

LINK meeting to discuss network integration on land and coastal issues and opportunities ahead, held 16 December 2014 at LINK Perth office.

Attending: Charles Dundas (chairing the meeting; Woodland Trust, Woodlands Forum), Eddie Palmer (Scottish Badgers, Wildlife Crime TF), Vicki Swales (RSPB, Sustainable Land Use TF; Agriculture TF), Sheila George (RSPB, FWTF), Jim Densham (RSPB, hibernating Climate Adaptation TF), Deborah Long (Plantlife, Wildlife Forum), Bruce Wilson (Scottish Wildlife Trust, Economics TF, ATF), Diarmid Hearn (National Trust Scotland, Agriculture TF), John Thomson (SCNP, Landscape TF), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG, Hilltracks Campaign), Jonathan Wordsworth (Archaeology Scotland, LTF, ATF), Chrissie Valuri (SWLG), Andy Myles, Alice Walsh (Staff).

Apologies: Mike Daniels & John Low (JMT), Helen Todd (RS), Craig Macadam (Buglife).

Sally Thomas and Zoe Kemp from Scottish Government attended the morning and presented on the Sustainable Land Use Strategy and the Land Reform consultation.

Land Use Strategy: Sally outlined discussions taken on the LUS mark 2. Timeline: Review has started, aiming for LUS 2 to be laid before Parliament by mid Feb 2016. Input of LINK particularly welcome Jan to March 2015 and again when consultation out in Summer to 2015.

SG held stakeholder gatherings and 1:1 meetings – asked about biggest barriers and challenges to delivery of the SLUS, how to address these – a synthesis of information and evaluating mechanisms including the 2 pilot projects in Aberdeen and Borders, to be ready in January from inhouse and external analysts (much on websites or soon to be there). Reviewing current evidence and gaps, and how to plug. 4 areas, climate change, Community Empowerment, multiple benefits and land reform. Effort into discussion with other areas of SG. Other part is synthesis of 3 other work areas, ?Collingwood, evaluation of pilots, review of different delivery mechanisms and their potential for delivery on regional basis. Any further regs or legislation needed, what resources, what potential for a bespoke mechanism.

Summary: No clear view. Political commitment and resources main issues.

Lot coming together in early 2015, will take advice to Ministers on overall shape and direction – Steering group agreed there would be no change to principles or main components of the LUS.

Discussion: No study was made on the impact of the LUS on other strategies. Strongly urged this should be done (some difficulties anticipated by Sally) and issue of where LUS sits in hierarchy of strategies, alongside rather than overarching, to be effective. (LINK to input on this aspect), and need for LUS to be a binding strategy. Planning cited as place where LUS mentioned, though not followed through in any meaningful way. Policy drivers need to be lined up to work together with delivery mechanisms. SG discussions on compulsion versus voluntary, the crux. Assessment of its impact on policy and decisions since it came into effect, eg on CAP, negligible. If serious it would have had an impact.

Pilots: explored mechanisms. SG had no decision making role on pilots. Owned by local authorities, up to them to take them forward how they can. Potentially a shadow system with SRDP to see if there would be a difference in outcome.

Land reform: Zoe Kemp's presentation is available on request - it covered history and areas being taken forward.

Discussion covered: definition of community. LINK briefing on same useful on communities of place and of interest. Essential to clarify this within the legislation. Planning has quite a sophisticated definition.

Public/private balance. Should be about the public interest and melding the various parts of community interest, and taking up the LUS as means of finding out what the public interest is in land. (LUS was not mentioned at all). Suggest LUS approach could be helpful in dealing with the audiences that will be opposed to the Bill.

ENGOs as guardians of the public interest in the environment - biodiversity is not owned, but is affected by land management decisions.

Duties on charities to engage communities? Possibly a sledgehammer to crack a nut if there to deal with secretive trusts. Should tackle this head on.

I million acres? Need to justify this somehow. Otherwise looks arbitrary and open to criticism.

Heritage sites mainly in eNGO hands, sometimes there is no community (St Kilda).

Removal of business rates for stalking and shooting. Why stop there? Should clarify why (include large agricultural holdings too), and possibly reinstate tax breaks for estates contributing to the public interest.

Local politics – are community councils represented of local interests? Poorly defined.

What are 'high standards of ownership and use'? Nowhere are these defined. How will that hold up under scrutiny.

Rights and responsibilities – see Scottish Outdoor Access Code for a model of defining responsible behaviour.

Relationship to marine ownership? Not looking at Crown Estate in this bill, not enough time.

LINK meeting followed.

Agreed LINK needs to engage with both LUS and LRB, though LUS is the priority in terms of delivering anything for the environment, and extent of input.

Both are complementary for our purposes. LRB is useful as the context for wrenching meaningful progress on LUS. LINK can take a similar stance to the Referendum: being clear about our position when the arguments become heated, and steer relatively clear.

Views will need to be expressed clearly and robustly.

RSPB will be putting resources into LUS and willing to lead if others can contribute. Key needs are leadership, getting position straight (drawing from past products), strategy.

Agreed that people attending the meeting (and those intending too) are the key LINK interests and can contribute from their various TFs (Deer not present).

Vicki will convene this overarching group. Sheila's time contributing largely, core members are Deborah, John, Jonathan (will try), Diarmid (yes, will be away from Agriculture TF), Charles. (and check out Helen Todd, Craig, not present). Extras (will comment to best of ability), Bruce, Jim, Beryl (may involve another from SWLG), Eddie.
Staff: Andy primarily, with others assisting as time allows.

Land Reform: Andy, Lloyd (leading for RSPB), John Thomson, Helen, also Diarmid. Extent of effort needed will become clearer in time. No difficulties foreseen from landowning member bodies as long as LINK processes are observed. Definition of sustainable development – LINK should own this one, and that land for conservation use is valid, not waste land. Privileges in tax benefits should equate to public benefits. LINK language to be in terms of the public interest in biodiversity, and pressure on all parts of SG to drive in the right direction. Will have to defend ourselves on public interest in land based on geographical communities.

RSPB's review of LUS (circulated) was discussed. This could be adapted for LINK purposes if others wish to contribute. This meeting indicated yes.

Political context: SNP won't want pre-election criticism. Opportunity to make strong case.

Hook is climate change where Scotland will want to look good come Paris discussions in December. LUS as a mechanism to make incompatible policies integrate.

Climate Adaptation Programme is very similar, good principle, SG wants no change. Shout louder about the absurdities.

Discussed how agriculture sector might look of LUS applied meaningfully. Currently there is no agriculture strategy, no intentions for Pillar 1 funding. Agriculture sector should feel the heat if its not doing its bit on emissions reduction.

Agreed we can do something on this, even if fairly crude.

Target audiences for raising awareness of LUS are the statutory agencies, advisors. Combination of guidance and regional strategy, which should articulate the problems and opportunities in a region (same as we have said before).

Agreed we didn't want to propose new legislation, more using the tools there are already.

Suggest a related challenge to candidates for Parliament in 2016, to make it real to them.

OPERAs work as a model. (Ecosystems science for policy & practice) - <http://operas-project.eu/> - the Scottish presentations at the 2nd December Seminar, including the visitor survey on the Pentlands <http://operas-project.eu/resources>

LUS working in practice would mean substantial devolution of spending decisions to regions.

Actions agreed:

Short paper to be produced for input to Sally Thomas for Feb March. Vicki & Sheila to draft.

Sheila to organise January meeting.

Andy to draw up advocacy strategy (broad policy agenda, timetable for briefings meeting)

Identify allies and opponents. Allies include attendees at SLU annual events. Local representatives of NFUS, SLE often are less rigid than their HQ.

Communities of place

Agencies (Jim's meeting with Mary Christie, SNH meeting at LINK office can be combined).

One longer paper identifying some of the conflicts, mismatches and gaps, allies will be clearer.