

In this issue....

- 1 Letter from the Chair
- 2 WORKING GROUPS
 - Farming & Rural Development
 - Woodland
- 3 Land Use Planning
 - Wildlife & Trade
 - Whales
- 4 TASK FORCES
 - Biodiversity
- 5 Marine
 - Bycatch
- 6 Water
 - OVERARCHING
 - NERC Bill
 - Commons Bill
- 7 SISTER LINKS
 - Northern Ireland
 - Scotland
- 8 Wales
 - NEWS FROM THE LINK SECRETARIAT

"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 Members,

A major focus of this quarter for the Link Secretariat has been the Government consultation on the Marine Bill. This work area continues to occupy a substantial amount of both the Secretariat's and members' time. The dedicated work of all the individuals concerned has, however, not gone unnoticed or unrewarded. Wildlife and Countryside Link has received, on behalf of the UK Link organisations, a substantial grant of £65,000 from a coalition of Charitable Trusts (the Tubney Charitable Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin), to fund work on the Marine Bill and to employ a consultant to draw together a wide-ranging strategy and a long-term programme of work on the Marine Bill, on behalf of the UK Link organisations which identifies funding requirements in this area. This is a fantastic opportunity for the UK Link Marine Task Forces and our members, and we hope that it will open many opportunities for all concerned.

In this quarter, Link's Working Groups and Task Forces have also responded to a wide range of other consultations, ranging from the Rural Development Programme for England for 2007-2013 and the Structural Fund consultations, to the consultation on the amendment of the Conservation Regulations 2006 and the Barker Review of Land Use Planning ('Barker II').

On a downside, in this quarter the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) took place in St Kitts and Nevis, where Link was represented on the UK delegation. At this meeting, the anti whaling nations (including UK, Australia, New Zealand) lost the majority to the pro whalers (including Japan, Norway, Iceland) for the first time in decades, with the pro-whalers winning the vote on the "St Kitts and Nevis declaration", a general statement calling for the resumption of whaling. This declaration stated that whales are out competing humans for fish and that conservation groups are a threat to governments. Link has been actively lobbying the Government on this very issue over the past few years, providing them with information and suggestions as to how they can 'take the initiative' at the IWC. We will continue to lobby the UK Government, asking the Prime Minister to take action to counter the takeover of the IWC by pro whaling nations.

The time has also arrived for Link to commence its forward planning for the next three years. Hopefully by now you will all have submitted your questionnaires to help guide Link's Forward Planning review. I hope to see as many of you as possible at the Forward Planning Workshop on 11th September, which will aim to further discuss Link's priorities for the future. Please make sure you make the most of the opportunity provided by the Forward Planning review to have your say on how you believe Link should be working in the future and which policy areas will form the focus of our activity for the next three years.

Best wishes,



Dr. Hilary Allison

Working Groups



Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair: Nick Collinson, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Farming and Rural Development

This quarter the Farming and Rural Development (FRD) working group submitted a response to the consultation on the draft National Strategy for the next Rural Development Programme for England 2007 - 2013 (the 'next ERDP'). The FRD group also submitted bioenergy-specific comments to Defra earlier in the quarter, to help inform Government's response to the Ben Gill Biomass Task Force report.

The FRD group met in May to discuss, amongst other things, continuing concerns with the development of the next ERDP, the lack of opportunity to be able to provide input into the development of the Programme document and the function of the Rural Development 2007 Policy Advisory Group (PAG). The group continues to attend external meetings, such as PAG meetings and the Agri-Environment Steering Group meetings and Ian Woodhurst, the FRD Group Chair, attended the Defra Stakeholder Group on Cross Compliance in May.

Link's work on its Vision of the CAP continues, with a meeting of the sub-group held this quarter to discuss next steps. Work will continue throughout the summer, with the aim of producing a detailed policy document setting out Link's position in Autumn. During this quarter Link also finalised its position statement on Genetically Modified Organisms, which is available for download at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_PS_on_GM_June06.pdf and began discussions with Land Use Consultants regarding a six month project to investigate the environmental implications of increased bioenergy production and use in the UK.

Bovine TB and Badgers

The consultation on badger culling has now closed and Link's response can be downloaded from our www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_response_Badger_Cull_10Mar06.pdf. Defra have informed all respondents to the consultation that a summary report of the responses is underway but that it will take longer than expected due to the large number of responses received; 47,474 responses were received during the consultation period.

At the All Party Parliamentary Conservation and Wildlife Group meeting held in May, the Minister for Animal Health and Welfare, Ben Bradshaw MP, confirmed that the Government had yet to make a decision on the issue of badger culling and that he was keen to release results of the consultation as soon as possible. Link does not support the proposed culling measures and continues to maintain that, in the current circumstances, we do not support any moves to introduce any form of badger culling as a mechanism to control the spread of bTB.

Structural Funds

During the quarter Link submitted a response to the National Strategic Reference Framework which is available for download from our website at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_response_Structural_Funds_NSFR_22May06.pdf.



Woodland

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

At the Woodland subgroup's first meeting held in the last quarter, it was decided that the group's focus for 2006 would be the next ERDP consultation and the review of the England Forestry Strategy (EFS). The group met in June to discuss the Link response to the EFS, the consultation for which was launched in May. A first draft of the response was circulated to members for comment in advance of this meeting and Link also met with Keith Kirby & Emma Goldberg from English Nature in early July to share positions and discuss the review of the EFS further.

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Working Groups

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In this quarter the group also submitted nominations to the Forestry Commission's South East and South West Regional Advisory Committees and it is expected that Link will be informed of the outcomes of these nominations by November.



Chair: Henry Oliver, CPRE
Vice Chair (Minerals): Ruth Chambers, Council for National Parks
Vice Chair (Planning): Ed Pomfret, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Helen Meech

Land Use Planning

ODPM has now been replaced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) under Ruth Kelly's leadership. DCLG is an expanded department with a powerful new remit to promote community cohesion and equality, as well as responsibility for housing, urban regeneration, planning and local government. Link wrote to Ms Kelly to welcome her to her new role and request a meeting to discuss Link's priorities for the new Department.

The focus of the work of the Land Use Planning group for much of the last quarter has been the Barker Review of Land Use Planning (Barker II). Link submitted detailed written and oral evidence to the review, highlighting the importance of spatial planning in protecting and enhancing wildlife, landscape and other aspects of the natural and historic environment. The interim report of the Barker II Review is expected in July, to which the group intends to respond.

Government has announced their intention to produce a Planning Policy Statement on climate change (PPS26). Link held a workshop in June to discuss what PPS26 should contain, and a number of Link representatives are expected to attend a series of upcoming TCPA Stakeholder events centred on the development of PPS26.

Work also continues on the production of a spatial planning briefing intended to assist local authorities and others implement the changes brought about by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The document will be distributed to planning authorities in the coming weeks.



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

Wildlife and Trade

During this quarter a reorganisation has taken place at Defra, resulting in a change in the staff responsible for CITES Policy and the Head of the division. In June, a delegation of Link members met with Trevor Salmon, the new Head of CITES Policy at Defra who has replaced Bob Ford in a swap round of roles. At this meeting the role and value of the Link representative on the UK delegations to CITES meetings was discussed together with the proposed timetable in the run up to the next Conference of Parties (CoP), CoP14, due to take place in the Netherlands in June 2007. Link has also begun discussions with Defra on possible proposals to CoP14, which may include proposals on Non-Detriment Findings, Internet Trade and Spiny dogfish.



Chair: John Frizell, Greenpeace International
Vice Chair: Virag Kaufer, WSPA
Vice Chair: Leah Garces, WSPA
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Whales

Whaling

During this quarter the Whales subgroup met regularly in the build up to the 58th International Whaling Commission (IWC) annual meeting held in St Kitts & Nevis, at which it looked likely that Japan would obtain a majority for the first time since the 1970's.

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Working Groups

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Link and its members worked hard to direct political attention to whaling, planning for different voting scenarios and prior to IWC58, a delegation of Link representatives met The Gambia's Deputy Commissioner to discuss his country's membership of the IWC. The group also provided the UK Government with a list of NGO representatives for the UK delegation and submitted comments on the provisional annotated agenda, which is available for download from our website at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_comments_IWC58_agenda_04May06.pdf). Prior to leaving to attend IWC58, Link members met with Defra's Whale Team to discuss the annotated agenda and IWC58 in detail.

Despite this work, at IWC58 the anti-whaling nations lost the majority for the first time in decades, with the pro-whalers winning the vote on the "St Kitts and Nevis declaration" - a general statement calling for the resumption of whaling, stating that whales are out competing humans for fish and that conservation groups are a threat to governments.

Sakhalin II

Both the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD) held consultations on Sakhalin II, ending in April. A small group of Link members then met to discuss next steps and Link submitted a short letter to the EBRD and ECGD urging them not to fund the Sakhalin II project.

In May many Link members attended the EBRD's AGM, at which Sakhalin II was discussed. Representatives from Link member organisations, Sakhalin Environment Watch and other international environmental campaign groups protested outside the meeting, and presented a dossier of evidence regarding environmental problems with the project to EBRD officials.

Sonar 2087

Following the group's letter to the Secretary of State for Defence requesting information the MoD may have on the recent beaked whale strandings in Spain, a reply has now been received from the Royal Navy denying any involvement in the strandings. Link judged this response to be unsatisfactory and has again written to the Navy asking for further information on this issue.

Task Forces



Chair: Martin Harper, RSPB
Vice Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Secretary: Helen Meech

Biodiversity

The NERC Bill received Royal Assent on 29th March, with the biodiversity duty clause remaining as a duty to "have regard to" rather than "to further" biodiversity conservation. Government has committed to report in three years on how this duty has been addressed by public bodies and Link intends to work with Natural England in the coming months to influence emerging guidance that will encourage public bodies to implement the duty and check they are reporting appropriately.

Members of the Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) continue to contribute to the BAP review, working closely with Government to help shape the next stages of the process. Link raised concerns regarding the review timetable and process at the highest level, and circulated the Joint Links statement on the BAP Review to the UK Standing Committee for consideration.

At the BTF meeting in May, the group developed ideas on how to maximise advocacy opportunities through both proactive and reactive work. Three desired outcomes were agreed: renewed commitment across Government to a reinvigorated BAP; targeting of resources to the right conservation priorities in the most efficient way; and increased resources for biodiversity delivery. The group also wrote to the new Biodiversity Minister, Barry Gardiner MP, to introduce the work of Link and set the scene for a forthcoming meeting.

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Task Forces

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Many Link members attended the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference in Belfast in June. John Everitt (The Wildlife Trusts) and Heather Thompson (Ulster Wildlife Trust) gave a presentation on behalf of Link at the event, which built upon the challenge set out in the Joint Links 2010 leaflet. The BTF continues to advocate the challenge set out within the leaflet, and is considering further opportunities for its dissemination. If you have any upcoming events at which you would be willing to distribute the leaflet please contact Helen (helen.meech@wcl.org.uk).

The BTF also submitted a response to the Defra consultation on the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &C.) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006, which can be downloaded from www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_response_Habs_Regs_consultation_30Jun06.pdf.



Campaign Chair: Ben Stafford, RSPB
Policy Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair (Campaign & Media): Anthony Field, WWF
Vice Chair (Policy): Melissa Moore, Marine Conservation Society
Secretary: Helen Meech

Marine

The last quarter has seen a very busy time for Link's Marine Task Force. Defra published the consultation package on the Marine Bill in late March and Link issued a press release in response (see www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_PR_Marine_Bill_Consultation.pdf). A two-day workshop was held in late April to develop a Link response to the consultation, and to develop a strategy for engaging the media and members of the public during the consultation period. A substantial Link response was submitted to Defra in June and is available for download from our website at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_response_Marine_Bill_23Jun06.pdf.

Representatives of the MTF attended each of Defra's Marine Bill Forum events in May, and met a number of key stakeholders including English Nature, the Environment Agency, and the Sea Users Development Group (a coalition of industry bodies) during the consultation period. The group also continues to liaise with Defra, meeting the Marine Bill team to talk about Link's response to the consultation in some detail, and Ben Bradshaw to discuss the consultation and the Bill timetable. The MTF also continues to engage with other Government Departments, and will meet Malcolm Wicks, Minister for Energy at the DTI, in July.

Link was a sponsor of the Coastal Futures Marine Bill conference in June. A number of Link representatives gave presentations at the event and Joan Edwards, Chair of MTF, chaired the first session of the conference. The outputs of the conference are available from www.coastms.co.uk.

Link has also submitted written and oral evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry into the Marine Bill.



Chair: Ali Ross, Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society
Vice Chair: Lissa Goodwin, Marine Connection
Secretary: Helen Meech

Bycatch

In May, representatives of Link's Bycatch subgroup met Ben Bradshaw MP, Minister for Fisheries, to discuss cetacean bycatch. There was a detailed discussion on the deployment of pingers, and Link urged Defra to actively support the investigation of other potential mitigation measures including alternative fishing methods. Link later wrote to the Minister to follow-up on the meeting expressing its wish to work closely with Defra to find effective solutions to the problems discussed. Defra have since agreed to set up a meeting with officials to continue the dialogue on pingers and cetacean bycatch.

Task Forces



Water

Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB
Vice Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

The Water Task Force (WTF) pooled its technical expertise to inform a Joint Link response to the consultation on the Water Framework Directive UK Technical Advisory Group (UKTAG) draft report, which was submitted in mid-April and can be downloaded from our website at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Joint_Links_response_to_UKTAG_18Apr06.pdf. Link is working to maintain dialogue with UKTAG representatives on aspects of water quantity and quality, and hydromorphology, contained within the draft report. The WTF met in May to discuss, amongst other things, progress in River Basin Districts (RBDs) Liaison Panels process and the EA's Head of Monitoring, Catherine Wright, updated the group on the establishment of a WFD compliant monitoring system.

During the quarter, many of Link's members attended meetings held in each of the ten English and Welsh RBDs at which representatives of local and regional environmental NGOs met to discuss the best ways to organise themselves as a sector and who should be nominated as the sectoral representative on each RBD Liaison Panel. Link wrote to the Environment Agency (EA), both centrally and regionally, to support the proposed nominations and to press the case for an increase in the number of panel seats allocated to the environmental sector in certain RBDs. Link is awaiting confirmation of the acceptance by the EA of the Link supported nominations.

Overarching



NERC Bill & Natural England

Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Following Royal Assent on 30th March 2006, this quarter has seen the implementation of a number of provisions from the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. The new provisions regarding the use of rights of way by motorised vehicles which came into effect at the beginning of May have been welcomed by Link's members. The provisions in the NERC Act are intended to curtail the scope for adding further public rights of way for motor vehicles to the local highway authorities' legal record of public rights of way. Also, certain wild birds are now afforded increased protection under the law. The NERC Act makes it an offence to take, damage or destroy the nests of certain wild birds at any time during the year.

At the end of April, the Executive Board of NE was formally announced. The thirteen new appointees are: Peter Allen, Melinda Appleby, Sarah Burton, Roger Clarke, Lynn Crowe, Merrick Denton-Thompson, Michael Depledge, Tony Hams, David Hill, Doug Hulyer, David Macdonald, Christopher Pennell and Pam Warhurst. They took up their positions on the NE Board when the body was legally established in May and Link understands that copies of NE's Strategic Directions document will soon be available and distributed to stakeholders early in third quarter.

The NERC Act is available for download at www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060016_en.pdf



Commons Bill

Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

The Second Reading of the Commons Bill in the House of Commons took place in April followed by four sittings of the Committee.

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Overarching

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The Report stage and Third Reading subsequently took place on 29th June and the Bill has now returned to the House of Lords, where it is expected to be considered on 17th July, soon after which it is expected that the Bill will receive Royal Assent before Parliament rises for Summer Recess in late July.

An implementation working group for the Commons Bill has also been established, with the first meeting taking place in late June, which examined the implementation of a number of Clauses from the Bill.

The latest version of the Bill (including changes made at Report stage) can be downloaded from www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmbills/115/2006115.htm

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL has held a number of seminars and conferences over the past few months: 'Maximising the Benefits' on water legislation in March, 'Growing for Life' in April and 'Landscape, an integrated approach' in May. NIEL have also been working hard on helping develop the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy and contributing to the Review of Environmental Governance (developing an Environmental Protection Agency for Northern Ireland).

Work on the Task Forces, especially Marine and Planning, is proceeding and our Annual General Meeting and conference, also on the Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plan, was held in June. The SD Strategy and its Implementation Plan was also the subject of our most recent Fact Sheet. For copies of any of these documents or reports of the conferences see the NIEL website at www.NIenvironmentlink.org. or if you would like to receive NIEL's monthly NIEL News publication by email to keep you up to date with environmental issues in Northern Ireland, get in touch with Kelly (Kelly@nienvironmentlink.org).



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

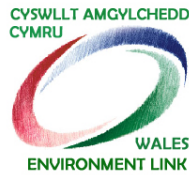
LINK is working hard to improve the Planning legislation going through the Scottish Parliament and is disappointed at the lack of independent scrutiny of the proposed national planning framework, the lack of a third party right of appeal and only partial commitment to a purpose of sustainable development.

Landscape is coming up the agenda with clauses likely to be added to the Planning Bill to secure National Scenic Areas with adequate funding and powers. LINK is pleased to have two places on the new Scottish Landscape Forum.

The Marine Task Force has responded to the consultation on the UK marine bill, flagging up the need for a Scottish Marine Act. The Scottish Climate Change programme has been published and the task force is planning briefings on energy efficiency, biomass and nuclear issues.

A new coordinator Ylva Haglund has been appointed to take LINK through the Holyrood elections in May 2007. In June LINK ran a workshop, with Quality of Life as the key theme for the campaign covering the issues of health, economy/wealth, food (including farming, fishing and aquaculture), action on threatened species and places, and tackling waste and pollution.

Sister Links



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

Wales' first Environment Strategy was launched on May 17th. The need for this strategy was highlighted by WEL during campaigning for the Assembly Elections in 2004. The Environment Strategy Working Group will meet once a year to monitor implementation of the Strategy's Action Plan.

Member organisations recently challenged attempts to revive a Severn barrage proposal which they believe is neither a green nor a cost effective option. A joint statement was signed, calling upon the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments not to waste time and resources on yet another Severn Barrage feasibility study.

The 2006 review of WEL highlighted demand for development in certain areas such as increasing the potential and number of working groups, improving the number of consultations to which WEL can respond and developing new facilities within the Assembly Information Service. There is clearly room to expand, WEL's Management Committee are looking into possibilities for increasing staffing levels.

The review was overall a very positive exercise, words like 'vital', 'first class' and 'model' organisation clearly show the need for the services WEL offers and the value members place on the growing network. WEL recently welcomed the Bat Conservation Trust as the 27th member of the network.

News from the Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The second Management Committee meeting of 2006 was held on 27th June at Link's offices. Issues discussed at the meeting included Link's quarterly accounts, 2005 Annual Accounts and Link's Forward Planning review. Link members are being encouraged to submit a completed Forward Planning survey (one per member organisation) and are invited to participate in a workshop to discuss the results on 11th September at The Wetland Centre in Barnes. More information on this is outlined in the 'Other Link news' section below.

At this meeting, Frank Syratt confirmed that he will be standing down as Link's Treasurer at the end of the year. We will therefore be looking to replace Frank. If you are aware of any colleagues who would be interested in acting as Link's Treasurer please contact Alexia (alexia@wcl.org.uk) for more information.

In addition, Anna Shiel from the National Trust advised that she would be moving roles within the National Trust, and therefore unable to stand again as a Trustee for Link. If you would be interested in becoming a Trustee of Link please contact Alexia for more details.

The next Management Committee meeting is scheduled for 27th September.

Other Link news

Link's Forward Planning work has now begun, with our current workplan due to end at the end of 2006, we have been seeking views from all our members on our future workplans and where Link should be focusing in the future. Thank you to all who have contributed to this process to date.

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News from the Secretariat

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If you haven't already done so please ensure your organisation is represented - as you will be aware Link sets its work areas based upon the views of our members so your input is extremely important to us!

A report setting out the results of the initial survey will be produced in August, to be followed shortly afterwards by a workshop on Forward Planning, on Monday 11th September at the London Wetland Centre (thanks to WWT for hosting Link for this event). Please let Alexia know as soon as possible who will be representing your organisation at this workshop (alexia@wcl.org.uk). The results from this workshop and the survey will form Link's Forward Planning review document, which we hope to send out by November, in time to inform our future plans for 2007 onwards.

During this quarter, Link confirmed the appointment of three Vice Presidents; Peter Ainsworth MP (Conservative), David Kidney MP (Labour) and Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (Liberal). The role of the Vice Presidents will be to raise the profile of Link's interests with a wide range of audiences and in particular within their own political sphere.

The redesigning of Link's library continues slowly but surely. The reconfiguration of the library database in MS Access by our volunteer from the MSc in Conservation course at UCL, Graeme Duckworth, has been halted whilst we re-catalogue the remaining sections of the documentation. Sabina Korzonkiewicz-Scheich, an undergraduate from the Open University, has recently joined us to carry on with this time-consuming process, and to help out with other Secretariat related tasks. Sabina will be with us until the end of September.

And finally, many of Link's members will be aware of the recent funding received by Wildlife and Countryside Link, on behalf of the UK Link organisations, towards work on the Marine Bill campaigns. Over the remainder of the year, Alexia will be responsible for managing a substantial grant of £65,000 from a coalition of Charitable Trusts (the Tubney Charitable Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin), which is intended to fund work on the Marine Bill and to employ a consultant to draw together a wide-ranging strategy and a long-term programme of work on the Marine Bill, on behalf of the UK Link organisations. If you have any questions regarding this funding please contact the Link Secretariat (enquiry@wcl.org.uk).



Wildlife and Countryside Link