

## **Note of the LINK Land group meeting 14 September 2017.**

**Attending:** Vicki Swales (RSPB, Convener), Bruce Wilson (SWT, NEN, Planning Group), Helen Todd (RS, Hilltracks, Landscape, Deer), Caroline Griffin (Froglife, Wildlife Subgroup), Chrissie Valluri (SWLG), Diarmid Hearn (NTS, Planning Group), John Thomson (SCNP, Land ownership, use and landscape Subgroup), Phoebe Cochrane (Climate Policy Officer LINK), Daphne Vlastari (Advocacy Officer LINK), Alice Walsh (Development Officer LINK)

**Apologies:** Alan McDonnell (Trees for Life), Craig Macadam (Buglife, Wildlife Leader), Charles Dundas (WTS, Woodlands, Vice Convener), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG, Hilltracks co-leader).

### **1. Welcome, purpose and aims of the day.**

Vicki welcomed everyone. These twice yearly meetings were the means of keeping an overview of the Land agenda, coordinating work plans and integration needs.

### **2. Progress on Land Group priorities:**

**Land reform, use & Landscape:** There had been two meetings with Andrew Thin (one earlier that day) in his role as chair of the **Land Commission**, to discuss its programme and if LINK can influence them in terms of the issues they will be exploring. The wider public interest is one issue, also to look beyond community ownership. The LC will have its strategic plan, and programme of work. Over next 4 years it needs to establish its credentials to be longstanding rather than temporary. AT emphasised political realities, that the LC will be an honest broker on contentious issues. Its brief covers the whole country, priorities include urban issues. Aims to bring about cultural change among landowners and managers – will be producing guidance and codes of practice example of the tenant farmer review which AT oversaw, and thinks is having an impact because Govt has potential big stick for non-compliance. Other issues are land for affordable housing; scale of land ownership, including whether the citizen is getting value from various tax exemptions that some landowners enjoy. He was disappointing in terms of land use strategy and land use planning, says there is no resources, so talking about individual landowners doing more to liaise. Also looking at barriers to entry. Land for housing is potentially a big issue. He did not rule out potential for collaborative research. We should not rely on it to push for what we want. It will not be dealing with CAP. The Cab Secs standoff makes it harder. It may be clearer after its summit later this year, where the strategic plan and work plan will be launched. AT may want to put some NGOs under scrutiny. One positive to take from the earlier meeting is recognition that the public interest comes in wide variety of shapes and forms. We can compare what NGOs get in tax relief against what others get from CAP. If landowners complain LC can point to similar treatment for NGOs. The Subgroup will keep a watching brief on the Land Commission, check out its website as the programme develops and input when useful to what affects our interests.

**Land Use Strategy:** Concerned it has run out of steam and trying to figure out how to boost it. Even the limited ambition of getting some regional partnerships in place by the year end has slipped. We have opportunity to work more closely with SLE, which is supportive in principle of multi-benefit land use. Scope too in identifying what constitutes the public interest. Short term list of priorities to finding out where things stand, will talk to Keith Connal and Mark Ruskell (some interesting PQs), and some legislation and policy debates in the next few months have a bearing, eg the Climate bill (specifics asks are included in LINK's response), Forestry bill - questions to ask of the proposed forestry strategy, why just a sectoral strategy rather than overarching one for forestry to sit under. Why not recognise that 1.5 planets (that figure to be explored further) is needed from the outset? Interest on the ground for LU partnerships (in John's SW Scotland work), and there must be with

other land management and community sectors more widely. Sheila will progress thoughts on that. There is a longer paper which will go on the website. Plan is to produce a joint 6-sider with SLE for future advocacy and hold series of meetings planned to promote the paper more widely, see where that *leads*. That should integrate with the Food and Farming Subgroup's work with SLE.

**Landscape:** Subgroup met on back of shared perception of the bad deal landscape considerations gets from politicians, and the need to counter it by raising profile of landscape issues. Plan is to hold for a series of events run by individual organisations, addressing issues across the agenda (wild land, peri urban land), building the blocks thematically, which may be drawn together for a major conference in 2019. Diarmid will coordinate, is drawing up a long list to see what input members can bring. Some topics might relate closely to what other Groups and Subgroups are doing.

**Food and Farming:** Has been developing thinking as LINK on post CAP rural funding. Good sign up for the paper which sets out high level vision for future agriculture policy. Been working with SLE who have their own paper and vision, and other papers and visions are in the policy debate too Collaborated with SLE on the workshop in June, report is now ready for the website. Some members are having discussion on issues in it with officials and MSPs, David Barnes (ScotGov) and the Brexit hub. It is difficult to know how it is being heard. Govt has set up a national council of rural advisors, excludes all eNGOs. Fergus Ewing's appointment of 4 agriculture champions, goes back to the split between portfolios. There is potential for further work with SLE and with crofters. Its clear that at high level there is agreement, less so when it gets down to detail, exploring further to assess possibility for LINK and SLE signing off a joint paper. Vicki will meet Crofters to see if they too are interested. Have reached out to NFUS via their Farmed Environment Forum which Vicki was asked to chair (that has not met recently, is useful for liaison), and a joint position very unlikely. SLE is talking up public goods, has broadly similar position to LINK. The Subgroups plans are to continue in this vein. Discussed possible parliamentary event, as LINK or with SLE. Asking PQs, trying for a parliamentary inquiry in the medium term. There is a lot of uncertainty on how it will pan out, also the UK Government and Agriculture bill next spring. Meantime we need to continue to communicate and get across our ideas. Daphne talked to the Labour party, more to pursue to get them on our side, the principle of public goods for public money, could help in coming months over the party conference season. Also public polling about public ideas on farming food and environment, nationwide and focus groups. LINK and RSPB are contributing to costs, and if others can that will be very helpful. Pete is taking forward the polling action. It will depend on what it comes out with but hopefully helpful in communicating with politicians and may be of media interest. Chrissie's PhD work included polling. She will explore if the results and questions can be shared. One of the agriculture champions may be involved in the EEB conference which could be helpful. Vicki has communicated NGO disquiet to David Barnes about the process so far. There will be an event later this year to give better access to other stakeholders.

**Wildlife Subgroup:** On the National Ecological Network, SNH called a meeting of stakeholders to discuss the draft statement. There will be a LINK discussion beforehand to inform Craig and Bruce attending the event. SNH draft is better than expected but some concerns still and want to improve on marine, will talk to Marine Group beforehand. SNH need help to sell it to Marine Scotland, its clear there is little capacity in the public sector to pursue. Connections to be made back to LUS and regional frameworks, as means of delivering part of the NEN. Will talk to the Planning Group and take thoughts back to SNH. Its positive that SNH are receptive. Concern at what it might mean for protected areas, pleased that they are still there as nodes. CSGN section in the programme for Govt does not mention the natural environment.

Species champions: lost 3 who moved to Westminster and seeking replacements for their species. Discussion about grouping them ie as pollinators, to attend launches etc, and get involved more in members' issues. LINK intern is being recruited. Daphne has spoken with RSPB in England to discuss coordination etc.

Mainstreaming biodiversity: there may be a replacement for LIFE funds. Discussed whether we can do more to get biodiversity back up the agenda. A priority for RSPB. ECLLR Ctte dealt with SNH's budget as far as it can. Mark Ruskell is interested in pushing further. LINK will be meeting the new SNH CEO. LINK's Climate response incorporates biodiversity concerns.

**Action:** All Subgroups to complete their reports and forward plans by 4 October, copying in Charles Dundas for the reports as he will compile it for the Land Group.

### **3. Progress and plans of other Subgroups.**

**Hilltracks:** consultant Mel Nicoll started in May, been great, updating web page, inundated with material, majority for hydro schemes. These will have to be mentioned in part of the report; it is relevant that full planning permission is not the end of the story - tracks have to be monitored and enforcement action taken where needed. The Munro Society and MCoFS have parallel process on hydro schemes, and some integration is happening. To be clear there is not a campaign against hydro. Subgroup is working towards a report next May. Prior Notification is not fit for purpose for eNGOs or for landowners. SLE is keen to meet (October), want to know those that are causing problems for SLE to sort them out. Also making links with grouse moor management, meeting Duncan Orr-Ewing to talk about the Cab Sec's grouse moor review, may be open to including hilltracks in the mix. Confor also keen to meet, is worried about badly done forestry tracks.

**Deer:** meeting SNH on 28 November. The ECCLR Committee was calling for more funding for SNH to do their oversight. Subgroup is still working within the process set out by Govt, no commitment to more legislation as yet. The Board has discussed JMT's involvement. JMT will be discussing LINK membership again in December. There is strong feeling that it is such a sensitive time for deer management that changes to our arrangements could send wrong signals. The Programme for Govt has mentioned the setting up of an independent group.

**Woodlands:** LINK response to the Forestry bill has just gone in. There is more coming in terms of afforestation and woodland expansion. The bill sets up a new body, devolution of the FC. No expectation it will deliver much else. It will have 2 duties, forestry and sustainable development. Could that be extended out to other forms of land management? may be topic for further work. Have pushed for biodiversity related elements in the submission. May need more link up better with the Land reform etc subgroup. The work that Sheila has done for the Land Use subgroup (hectares for xyz add up to more than one Scotland), useful to find out more, potential for an infographic to message the issues across several agendas.

**Wildlife Crime:** some progress, good relations with the police. Drawing up advocacy strategy shortly with Daphne.

### **4. Climate Bill consultation and next steps.**

Phoebe drafted the response, out now for sign up. Phoebe will email subgroup leaders ahead of their meetings in the next few months to ensure what we are asking for is kept in mind, to be advocated for climate purposes too. We need to make sure we keep up momentum across the advocacy of the different groups, should always be thinking in these terms. The Bill is not expected until 2019. Daphne is hoping for meeting with the Cab Sec and the asks will be on the agenda. There

is potential for the EEB conference as an opportunity for a joint statement, distilling some key challenges that we want Governments to respond to in context of Brexit, which some of this response would feed into. Phoebe's role as it stands will end in November. Further needs for discussion at Strategic Planning meeting.

## **5. Priorities for next 6 months. Capacity and support needs. Integration across Subgroups and with other LINK Groups, initiatives (EEB conference, SEW etc).**

Priorities covered above and some cross cutting issues identified.

Planning Group: Bill has rural aspects, no concrete proposals to respond too, housing driven. In context of post CAP and future policy, freeing things up. Planning underlies a lot of this Group in doing.

Economics: A valuing nature statement is agreed.

Governance: all discussed above in within the Brexit context: Greener UK and the Links are working together. We have good connections on Agriculture and Fisheries via member bodies. Daphne and Lloyd are closely involved. The starting point is that when UK wide frameworks are developed they need to be done together. There is a complicated eNGO structure. The ELUK group is tasked to look at the nature legislation, asking that the previous REFIT work and evidence be worked into a case study for a post EU scenario. Governance gap, when losing the assistance of the Commission and the ECJ. LINK's Legal Subgroup work on environmental courts and an Environmental Law Centre for Scotland pertains. Provisionally meeting Ian Duncan, (Bruce, Callum, Lloyd, Pete) and hoping for constructive discussions.

EEB conference; couple of workshops relevant – Food and Farming, Fisheries, Climate; registrations are open. A workshop on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> for EEB members only, discussing digital campaigns and working with each other (contact Daphne if you want to take part). Will be exploring with our EEB rep the challenge to issue to Govts as an EEB statement. Green 10 will meet M Russell and R Cunningham, agriculture is one of the topics for discussion.

Scottish Environment Week: The review concluded it made sense to spread the topic based seminar over the year, to tie in better with advocacy strategies. We will keep the February main reception and have an equivalent number of events spread over the year. We will continue outreach to other sector in context of the reception. All to bear in mind for advocacy strategies. Would need discussion among the land interests. Considering one with David Barnes on agriculture.

### Other issues

Bruce flagged the Coul links development proposal which several members are working on together, to be aware of the media take on opposition in relation (all because of a rare fly).

Helen flagged the Camas Mor decision which could mean massive access restrictions. Ramblers FB page had 46,000 hits, way above the norm. Public pressure on recreation may be more powerful than conservation arguments over capercaillie. The applicant has to come up with the plan, and CNPA has to carry it out. Govt is pushing for the development and with more public pressure may back off. Bruce noted potential impacts on the SPA from the water course too.

Group admin: Charles was thanked being vice-convenor for the last two years. He needs to step down to take up duties as Chair (subject to election of course) at the AGM. Diarmid offered to take on the role of VC (main job is the reporting) and was enthusiastically accepted.

**6. Next meeting** will be on 14 March, venue to be decided.