

Q4 Report October - December 2010

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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...*

Friends,

As 2010 drew to a close, Link was charging full steam ahead with work on the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP). Our response to Defra's discussion document on the NEWP achieved record sign-on from 32 Link member organisations. The NEWP, when published, will be the first environmental white paper in over 20 years and we are taking full advantage of the opportunity to input to it.

This quarter also saw the publication of the long-awaited Localism Bill, which will have huge implications for land use planning throughout England. In light of this, we have created a brand new coalition, the [Greenest Planning Ever](#) coalition, formed of both Link members and partner bodies. The new coalition began its campaign with the publication of [Our Vision for the Future of Planning](#) and will be pushing hard for a planning system that protects and enhances the natural environment whilst ensuring its resilience and adaptation to climate change.

In October the results of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review were announced, with mixed implications for wildlife and the countryside. We were especially concerned with the implications for the marine environment and access to nature and worked hard to lobby Ministers and Defra on these and other aspects. We have since had assurances from the Minister for Environment, Richard Benyon MP, that the Government is keen to see more access to the countryside and that they are fully committed to protecting the marine environment and securing an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas by 2012.

It was great to see so many of you at our AGM on 7 December in London. The AGM marked the end of the first year of working towards our 2010 - 2012 strategy and there were many achievements to share. A big thanks to our panel of CEOs; Victoria Chester, Andy Atkins, Kate Ashbrook and James Kirkwood, who following the main business of the AGM, led a lively discussion on challenges facing the conservation and environmental movement.

The AGM also saw a few changes made to Link's Management Committee. I'm very pleased to welcome Lucy Cooper (The Grasslands Trust), who was elected as the newest board member. I would like to extend a huge thank you to Martin Harper (RSPB), who stepped down as Link's Deputy Chair after serving a full term on the board. Martin has been a member of Link's Management Committee for six years and will be very much missed at our quarterly meetings. However, Martin has a worthy successor in Victoria Chester, who was appointed as the new Deputy Chair.

Best wishes for 2011,

Paul de Zylva
Chair



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Agriculture

Chair: *Abi Bunker, RSPB*
Vice Chair: *Ian Woodhurst, CPRE*
Secretary: *Kirsten Loveday*

“Works to support and deliver a sustainable high quality, multi-functional rural environment through influencing and monitoring policy on rural development, agri-environment, bioenergy, and animal welfare standards”

This quarter, Link members attended the launch of the European Commission’s [communication on the future of the CAP](#). Elements of the communication are promising; however we await the details of how the CAP reform will be implemented, and especially how payments will be distributed among Member States. We will need to work hard to protect cross compliance and guard against Pillar II resources being directed to other measures. However, Link has been given strong reassurances that despite the lack of a specific mention of agri-environment, it will remain a cornerstone of the CAP.

In November Link attended a positive meeting with Richard Macdonald, Chair of Defra’s [Farming Regulation Task Force](#), which was set up by Defra in July and is undertaking a review of farming regulations in England. Mr Macdonald reassured Link that the Task Force would look into any areas where Link has concerns. In December the Agricultural Working Group held their final meeting of the year and welcomed a new Chair of the group, Abi Bunker (RSPB). The meeting included discussing priorities and plans for 2011, including producing a new publication on the CAP.



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Biodiversity

Chair: *Nicola Hutchinson, Plantlife*
Vice Chair: *Miles King, The Grasslands Trust*
Secretary: *Kirsten Loveday*

“Works to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by working to improve the UK BAP process and seeks to ensure that the England Biodiversity Strategy is fully implemented”

A new global biodiversity target was agreed at the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which took place in Nagoya, Japan in October. The strategic plan of the CBD, adopted at the meeting outlines 20 headline targets, including; establishing a target of 17% of terrestrial and 10% of marine and coastal areas as nature reserves, and at least halving the rate of loss of natural habitats. Further details of the strategic plan can be found in the CBD press release; [“A new era of living in harmony with Nature is born at the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit”](#).

The Secretary of State for Environment, Caroline Spelman MP, delivered a [speech](#) to the meeting in Nagoya, during which she announced that the UK will provide a new special fund of £100m over the next four years, designed to deliver biodiversity benefits through international forestry.

Link attended a number of meetings this quarter, including the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee, the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference, and a Defra workshop on the proposal for a system of biodiversity offsets in England. The Biodiversity Working Group has also been focusing on how best to input to Link’s work on the Natural Environment White Paper and how to carry this work forward in 2011.

We are pleased to announce that at Link’s AGM on 7 December Nicola Hutchinson (PL) and Miles King (GT) were elected as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Biodiversity Working Group for 2011.

Land use planning

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Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Vice Chair: Paul Miner, CPRE
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

“Works to conserve the natural and historic environment by working to improve the national planning system for the benefit of biodiversity and landscape”

This quarter Link formed the Greenest Planning Ever coalition; a group of both Link members and partner bodies specifically interested in planning reform in England. Coalition activities began with the launch of [Our Vision for the Future of Planning](#), which was widely distributed to key MPs and stakeholders. In October the coalition held a briefing meeting on Our Vision for the Future of Planning, which was attended by Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), Defra, Natural England, the Environment Agency and a range of NGO representatives. John Howell MP, author of the Conservative Party’s [Open Source Planning](#) Green Paper, delivered the keynote speech, in which he welcomed the Vision document and further input from the NGO community to the upcoming National Planning Framework. To highlight the Vision document, the coalition issued a press release, [Planning reform must protect the environment, say conservation groups](#) and the story was covered by Planning Daily in an article entitled, [Green groups urge bill habitat action](#).

The long-awaited Localism Bill was published on 13 December and work has already begun on preparing briefings on the Bill. The first coalition briefing will be distributed to key MPs prior to the Second Reading of the Bill in the House of Commons on 17 January. We are calling for a planning system that protects and enhances the natural environment whilst ensuring its resilience and adaptation to climate change. Visit the [Greenest Planning Ever website](#) for more information on our asks.

This quarter Link’s Land Use Planning Working Group also [responded](#) to the CLG [consultation on draft regulations of the Town and Country Planning \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) Regulations 2010](#), welcoming in general terms the government’s intention to consolidate the EIA regulations.

We are pleased to announce that at Link’s AGM on 7 December Simon Marsh (RSPB) and Paul Miner (CPRE) were re-elected as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Land Use Planning Working Group for 2011.

Water

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Chair: Robert Cunningham, RSPB
Vice Chair: Janina Gray, Salmon & Trout Association
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday

“Works to restore the ecology of the UK’s rivers, lakes and wetlands by working to ensure the delivery of the objectives of the Water Framework Directive”

In November the Blueprint for Water coalition launched its new [10 step action plan for sustainable water](#) at a [Parliamentary reception](#) hosted by Martin Horwood MP. The event was attended by a wide range of MPs and organisations, including Defra, Ofwat, Water UK and representatives from various water companies. The Minister for Water, Richard Benyon MP delivered a welcoming keynote speech in which he recognised the importance of the Blueprint for Water. Speeches were also heard from Mike Clarke (CEO of RSPB) and Martin Horwood. Following the event, the 10-step action plan was distributed to hundreds of MPs and key stakeholders.

The next item on the agenda for the Water Working Group is the Water White Paper, which is expected to be published in the summer of 2011. At the end of November the Blueprint coalition submitted their 10-step action plan in [response](#) to Defra’s online survey of the White Paper. Following the response, members of the coalition met with Defra’s White Paper Team in December. Defra outlined a number of issues that would definitely be covered in the White Paper, including securing sustainable water supplies, fair affordable water charges and modernising the current water regulation system. The coalition has now begun work on a NGO narrative on the White Paper, which will be presented to Defra in January.

We are pleased to announce that at Link’s AGM on 7 December Robert Cunningham (RSPB) and Janina Gray (STA) were elected as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Water Working Group for 2011.

Natural Environment White Paper

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*Chair: Paul Wilkinson, TWT
Vice Chair: Alice Hardiman, RSPB
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday*

Work on the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) continued to be a priority for Link in the last quarter of 2010. The NEWP, when published, will be the first environmental white paper in over 20 years and Link is taking full advantage of the opportunity to input to it.

In November, with the record support of 32 member organisations, Link submitted a response to Defra's [discussion document](#) on the NEWP. Within a generation we wish to see a resilient, healthy natural environment. Our response outlined the mechanisms we believe can help achieve this goal, as well as detailed answers to specific questions within the discussion document. Read the full response [here](#).

Following endorsement at Link's AGM in December, the NEWP Steering Group was opened up into a Task Force, allowing input from across the whole of Link's membership. The Task Force will be overarching and strategic, working with other Link Working Groups on specific policy areas where required.

Work has now begun on a project plan for the NEWP Task Force, which will be made available to members following the first NEWP meeting of 2011 in January.

We are pleased to announce that at Link's AGM on 7 December Paul Wilkinson (TWT) and Alice Hardiman (RSPB) were elected as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the NEWP Task Force for 2011.

Spending Cuts

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Secretary: Joanna Fisher

In October the results of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) were announced, with mixed implications for wildlife and the countryside. Encouragingly, funding for Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) is to be increased by 83% over the next 4 years, however Defra's resource, capital and administration spending was cut by approximately 30%.

Following the announcement, Link's Spending Cuts Task and Finish Group wrote to the Minister for Environment, Richard Benyon MP, outlining our initial thoughts on the CSR. We welcomed the Government's support for agri-environment schemes, particularly the higher level scheme, and the increased support for nature conservation in developing countries as outlined by the Secretary of State in Nagoya. We also outlined our disappointment at the lack of priority given to access and recreation as well as the lack of reference to the protection of the marine environment. Furthermore, the letter questioned whether the reduced agencies will be able to deliver their statutory functions and highlighted some key areas that Link believes should be considered in the context of the Localism Bill, National Planning Policy Framework and the NEWP.

We received a response from the Minister in December, in which he recognised our concerns and thanked us for our constructive input to the NEWP. The Minister stated that the Government is keen to see more access to the countryside and will be giving people a real say in what happens in their area. The Minister also assured us that the Government is fully committed to protecting the marine environment and securing an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas by 2012.

Link has held several meetings this quarter to discuss implications of the CSR with Government and Defra officials, including Richard Benyon MP, Andrew George MP, Chair of the Liberal Democrat back bench Defra/DECC Committee, and Peter Unwin, Director General of Defra's Environment and Rural Group.

Marine

© Sally Sharrock

Chair: Joan Edwards, TWT
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Fisher

“Works to ensure better protection of marine wildlife and effective management of our seas by seeking the full implementation of the Marine and Coastal Access Act”

The quarter began with Link publishing the first in a new series of [Marine Act Policy Bulletins](#). This first bulletin focused on Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and was distributed to decision makers and key marine stakeholders, including Defra, the MCZ regional projects and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

The Joint Links responded to Defra’s [Draft Marine Policy Statement](#) (MPS), reiterating our concerns, including its lack of strategic policy prioritisation, steer or direction for marine plan authorities or marine decision-makers. Following the submission of our response, Link met with Defra’s MPS team in November discuss our concerns and encourage positive changes to be made to the final version of the MPS. It was announced this quarter that the EFRA Committee would be launching a short inquiry into the Draft MPS. In advance of the EFRA Committee’s first and only evidence session with the Minister and Defra officials on 24 November, Link sent a summary of the Joint Links MPS response along with our [marine planning principles leaflet](#) to all Committee members. Link also sent the summary response and leaflet to Peers ahead of the Grand Committee Debate on the draft MPS in the House of Lords on 15 December. As a result, Link’s key points were highlighted during the debate.

In October Link submitted a [response](#) to the consultation on the new [marine planning system in England](#). Overall we welcomed the consultation document, however, we did call for a national marine plan or planning strategy/guidance to link the MPS and marine plans. We also raised concern regarding the relationship between the marine planning system and Marine Protected Areas, and the role of the MMO in relation to these sites. In November Link submitted a [response](#) to [JNCC’s consultation](#) on the Dogger Bank possible Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The response supported the scientific basis for the Dogger Bank being put forward as an SAC, however, it did not support JNCC’s interpretation of the selection criteria. In particular, Link opposed the down-grading of the harbour porpoise from a qualifying feature to a non-significant population within the proposed SAC.

Link has attended a number of meetings this quarter, including the first UK MPA Stakeholder Forum meeting, the Seabed User and Developer Group socio-economic workshop and a Natural England mobile species workshop. Link’s Marine Working Group also met with Defra officials in November to discuss MPA-related issues and the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review for Defra, Natural England, JNCC and the MMO’s marine work.

We are pleased to announce that at Link’s AGM on 7 December Joan Edwards (TWT) and Sharon Thompson (RSPB) were re-elected as Chair and Vice Chair of the Marine Working Group for 2011.

Whales

© WDACS/Scott Portelli

Chair: Mark Simmonds, WDACS
Secretary: Joanna Fisher

“Works to ensure better protection of cetaceans including through the reform of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) into a conservation body”

Link’s Whales Working Group began the quarter by holding a meeting to discuss the continued whaling by Japan, Norway, Iceland and Greenland; future work on UK cetacean issues; and Link’s narrative to Government on whaling. Members agreed that it would be useful to hold two further Working Group meetings in early 2011; one on international whaling issues and one on UK-related cetacean issues. Following the meeting, Link wrote to the UK’s IWC Commissioner, Nigel Gooding, regarding the consideration of scientific issues by the IWC. We asked for Mr Gooding’s assurance that UK policy will stipulate that scientific matters within the IWC are properly scrutinised by the full IWC Scientific Committee before any Commission decisions are taken, and that this policy is followed by all UK representatives.

In December Link wrote to the Environment Minister, Richard Benyon MP, regarding corruption at the IWC, the continued whaling by the aforementioned nations, and strengthening the conservation agenda of the IWC. We have also requested a meeting with the Minister early in 2011 to discuss these issues further. We are pleased to announce that at Link’s AGM on 7 December Mark Simmonds (WDACS) was elected as Chair of the Whales Working Group for 2011.

Working Groups

Wildlife trade

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Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCS
Vice Chair: Matt Collis, IFAW
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

“Works to improve the conservation of wild flora and fauna threatened by international trade by seeking to ensure the proper implementation of CITES”

In October members of the Wildlife Trade Working Group attended the Defra Joint NGO Liaison Group (JLG) meeting of conservationists and traders, which was also attended by JNCC, Animal Health, and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. Defra updated the JLG group on recent meetings of the CITES Scientific Review Group, noting that the EU were taking a precautionary approach to eel quotas - all member states now had eel management plans in place - and that the EU CITES Management Committee had considered unilateral listing of marine species on Annex B of the EU regulations.

Decisions on which marine species to put forward for listing will be taken at the 53rd EU CITES Management Committee on 6 December. The JLG meeting also discussed policy updates on the Ports of Entry and Exit Review, e-commerce, the review of EU wildlife trade legislation and forest law enforcement.

We are pleased to announce that at Link's AGM on 7 December Cathy Williamson (WDCS) and Matt Collis (IFAW) were elected as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Wildlife Trade Working Group for 2011.

Link News

Link Secretariat

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It was another busy quarter for Link as 2010 drew to a close. We had a great turn out to our AGM on 7 December at Greencoat Place in London. Following the main business of the AGM we were pleased to welcome a panel of Link member CEOs including Andy Atkins, CEO of Friends of the Earth, Dr James Kirkwood - CEO of Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, Victoria Chester, CEO of Plantlife, and Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary of Open Spaces Society for our discussion session. This year the session focused on challenges facing the conservation and environmental movement and as you can imagine, some very interesting and philosophical discussions were had!

We were delighted to welcome our newest member, the People's Trust for Endangered Species in November. We also welcomed the Town and Country Planning Association and the Campaign for Better Transport as official partners in our new Greenest Planning Ever Coalition. Link now has 34 full members and five partners.

A number of changes were made to Link's Management Committee at the AGM. We would like to say a huge thank you to Martin Harper (RSPB), who stepped down as a Trustee after a full term on the Board. Martin has been a member of Link's Management Committee for the past six years and has been Deputy Chair of Link since 2008. We are delighted that Victoria Chester (Plantlife), a current member of the Management Committee, has agreed to step up into the role of Deputy Chair. In addition we would like to extend a very warm welcome to Lucy Cooper (The Grasslands Trust) who was elected as Link's newest Trustee.

And finally, congratulations to Jo, our Marine Policy and Campaigns Advisor, who will be going on maternity leave at the beginning of March. Jo will be sorely missed, but we wish her all the best. We are currently recruiting for a Marine Policy and Campaigns Coordinator to cover for Jo whilst she is away.



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

The main work for NIEL this period has been on the NI chapter of the National Ecosystem Assessment, which is now out to review. NIEL has been granted a Building Change Trust project to look at a combination of effective environmental messaging and adapting the sector to straitened circumstances.

The long awaited independent review of the eNGO sector arrived in October. NIEL held a meeting in December to look at the results; in particular at how the sector can work most effectively with fewer financial resources, and the first stage of planning for the future via the BCT project.

NIEL continues to work on huge numbers of consultation; the Planning Bill, Regional Development Strategy, local government reform and more, all before elections in May. Full reform of local government will not take place until 2015 or so (elections of new 'old' councils will be for a full term in May) but much, including development control of planning, Community Planning and Power of Wellbeing going out to Councils (alone or in groups) before then. Major Environmental Strategy is also being developed - exciting and busy times.

Wales Environment Link (WEL)

In October WEL's Climate Change Working Group issued a press release welcoming the launch of WAG's Climate Change Strategy, but raising concerns about delivery. The group wrote to the Environment Minister with WEL's key messages for the December climate talks in Cancun. The messages were included in the official Cancun statement from the Wales Climate Change Commission. This quarter, the Climate Change and Energy & Transport Working Groups have merged, to improve cross-cutting work on climate, energy and transport. This larger Working Group has retained Climate Change as its title.

WEL supported a meeting of the Cross Party Group for Biodiversity in October which included a presentation on investing in nature's capital and a tour of Newport Wetlands.

Members of the Biodiversity Working Group gave oral evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee's Biodiversity Inquiry in November. In December, WEL sent a letter to the Rural Affairs Minister regarding the Glastir agri-environment scheme and concerns regarding the ability to deliver for biodiversity.

The Marine Working Group is producing an educational Marine Booklet. The group submitted their contribution for the Joint Links response to the Marine Policy Statement consultation in October.

Members of all Working Groups have collaborated to produce a WEL response to the Natural Environment Framework consultation, *A Living Wales*, which was submitted in December.

WEL representatives met with the Environment Minister in November to discuss the review of the statutory environment sector in Wales, cross-departmental working, marine issues, coastal access and Glastir.