

E-bulletin: March 2012

Welcome to Link's March e-bulletin. Please see below for March's top stories and updates from each of our working groups. If you would like to subscribe to our e-bulletin or submit news items, please contact [Louise](#).



Link reaction to the NPPF

The Government finally published its [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) on Tuesday 27 March. In its '[red lines](#)' for the NPPF Link set out a number of tests that the document would have to meet in order to be genuinely sustainable.

We said that the NPPF should define 'sustainable development' in line with the Brundtland definition and the five principles in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy; the NPPF does this, and the pursuit of sustainable development has been expanded to include 'net gains for nature'. The presumption in favour of sustainable development has retained the 'significantly and demonstrably' test which we said should be removed, however, the 'default yes' to development has gone and the NPPF is clearer that 'local plans should meet objectively assessed need', *unless* 'specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.'

We also said that the Framework should show consistency with the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP), which is now referenced in the NPPF. In addition, the core planning principles now include recognition of 'the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside' as well as the encouragement of a Brownfield approach (although without recognising Open Mosaic Habitat). The NPPF also links to the NEWP, and importantly it clearly recognises European sites, irreplaceable habitats, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Wildlife Sites and Nature Improvement Areas within the planning system.

We also lobbied for the reinstatement of the town centre first policy and for development to be located next to existing public transport, both of which have been clearly recognised within the final NPPF. Finally, we called for transitional arrangements to allow Local Plans to be updated to take account of the NPPF, and the Government has announced that there will be a 12 month implementation period for that purpose.

Overall, the Government has come considerably further than expected towards meeting our concerns, and although there are still issues of concern with the NPPF, it is a good basis on which to go forward.

Link reaction to Osborne's budget

Following the Chancellor's announcement of the budget for 2012, on 21 March, Link expressed concern over the Government's continuing negative attitude towards the environment.

Dr Elaine King, Link's Director, commented, "It is worrying that the Chancellor persists in wrongly casting our natural environment as a barrier to growth and prosperity. Claims that vital environmental protections stifle good development are groundless.

"The Budget's description of planning reforms suggest that the Government will focus on economic growth at the cost of genuinely sustainable development. The Government still has the chance to ensure its new reduced planning rules will properly protect our wildlife and countryside not put it all up for grabs.

"Last October, our [Nature Check report](#) showed the Government had rapidly lost ground in its claims to be the 'greenest Government ever'. We want to help the Government repair its reputation but that has to start with proper restoration of our natural environment and not treating it as an endless resource."

To view Link's Budget statement online click [here](#).

Cutting Red Tape

On 19 March, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Caroline Spelman MP, announced the results of the Environment Theme of the Government's [Red Tape Challenge](#).

It was stated that, of 255 environmental regulations, 132 are to be made simpler or consolidated and 53 obsolete regulations are to be removed all together. The Government plans to take forward the proposals in consultation with the public and stakeholders. It also acknowledges that some proposals may alter in the light of the Law Commission's review of wildlife legislation, which is due to publish its conclusions in February 2013.

The Government is currently seeking views on water and marine regulations. The deadline for submission is 12 April. For more information, click [here](#).

Link trustees meeting

At Link's first Management Committee meeting of the year on 19 March, the Trustees signed off our independently examined Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2011, which will shortly be available to view on the [Charity Commission](#) website. Discussions also focussed on Link's advocacy work, the Operational Strategy for 2013 – 2015 and the subscription structure for 2013.

Link Secretariat at full strength

Following a recruitment process last month, we are pleased to announce that John Sadler and Julie Middleton have now joined the Link team.

John, our new Marine Policy and Campaigns Coordinator, has worked with the Campaign for Better Transport and in various roles for the Ramblers over four years, latterly coordinating the Get Walking project. He has worked on a range of environmental projects and was part of the team that successfully campaigned for the Marine and Coastal Access Act. John is passionate about wildlife, marine and conservation issues and his favourite coastal area is the North Norfolk coast.

Julie, our new part-time Policy and Campaigns Coordinator, has 12 years experience across a range of Link's policy areas, including planning and forestry management, and has worked with organisations including the National Trust, the National Trust for Scotland and the Food Ethics Council. Julie also spent six years in South Africa, where she worked as a consultant to the post-apartheid Government on environmental policy, planning and regulation. Julie will provide secretariat support for the Agriculture and Legal Strategy Working Groups.

For updates on who will provide secretariat support for each of our working groups, please see the relevant working group's page on our [website](#).

Joint Links

Joint Links biennial seminar will be hosted by Northern Ireland Environment Link, at Strangford Lough, Belfast. on 26 - 27 September 2012. More information will be available shortly.

Follow Link!

Link has now joined the world of Twitter! To keep up to date with Link news and articles relevant to our working groups why not follow us. Click [here](#) to check out our Twitter page.

ENDS Report

Does your organisation subscribe to the ENDS Report? It would be much appreciated if you would be willing to share these with Link once you have finished with them or send us relevant articles. Please contact [Louise](#) if you can help. Many thanks.



CAP Consultation

Link has submitted a response to Defra's discussion paper on the [impact in England of EU Commission regulatory proposals for Common Agricultural Policy reform, post 2013](#) with support from 15 member organisations. The response focuses on the problems around the current direct payment system and makes suggestions regarding the greening proposals for Pillar I. A copy of Link's response is available on our [website](#).

Agri-Environment Stakeholder Group

Link members attended a meeting of the Agri-Environment Stakeholder Group (AESG) on 20 March, at which Defra and Natural England provided feedback on uptake and performance of the various schemes in 2011-12 and discussed plans for 2012-13. In the year ahead, a greater focus will be placed on monitoring outcomes of the schemes, with an expanded list of nine indicators announced for the Higher Entry Level Stewardship Scheme.

Pesticides Forum

Vicky Kindemba from Buglife, attended the Pesticides Forum on 22 February on behalf of Link, which focused on the following topics:

- UK Pesticides National Action Plan. The Pesticides Forum will remain the primary engagement group for the Pesticides NAP, helping to develop the document through a series of working groups and informing its delivery via voluntary initiatives. A draft NAP has been produced and it is likely that there will be a public consultation on this before the final document is submitted to the EC in November 2012. The next meeting of the Pesticides Forum will consider this draft NAP in detail
- Pesticides Forum Annual Report 2011. A draft has been produced and circulated for comment. A final version will be published on the Pesticides Forum webpage by the end of April
- Implementation of the Sustainable Use Directive. Topics covered included training; sales; equipment testing; aerial application; protection of water and specific areas (including conservation areas); and integrated pest management



Terrestrial Biodiversity Group

The Terrestrial Biodiversity Group (TBG) Task and Finish Group met at the end of February to discuss the definitions for Outcomes 1A, 1B (Habitats) and Outcome 3 (Species) of [Biodiversity2020](#).

Working Group

The Biodiversity Working Group will be meeting on Wednesday 25 April to discuss work on defining outcomes for [Biodiversity2020](#) (B2020); the B2020 delivery plan and how it measures up to Link's critique; our report on the 2010 targets for priority species; biodiversity outcomes and Nature Improvement Areas.



Review published

The [Report of the Habitats and Wild Birds Implementation Review](#) was published by Defra on 22 March. This reiterated the Government's commitment to 'ensuring that England's most vulnerable habitats and species are protected and that development is carried out in a sustainable manner'. It set up two new groups, the Major Infrastructure and Environment Unit and the Multi Stakeholder Infrastructure and Habitats Group. There will be new guidance in a number of places, a website which brings all the relevant information together, standards for evidence required, a new Marine Evidence Group, improvements to surveillance and also support for ecological expertise.

Link's Habitats and Birds Task and Finish Group will be considering whether and where it can play a useful role in the implementation of these proposals over the coming weeks.



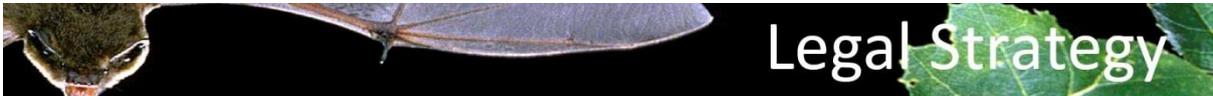
Land Use Planning

Best practice guidance on planning

On 6 March Link attended a meeting to discuss the revised version of The Wildlife Trusts and TCPA-led Green Infrastructure for biodiversity guidance. The guidance will be finalised over the next few weeks with a view to being published in late April.

NGO Planning Panel

Emma Marrington (CPRE), represented Link at the Natural England NGO Planning Panel on 28 March. The meeting provided an opportunity for NE to inform NGOs of their work in spatial planning and to understand NGOs perspective of NE's involvement in planning.



Legal Strategy

Advisory Group meeting

The Law Commission's Wildlife Management Project Advisory Group met on 5 March to discuss the Commission's current thinking on their work programme and potential legislative reforms. Link was represented at the meeting by Matt Shardlow, Director of Buglife and Chair of the Legal Strategy Working Group.

The review is likely to address a wide range of legislation affecting wildlife. The Commission expects to publish its consultation document, leading to a three-month consultation period, at the end of July 2012. It will report to Defra – who commissioned the review – in February 2013 with a draft Bill being published in March 2014.

For further information on the Law Commission review, contact [Julie Middleton](mailto:Julie.Middleton@lawcommission.justice.gov.uk) and see: <http://lawcommission.justice.gov.uk/areas/wildlife.htm>

Wildlife and Countryside Act adjustment

Defra has acknowledged that a section of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Amendment) Resolutions 2004 on the possession of a wild bird egg was made unlawfully. Defra is now reviewing the options for amending the legislation and is seeking stakeholder views. Defra subsequently intends to undertake a full public consultation. Link is planning to respond to Defra shortly.



Marine

Ministerial meeting

Link's Marine Working Group will be meeting the Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries, Richard Benyon MP, on 17 April primarily to discuss the consultations for the Marine Consultation Zones (MCZ) impact assessments. The group will be holding a pre-meeting with Defra's Marine Biodiversity Team on 16 April.

Marine Strategy Framework Directive

Link will be meeting with Defra on 23 April to discuss the public consultation on the implementation of the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#) (MSFD), following its publication on 27 March.

Red Tape Challenge

The Red Tape Challenge 'spotlight' period for Water and Marine has now been extended to 12 April to allow stakeholders more time to comment. Link will be submitting a response to the consultation in the coming weeks. Members of the public are invited to post comments on the Red Tape Challenge website at: www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/themehome/water-and-marine



Natural Environment White Paper

EFRA evidence session

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee has postponed the Natural Environment White Paper evidence session planned for 27 March until 18 April. The Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries, Richard Benyon MP, will be providing evidence.

Meeting with Defra

Paul Wilkinson, from The Wildlife Trusts, represented Link at a meeting with Defra on 15 March to discuss Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs). Defra plans to open the LNP application process in early April and the first LNPs will be announced before prorogation. Discussions on LNPs centred on funding and the relationship between LNPs and LEPs. In terms of NIAs, Defra is establishing an 'enabling framework' to support Local Authorities to identify and potentially recognise NIAs in local plans.



Water

SuDS consultation

The Blueprint for Water coalition has [submitted a response](#) to the consultation on national standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), with sign-on from 10 member organisations. Whilst Blueprint is very supportive of the Government's aim to drive an increase in the uptake of SuDS, the group have concerns over the way SuDS are promoted through this consultation. Link's response highlighted a lack of clarity and precision in several areas including: defining the terms 'affordable' and 'sustainable'; how climate change may impact SuDS uptake; and how SuDS could be utilised to deliver water quality benefits. It was also noted that complementary Government policy priorities, including the Natural Environment White Paper and England Biodiversity Strategy, have not been mentioned at all in the SuDS consultation.

Nitrates consultation

The Water and Agriculture Working Groups have [submitted a joint response](#) to the consultation on the Implementation of the Nitrates Directive in England, with sign-on from 13 member organisations. The response recommends that Defra applies the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone Action Programme to the whole of England and that Defra links meeting obligations under the Nitrates Directive with opportunities to incentivise sustainable farming practices through CAP reform.

Thames Water

The Blueprint for Water coalition has been invited to sit on the Thames Water Customer Challenge Panel and will be working with member organisations to input into this group. Carrie Hume, from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and chair of Blueprint, is representing Link on the panel and attended the first meeting on 19 March.

Link also attended Thames Water's Water Resources Forum on 9 March to discuss their Water Resources Management Plan, which sets out how they will meet predicted water demand over the next 25 years. The current and developing drought situation was also discussed at the meeting.

National Drought Management Group

The Blueprint for Water has been invited to join the new National Drought Management Group, which will be a cross-sector team to manage coordinated delivery of drought management activities, communications, risk mitigation and forward planning. The group will meet every two weeks through the summer, and the Blueprint representative is Paul Knight (CEO, Salmon & Trout Association).

At their first meeting on 19 March, the group discussed the Environment Agency's Drought Prospects report, including the role of landowners and farmers in supporting EA. The increased danger of alien species during droughts was also raised. It was agreed that planning was required now for a third dry winter and summer 2013, and for an increasing number of droughts due to climate change. Drought controls for 2012 will increase restrictions, starting with temporary use bans, leading into household restrictions, only priority agricultural/business use and ending in full Drought Orders where necessary.



IWC like-minded meeting

On 5 March Link's Whales Working Group attended a meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) like-minded countries. Discussions focused around resolutions for the 64th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, scheduled to take place in Panama on 11 June to 6 July 2012.

Meeting with the IWC Commissioner

Ahead of the IWC like-minded meeting on 2 March, the Link Whales Working Group met with Nigel Gooding the newly re-appointed IWC Commissioner. Link is in the process of nominating two NGO delegates to attend the Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission.



Environmental Audit Committee

The [Environmental Audit Committee](#) held two public evidence sessions this month for its inquiry into Wildlife Crime. These took place on 7 and 22 March. Last month Link [submitted a response](#) to this inquiry to commend the work of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and urge that the introduction of the National Crime Agency (NCA) does not undermine the work of the NWCU. Link's

response also expressed concern over the potential weakening of protection for wildlife and highlighted the need for improved surveillance.

JLG meeting

Members of the Link Wildlife Trade Working Group attended a meeting in January of the Joint NGO Liaison Group (JLG), chaired by Defra's [*Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species*](#) (CITES) and International Species Policy Team. Discussions focused around the EU regulations review which aims to be finalised by April 2012 and preparations for the 16th Conference of the Parties on CITES in March 2013. The next JLG meeting will take place on 16 May in London.



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