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In the text Link documents
are in italics and underlined.

Copies are available by
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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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Wildlife and
Countryside



Quarterly Report January-March 2003

Letter from the Chair

Earlier this year you may have had a call from the Link secretariat as we updated the database of information about our members. Thank you for responding as it has given us some really useful statistics. In 2003 Link's members have a combined membership of nearly 7 million people, together we own and manage almost 390,000 ha (which is larger than Hampshire county) and we have a combined turnover of over £700 million pa.

Given the scale of Link's membership it is unsurprising that Link is constantly busy. Ruth Chambers of CNP recently commented that Link is very efficient at ensuring everyone is kept up to date and well informed on current policy issues. The benefits of Link extend outside its membership. This was demonstrated last week when a DEFRA official contacted Link as a shortcut to contacting all the relevant NGOs individually. One call to Link and the information went to all the members working on the issue. I hope you agree that the working groups are great sources of targeted information as well as being useful for discussing joint responses to the latest government consultation. If you have any comments about how Link works then please tell us, the Secretariat will be reviewing all the groups over the summer and seeking your comments.

We will also be reviewing our priorities and activity more generally since this is the last year of the current workplan. The Secretariat will be asking you for your ideas and suggestions about where Link can best add value and the issues on which we should be running working groups and task forces from 2004 onwards. This is your key chance to shape Link activity for the next 3 years. If you have an issue which you think would benefit from working with other members through Link then Pippa should be your first port of call as she will be able to help you develop your idea into a working proposal.

The Management Committee has also been reviewing Link's financial position. We will need to address some strategic issues about funding within the next two or three years for Link to thrive in the longer term. We will be writing to members soon to explain the issues in more depth and to seek your feedback on how we should solve the problems. A little of your time spent on this will be very useful to us.

The management committee think that it is a good time to remind key players in DEFRA of the benefits of Link and how they could support it in the future. This not only benefits Link's members, but also benefits the department and saves them time.

On the policy side all the working groups and task forces have been busy. Within Parliament Link has been working on joint briefings on the Water Bill. The briefings have had wide support from across the membership and have been well received. The Water Bill looks like it will keep us busy into the next quarter when Link will also be working on joint amendments to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill when it reaches the Lords.

If you have not yet commented on the Haskins' review of Defra's delivery arrangements please let us know your thoughts soon, Link will be meeting Chris Haskins again in May and I am a member of his sounding board.

Best wishes

Tony Burton

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

Early in the New Year, Link members were concerned by developments which threatened to undermine the mid term review of the CAP. Link teamed up with Sustain and the UK Food group to send an open letter to Margaret Beckett expressing our joint concerns. The letter was supported by 25 organisations. The letter to the media had signatures from 23 chief executives of member organisations. Unfortunately reform of the CAP was not of interest to the media and the letter did not get picked up by any of the press.

Link members attended meetings of the Agri-environment Review steering group in January and March. Many members are represented directly on the steering group, Link is represented by Pippa Langford.

Lord Whitty's contact group met again in March and was updated on CAP MTR developments. There were discussions about the possible impacts of decoupling income payments and the possible effects this may have on the rural environment and land owners.

In March Link members met with English Nature and the Countryside Agency to discuss the latest CAP MTR developments. The meeting was very useful as an opportunity to discuss issues and exchange views. Notes of the meeting were circulated to the farming group. Members were urged to make their views known as soon as possible because of the pace of developments at the European level.

Defra has established a Food Industry Sustainability Strategy steering group, chaired by Lord Whitty. The first meeting was held in March at which the Terms of Reference were discussed. Link was concerned that a false divide was being created in consideration of pre and post farm gate issues were separated. The second meeting of the group is to be held on 6th May, Hannah Bartram is the Link representative.

Agri-Environment Schemes Review (2nd Consultation)

In response to DEFRA's consultation, Link expressed its support for the proposed integration of schemes outlined in the consultation with a hope that it would pave the way to more joined-up thinking in the wider land management of our countryside. Link expressed a view that the integrated management of issues such as biodiversity, food production, forestry, non-food crops, carbon management, water management, waste management, access, recreation and the historic environment must be addressed if we are to achieve a truly sustainable land use system.

Meetings

21st January 2003 Link working group meeting 9 attended, 8 organisations

23rd January 2003 – Agri-Environment Review steering group meeting

14th March 2003 Lord Whitty contact group meeting

26th March FISS meeting

28th March EN/CA Link meeting

Activity Forecast

April Hedgerow regulations consultation response

May AES Steering group meeting

May FISS meeting

June DWPA consultation

Monitor and respond to developments in the CAP MTR

Woodland Sub-Group

Link members were concerned by some rumours about the recent Economic Review of Forestry Policy in England and in light of these Link wrote to DEFRA to express its views and observations. Concerns were raised that the Treasury would see the opportunity for resurrecting the proposals of the early 1990s examined

in the Forestry Review in 1993 for a major rationalisation of the public forest sector. Link believes this would create public outcry over the potential loss of millions of acres of publicly accessible woodland.

Land Use Planning WG

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

The Bill passed rapidly through the Commons with very little quality debate, 28th Jan was the Bill's final day before Committee in the House of Commons. The level of debate was poor, much has been left to guidance and secondary legislation. Only about one third of the clauses have been debated despite Lord Rooker's assurance that the Bill would not be rushed through. It is hoped that the Lords will examine the Bill more closely. Members of Link will be identifying priorities for a joint book of amendments for the Lords.

John Prescott announced the Community Plan in early February. Members are concerned about the potential for new housing in the southeast and elsewhere, and the lack of community involvement. Members agreed to work on a joint statement on participation in the planning system.

Aviation

Link members issued a joint statement on aviation in January. Link supports the Government's stated aim of developing a long-term policy for aviation that is based on sustainable development principles. We are concerned, however, that the current 'predict and provide' approach to policy, based on questionable forecasts of demand, will mean that significant growth in the air transport will be at considerable damage to the environment and communities, and is not therefore based on sustainable development principles. We called on the Government to develop a policy that respects environmental capacity constraints, manages demand, and makes more efficient use of existing infrastructure.

Working Groups

Countryside Agency and Planning

On March 11th the group met with David Brooke of the Countryside Agency to discuss the agency's involvement in the planning system.

The internal structures of the CA have been altered – now there are two main work areas

A Helping Communities in the Countryside

B Helping everyone to benefit from the countryside

Planning is in B – rural well being through the countryside, “Planning and Sustainable Development” is to be renamed “Positive Planning”. This will include less work on energy and urban fringe as these work areas are moving to other teams. The central planning team is being reduced from 7 people to 5. There will be a new head of planning appointed on 1st April. The HQ role is clear, they need to select the most important things on which to work. The central office will become a conduit for some planning matters – such as energy, however they will continue to work on central planning matters and MPGs.

In future the agency will need to be more selective especially at regional level. The regional staff will remain the same. There are an average of one and a half people at each region to deal with planning issues. The agency will prescribe a “menu” of issues from which regions can decide their priorities, this will require intelligence on plans and strategies, but will hopefully direct effort towards the most important issues.

Review Of Planning Policy Guidance 7

In January Link members issued a joint statement on a new PPG7 this received fair coverage within the planning press, and has been accessed by many people from the website. Link expressed the view that the rural environment is under increasing pressure and PPG7 provides the principal source of guidance for rural authorities on managing change in rural areas.

On March 20th some Link members met with Nicci Collins and Sheila Watson, Beckett's special advisors. The meeting included discussions on the government's sustainable development strategy, the planning and compulsory purchase Bill, a new PPG1, green belts, rural housing, embedding countryside character into the new planning system, PPG7, Discerning development, National Parks – the test for major development, PPG22, the Sustainable Consumption and Production Strategy and the review of the Rural White Paper.

Meetings

23rd January 2003 – Land Use Planning meeting, 8 attended, 8 organisations

11th March 2003 – Land Use Planning Meeting, 6 attended, 6 organisations

20th March 2003 Meeting with Defra's special advisors

Activity Forecast

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill debated in the Lords

PPS 7 May or June public consultation

PPS 1 Link statement

Public participation in the planning system - Link statement

MINERALS SUB GROUP

In January, group members attended a seminar on minerals planning guidance that Land Use Consultants had been commissioned to prepare for POS. The LUC work was felt to be useful, though there was much the group felt was missing - there was no consideration of the Aggregates Levy, or alternative materials other than secondary/recycled aggregates. It was unclear how the

guidance would fit in with the MPGs once they had been reviewed. LUC hoped to release the final document by April.

The group continued to monitor the progress of the Aggregates Levy and Sustainability Fund. English Nature had apparently been overwhelmed by applications to the Sustainability Fund for restoration projects, and was expected to be allowed to carry over some of the money which should be spent this year. Group members had a useful meeting with Defra at the end of March, where they exchanged ideas on the forthcoming Defra review of the Fund and the types of projects Link would like to see funded. A meeting to discuss the effects of the Levy with Customs and Excise was arranged for early in the second quarter.

Meetings

20th January 2003 - LUC/POS - guidance on minerals policy in development plans

29th January 2003 – Minerals Group meeting

28th March 2003 – Minerals Group meeting with DEFRA

Activity Forecast

7th April 2003 - Minerals group meeting with Paul Harrison, HMCE

11th April 2003 - deadline for MPS2 response

14th May 2003 - WRAP Aggregates Forum Meeting

PPG 9

The Link Scoping Paper for the new PPS9 was finalised in mid-February, and the group met with Defra's Martin Capstick and Hilary Neal in March. It was confirmed that PPG9 would be revised to a PPS, accompanied by a legal circular and Good Practice Guidance. ODPM (which had declined to meet the group at this stage) was leading on the revision, and Defra's role

Working Groups and Task Forces

had not been clearly defined, though the departments were working closely together and EN was also engaged in an advisory capacity. Feedback on Link's paper was generally positive, and Defra were keen to continue to receive Link's comments and to meet again in future. Formal consultation on PPS9 was still expected to take place in late Spring, although worryingly the accompanying documents would not be consulted on at the same time, and in fact may not be consulted on at all.

Meetings

12th February 2003 - PPG9 group meeting

5th March 2003 – PPG9 meeting with Martin Capstick and Hilary Neal (DEFRA)

Wildlife and Trade Group

The group met with Defra, FCO and the CITES authorities for a Cop12 de-brief in January. All agreed that the inclusion of a Link rep on the UK delegation had been a positive step, although the arrangement needed to be worked on in advance of the next CoP - unsurprising, as we were invited to nominate a rep very late last year, so that preparation time with the delegation was extremely limited. Officials were pleased with many of the CoP outcomes, and Link urged them to ensure that decisions were properly implemented. Link also raised concerns regarding the EU decision making process in advance of and during the CoP (and at other international meetings where the EU takes competency).

This is a significant issue - NGOs feel that there is a lack of public accountability due to the closed nature of these meetings, and that this may be one factor which allows Member States to change their votes at very short notice (this had happened at CoP12). Where agreement cannot be reached among Member States all 15 are forced to abstain - this had been the case, for example, in the ivory decisions at CoP12. The group decided at a later meeting that this should be a focus for joint lobbying with other European NGOs.

Link met again with DEFRA in March to discuss the renewed possibility of ivory trade and associated conditions, in advance of the EU meeting in March. Since the CoP12 decision to allow one-off shipments of ivory from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Link has urged Defra to ensure that all of the conditions laid down to allow the sale are properly monitored and that no sale is allowed unless they are met. This meeting provided the opportunity to discuss requirements for data collection and concerns over how illegal killing of elephants and trade within importing Parties will be monitored and regulated.

The formal consultation on the Review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (COTES) was finally published in January. Link submitted a response welcoming most of the proposals, which included extra powers for police officers and government wildlife inspectors, certain offences becoming arrestable, and increases in some minimum sentences. Such changes would bring the protection of internationally protected species more into line with that afforded to some native species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000).

The 25th meeting of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) took place in March, and members were very concerned that the EU performed very weakly in two debates - one on ecosystem management and one on the draft MoU between COFI and CITES. The first, on ecosystem based fisheries management, was hijacked by Japan and supporters and turned into a 'whales eat fish' debate, whales being characterised as a threat to human food security (and even survival) due to their predation of fish driving down fish stocks. The second, on the CITES MoU, saw Japan and its bloc present an alternative version which would enable a single party to veto future CITES meetings for marine species. The EU did little to counter either move, and trade and whale group members wrote to the Minister to ask for an explanation.

Meetings

15th January 2003 - Meeting with Defra and CITES authorities - CoP12 de-brief

26th February 2003 – Wildlife and Trade Group meeting

3rd March 2003 – Wildlife and Trade Group meeting with DEFRA to discuss ivory

Activity Forecast

22nd-25th April 2003 - CITIES Standing Committee

May 2003 - Wildlife and Trade Group Meeting

August 2003 - CITIES Animals Committee Meeting

Whale Group

Members remained very concerned about Iceland's readmission to the IWC. The UK had acted quickly following the IWC intersessional meeting in Cambridge last October to inform the Depository Government that it did not recognise Iceland's reservation to the moratorium. The group questioned whether the controversial vote which readmitted Iceland should stand, and wrote to the Commissioner urging him to ensure this matter was discussed at a meeting of the like-minded in Rome in February. We also asked the Commissioner to ensure the like-minded considered recruiting more anti-whaling nations to the IWC.

Following reports of Norwegian whalers dumping large quantities of blubber at sea from last year's hunt, members became concerned that this disposal of blubber, which is highly contaminated, could result in harm to living organisms and marine ecosystems. Members felt that this action put Norway in violation of the OSPAR Convention, and wrote to the Minister to urge the UK to take action.

Task Forces

The group continues to discuss possible action to highlight Nordic whaling, and has broadened its focus to look at other threats to cetaceans including noise. Members of the Whale Group and the Bycatch planned to attend the meeting of the Advisory Committee of ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Seas) in Bonn in April.

Meetings

28th January 2003 – Whale Group

6th March 2003 – Whale Group

21st March 2003 – Whaling Humane sub-forum

Activity Forecast

9th - 11th April 10th meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee

6th May - 12th Consultative Whaling Forum

Marine Task Force

The MTF held several meetings in the first quarter to further its campaign plans for comprehensive legislation for the better protection of the marine environment. These included a workshop in February facilitated by consultant Tessa Devlin and attended by PR and media specialists from member organisations. The group has also made great progress on the policy content of the campaign - several internal working papers have been tabled for discussion at recent meetings. It was agreed before Christmas that the group should have joint Chairs this year - Stuart Singleton-White (WWF) now chairs on campaign planning, while Sam Fanshawe (MCS) continues to chair on policy issues.

The RMNC's Legislative sub-group met for the first time in February, and unfortunately proved disappointing due to much disagreement on the group's role and terms of reference. The Chair, Jim Andrews, produced a paper following the meeting which the WCL

and RSPB representatives commented on, and it is hoped that the next meeting, in April, will be far more productive. Link hopes that the LSG will offer real legislative solutions to some of the problems identified in the RMNC's interim report.

MTF members continue to engage with the RMNC working group and the remaining sub-groups. The Irish Sea Pilot Project recently commissioned research which aims to identify gaps in legislation affecting the marine environment - the results of this may be informative to the legislation campaign, and members are keeping a watching brief.

The group submitted a response to the consultation on the Marine Stewardship Report, Seas of Change, at the end of February. The Government issued its long-awaited UK small cetacean bycatch response strategy for consultation in late March. The Bycatch group has planned a meeting in May to discuss a response to the UK strategy.

Meetings

17th January 2003 - Marine Task Force meeting

13th February 2003 - Marine Task Force Campaign Planning Workshop

7th March 2003 - Marine Task Force (Policy) meeting

Activity Forecast

3rd April - Marine Task Force (Policy) meeting

28th April - Marine Task Force (Campaign) meeting

1st May - Bycatch sub-group meeting

9th May - Joint Links marine meeting

29th May - Marine Task Force (Policy) meeting with OSPAR briefing from John Roberts

3rd June - CoastNET conference - Conserving biodiversity in the marine environment - What needs to change? Targets and actions for the future decade.

Water Task Force

WATER BILL

The Water group produced a number of briefings on the Water Bill. They include: General briefing; Extending opportunities for competition; Duties of the new Consumer Council for Water; The costs of unsustainable abstraction; "Better integration of Water Framework Directive requirements needed"; Mechanism to encourage time-limiting of abstraction licences; The need for realistic time limits on abstraction licences; Bringing trickle irrigation within the abstraction licensing regime; Duty to further water conservation.

The group responded to the 2nd consultation on the implementation of the Water framework directive. The group are concerned that the government will not be able to achieve good ecological status as required by the Directive. The government also issued a new Water policy statement "Directing the Folw" which is much more aspirational and indicates that ministers wish to achieve better standards. Link will be writing to the minister to highlight our concerns and indicate the detailed policy consultation does not currently support their aspirations.

Periodic Review

Link members have joined to gether to find the funds so that Link is represented on the steering group for the next phase of the customer research. This is vitla to ensure that the environment is fairly represented and that anti-environemntal bias does not squew the findings.

Ribble Valley Pilot

The link members discussed the esptablishment of th eRibble Valley Pilot by the Environtmn Agency. Link members agreed to work together at the regional lelvel to inform local people and encourage participation.

Task Forces

Diffuse Pollution

Link members have been working on a Link statement on diffuse pollution, this will be circulated around the group in April and following this, the Farming group.

Meetings

28th January 2003 - Environment Agency Water Bill reception

25th February 2003 - Water Task Force meeting, 7 attended, 4 organisations

7th April 2003 Water Task Force meeting 4 attended, 4 organisations

Biodiversity Task Force

The first meeting of the Biodiversity Task Force took place on 27th February, chaired by Martin Harper (PL) and attended by representatives of ten organisations which, between them, are Lead Partners for almost 200 BAP species. Presentations were made on the history of the BAP process by Robin Wynde (RSPB), Tim Sands (TWT) and Martin Harper, and work was done on the Workplan and Terms of Reference. One of the first actions for the group was to write an introductory letter to Hilary Neal, Head of Defra's Biodiversity Policy Unit, to request greater NGO/Link representation on the wide range of groups which are convened by Defra to work on the BAP.

Meetings

22nd January 2003 - APPG Wildlife and conservation - England's Biodiversity Strategy

27th February 2003 - Biodiversity Task Force meeting

Activity Forecast

2nd May - Biodiversity Task Force meeting

21st -23rd May - UK Biodiversity Forum, Battleby

Sister Links

Northern Ireland Link (NIEL)

Northern Ireland Link's (NIEL) main activity during the first three months of this year has been on the strategic planning front. They have held two meetings with Members to devise their new Plan for 2004 - 2007 and have also had several meetings with the Environment and Heritage Service, their Government funder. NIEL hopes that the Recommendations from a review of NIEL's work will be fully implemented, allowing them to greatly increase their activities (due to adequate funding being available) and deliver their ambitious plans. The Review was extremely positive, and they look forward to its implementation.

Northern Ireland Link are about to produce a Fact Sheet on the Built Heritage, and a major publication updating their Environmental Strategy from 1996 will be launched in May at a conference 'Forging Links' between the environmental NGOs and rural community organisations. A highly successful event 'Cultivating Creativity' was held to promote their project. It focused on using the arts to help rural communities address the challenges of change.

Wales Environment Link (WEL)

During the first quarter of 2003, Wales Environment Link (WEL) have made great progress with their Strategic Development Plan. The remainder of their efforts have gone into the upcoming National Assembly Elections in May. For this WEL have drafted, published and circulated the Wales Link statement "Rhetoric into Reality - Assembly Elections 2003 and the Environment" to all 200+ prospective National Assembly for Wales candidates. Furthermore, they have just recently (in time for elections) completed their Elections and the Environment Web site (www.waleslink.org/assembly).

Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

The first quarter of 2003 was the time of last stages of the Water Environment and Water Services Bill in which LINK has been a major advocate in Scotland; also of the Land Reform Bill in which LINK interest has been the Access part. Both came to good outcomes. Scottish Link felt disappointed about the outcome on the Cairngorms Nat Park boundary decision by Parliament. The result of this decision brought formation of a new coalition of public, private and voluntary bodies to fight for a return to the SNH-recommended boundary (ie one including the Perthshire part of the area).

During the first months of 2003, Scottish Environmental Link (SEL) launched a Campaign aimed at raising environment up political agenda in Scotland - via a website (www.everyonecan.org) - with the Holyrood elections as a first step. The aim of the campaign is to identify environment as a voting concern and request response from candidates on their future contribution to the environment, if they became elected.

The first step on this issue was the launch of a 10-point agenda for Scotland ('Must Do It') and a review of the Scottish Parliament's first 4 years track record on environment (For Better or Worse) - both on the campaign website. A comparison of the manifestos will also be included. In addition to that, SEL has organised Hustings across Scotland via LINK members' groups/activists where the main parties can be questioned by local voters about the environment.

Since Christmas, SEL has taken part in seminars on Planning, Wild Land and on Agri-Environment (the consultation by SEERAD).

Organisational Development

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development

Chair: Martin Harper
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Sec: Pippa Langford
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Woodland: Nick Collinson
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Sec: Pippa Langford
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Land Use Planning

Chair: Mark Southgate
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Sec: Pippa Langford
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Minerals: Emily Richmond
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PPG 9: Tony Gent
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Sec: Annie Smith
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Wildlife and Trade

Chair: Rob Atkinson
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Whales: Mark Simmonds
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Sec: Annie Smith
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Task Forces

Marine Nature Conservation

Chair: Sam Fanshawe
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Bycatch: Ali Ross
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Sec: Annie Smith
(annie@wcl.org.uk)

Water Policy and Legislation

Chair: Rob Cunningham
(robert@waterteam.cix.co.uk)

Sec: Pippa Langford
(pippa@wcl.org.uk)

Biodiversity

Chair: Martin Harper
(martin.harper@plantlife.org.uk)

Sec: Annie Smith
(annie@wcl.org.uk)

One-off Initiatives

Access to the Countryside

Future of Commonland in England and Wales

Brownfield Sites

(pippa@wcl.org.uk)

Sec: Pippa Langford

Management Committee Meeting

Management Committee of Wildlife and Countryside Link held its first quarter meeting on 27th March 2003. The matters discussed during the meeting included: subscription and grants, draft 2002 accounts, quarterly accounts (Jan-Mar 2003), Heritage Link, Fundraising, Review of Secretariat Time, Website Review, and Planning Process for 2004-2007.

It was announced during the meeting that Heritage Link will share office space with WCL for which Heritage Link will make a financial contribution to WCL.

The matters of Link's funding were outlined during the meeting, although detailed discussion on fundraising took place earlier in a day during a Fundraising Meeting. Link's members will soon be notified of the route Link plans to take with regards to future funding and the different possibilities that are still under revision.

Another point for discussion was our current website management arrangements. The high cost of any updates (under current arrangements) has forced us to reconsider current arrangements and we are working on creating our new website ourselves and hopefully we will be able to run our spanking new website within the second quarter of 2003.

Other Link News

First quarter of 2003 saw a new arrival to our extended family. Jen Bolton (our Office and Information Coordinator) had a healthy baby girl, whom she named Miranda Jane. Congratulations Jen!

To keep our members up-to-date with all useful information related to their policy work, Anna Rackett (Jen Bolton's maternity cover) has started producing e-bulletins. They are concise information summary of all relevant consultations and information related to the policy and campaigns work conducted by Link. We have already received quite a few responses to say that you find the information useful and that it gives you a breadth, that is not conveyed in other way of communication with members.

We have recently purchased website design software which will enable us to create our own website. Anna Rackett has undertaken the task of website design and she will try to activate a new website as soon as possible.

During first quarter of 2003, we had three new volunteers (Catherine Hoy from Pittsburg, Bjoern Beckmann from Germany and Ralph Underhill (who lives locally), helping Link with different tasks from helping with research on diffuse pollution to updating our database library etc. We want to thank them for their hard work and commitment they have shown while being with us.

Catherine Hoy will be leaving us on 16th April 2003, as she is going back to United States to continue her studies. We are wishing her the best of luck with her chosen career!