code of practice on ATV use. The Review of PDR is coming up next year, for which there will be lots of advocacy.

**Deer**: Charles reported on a year of waiting for the outcome of the independent working group report, what the Govt should follow, expecting that end November. Before that an update on how Deer Management Groups are performing. Expect that will be very positive, and that the review will say the opposite. Then it will be debated by ECCLR and depending on appetite SGovt may take on the recommendations.

Revive conference in August, Beryl and Helen gave a presentation, been very good in highlighting the hilltracks issue, lots of social media on the lack of democracy. Werrity review report is to come and other things on upland and sporting management could shift things.

Charles, sees parallels in the DMGs with what regional planning groups would do. Is one of the problems that there is no framework there, and if we had the framework we could use it for deer and many other issues.

Pete. Use opportunity cost. Almost all of it comes down to cost, on fencing. What opportunities are we not able to take up because of that we are doing just now.

Deer management groups - we have our place on their executive. And more meetings with SNH mediating, some personality issues to be overcome. **Richard Cooke has asked for a meeting so we need to plan that. out when to have that.**

Deborah asked each group to come up with their vision for 2050 for each work area, useful in compiling a wholistic vision, if we break it down into topics and merge.

Pete, on the climate plan that needs to start from the bottom up. What it would be like living there. Most of scotland lives in towns and cities. We need to frame it around wellbeing. Paint it in a different palette.

Deborah would contact convenors and leaders outlining what is sought for the LINK Corporate Strategy.

Vicki asked if people were happy with how the Group functions. Are there other jobs to be done?

John said it would be a good idea for all the other groupings who work under its umbrella could **look at how the land use partnerships can help their issues.**

Charles said it was a useful grouping, to get the subgroups together, like a mini networking.

Andrew asked if there was scope for the Subgroups to do something on the **benefits for biodiversity of conversion of agricultural land, that also brings in woodlands, as loss of that land will be to trees**. Can sell a positive story. WWF doing some work on the back of the Vivid report. A specific job for these 3 groups to do. Parallel happening with the climate work. Dilraj will be organising a meeting.

What is our pitch into the climate work, and how it links to the vision work, how to get to net zero in a way that balances the needs and how you might do it.

Underlying idea of agroecology, a unifying concept with climate, biodiversity and food objectives. The RSPB work about what you can do on an arable farm was very good.

Andrew: what policy levers might Govt want to pull. The Climate Change Plan, in next 6 months. Aspiration that there will be land use change rather than Govt driving it.

Pathways set out by the CCC, includes moderate and extreme. WWF are working on it, and there are some really big and different choices. Do you accept the CCC model, or the agro-ecological model? Might be a simpler approach, some basics about not damaging wildlife in the process. Even spelling out what the choices are to the CCC pathways.

Would this be a useful topic for a workshop. What we can and do agree on, any basic principles on responding to the climate emergency that LINK wants to put out there?

The CC Plan, 6 months after the bill. The ambition for agriculture was 9% very non-ambitious before. Argue that ambition needs to rise. Also will be done through SCCS and as individual organisations.

**4. Convenorship and date of next meeting.**

Vicki was willing to continue for a further year, which was unanimously agreed. The Group should look for a new convenor from September 2020. There would be a gap on the Food and Farming subgroup when Anna had left. *Scott Leatham SWT subsequently agreed to step up as depute.*

Date of next meeting - 12 March 2020.