

Q3 Report July - September 2011

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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,

This quarter Link has started the sizeable task of holding the Government to account on its pledge to be the ‘greenest Government ever’.

The work has resulted in our recent *Nature Check: an analysis of the Government’s natural environment commitments*. Thanks to all members who helped with the assessment and media work and to Link staff, especially Kate Hand and Jodie Bettis, who pulled it all together. *Nature Check* complements *Climate Check* by our colleagues at the Green Alliance. Both reports use a traffic light system to convey a clear message that the Government’s deeds not words are vital in succeeding on its 16 green commitments, including the restoration and protection of the natural environment for present and future generations.

The summer saw a heated debate on the Government’s *draft National Planning Policy Framework*; heated because instead of listening Ministers chose, unwisely, to attack conservation NGOs during the public consultation and seek to drum up support from business interests to oppose legitimate concerns. Link’s Land Use Planning Working Group tracked the public debate and used its meetings with the Minister to reiterate concerns on both the thrust and the detail of the proposals. Championing genuine ‘sustainable development’ is the opportunity around which we have rallied in our quest for a better, greener planning system instead of a developers’ free for all under the guise of localism and simplification.

Following the Natural Environment White Paper in the spring the England Biodiversity Strategy, *Biodiversity 2020*, promised to put detail on the Coalition’s vision for conservation and the natural environment. Link swiftly assessed the Strategy when it appeared in August but we were surprised at how little it added to the NEWP.

In July the European Commission announced its budget proposals which suggested that funding for the environmental aims of the Common Agricultural Policy would be, thus far, 25% of total funding. In response we sent Joint Links’ *briefing* on the future requirements of the CAP and the EU Budget to all MPs and Peers. This was very well received by Lord Henley, Environment Minister who said, “The Government is keen to see ambitious reform of the CAP which enables a thriving, competitive and sustainable agricultural sector.” Link’s Agricultural Working Group continues to relate the importance of agri-environment schemes and other key tools in a new, forthcoming report: “*Crunch time for CAP: Choosing the right tools for a richer countryside*” to be launched at a Parliamentary event on 8 November.

Link’s AGM on 7 December is a date to note. We’ll present some of the ideas Link’s Management Committee has been considering for 2012. We’ll also hear the results of the Members’ Survey which will inform the work plan for the coming year, and present the results of the Link membership subscription review.

Thank you for your continuing work and support and I hope to see you on 7 December.

Best wishes,

Paul de Zylva, Chair



Agriculture

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*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”

At the beginning of the quarter the Joint Links published a [briefing](#) on the future requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the EU Budget. The briefing, sent to all MPs, was well received by Lord Henley, Minister for Environment, who assured Link that the Government was committed to “the effective delivery of environmental public goods.” On 6 September Link wrote to Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, summarising concerns regarding the EU Commission’s proposals for greening the CAP. The Minister for Agriculture, Jim Paice MP replied in a detailed letter with assertions that the UK Government would continue to place strong emphasis on agri-environment schemes.

Throughout the quarter the AWG has worked with Joint Links on a new report for the forthcoming CAP entitled, *“Crunch Time for CAP: Choosing the right tools for a richer countryside.”* The report outlines a set of key tools that the reformed CAP should include to ensure a healthier countryside. The report will be launched at a parliamentary reception on 8 November hosted by Neil Parish MP with Jim Paice delivering the key note speech. A number of farmers and key officials will be invited to attend. For more information please contact [Kirsten](#).

In July the Agriculture Working Group (AWG) enjoyed their meeting held at the National Trust’s Wimpole Estate, where the [MyFarm](#) project is situated. The Group discussed CAP reform, the Natural Environment White Paper, the Farming Regulation Task Force and several other policy related issues.

Link members also attended both the Rural Development Programme for England Programme (RDPE) Programme Monitoring Committee and the Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective Stakeholders Group in July. Both meetings held encouraging discussions on the implementation of the RDPE, and the implementation of current Entry and Higher Level Stewardships respectively.



Biodiversity

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*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”

This quarter Link joined the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Biodiversity. Over the next year Link’s Biodiversity Working Group will be involved in discussions with the APPG on topics including the England Biodiversity Strategy (EBS) and ‘Biodiversity and Climate Change’. Link met with Natural England in July to discuss the EBS and improvements to future baseline monitoring. Link also attended the England Biodiversity Group (EBG) meeting where further discussion was held on the need to improve baseline data, along with biodiversity offsetting and Nature Improvement Areas as proposed by the [Lawton Review](#).

Both the EBS, [Biodiversity 2020: Strategy for England’s and Wildlife and Ecosystems Services](#) and a corresponding discussion paper on [Developing indicators to measure success](#) were released in August. The EBS aims to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 in line with the international Nagoya 2010 agreement and the recently published Natural Environment White Paper.

Following these releases, the Biodiversity Working Group met on 8 September to examine *Biodiversity 2020* in detail and create priority actions across Link’s working groups. In September the group met with Natural England to discuss the delivery plan for this strategy and will continue engagement with both Defra and Natural England on the plan going forward.



*Acting Chair: Paul Miner, CPRE
Acting Vice Chair: Lee Bruce, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Kate Hand*

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

Localism Bill

During this quarter the Localism Bill underwent the Committee Stage in the House of Lords. The **Greenest Planning Ever (GPE) Coalition** provided briefings on Link’s tabled amendments which were discussed and debated by peers and received cross-party support.

Report Stage in the House of Lords Report Stage ran from 5 - 17 October. The GPE coalition produced a briefing on its key issues for Report Stage, supporting amendments on sustainable development, neighbourhood planning and community right of appeal.

Following a successful meeting in July, the GPE coalition arranged a second meeting with Baroness Hanham, the lead for the Localism Bill in the House of Lords, to discuss sustainable development, Clause 130 (financial considerations in planning), a limited community right of appeal and transitional arrangements.

NPPF

The Government’s **draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** was published in July and following this, the Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) discussed and drafted Link’s response in early September.

Link met with Defra in August to discuss the likely impact of the NPPF on the natural environment. Link expressed concern with the inadequate definition of sustainable development, as well as the weak language used to discuss the protection of biodiversity. In addition, Link stated the need for greater cohesion between the objectives of the Natural Environment White Paper and the NPPF. Defra has since expressed Link’s concerns to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), and will continue to discuss planning reform issues with Link.

In early July the LUPWG wrote to Greg Clark MP, Minister for Decentralisation and Cities, to highlight these concerns and in response to Link’s letter, he met with the LUPWG in September. Link stated concerns with the strong economic focus of the draft and the need for a robust definition of sustainable development that incorporates the five principles of sustainable development from the 2005 UK Sustainable Development Strategy. The Minister suggested that a draft definition be submitted by Link to operationalise the high level Brundtland definition. Following the meeting the LUPWG wrote to the Minister to reiterate these points, and to emphasise the need to align planning reform with the recently published Natural Environment White Paper.

Marine

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*Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn*

“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”

Link’s Marine Working Group’s focus continues to be on England’s *Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) project*, which is now entering its final phases.

At the beginning of the quarter Link attended the All Party Parliamentary Group Annual General Meeting in which the Environment Minister, Richard Benyon MP, spoke about the Marine and Coastal Act (2009). Following the meeting Link wrote to the Minister stressing that in order for the MCZ network to be truly ecologically coherent, it must protect examples of the entire range of habitats and species found in healthy UK seas, as well as rare, threatened, or vulnerable wildlife.

In September Link attended the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) stakeholder meeting, hosted by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and attended by Natural England, JNCC and Defra. Discussions focused on the progress of the MCZ project, in particular the designation, and effective monitoring and management of sites. Link restated ongoing concerns with the MCZ project, including the slipping timetable, the lack of protection for mobile species and the emphasis on socio-economic considerations.

Link was invited to sit on the MMO’s Sustainability Appraisal Advisory Group for the first two marine plan areas (*East Inshore and East Offshore*), and attended the first meeting of the group in August.

Natural Environment White Paper

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*Chair: Paul Wilkinson, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Alice Hardiman, RSPB
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday*

“The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) Task Force seeks to influence the White Paper and its outcomes to empower the recovery of England’s natural environment”

The Natural Environment White Paper Task Force met in July to discuss the content of the White Paper and related work since its *publication* on 7 June. It was agreed that the task force should now focus on Government plans to implement the White Paper, which will be important to all of Link’s working groups.

In August Defra invited Link members to attend the first of a series of meetings to discuss strategic landscapes and access policies in the White Paper and to explore opportunities for collaborative working.

The Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Committee have launched a *second inquiry* into aspects of the White Paper. The focus of this inquiry includes actions required across Government for delivering a green economy and the resources needed to develop a practical programme sufficiently detailed to deliver the White Paper’s ambition. Link responded to the enquiry in September, which will be shared with all members of the Select Committee.

On 1 September the Natural Environment White Paper Task Force met to focus on the delivery of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) in preparation for a meeting with Defra on 19 September. Link is keen to ascertain the roles of LNPs and how they fit in with other initiatives. The NIA panel will be meeting to agree a shortlist of projects to be funded. Link will attend a further meeting to discuss criteria and guidance for LNPs in November.

In late September Link met with Defra to discuss the White Paper’s implementation plan. Defra will be producing a document which includes the lead contact responsible for each of the 92 commitments.

Water

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*Chair: Robert Cunningham, RSPB
Vice Chair: Janina Gray, Salmon & Trout Association
Secretary: Kate Hand*

“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”

The Water Working Group met on 18 August. Discussions culminated in the agreement of Link’s strategy for the Water White Paper, with actions to include meeting MPs and using the Natural Environment White Paper to strengthen the group’s arguments.

In September Link released *A Blueprint for a Sustainable Water White Paper*, highlight advocacy priorities for the forthcoming Water White Paper. Link has written to MPs interested in water issues to share the key test document that envisages good health of wetlands and rivers, fairly priced water and a reduction of waste resulting in water efficiency as marks of a strong White Paper. In response the *Blueprint for Water Coalition* received an invitation to meet with Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Richard Benyon MP, Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries to discuss these concerns further.

The Water Working Group met with the Water White Paper team at Defra in September. The White Paper team noted that the paper would look at the long-term picture for water use, in the face of pressures including climate change and the need to improve facilities and infrastructure whilst keeping prices affordable. The White Paper is expected to be published in December 2011. In the lead up to the publication, the Blueprint for Water Coalition will develop statement positions on water trading, inappropriate mitigation measures and water protection zones. The Environment Agency is also keen to develop a stronger ongoing relationship with the Coalition and will be meeting regularly to update them on concerns.

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”

The *61st meeting of the CITES Standing Committee* took place in Geneva this quarter. Prior to this, Link attended a meeting of the Joint NGO Liaison Group on CITES to discuss the CITES Standing Committee, as well as to make preparations for the *25th Animals Committee meeting*, and address the UK’s shortlist of species for Review of Significant Trade. At this time Defra also confirmed that the COTES reviews regarding enforcement and Ports of Entry and Exit would be taken forward, and that the associated regulation would be in place by autumn 2012.

The Wildlife Trade Working Group met on 13 October to discuss key priorities ahead of the next Joint Liaison Group meeting on CITES later in the month. Members of the group will also be updating each other on their activities in this area of policy and Link has invited Humane Society International (HSI) UK to attend the meeting as HSI is interested in joining this group. If you are interested in attending or would like more information about this group’s work please contact *Jodie*.

Whales

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*Chair: Mark Simmonds, WDCS
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn*

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

The *International Whaling Commission’s 63rd Annual Meeting* (IWC63) took place in Jersey in July. Prior to the meeting Link published a *Briefing to the UK Government on key issues for IWC63*, highlighting key concerns and priorities for IWC63.

Several Link members attended IWC63 and two Link/NGO representatives sat on the UK delegation to the IWC, along with Defra and the UK’s IWC Commissioner. Link was delighted that the *UK-led governance proposal* to improve the transparency and effectiveness of the IWC was adopted. Unfortunately IWC63 did not end so well, with 20 pro-whaling nations walking out on the last day to deliberately prevent a vote on proposals for a new whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic. The resulting delays in talks meant that a number of important issues including marine debris, small cetaceans, noise pollution and the conservation remit of the IWC were not discussed at all, much to the disappointment of Link.

Following IWC63, the Whales Working Group wrote to Richard Benyon, the Environment Minister, to congratulate him and Defra on the UK’s strong representation and commitment to whale conservation at the meeting.



Update from: Kate MacColl

Scottish Environment LINK (SEL)

This has been a quiet quarter for a number of the SEL taskforces as the new SNP majority government settles in and taskforces wait to see its plans in various sectors.

SEL's August seminar on environmental economics "*Greening the Economy for a Sustainable and Prosperous Scotland*", which offered a broad view on approaches to environmental economics - from the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, to GDP alternatives - was well attended by both members and invited guests. To continue engagement after the event, SEL has set up a new Economics forum to develop a LINK position and strategies for advocacy.

A briefing on SEL's Single Outcome Agreement work, underlining the need for the SOA process to deliver on the environment, was circulated to new MSPs in July. This led to an invitation for LINK to give written and oral evidence to the Planning, Local Government and Regeneration Committee in September. The Taskforce continues work on LINK's Manifesto for the 2012 local government elections, *Acting Locally*, which will be launched on 26th October in Edinburgh.

Following a meeting between the Cairngorms National Park Authority and SEL members in September, a new National Parks Taskforce has been set up which plans to monitor the delivery of National Parks objectives in Scotland and to promote strategic considerations. One of the first tasks of the new TF will be to engage with the new CNPA draft plans at a joint workshop to be held with the Park Authority later this year.

In August SEL's Wildlife Forum submitted a proposed set of Biodiversity Indicators to the Scottish Government during their refresh of Scotland's National Performance Framework.

Activity in the Freshwater taskforce has been centred on the preparation and submission of the LINK response to SEPA's '*Flooding in Scotland*' consultation. The Taskforce presented a summary of the response at the National Flood Management Advisory Group in August, a good opportunity to present LINK's views.

One of the main successes of the Marine Taskforce this quarter, was the designation of the Mingulay SAC. Further, the Taskforce is pleased to hear that the Sound of Barra has been put forward as a candidate SAC and it will be taking part in the consultation on the scientific case in due course. In July the Marine Taskforce met with SNH and JNCC to discuss the least damaged/more natural areas review and the MPA process.

Update from: Sue Christie

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL have been busy finalising the summary document for the NI chapter of the National Ecosystem Assessment for the big local launch on 20 October and preparing an agreed paper on what we as a sector feel should go into the NI Programme for Government which will be out for consultation shortly. In addition there have been major consultation exercises on plastic bag levy, revision of waste management strategy and legislation to allow for National Parks. Work also continues on our Building Change Trust project around environmental messaging and encouraging collaborative approaches. Our annual conference in June was a highly successful event with both the Minister and most of the Environmental Committee in attendance to discuss environmental priorities.

Update from: Susan Evans

Wales Environment Link (WEL)

This quarter, the Biodiversity and Land Use Working Groups have focussed on Glastir agri-environment scheme and CAP reform. They have been monitoring and commenting on the latest developments regarding the revised prescriptions for the All Wales Element, and the proposed outcomes of the Targeted Element of Glastir. Both groups have also contributed to the Joint Links CAP reform report, *Crunch Time for CAP: choosing the right tools for a richer countryside*, which will be launched in November. The Land Use Working Group has been supporting the Coed Cadw (Woodland Trust) led campaign to protect ancient and notable trees.

The Marine Working Group has concluded its successful 'Summer of Seas' campaign during which marine representatives engaged face to face with over 1500 groups and individuals at various events and gained 275 official supporters of the campaign via the new WEL marine website <http://www.waleslinkmarine.org.uk/>

Members of the Natural Environment Framework Working Group met with Welsh Government Officials in September to discuss more detailed proposals for a single environmental body in Wales, which would result from the potential merger of Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales. WEL representatives raised concerns about the primary purpose and draft overarching aim for this proposed body. Our next regular meeting with the CEOs of the three organisations is planned to take place next quarter.

The Climate Change Working Group has decided to update its position statement on Severn Tidal Energy in the coming weeks.

WEL was pleased to welcome our new Advocacy Officer, Raoul Bhambral, who started in post in September.

Link Secretariat



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Update from: Sam Bickerstaff

In August Link advertised for an interim Director, to provide cover whilst Jodie Bettis is on maternity leave. Link is delighted to announce that Dr Elaine King has now been appointed. Elaine has over 15 years of management experience in the third sector and was Chief Executive of The Badger Trust from 1996 to 2006. Elaine is returning to the Link network after serving as the Chair of the Board of Trustees at her local pre-school and raising two children through their early years. We hope you will all give Elaine a warm welcome when she takes over the reins in November. Jodie will be on maternity leave from 28 November 2011 until January 2013.

The release of the Natural Environment White Paper, the England Biodiversity Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework has highlighted some key Government trends on the environment, which impact across a number of Link's working groups. In light of this, Link is encouraging collaborative work across all its working groups and held a Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting on 1 September to share policy updates and communicate working group strategies.

On 21 September Link's Management Committee held its third quarterly meeting of 2011. Discussions focused on the plans for the forthcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) and implementing recommendations of the members' subscription review. Trustees also looked across the horizon at future policy areas to prepare for the 2012 work plan.

Link's AGM will take place on 7 December at the British Ecological Society in London. The day will begin with a gathering of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all Link's working groups and task forces before the official business of the AGM begins at 15:00. This year the topic for the annual post-AGM debate will be 'sustainable intensification' of the UK food supply and invited speakers will be exploring this issue from the perspectives of people, wildlife and animal welfare. Invitations and registration forms will be circulated in the next few weeks. For more information on your AGM voting rights, please contact your Link representative.