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"Bringing together organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside."



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Letter from the Chair...

Dear Link members

This quarter, Link's Marine Bill campaign stepped up a gear after the Government published its response to the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee report and the public consultation on the draft Marine Bill.

We were delighted to note that the Government's response contains a number of Link's proposals including our call for a duty on the Secretary of State to designate Marine Conservation Zones. With the Queen's Speech fast approaching, the Marine Task Force will continue to focus efforts on ensuring that the Marine Bill is indeed announced and introduced in the next parliamentary session.

Eco-towns continue to be a focus for the Land Use Planning Working Group, with Link members working together with the Town and Country Planning Association to produce worksheets that aim to set out important principles to be included within each eco-town application. TCPA recently published its worksheet on green infrastructure, recommending Link's proposed target of 40% of the total land of an eco-town to be earmarked for green infrastructure and for every eco-town to have its own Biodiversity Action Plan.

We also learned this quarter that the Government would not be issuing licenses to cull badgers. We welcome the announcement that instead of a cull, the use of vaccines are to be adopted to control the spread of bovine TB and extra funding will go towards vaccine development.

Since my last letter to you, there have been some changes within the Link Secretariat. The Director, Alexia Wellbelove, has now left the organisation with our gratitude and best wishes for her new life in Australia. I am pleased to announce that Jodie Bettis, Link's Policy & Campaigns Co-ordinator, has been appointed to succeed Alexia. As a result of Jodie's appointment to the role of Director, Link has recruited a new Policy & Campaigns Co-ordinator who will join us in late October.

Lastly, have you seen that Link has launched its brand new website? Log on to www.wcl.org.uk to check out the changes for yourself and please send us your views and any comments you may have on this new resource.

Best wishes



Paul de Zylva

Working Groups



Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Vice Chair: Nicola Hutchinson, Plantlife
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Biodiversity

At the beginning of the quarter John Everitt stepped down as Vice Chair of the Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) and Nicola Hutchinson at Plantlife took on the role. We wish John all the best in his new role as Chief Executive of Nottingham Wildlife Trust and thank him for his longstanding commitment to the group.

Early in the quarter, Link met with Natural England to discuss the detail of the revised England Biodiversity Strategy (EBS) / Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) framework and Link's role in its implementation. Later in July, Link met with the Minister for Biodiversity, Joan Ruddock MP, to discuss the independent review of Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) and Defra's plans for post-2010 target setting. Following our meeting with the Minister, Link has now taken up its place on the Section 40 Review steering group and is also liaising with Defra regarding a joint post-2010 target setting workshop.

The BWG met on 22nd September to discuss feedback from recent meetings and events, including the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Seminar in Cambridge and the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) meeting, and plans for its annual assessment of progress towards halting biodiversity loss by 2010. Link representatives also attended the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference, [Delivering for Nature Biodiversity – a keystone of Sustainable Development](#), in September.



Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair: Gareth Morgan, RSPB
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove / Jodie Bettis

Farming and Rural Development

At the beginning of July the Renewable Fuels Agency (RFA) published a report on the Gallagher Review on the indirect impacts of biofuels. Subsequently, the Department for Transport and Defra announced that the introduction of biofuels in the UK would be slowed down to take into account the emerging scientific evidence about their sustainability.

Link members wrote to Sir Don Curry in support of the High Level Set Aside Group's proposed options for mitigating for the loss of the environmental benefits arising from set-aside. This was followed at the end of July by Defra's Secretary of State, Hilary Benn MP, announcing his acceptance of the recommendations of the Curry Group. The detailed implementation proposals are currently under discussion, and will also depend on Defra's successful negotiations within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Health Check process.

At the end of July Hilary Benn MP also announced that the Hill Farm Allowance scheme is to be replaced from 2010 by the Uplands Entry Level Scheme. Specific support to upland areas will be integrated into Environmental Stewardship schemes to reward hill farmers for the environmental and landscape benefits they deliver. Detailed proposals are expected later in the year.

In August, Link responded to the Defra consultation on the proposed Health Check reforms of the CAP and their potential impacts on the UK by preparing a series of [position statements](#) based on our policy perspective on the future of the CAP - '[Beyond the Pillars](#)'.

The group met on 19th September to discuss all of these issues further and plan their activities until the end of 2008 and beyond. Link continues to monitor progress of the CAP Health Check and the outcomes of other work such as Natural England's review of Environmental Stewardship. During the quarter Link representatives have also attended the Set Aside Stakeholder meeting, the Agri-Environment Stakeholder group, and a workshop to discuss the Vision for the CAP.

Working Groups



Badgers

At the beginning of the quarter, Hilary Benn MP announced that the Government would not be issuing licenses to cull badgers. Instead, the use of vaccines would be adopted to control the spread of bovine TB and extra funding would go towards vaccine development. This announcement was welcomed by Link members.

At the end of July, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee published a report on the Government's response to the EFRA Committee's initial report following the publication of the Independent Scientific Group's report. In this most recent report, the Chair of the EFRA Committee accuses the Government of playing down the serious nature of bovine TB, criticising the Government's strategy and the Government's lack of leadership. A further response is expected from the Secretary of State in the Autumn.



Woodland

Chair: Mike Wood, RSPB
Vice Chair: James Cooper, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove / Fiona Llewellyn

There has been no news from the Woodland Working Sub Group this quarter.



Land Use Planning

Chair: Fiona Mahon, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

The Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) met in July to discuss progress on the Planning Bill, eco-towns and the Sub National Review (SNR). Shortly before Parliamentary Recess, the Planning Bill passed into the House of Lords for its first and second readings. The Lords Committee stage is scheduled to begin when Parliament returns on 6th October.

Following a meeting with officials from the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Department for Business and Regulatory Reform (BERR), the Chair of Link, with the support of 20 member organisations, wrote to the Secretaries of State for CLG, BERR and Defra to highlight our concerns with taking forward the SNR at the expense of climate change, the natural environment and sustainable development. The Government is expected to publish its response to the consultation in the Autumn.

The LUPWG has also been looking into how funds generated by the Government's proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) could be used to fund habitat creation and other green infrastructure projects. The group's [briefing on CIL](#) is now available on our website.

The LUPWG continues to input to the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) eco-town worksheets that aim to set out important principles to be included within each eco-town application. The worksheet on green infrastructure was published in September containing a number of Link's recommendations including our call for 40% of the total land of an eco-town to be earmarked for green infrastructure, and every eco-town to have its own Biodiversity Action Plan. Link will also feed into the proposed worksheet on biodiversity.

Working Groups



Strategy Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF
Campaigns Chair: Danny Stone, RSPB
Policy Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB
Vice Chair (Strategy): Helen Meech, National Trust
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Water

In July the Blueprint for Water coalition held a roundtable meeting in the House of Commons on the 2009 Price Review (PR09) that was attended by the Minister for Water, Phil Woolas MP, and a wide range of stakeholders from the water industry, civil and public service, and NGOs. The Minister welcomed Link's support of the Government's Water Strategy and thanked the Blueprint coalition for bringing about a consensus for action on PR09.

The Water Working Group (WWG) held a meeting in July to discuss, amongst other things, parliamentary and media plans for the Blueprint for Water second year review. In August, the WWG met to discuss the River Basin Management Planning process, PR09 and the Blueprint for Water annual review process. The group also began to look ahead to plans for coalition activities in preparation for agreeing a workplan for 2009 later in the year.

Members of the Blueprint for Water coalition met with Thames Water in August to continue dialogue on how the company can help deliver the 10 steps to sustainable water use by 2015.

At the end of August, Link members attended an Environment Agency (EA) briefing session on Water Framework Directive classification and Link continues to be represented on an EA-led working group convened to focus on delivering flood management through working with natural processes (recommendation 27 from the Sir Michael Pitt's review of lessons learned from the 2007 floods).



Chair: Jennifer Lonsdale, Environmental Investigation Agency
Vice Chair: Claire Bass, World Society for the Protection of Animals
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove / Jodie Bettis

Whales

The 60th meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC60) took place in June in Chile. Two representatives from Link were included in the UK delegation to the plenary stage, in addition to four further Link representatives included in the UK's delegation to the IWC's Scientific Committee. Link members were pleased that the Minister of State, Lord Rooker, attended the meeting.

Compared with recent IWC meetings very few votes took place. Commitments have been made for further negotiation over the coming year. Link will monitor dialogue between the two sides who failed to reach the desired agreement at IWC60, and continue to repeat our desire for the IWC to focus on the conservation of cetaceans.

The Whales Working Group met on 8th September to discuss the outcomes of IWC60 and possible Link actions for the coming year as we work towards IWC61, which will take place in Madeira in June 2009. Link members also discussed the IWC Small Working Group meeting, which took place in Florida from 15th -19th September, as well as the future of the IWC.

Working Groups



Chair: Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove / Jodie Bettis

Wildlife and Trade

Members of the Wildlife and Trade Working Group last met with the Defra Joint Liaison Group meeting in June, at which updates from recent EU and CITES meetings were provided together with an update on legislation.

The CITES Standing Committee meeting took place from 14th-18th July in Geneva. Link members were extremely disappointed with the vote in favour of allowing China to buy stockpiled ivory from a number of African countries. With a nine votes to two majority, China was given permission to buy the ivory in a one-off sale. Link members fear that this decision will help fuel the illegal trade of ivory in China and could lead to an increase in poaching of elephants throughout Africa.

On 5th September the Minister, Joan Ruddock MP, announced changes to the Bird Registration Scheme, an issue on which Link has had much debate with the Minister over the past six months or so. Further information is available on [Defra's website](#).

The Wildlife and Trade Working Group met on 6th September to discuss preparation for the next Conference of the Parties (CoP15) and plans for the group's activities in 2009.

Task Forces



Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Butler

Marine

Parliamentary pre-legislative scrutiny by two Parliamentary Committees and Defra's public consultation on the draft Marine Bill concluded at the end of June. Link submitted written evidence to the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee, which examined the coastal access provisions of the draft Bill, and written and oral evidence to the Joint Committee, which examined the draft Marine Bill in its entirety. Link also responded in full to the Defra consultation.

Following its inquiry, the EFRA Committee published its [Report](#) to Government on 22nd July. The Joint Committee also published its [Report](#) to Government on 30th July. The Government published its [response](#) to pre-legislative scrutiny and public consultation on 25th September. The Government is now expected to make amendments to the draft Bill in preparation for the introduction of a full Marine Bill to Parliament, which is expected to happen at the end of this year.

Link and the Seabed User and Developer Group (SUDG) held a joint event in July to launch their Joint Statement on the draft Marine Bill. The statement and event demonstrated that industry bodies and environmental NGOs are united in their broad support for the draft Bill, but believe that improvements still need to be made in order to ensure that the final Bill delivers sustainable development of the marine environment. The Minister, Jonathan Shaw MP, attended the event and welcomed the launch of the Joint Statement.

In September, Link, together with its sister Link organisations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, submitted a joint response to Defra's consultation on the high level Marine Objectives. Link and Wales Environment Link also responded jointly to Defra's Draft Guidance Notes on Part 4 (Marine Conservation Zones – 'MCZs') of the draft Marine Bill.

Link's Marine Task Force (MTF) met on 16th September to discuss, amongst other things, its activities over the coming months in the lead up to the Queen's Speech and the expected introduction of the Marine Bill into Parliament shortly afterwards.

At the end of September, MTF members met with Defra officials and Natural England to discuss their response to the draft Marine Bill, the Government's response to pre-legislative scrutiny and public consultation, the high level Marine Objectives and Defra's Guidance Notes on MCZs.

Sister Links



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

Agriculture: LINK's Agriculture Taskforce (ATF) continues its active involvement in the SRDP implementation, through the Programme Monitoring committee and Implementation group. In September it submitted a response to the CAP Health Check consultation and launched its CAP vision document. Following a LINK workshop on the Scottish Soil Framework consultation in early August, the ATF submitted its response in September. The ATF is also starting to engage in discussions around a Scottish food policy and land use strategy.

Climate: In anticipation of the Scottish Climate Change Bill, which is expected to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament before the end of this year, LINK's Climate Task Force (CTF) has produced a LINK Climate Position Statement, '[Time to act on climate change](#)'. The CTF has also been engaging with key MSPs and the Scottish Government.

Freshwater: Work is on-going on the Flooding Bill (introduced to Parliament at the end of September) to achieve Sustainable Flood Management. LINK's Freshwater Taskforce (FTF) has produced a position statement, '[A vital step for Scotland](#)', and a review report, '[The way forward for natural flood management in Scotland](#)'. Progress in addressing the complex issues of diffuse pollution has been slow and the new General Binding Rules and new measures within the SRDP are seen as inadequate.

Marine: Some 40,000 Scottish Marine Bill leaflets were distributed throughout Scotland during the summer and a petition of 4,400 signatures supporting LINK's asks will be presented to the Minister Richard Lochhead MSP on 1st October.

Other news: LINK welcomed the appointment of Helen Zealley OBE MD as its new president in August; Helen's career is in public health and interests are in climate and behavioural change issues. LINK is currently consulting with its members to review its Corporate Strategy for 2009-12.



Wales Environment LINK (WEL)

At WEL's AGM and Council meeting in July, a proposal to create a new Climate Change Working Group to focus on supporting WEL's Climate Change Commissioner was agreed. The first meeting of this group took place in September. A change of focus and name change for the Health & Environment Working Group was also agreed - they are now the Green Exercise Working Group.

'The Government of Wales Act 2006: What now for Advocacy?' seminar organised by WEL's Advocacy Working Group was a great success. Members gained a better understanding of the Act and its implications, and learned how best to undertake, and prioritise, advocacy work within the new Assembly structures. Speakers included Assembly Members, Assembly committee and research staff, and WEL members who have already experienced the new powers in relation to proposals for environmental legislation.

Other policy work during this period included:

- Pre-consultation meeting with civil servants to discuss the re-make of the Sustainable Development Scheme and Action Plan
- Post-consultation meeting with civil servants to discuss the second Environment Strategy for Wales Action Plan, before the final version is published
- Submission of a response to the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Farming, Food and Countryside: Building a secure future' consultation
- Submission of a pre-consultation response to the Welsh Assembly Government's draft Green Jobs Strategy
- Submission of a response to the Assembly's Subordinate Legislation Committee's consultation on scrutiny of subordinate legislation and delegated powers

WEL has employed a consultant to research how the network should engage with the Wales Spatial Plan as it moves into the delivery stage. A special meeting of WEL Council was held in September as part of this process.

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

While NIEL has gone quickly back into gear following a slight summer break, the same cannot be said of the NI Assembly, and particularly the Executive, which is still not meeting. We hope that the political differences will be resolved shortly and our politicians can resume the business of governing. Many crucial aspects are held up awaiting signature/discussion in the Executive, including a major review of rural planning (PPS14), the new Sustainable Development Strategy and a number of aspects of legislation regarding the new council functions. Committees continue to meet and a number of questions have been raised about sustainable development and climate change.

Meanwhile we are arranging a number of meetings, including two with the NIEA (revamped Environment and Heritage Service following the rejection of an independent EPA in May), one on its role and activities (inputting to their strategic plan) and the other on 'Better Regulation' one of their key themes; a conference on the role of European legislation in NI; a couple of members meetings and a big conference on CLimate Change on the 19th and 20th of January. We are also developing a major project with a number of business partners to look at the implications of current drivers (depression, climate change, price of oil, carbon costing, etc.) on business activities with relation to the environmental impacts of their activities. Obviously this is evolving on a day by day basis.

We continue to comment on numerous government consultations and hold meetings with government, including with the Planning and Environmental Policy group on PPSs, the Planning Service on reform of the planning system and with the Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development on renewable energy. A Fact Sheet on food and the environment based on the papers from our annual conference in June nears completion.

News from the Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The third Management Committee (Man Com) meeting of 2008 was held on 24th September 2008 at Link's offices. Issues discussed at the meeting included a report back from the recent meeting of Link's Policy Directors held on 15th September, and taking forward the Management Committee's strategic thinking further to the Away Day held in August. Further to the recommendations of the 2006 Forward Planning Review, the Man Com is looking at working more strategically on behalf of Link's wider membership and is discussing upcoming issues for Link in preparation for the development of our 2010-2012 workplan, which will commence in mid 2009.

The next Management Committee meeting is scheduled for 18th November 2008 at Link's offices. Link's Annual General Meeting will be held on 2nd December 2008 at the Royal Society in London.

News from the Secretariat

Other Link News

As you will all be aware, Link's Director, Alexia Wellbelove, left Link at the end of September to move to Australia. Following a recruitment process, we are pleased to announce that Jodie Bettis, Link's Policy & Campaigns Co-ordinator was appointed to succeed Alexia as Link's Director. Jodie took on the role of Director from 22nd September.

As a result of Jodie's appointment to the role of Director, Link has been through a second recruitment process this quarter to recruit a new Policy & Campaigns Co-ordinator. Our newest member of the Secretariat is scheduled to start in late October and will be taking on the role of Secretary to the Biodiversity Working Group, the Farming and Rural Development Working Group, and the Water Working Group.

This quarter also saw the launch of Link's brand new website! We contracted Studio Republic to bring our website up to date and make it more interesting and accessible to both our members and any other users. As part of the redesign we sought to make the website look more attractive with information easy and quick to find. The new site has improved search facilities including a library where Link documents going back to 2001 can be viewed and specific reports found. We encourage you to log onto www.wcl.org.uk to see the changes for yourself and hope you enjoy the new site - please send us your views and any comments you may have.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

