

Wildlife and
Countryside

LINK 

Wildlife and Countryside Link Operational Strategy 2010 – 2012

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1. Foreword by the Director

Within weeks of being appointed Director of Wildlife and Countryside Link in September 2008, I was asked by Link's Trustees to lead the Forward Planning Process and produce a work programme for the organisation to take it through the next three years. With the help of the Secretariat and Management Committee, Link filled the summer and autumn with group workshops, management meetings and online surveys, and I had many inspiring conversations with members from across the broad spectrum of organisations that come together under the umbrella of Link.

These forward planning activities provided an excellent opportunity to highlight the challenges ahead and provide an aspirational framework within which Link, as a united coalition of environmental organisations, could strive towards its shared goals. The reframing of Link's mission is a product of those conversations and is set out in Link's Direction Statement.

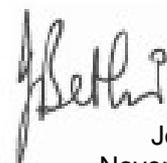
In listening to its members, Link has produced what I believe is an ambitious and achievable Operational Strategy for the next three years. Members want Link, and the issues it represents, to be taken more seriously as part of good government. Members want the government to fear failure on these issues more and not merely to respect Link or see Link as a convenient way to gain support from the environment sector for its policies or to keep our member organisations quiet. We responded by devising a Strategy that we hope will support Link's overarching goal to make it politically desirable to take action to protect and conserve the natural environment.

Through our Working Groups, Link will campaign to get the natural environment as highly placed on the agenda as climate. In particular, we wish to move beyond halting species and habitat loss towards the recovery of biodiversity at a landscape scale. To do this the Common Agricultural Policy will need to evolve into a European Sustainable Land Management Policy and the UK's rivers, lakes and wetlands must meet the ecological objectives of the Water Framework Directive. At the seascape scale, the Marine and Coastal Access Act will need to be fully implemented so an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas can give our marine wildlife the opportunity to adapt to climate change.

I have been encouraged by the enthusiasm shown for coalition campaigning, particularly the goal to push biodiversity up the political agenda. This enthusiasm must now be turned in to action. Link acknowledges the desired change in approach to engaging with those who we seek to influence and Link, as a service provider, will provide the necessary support.

We will introduce a Skills Share Programme to strengthen the network, a Political Strategy Group to sharpen our campaigning teeth and an Enforcement Group that will be ready to defend hard-won environmental laws. In addition, we will consider the expansion of the Link Secretariat to include a dedicated Parliamentary Officer and through regular monitoring we will review all our roles in the delivery of this Strategy.

I am delighted to bring you this new Strategy for Link and I look forward to working with all Link's members and partners to achieve our collective goals in the months and years to come.



Jodie Bettis
November 2009

2. Introduction

This Strategy and its guiding Direction Statement aim to help Link and its members take on the challenges that lay ahead as the political and economic landscapes shift around us. The Operational Strategy (2010-2012) is guided by Link's Direction Statement to 2020 and is informed by the work programmes and advocacy plans of Link's specialist Working Groups. It is a dynamic document which is reviewed and refreshed each year as we move towards Link's 10 year Strategic Goal of ensuring that Link, and the issues it represents, are taken more seriously as part of good government.

The document has two main chapters. Chapter 3 ('The Review') describes where we are now and the challenges that Link must step up to. It begins with a brief look at who our competitors are and what is on the horizon for Link and its members, and is followed by an analysis of Link's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and strengths as well as providing a snapshot of our financial position before contextualising why it was felt that now would be the right time to bring members together to decide our collective future.

The goals, objectives, and targets, and their monitoring, are the subject of the fourth and probably the most important chapter in this publication ('The Strategy'). We set out how we will work and how we will be structured both in relation to our governance and our activity hubs. Members have proposed how they wish to work together over the next three years and we reiterate the principles within which Link agrees to operate as a coalition and a service for its members. Finally, we consider future funding gaps and undertake a risk analysis to inform the implementation of the Strategy that will help set us Link on its course to push the natural environment up the agenda.

3. The Review

3.1 Background

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) marked its 30th anniversary in 2010. Link began as Wildlife Link in 1980, taking over from two existing umbrella bodies, the Council for Nature and the Council for Environmental Conservation (CoEnCo). The formation of Link was driven by Lord Melchett whose position in the House of Lords convinced him that better co-ordination was needed between voluntary organisations with similar core objectives.

In 1982 Countryside Link was formed to look after the interests of the countryside and in 1990 the two organisations merged, creating the organisation that we have today whose interests span the breadth of wildlife and countryside issues. Link members continue to grow their supporter base¹ and work on an increasing variety of policy issues².

With such a diverse membership, Link undertakes a "stock-take" of Link's collective priorities and work areas every three years. During this forward planning process, suggestions from members are synthesised by the Link Secretariat and Management Committee into a forward plan proposal, which the membership refine and then endorse at Link's Annual General Meeting.

¹ The full list of Link's current members can be found at <http://www.wcl.org.uk/our-members.asp>

² A summary of Link's current work areas can be found at <http://www.wcl.org.uk/currentworkareas.asp>

3.2 External Context

3.2.1 Competitor analysis

Link is a unique organisation – it is the only umbrella body of its kind in England that has, over its 30 year history, remained a service to its member organisations rather than operating as an end in itself. Uncommonly, Link is member led and member funded, with a Management Committee elected from the membership and the Chairs of all its working groups led by elected members. As a network, its constituent parts have diverse interests across natural and historic environment conservation, animal welfare and the access and recreation sectors, yet the goals of Link are shared.

Although Link has a unique way of governing, funding and delivering its operations it is not without competitors of sorts, which have the similar aims and aspirations to effect positive change for the benefit of the environment and people through working in partnerships or coalitions. Some coalitions are topic based, such as Stop Climate Chaos or WhaleWatch; others concentrate their activities around particular geographical areas, such as the UK European Environment Bureau (EEB-UK) or regional forums such as North West Environment Link.

Link covers many topics at an England and UK level and therefore focuses most of its efforts on influencing Westminster and Whitehall, as do the majority of its individual members. Larger members also work through Link's nearest equivalent – Green Alliance – on issues relating to climate, energy, waste and the natural environment.

However, Link members are aware of Green Alliance's predominant focus on climate change, working far less on Link issues. And despite campaign and policy successes and influence, Link is not normally perceived as a high level political operator. In both instances members have suggested that Link could step in to fill these perceived voids. This Strategy and its guiding Direction Statement aim to help Link and its members take on that challenge.

3.2.2 Horizon Scan

Link, with others, has successfully put its issues on the agenda such as marine legislation and the recognised need for CAP reform. Defending these gains and developing them presents the environment sector with a continual challenge.

Over time, public faith in politics, politicians and institutions has diminished, whether locally, nationally, at European or international levels. This has reached a low point just at the time when political leadership and action are most needed; the interest in 'localism' and the push for "Big Society" may offer ways to rebuild public faith and engagement.

A short-term preoccupation with UK elections and economic recovery does not disguise the need for consistent and transparent action, for example to avoid biodiversity collapse and man-made climate change. With centre right political parties in power in many EU states, the balance between legislation / regulation and deregulation / the voluntary approach is shifting towards a more laissez-faire market and a conservative political outlook.

Link can use strategic drivers, for example the economic agenda, to achieve gains for the environment. Better clarity of past campaigning strengths and weaknesses, along with improved horizon scanning, will help guide Link to work on the right things at the right time with the right people and to engender the right debates around the right priorities.

See Appendix 2 for a detailed horizon scan by Link (conducted in October 2010).

3.3 Internal Context

3.3.1 SWOT analysis

Link has a track record of influence and success despite not having a high public profile nor its issues being especially high on the political agenda. Opportunities exist to demonstrate the importance of Link's issues to the economic, well being and quality of life debates which now straddle Whitehall (and Europe) and are not confined to Defra.

Link's membership covers a lot of bases and Link provides the means to focus collective aims. This can still be confusing for onlookers to understand and for us to communicate in simple terms. The economic downturn affects our members and Link's dependence on its members to carry out its work makes Link susceptible to the constraints which its members face.

Link members have in the past felt less in control of the agenda and more on the backfoot, locked into consultation exercises. Members wish to strike the right balance between policy work and more overt campaigning. Link campaigns should be unmistakably Link and must be chosen by recognising our unique role.

Our campaigns put Link in pole position in communications with decision makers and play to the strength of the network and of the member organisations. By acting on members' enthusiasm, Link can occupy the space between member organisations' priorities and, in doing so, will strengthen its networking and facilitation role.

See Appendix 2 for a detailed SWOT analysis of Link (conducted in 2009).

3.3.2 Financial analysis

Link is member-led and member-funded. Members provide the majority proportion of Link's core income through an annual subscription and additional voluntary contributions. A number of projects are also funded by the membership, such as the Blueprint for Water campaign and our Joint Links work. Non-member financial support is provided by Natural England which currently grants Link approximately 20 percent of its core costs through a three-year Memorandum of Agreement. In addition, Link's Marine Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator position is fully funded for three years (Aug 2010 - July 2013) by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Tubney Charitable Trust.

Since 2005, Link has ended the financial year on a surplus. This led to Link building up its formerly depleted reserves to a healthy nine months of operating costs in 2009, which should allow Link to weather the economic storm. Link froze its subscription rates in 2010 and it Link will end 2010 with a small deficit.

In light of recent economic events and as an important consideration in the implementation of this Strategy, Link considered the risks to its income and conducted a funding gap exercise for the three year planning period (to 2012). It was found that by operating a moderate budget and projecting forward by three years, Link will be operating on its reserves by 2012. This assumes that the Link office remains at its present location, that all current and future funding bids are unsuccessful, and that there are no further losses in member income. Results also assume that Natural England will continue to fund Link at the present levels and that salary bands will increase by an agreed inflation rate each year.

Therefore, additional income will be required should Link wish to:

- expand operations beyond the current level within the next three years, or;
- retain operations at the current level beyond 2012.

3.4 Rationale for devising a Link Strategy

The Strategy for 2010-12 restates Link's aims by providing a sharper focus to Link's natural environment work that binds all Link members, and explicitly sets out to raise the political stakes.

Against a backdrop of political and economic change, Link's previous three-year work programme came to an end in December 2009. Link took this opportunity to bring members together to review existing work areas to ensure that Link works on those issues of most importance to members and where Link can most 'add value'. Work to agree the 2010-2012 programme (the 2009 Forward Planning Review) was undertaken during the summer and autumn 2009³.

The Forward Planning process keeps Link's work relevant to its members and to the external environment. By being open to new issue areas for collective working and seeking to improve the way Link supports its membership, Link can better deliver the change that its members, and individual staff within those organisations, wish to achieve.

In producing a collectively agreed strategy, Link as a service provider will be better placed to:

- inform the membership of relevant current and anticipated developments in natural and historic environment conservation, animal welfare, and access and recreation policy;
- facilitate the consensus building process through which collective work and messages are agreed; and,
- advocate those messages to external audiences, primarily Whitehall and Westminster, whose decisions affect the environment.

Additionally, the process itself aimed to make Link as a coalition:

- a network that is well informed and confident of the strength of joint working;
- a cohesive body with a shared agenda which draws on and recognises its wide diversity of campaign goals; and,
- a collective of advocates that can articulate the consensus view on issues of importance to its supporters and key policy and decision makers.

³ Details of the consultation process and the participants involved can be found in Appendix 1.

4. The Strategy (2010-2012)

The 2009 Forward Planning Review helped Link to devise its collectively agreed long term direction and strategy for the three year period, 2010 to 2012. The resultant Direction Statement sets out Link's ambitions whilst the Operational Strategy guides the annual work plans from both a policy and campaigns (task-based) perspective and an organisational (resources-based) perspective. Together these documents identify what Link wishes to achieve as an umbrella organisation and helps guide the way in which we will work together.

This chapter sets out in detail Link's Operational Strategy for 2010-2012.

4.1 Strategic Goals, Objectives & Targets

Although this Strategy is operational from 2010 to 2012, Link has taken the opportunity presented by the 2009 Forward Planning Review process to refocus its mission and ambitions over the next decade. Link and its members will steer a course towards a collective long term goal and along the route will work towards meeting a set of strategic objectives built upon the desires and aims of Link's specialist working groups.

4.1.1 To 2020: Link's Ten Year Strategic Goal

Members want Link and the collective positions it advocates to carry more weight with Government, and to be acted upon because they are taken more seriously. Our long-term objective is therefore,

“to ensure that the issues which Link and its members represent are recognised as part of good government.”

Members want the Government to fear failure on environmental issues more and not merely to respect Link or see Link as a convenient way to gain support from the environment sector for its policies or to keep our member organisations quiet.

Link's collective goal is to raise the political cost of failure to protect and conserve the natural environment, in other words, to make it politically desirable as part of good government to take action to protect, conserve and improve the natural environment and welfare protection.

4.1.2 To 2015: Link's Five Year Objectives

Link as a coalition of environmental organisations will work together to achieve the following five strategic objectives for 2010-2015;

- To present an integrated vision for sustainable land and water use that promotes effective mechanisms for supporting landscape-scale natural and historic environment conservation.
- To help protect and connect marine species and habitats through the promotion of an ecosystem based approach to marine conservation
- To raise the political profile of the ethical and economic value of biodiversity and the socio-economic and ecological impacts of its loss
- To promote the delivery of access to nature that is compatible with conservation of wildlife, reconnects society with the environment, and enhances human health and welfare

- To raise the UK's commitment to wildlife protection, animal welfare and respect for animals

Link as a service provider will work towards achieving the following four strategic objectives for 2010-2015;

- To improve the advocacy of agreed collective messages from the environmental voluntary sector to those who can help us bring about the change we desire
- To add value to the work of members by facilitating consensus on policies and providing support in the production of joint positions on a wide range of issues
- To provide a safe forum for members to exchange information, and develop and promote action that could effect positive change
- To maintain a high standard of service whilst developing the Secretariat's capacity to meet the needs of the membership

Progress on these collective goals and objectives will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis, details of which are explained in Section 4.2.5.

4.2 Ways of Working

4.2.1 External Operations: Coalition Activities

In the period from 2010 to 2012, Link will support a varying number of specialist groups. In 2011, Link will support nine specialist groups, seven of which will be Working Groups, one a Task Force and one a Task and Finish Group.

As in recent years, the Secretariat will encourage cross-working group dialogue to help develop common themes, give mutual support, and deliver on complementary aims. Where appropriate and when resources allow, overarching activities will be supported through flexible groupings.

The Biodiversity Working Group will work to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by working with Government to develop a new England Biodiversity Strategy through engaging with Defra's review process. The group will also have a key role in influencing the biodiversity elements of the forthcoming Natural Environment White Paper.

The Agriculture Working Group will work to support and deliver a sustainable, high quality, multi-functional rural environment through influencing policy on rural development, agri-environment, bioenergy, and animal welfare standards. The group will lead a CAP Reform Campaign that will call for a clear route map with measurable milestones for the CAP to evolve into a European Sustainable Land Management Policy by 2020.

The Water Working Group will work to restore the ecology of the UK's rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands by working to ensure the delivery of the objectives of the Water Framework Directive. Through the work of the Blueprint for Water coalition, the group will continue to advocate the 10 steps to sustainable water.

The Land Use Planning Working Group will work to conserve the natural and historic environment by working to improve the national planning system for the benefit of biodiversity and landscape. The group will work with a range of coalition partners to ensure that proposals for planning reform in England help deliver better protection and enhancement of the natural environment as a key component of sustainable development.

The Marine Working Group will work to ensure better protection of marine wildlife and effective management of our seas by seeking the full implementation of the Marine and Coastal Access Act. The group will also review its role in a new England Biodiversity Strategy and the implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The Whales Working Group will work to ensure better protection of cetaceans including through the opportunities provided by the International Whaling Commission. The group will also address issues relating to cetacean conservation and welfare in UK waters.

The Wildlife Trade Working Group will work to improve the conservation of wild flora and fauna threatened by international trade by seeking to ensure the proper implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in the UK.

The Spending Cuts Task and Finish Group will continue to act as a virtual group to share intelligence around the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and will seek to ensure Link's priorities areas are protected in the relevant departmental budgets and business plans going forward. The group will also monitor the proposed sale of state owned forest estate and national nature reserves, and promote innovative finance solutions, where possible.

A Natural Environment White Paper Task Force will be created to continue the work of the NEWP Steering Group, which formed in 2010 to lead Link's work on the White Paper. The new Task Force open to all members of Link, will seek to influence the Natural Environment White Paper through collective advocacy activities. It will consider the need for legislative change to empower the recovery of England's natural environment and will work with other Link Working Groups in the delivery of its aims.

Each Working Group and Task Force will be allocated a member of the Secretariat who will work with the elected Chair of the Group to help deliver both the group's objectives and its contribution to the delivery of the Link Strategy. Cross-group working, with Secretariat support, will also help Link remain flexible and responsive to change, help minimise repetition and capitalise on opportunities that ensure Link's messages to its external audiences are consistent across the spectrum of Link's specialist groups.

Link's organisational structure for 2011 is included in Appendix 3. Although this illustrates well the relationships between the Secretariat and elected officials i.e. Trustees and Chairs & Vice Chairs of Working Groups, the interrelationships *between* the working groups and the linking of common aims is better illustrated by Figure 1 (below).

4.2.2 External Operations: New ideas and activities

Investing in the membership

In the period from 2010 to 2012, Link will seek to facilitate the sharing of skills across the NGO network to better equip the collective to mount more effective campaigns and to engage in more meaningful dialogue with political decision makers and the media. Link will not offer 'training courses' but rather we will work to retain and build on the skills we have both within the Secretariat and across the membership as a whole.

During the review process, members expressed a high interest in getting together to share skills on campaigning and parliamentary work, as well as improving coalition activities around media and communications work and it may be that other needs arise during the period of this Strategy.

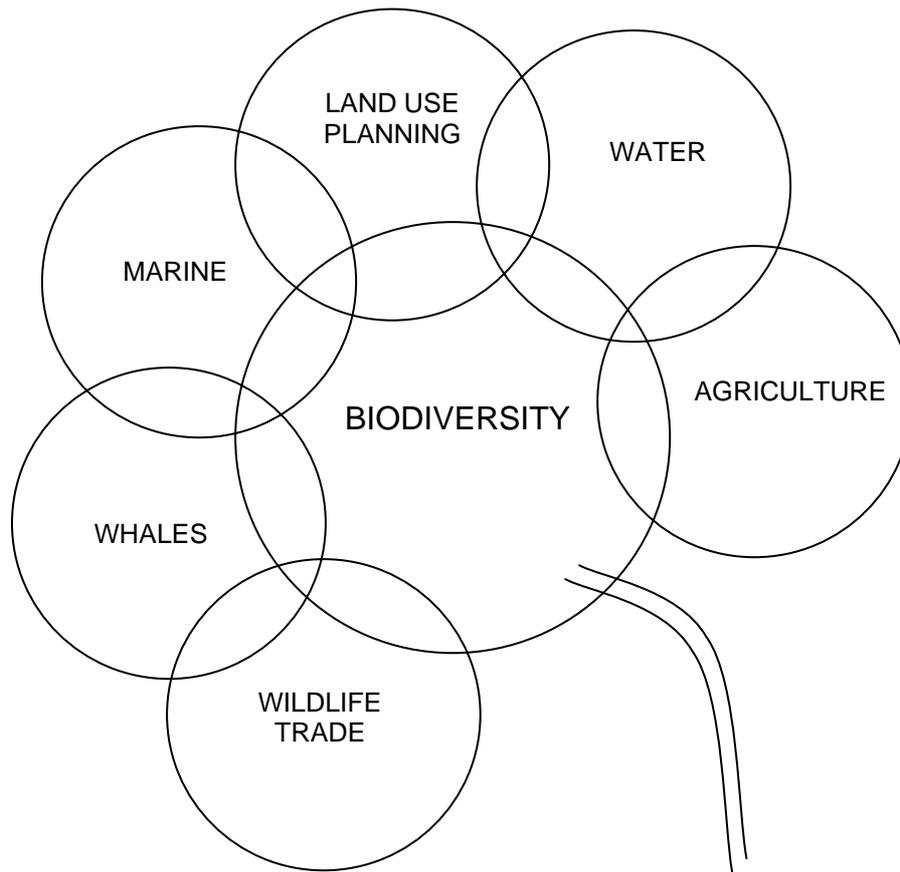


Fig 1 – *The Link Flower of Interdependency* – Each petal represents a Link specialist Working Group for 2010 and how their aims and activities interrelate with each other. NEWP Task Force not shown.

This is not entirely new for Link – Working Groups and Task Forces groups often dedicate time to preparing for collective activities and seek to bring in additional skills as and when required. The change is that skills development will be done more consciously and routinely than it has been done before.

A Skills Share Programme would offer these collective preparations as non-policy based workshops at regular intervals over the next three years. The workshops will be co-ordinated by the Link Secretariat and led by experts from both within and beyond the membership. The aim of a successful Skills Share Programme is to strengthen the capacity of the sector and make Link a more proactive and effective coalition.

During the period 2010-2012, Link will consider holding workshops on the following areas:

- Parliamentary work
- Campaigning
- Media & communications
- Legal work
- European work (in partnership with EEB UK & Green Alliance)

Supporting enforcement action

Link is considering a potential new area of work which has been identified by the membership as having a bearing on the activities of all the Working Groups: environmental law enforcement. The creation of an “Enforcement Task Forces” (or similar ways of working) would be fleet of foot and able to take up opportunities to support members whether on CITES, breaches of planning rules, rolling back of EU Directives, threats to SSSIs etc. Any

enforcement work would be on a case-by-case basis with members coming together to work on specific breaches or soon-to-be breaches of environmental legislation. These 'task and finish' type groups, comprised of those interested in the case at hand rather than a constant coalition of the same members and individuals, would be guided by a Legal Strategy Group.

An inaugural meeting of a **Legal Strategy Group** will be convened in 2011 and if successful, this group will seek to improve the creation, implementation and enforcement of English Law to better protect the natural environment by bringing together legal experts from across the NGO community to identify and take opportunities to provide support to members and working groups in the implementation, defence and development of environmental law. Partnership working with like-minded organisations and external advisors will be encouraged.

Political Strategy Group

As a means of sharpening our campaigning teeth, Link seeks to support some form of a Political Strategy Group whose remit will be to consider how to raise the political profile of the natural environment and to come up with practical proposals for coalition action. Originally envisaged as, a relatively small group made up of a select number of people with specific capacity/expertise in this area, rather than an information sharing forum, the function of this group has been recently taken on by the broader Policy Directors Forum. Proposals for action are reported to Link's Management Committee in the same way as other Working Groups and action is delivered through other Link mechanisms such as the Spending Cuts Task and Finish Group.

For details of how each of Link's groups and forums, Secretariat and Management Committee relate to each other, see Link's Organisational Chart in Appendix 3.

Other Considerations

However much we try to predict the future and plan accordingly, over the life of this Strategy Link will need to be open to acting on and reacting to unexpected events. This may mean re-phrasing or withdrawing Secretariat support for particular projects or topics in order to give more attention to new ones, merging groups and activities more, or adopting different ways of working such as 'task and finish' style groupings. Therefore, this Operational Strategy will remain a dynamic document and will be refreshed annually in light of monitoring and review processes.

Throughout the Forward Planning Process members highlighted the strong desire for Link to be more proactive in setting the agenda and more selective in responding to consultations. Member organisations prepared for the new rounds of policy debate with the coalition government and wanted Link to sharpen its campaigning teeth whilst still retaining the quieter forms of policy influencing, the two are of course linked. The desire to engage in more collective campaigning activities is evidenced in this Strategy by the stated ambition (by the groups) to switch from the current reactive policy 'monitoring' and 'responding' mode to a proactive 'campaigning' and 'advocacy' mode.

The high level of enthusiasm shown for the proposed Link campaigns for 2010 to 2012, particularly the campaign to push biodiversity up the political agenda, must be turned in to action. Through the annual work planning process much of the detail of Link's new campaigns will be agreed, nevertheless, the desired change in approach to engaging with those who Link seeks to influence has been acknowledged by the Secretariat and Trustees, and as a service provider, Link will seek to provide the necessary support.

Link has had many successes over its 30 year history. Link will investigate and bear in mind what has made past Link campaigns successful or otherwise and will consider its proactive

campaigning and advocacy work objectively with the aid of external experts where appropriate. The specific role of its member organisation CEOs and senior level staff in Link campaigns and strategic forums will be examined, as will the idea of developing and advocating position statements on key issues regardless of the specifics of individual consultations.

For example, in 2011 Link will consider provision of secretariat support to the nature NGO CEOs group who originally came together to ensure they had a shared perspective on the White Paper as it was initiated. Also, as part of our aim to ensure that the issues which Link and our members represent are recognised as part of good government, Link will bring its members together to scrutinise the progress in the current Government's stated intention to be "the greenest government ever" by agreeing our own benchmarks and measuring progress against them on a regular basis.

4.2.3 Internal Operations: Governance and Secretariat Management

In 2010 – 2012, Link will aim to retain a full quota of eight Management Committee members elected from and by the membership to serve as Trustees, and will include Link's Chair, Deputy Chair and Treasurer. In addition, Link will retain at least three parliamentary Vice Presidents selected from across the three main political parties.

Link will keep under review the efficacy of the Policy Directors' group which was set up in 2007, to act as source of higher level strategic advice to Link. Through this forum, senior staff from member organisations 'horizon scan' the broad remit of the Link membership to provide Link with an opportunity to better anticipate likely areas where coalition working would be beneficial and to recalibrate its strategy if necessary. Policy Directors will be encouraged to regularly review how they are working and how they can support Link's Strategy, for example through more political strategising as a Political Strategy Group.

Link will continue to be staffed by a professional, dedicated Secretariat comprising four full time members of staff - a Director, two Policy & Campaigns Co-ordinators, and an Information & Office Co-ordinator.

A number of members indicated during the 2009 review process a wish to have a Parliamentary Officer within the Link Secretariat. New funds would be required and it has been highlighted that should the post be funded from core income i.e. from Link member subscriptions and donations, this could raise problems for those organisations with parliamentary staff as they may not make use of the service. Other members may feel there is a case for seeking non-member/external funding for a new post on a three year pilot basis if it were felt that successful delivery of the Link Strategy 2010-2012 warranted an increase in capacity in this area. Therefore, Link will continue to keep under review the consideration of the appointment of an additional staff member within the Link Secretariat.

The review process indicated that there was little appetite to employ a European policy officer within the Link Secretariat, therefore, Link will not consider this appointment during the period of this Operational Strategy.

In both cases, Link will seek to ensure that knowledge and experience of parliamentary procedures and European policy making is kept within the Link network and more specifically that Link staff are appropriately trained to support Link work in both these areas.

4.2.4 Target Outcomes & Deliverables (2010-2012)

A summary table setting out three year work programmes of each of the Working Groups and Task Forces along the timeline of the Strategy is shown in Table 1 below. External drivers, as highlighted in Appendix 2, are included to help contextualise Link activities.

For the purpose of strategic organisational planning, group activities have been aggregated into six month blocks of overarching activities. Individual working group annual workplans will further breakdown these blocks into separate actions and objectives, dependent on the overall aims of the specialist groups.

Over the course of the three year work programme Link expects to be kept extremely busy delivering its agreed work programmes and responding to selected Government consultations. In addition to these activities, Link will continue to keep members informed through its monthly e-bulletins and quarterly reports, with the latter now circulated to Link's partners, funders and other interested stakeholders.

Facilitating meetings of Link's Working Groups and meeting external policy makers and decision takers will continue to be a core activity of Link, as will be the preparation of collective statements such as parliamentary briefings, position statements, reports and press releases. Link will also fulfil its legal obligation to produce and file Annual Reports and Financial Statements and will hold an Annual General Meeting in December each year as specified in its Constitution.

4.2.5 Monitoring the Strategy

The Secretariat will work with the Chairs of the Groups to ensure that annual workplans are in line with the Link Direction and Strategy and that both the aims and activities of each group contribute to the fulfilment of the organisation's five-year Strategic Objectives. In addition to annual workplans, each Working Group will produce clear advocacy plans for submission to Link's Management Committee with a constructive challenge process administered by the Committee. Group workplans will no longer be scrutinised by the Management Committee but will instead be reviewed by Link's Director.

In order to help Link measure its performance as both an organisation and a coalition of members a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) has been selected from a cross section of Link's activities. These will help Link define and evaluate how successfully it is delivering the Operational Strategy. Each of the Strategic Objectives for 2010 to 2015 has associated KPIs which will be monitored on an annual basis as part of Link's regular internal review processes.

Table 2 below includes qualitative KPIs to monitor overall progress towards meeting Link coalition strategic objectives to 2015. Although aspirational, the target outcomes Link would like to see achieved by 2012 are broadly realistic and measurable. However, it is accepted that their achievement may not be entirely within Link's control.

Table 3 includes quantitative KPIs of annual progress towards meeting Link Secretariat strategic objectives to 2015. Annual targets have been set at a level that will allow us to measure Link's level of service to its members. In reality, however, the Link Secretariat can only offer up opportunities to its members to become involved in coalition work - it is down to the membership how many statements / meetings, etc. are run each year.

Table 1: Three year work programme showing phases of working group activities against external drivers, which will be used as a management tool by the Link Secretariat and Management Committee to guide resource allocation across the period of this three-year Operational Strategy.

	2010		2011		2012	
Drivers	<i>International Year of Biodiversity Planning Act implementation New Conservation PPS M&CA Act implementation F&WM Act implementation LDEDC Act implementation Environmental Stewardship Review CITES COP15 IWC 62 PR09 implementation New UK Parliament CBD COP10 EC White Paper on CAP Reform EC 'White Paper' on CFP Reform Comprehensive Spending Review Decentralisation & Localism Bill Public Bodies Bill</i>		<i>Forestry sell off consultation New National Planning Framework Decentralisation & Localism Act Public Bodies Act Natural Environment White Paper Review of COTES Water White Paper Marine plan development Establishment of IFCA's Review of LAAs IWC63 CAP communication expected</i>		<i>UK MPA network designated WFD PoM report due EU CAP Reform negotiations EU CFP Reform negotiations EU Budget Review IWC64 M&CA Act implementation 1st opportunity in this Parliament to introduce new legislation</i>	
Policy areas						
Land Use Planning	Monitoring / Responding	Responding/ Campaigning	Campaigning/ Monitoring	Campaigning/ Monitoring	Monitoring/ Review	Monitoring/ Review
Agriculture	Advocacy	Policy Refresh	Policy Launch	Advocacy / Campaigning	Campaigning	Campaigning
Water	Monitoring / Preparation	Blueprint Event	Advocacy / Campaigning	Campaigning / Review	Campaigning	Blueprint Event / Review
Biodiversity	Preparation / Review	Review	Review	Monitoring	Monitoring	Review
Wildlife Trade	Monitoring	Monitoring	Monitoring	Monitoring	Monitoring	Preparation
Whales	Preparation	Monitoring	Preparation	Monitoring	Preparation	Monitoring
Marine	Monitoring / Responding	Monitoring / Responding	Monitoring / Responding	Campaigning	Campaigning	Campaigning
NEWP		Policy Development / Responding	Advocacy / Campaigning	Advocacy / Campaigning	Advocacy / Campaigning	Advocacy / Campaigning
Spending Cuts		Campaigning	Responding/ Campaigning	Monitoring		

Table 2: Summary table of qualitative key performance indicators of overall progress towards meeting Link coalition strategic objectives to 2015

Strategic objective	Key Performance Indicator	Target Outcome by 2012
1. To present an integrated vision for sustainable land and water use that promotes effective mechanisms for supporting landscape-scale natural and historic environment conservation	Introduction of new effective legislation &/or policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective Flood and Water Management Act introduced (in 2010) • A clear route map for the CAP to evolve into a European Sustainable Land Management Policy set as a high priority for Government
	Implementation of existing legislation &/or policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Act implemented to the benefit of biodiversity, landscape and open spaces
	Meeting of EU obligations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK leads Europe in its implementation of the Water Framework Directive
	High level political profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of landscape-scale conservation recognised and understood at the highest political level
2. To help protect and connect marine species and habitats through the promotion of an ecosystem based approach to marine conservation	Implementation of existing legislation &/or policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK-wide Marine Policy Statement developed and adopted (by 2011) • Government on track to adopt marine plans in 2013. • Ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas designated
	High level political profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cetacean conservation promoted across national Government and by the Government internationally
3. To raise the political profile of the ethical and economic value of biodiversity and the socio-economic and ecological impacts of its loss	Implementation of existing legislation &/or policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EBS is revised as an effective policy influencing framework across Government • A landscape-scale conservation project underway in each English region
	Meeting of international obligations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government adopts ambitious target to halt and reverse biodiversity loss • Robust Habitats and Birds Directives, and CITES fully implemented in the UK
	High level political profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value of all UK biodiversity recognised and understood at the highest political level
4. To promote the delivery of access to nature that is compatible with conservation of wildlife, reconnects society with the environment, and enhances human health and welfare	Implementation of existing legislation &/or policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal access implementation on track to deliver English Coastal Path and associated margin of land • High standards of accessible green infrastructure design exemplified by eco-towns integrated into mainstream planning
	High level political profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of access to nature recognised at the highest political level
5. To raise and retain the UK's commitment to wildlife protection, animal welfare and respect for animals	Implementation of existing legislation &/or policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures to tackle disease in wildlife and farmed animal populations are legal and sustainable, and based on sound science and high animal welfare standards.
	High level political profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildlife protection and high animal welfare standards promoted across national Government and by the Government internationally

Table 3: Summary table of key quantitative performance indicators of annual progress towards meeting Link Secretariat strategic objective to 2015

Strategic objective	Key Performance Indicator	Annual Target
1. To improve the delivery of agreed collective messages from the environmental voluntary sector to those who can help us bring about the change we desire	Number (#) of Link hosted events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold 1 campaign related event (depending on phase of activity) Hold 1 AGM with associated guest speakers Hold 1 summer event e.g. Link 30th birthday reception in 2010
	# of externally hosted events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer opportunities for Link representatives to attend at least 30 meetings on Link's key policy priorities
	# of meetings with key decision makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer opportunities for Link members to attend at least 10 meetings with UK Ministers / EU Commissioners
2. To add value to the work of members by facilitating consensus on policies and providing support in the production of joint positions on a wide range of issues	# and activity of Link groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide secretariat support to 7 (and no more than 10) specialist groups Provide support to each Link group to convene at least two meetings per year involving at least 4 of its members
	# of Link workshops / cross-working group activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer 3 skills exchange workshops as part of the Skill Share Programme Support 3 cross-working group meetings e.g. Chairs & Vice Chairs
	# of collective statements produced and level of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist production of at least 15 collective statements, e.g. position statements, press releases, joint letters etc, supported by a minimum of 5 members
	# of meetings/seminars with Joint Link partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist host nation to hold Devolution Seminar in Autumn 2010 Host or participate in at least 2 telephone conferences and 1 face-to-face meeting of the Joint Links (carbon budgets permitting)
3. To provide a safe forum for members to exchange information, and develop and promote action that could effect positive change.	# and activity level of Link mailing lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain 7 (and no more than 10) policy &/or campaigns related mailing lists Maintain 3 (and no more than 5) internal governance related mailing lists
	# and readership of Link Secretariat reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce 12 monthly e- bulletins with a readership of 35% Produce 4 quarterly reports with a readership of 40%
	Regularity of updates to Link website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain 3 (and no more than 5) mini campaign sites on Link website Post all collective statements within 3 days of production
	Availability of Link internal documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide minutes of Link meetings to members within 4 weeks of the meeting Circulate responses to Link letters to members within 1 week of receipt
4. To maintain a high standard of service whilst developing the Secretariat's capacity to meet the needs of the membership	Availability and quality of annual report and accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce and submit annual report & financial statements compliant with charity and company law within 3 months of year end
	Attraction and retention of motivated &/or experienced staff & volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain 4 full time staff (rising to 5 if necessary to achieve Link's objectives) Offer volunteering opportunities to people with a keen interest in Link issues retaining a pool of at least 2 volunteers at any one time

4.3 Principles of design & implementation

The successful implementation of the Link Operational Strategy will be guided by the set of principles or ways of working that Link, as a Secretariat service and a coalition of members, routinely employ.

Equality – Regardless of size or length of membership each member has equal voting rights - 'one member, one vote' - and voice in Link's direction.

Independence – An annual subscription fee and voluntary donations from members provide the majority of Link's core funds.

Transparency – High reporting standards, record keeping and transparent decision-making processes, from the Management Committee through to sub-group level.

Empowerment – Representatives are empowered to advocate the collective views of the membership, who have the support of over 8 million people in the UK.

Positive Endorsement – Support must be declared for each collective statement – blanket support by members for Link statements is never assumed.

Solidarity – By putting difference aside and working in collaboration, members support each other's views now which makes for stronger partnerships in the future.

Inclusivity – Sharing expertise and experience increases capacity of members and the sector and improves the ability to bring about positive change.

4.4 Geographic scope

The geographic scope of the Link Operational Strategy and Direction Statement is limited to the scope of the operations and activities of Wildlife and Countryside Link.

Link is based in London and focuses most of its efforts on influencing Westminster and Whitehall. There are other Links in each of the devolved administrations;

- Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)
- Scottish Environment Link (SEL)
- Wales Environment Link (WEL)

The four Link organisations in the UK are separately constituted and together the 'Joint Links' act as a liaison service to their memberships of NGOs in the four countries of the UK, working on environmental issues including wildlife, countryside, historic environment and public enjoyment. The Joint Links will continue to regularly exchange information and aim to meet face-to-face once a year to discuss priorities and best practice⁴.

With many environmental policies now devolved (including agriculture, land use planning, biodiversity action planning, environmental protection, site designation and in-shore fisheries) the four Link organisations liaise to make the most of opportunities for positive policy change in their own country, and also to ensure that NGOs in all four countries are

⁴ We are grateful for funding from WWF that facilitates these meetings.

aware of other experiences, best practice and progress across the UK on environmental issues.

The Joint Links will continue to build on the outcomes of the biennial series of seminars on devolution, hosted in rotation by one of the Links. These events give all our members an opportunity to share intelligence about the developing political cultures in the four countries, and the impact of devolution and spending cuts on the environmental agenda and eNGOs.

In 2010 to 2012, the Joint Links mechanism will continue to provide a useful means to add value both to the work of the individual Link organisations and to the collective work of Link across a range of working groups.

4.5 Financial plan

Link will seek to ensure that sufficient revenue is raised each year of the next three years to allow for implementation of the Strategy and associated work plans. Over the life of the Strategy, Link will seek to secure approximately 70% of its core income from its members, 20% from Natural England and 10% from Charitable Trusts.

In 2010, Link won its collective bid with its Sister Links to the consortium of Charitable Trusts that have funded Link's marine work since 2007⁵. The Joint Links requested a further three year grant to retain capacity across the eNGO sector to work on marine issues. As part of this bid, Link requested funds for its post of Marine Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator. The full cost recovery mechanism brings in sufficient funds to cover the post and project costs plus approximately 10% of Link's core costs until May 2013.

Link also secured a three year partnership agreement with Natural England that provides for 20% of Link's core costs until December 2012. Although Defra have had its budget cut by 29% over the next four years, our partnership agreement with NE is secure until 2012.

Should either of these funders be unable to honour their commitments, Link would first use a proportion of its healthy reserves to maintain service at the current levels in the short term. In the medium term, Link has identified a number of possible donors from outside the membership that it would seek to approach before looking to its members for further financial support. A fundraising plan for Link will be prepared in 2011/2012.

As noted in Section 3.3.2, additional income will be required should Link wish to expand operations beyond the current level within the next three years or retain operations at the current level beyond 2012.

4.6 Risk analysis

Broadly, there are three main categories of risk associated with the success or failure of the Link's Organisational Strategy 2010-2012, those associated with;

- funding the Strategy
- supporting the Strategy, and
- delivery the Strategy

Table 4 shows risks and proposed action (by Link) to mitigate those risks, and has been developed from an abridged version of Link's current Risk Register. It is not intended to be

⁵ The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Tubney Charitable Trust.

exhaustive or to allocate probability of occurrence but to serve as a focus of attention to identify possible problems that would affect Link's ability to fulfil its charitable Objects or its collective Strategy.

Table 4. Risks to fully implementing the Strategy and proposed mitigation action (by Link)

Risk	Action to reduce risk
<p>Funding the Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of core funds from members • Loss of core funds from external funders • Lack of adequate projects funds 	<p>Maintain Link resources, i.e. staff and assets, at a level commensurate with the capacity of the membership to secure 51-70% of core funds, and projects funds when required</p> <p>Secure and retain 3 year Memorandum of Understanding with Natural England for 20% of core funds</p> <p>Secure and retain 3 year grant from Charitable Trusts for one project post and 10% of core funds</p> <p>Formulate and implement a fundraising strategy to maintain non-member income to core funds and projects</p>
<p>Supporting the Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link staff overstretched leading to lack of regular support of Link activities • Link IT and assets inadequate for management and information exchange tasks • Loss of key staff leading to reduction in capacity of the Secretariat • Loss of Trustees leading to reduction in governance of Link 	<p>Assist the formulation and implementation of SMART workplans</p> <p>Regularly review IT capital items, software and staff training</p> <p>Regularly review personnel policies and staff training opportunities</p> <p>Maintain volunteer policy to help provide short to medium-term support without job substitution</p> <p>Ensure Trustees are inducted and supported by Director and staff</p>
<p>Delivering the Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissatisfaction with Link priorities leading to loss of engagement • Failure to deliver work plan actions leading to failure to meet Strategic Objectives • Misrepresentation of Link Strategy leading to negative impacts to Link's reputation 	<p>Monitor and review Link strategy every three years with annual assessment by members to ensure Link remains relevant to its members and those it seeks to influence</p> <p>Ensure Trustees and Chairs of working groups are regularly provided with feedback from members via Link working group secretaries and Director</p> <p>Formulate and implement an advocacy plan to tell Link members what the Strategy is and what their role in it is</p>

Appendix 1: The consultation process (in 2009)

Key to the strategic planning consultation process was Link's ability to involve and listen to its (then) 37 member organisations and the 250+ individuals who regularly engage in Link activities. Link's Director devised a three stage process which the membership was invited to input to, starting with the Policy Directors in May and finishing with the presentation of the strategy at Link's AGM in December. There were three main stages to the process – consultation, validation and presentation – which were undertaken over the seven month period.

Consultation

- May – Group consultation with Policy Directors (PD)
- June – Group consultation with Chairs & Vice Chairs
- July – Individual consultation through online survey
- August – Interviews with selected members

Validation

- September – Draft strategy presented to Management Committee
- October – Group validation of results with PDs
- October – Draft strategy circulated to membership for comment
- November – Draft strategy shared with selected external stakeholders

Presentation

- November – Final strategy signed off by Management Committee
- December – Final strategy presented at AGM for endorsement
- January 2010 – Advocate strategy to external audiences

The design of the review process took into account that membership liaison has, in recent years, moved away from being solely Working Group and Task Force based, and has become more 'layered' in order to facilitate a cross-cutting mechanism at a more senior level to help identify opportunities for collective working on overarching aspects of environmental policy. Group participatory events were therefore conducted with the Policy Directors of member organisations as well as convening the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Link's Working Groups and Task Forces. Individuals were surveyed through a short online questionnaire and through interviews with Link's Director and Chair.

As a member-led organisation based on a model of service provision, Link's primary consultee is its membership as organisations, individuals and Link representatives. It was important to ask the right questions of the right people. It was also important that the process drew upon the insights of the Director and Secretariat as service deliverers and Link's Trustees as governors of the organisation.

Member organisations are the source of ideas and providers of resources (both human and financial). They brought their own strategic views to bear on whether the direction that Link was currently taking would bring the coalition to where it needs to be in order to achieve positive change. Their input helped Link understand where best to focus its collective energies and add value to the work of its individual members.

During the Forward Planning process 16 member organisations engaged through the Policy Director forum, 33 took part in the online survey, and meetings were held with 10 member organisations on aspects of the Strategy as it was being formulated. In total, 35 out of 38 members input during the process, a coverage of 92%.

Appendix 2: SWOT analysis & horizon scan

INTERNAL	
<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well organised coalition of diverse membership • Member-led agenda • Member funded: members provide the majority of Link's core funds • Well established ways of working in Secretariat and with and across members • Link responsive to members needs: membership fees, different types of membership • Track record of influencing decision makers • Well regarded in Government circles • Established staff body whose members are developing in their roles • Increased attractiveness of Link's work to funders 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low profile in public arena • Some larger members less engaged in developing areas of Link work and unsupportive of some Link activities, e.g. scoping LSC work • Link's ties to / work with groupings such as the Green Alliance, EEB and others can be strengthened • Uncertainty over future of established Link campaigns i.e. <i>Blueprint for Water</i> • Uncertainty over future capacity (through any loss of Marine funding) • Dependence on members susceptible to members' capacity and resource constraints and own organisation's strategic direction • Staff and members' familiarity with established ways of working may prevent change • Small staff body susceptible to 'downtime' through prolonged absence or loss of staff • Staff capacity to support breadth of work and new types of working
EXTERNAL	
<p><u>Opportunities</u> <i>Policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment issues now well established in media and public discourse and on the political agenda - need to maintain this interest • NE's State of the Natural Environment and the EAC's Halting biodiversity loss reports - building on the momentum from the publication of these reports • NE's Vision for 2060 by 2020 Promotion of Link's landscape scale conservation (LSC) project - taking forward this agenda where there currently appear to be gaps • Environment is an apparent issue for Conservative Party leadership (but rest of party?) • Implications of Climate Act for biodiversity and for delivery bodies • Build on expected success of Marine & Coastal Access Bill; implementation of which to be right and timely • Reality of planning reforms start to be felt by people and politicians • Outcomes of CBD COP? 	<p><u>Threats</u> <i>Policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominance of economic agenda over sustainable development as with SNR and planning reform • Key parts of Link's agenda now rest with Whitehall beyond Defra, e.g. BIS, CLG, DECC, HMT • Climate so much on the agenda that it can over-shadow the rest of Link's agenda (?); climate dominant + becoming its own silo • International whaling conventions weakened; UK playing a lesser role in maintaining safeguards • EU Directives being watered down by new centre right Euro Parliament / Council of Ministers • JNCC aids monitoring / stats to support Marine work; otherwise not providing opportunities to influence our agenda <p><i>General</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defra / NE low profile in Government circles / funding prevents environment being higher on HMG agenda

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Directives coming into force • Credit crunch fall out has prompted debate about the right role for regulation • Quality of life and well being agenda <p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High public appetite for environmental concern despite economic downturn • Economic downturn has strong environmental origins (oil, food prices) • Change in Government signals change in policies (also a threat) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment 'lost' in run up to General Election; post election doubt for statutory agencies; recession + post election uncertainty for financial squeeze • Link / members could become distracted by structural reforms + reinventing policy for new HMG • Lack of funding available for the sector to successfully deliver the agenda (impacts on members and their ability to engage in breadth of Link work) • Limited access to an incoming Conservative Government • Ensuring compliance with Charity Commission rules • Getting right people involved at right time for Int'l work e.g. COP15
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Horizon Scan (last updated mid October 2010)

Westminster

Political discourse will continue to be dominated by the economic debate, specifically the coalition government's efforts to pay down the structural deficit and the public reaction to this over time.

The results of the Comprehensive Spending Review will be announced on 20 October but it is not clear how much detail the announcement will contain and how much leeway departments will have in implementing their 25% to 40% cuts. Regardless of this, Westminster and Whitehall will focus their energies on ensuring that the bulk of the decision-making on implementation is done before the start of the new financial year in April 2011.

Another big theme of the latter half of the coalition government's first year in office will be the referendum on voting reform which will take place in May 2011. If the Liberal Democrats fail to deliver the alternative vote, it may be that the party loses confidence in supporting a coalition which is sanctioning the greatest contraction in public spending for a generation. This could create political instability which could, in extremis, lead to the coalition collapsing and the Prime Minister being forced to call a snap general election – which may be sought by some in the Conservative Party seeking majority rule.

In terms of forthcoming legislation, the Decentralisation and Localism and Public Bodies Bills will reshape the governance structures and delivery mechanisms for public services and environmental protection. Coupled with the spending review, this will begin to make the legislative changes required to bring to life other components of the Big Society vision – local decision-making about land use and development and sub national economic growth.

Public debate on these important legislative changes is likely to be overshadowed by the aforementioned big debates on and reaction to the effects of spending cuts.

The Labour Party, with its new leader and shadow cabinet, will start to provide a more planned form of opposition than the coalition government has faced to date. The Labour Party rule of backbenchers choosing a new Labour leader's cabinet whilst in opposition has

produced an interim opposition frontbench and Ed Miliband is likely to seek to reshuffle some posts at the earliest opportunity.

New Ministers and MPs settle down in a new parliamentary session, show their colours and seek to be squeaky clean mindful of the fall out of the MP expenses debacle. The role of Select Committees is strengthened and the chairs and members of these committees start to exploit this new venture in the role of parliament.

Whitehall

The civil service will lose as many as 600,000 jobs with some departments and Arms Length Bodies losing a third of their workforces. Many of these redundancies will be made before April. For example, Natural England is planning an initial tranche of 400 redundancies with more expected post-April. Uncertainty around the final fate of Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission continues as the Government works out how to 'significantly reform' these three key Arms Length Bodies.

Relationships between ministers and civil servants settles down as ministers become more comfortable in their roles and less suspicious that the civil service is a left-wing conspiracy designed to prevent them doing their jobs.

Public purse, private purse

Public survey data shows that the public is broadly in favour of spending down the deficit but as cuts bite, those who are (dis)affected will become more vocal and act (take to the streets?) to demonstrate this. Trade unions are warning of poll tax style riots and threats of strike action by public and unionised workers may continue into the New Year.

A double dip recession remains likely and the VAT hike in January will exacerbate the drift into a flattened economy. Redundancies, particularly from the public sector as civil servants and public servants are laid off, will swell the numbers of unemployed with recession hit businesses and charities unlikely to be able to take up the slack. Ministers expect the private sector to replace roles and jobs but the efficacy of this and the knock-on effect on the private sector is uncertain. The cuts are just as likely to affect those who agree with lower public spending and private sector interests reliant on public spending.

The Taxpayers Alliance continues to gain influence and space to comment.

The challenge to Link will be to ensure that the debate moves quickly onto innovative sources of finance for natural environment at a time when public funding is tight.

Big society

Big Society, localism, and decentralisation are central to the new Government's approach, remain largely undefined even when expressed in Bills, but start to be defined by society itself in the wake of spending cuts and the intended rolling back of the state. Spending decisions by local government affect both familiar high profile services (e.g. education, social services) and lower profile environment schemes (e.g. public transport, local biodiversity and conservation, climate change).

Civil society groups, charitable or not-for-profit, will be increasingly courted by the coalition government through deregulatory incentives but uncertain/very little funding initiatives especially as local government grants dry up. Restructuring of the Big Lottery Fund and a new Green Investment Bank will give some help to projects and programmes that need support in the set up or transition to civil society phases but without changes to the attitude towards core funding, civil society groups will be unable to invest in their staff and infrastructure for the long term. At worse, with government grants drying up, there is the real

prospect of NGOs having to make significant cut backs themselves at a time when their services are needed most. 2011 is European Year of Volunteering.

There are unlikely to be many groups that have retained buoyant enough reserves to take advantage of opportunities to acquire state land in the sell off and long lease of public land estates (NNRs, FC land, MOD(?)). Opportunities for habitat restoration and species/habitat recreation may open up but few groups will be able to complete a desired landscape scale project through new acquisitions. Given the open market approach to the sell offs, there are no guarantees to the civil sector thus giving buoyant business the same advantages of the cut price sale and deregulatory incentives to snap up packets of land for development. The race is on to ensure that forthcoming changes to planning policy adequately set the benchmark for the quality of that development and how it relates to the natural environment.

The effect of spending cuts on Link members (and therefore Link) will start to be felt as soon as the Link AGM and membership renewals in January 2011.

International agenda

Environment Secretary, Caroline Spelman is attending the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Japan in October and the Climate Summit in Cancun in December. At CoP10, the UK is expected to push for international adoption of the EU 2020 target but it is unlikely to be palatable to other nations without a significant financial sweetener. This is the same situation for the climate summit and outcomes from CBD will have a significant bearing on how nations will behave at the Mexico summit.

The International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling will continue to be undermined by pro-whaling nations as they seek to lift the moratorium on commercial whaling. Japan will hold a meeting in November with whaling countries to discuss the package put forward to reopen commercial whaling after talks on 'the deal' ended without conclusion at the last International Whaling Commission meeting in June. A split within the NGO sector over what parts of the deal to accept or reject could continue to undermine consensus, making opposition to the proposal appear weak which may lead to a lifting of the ban.

In the USA, President Obama comes under pressure from mid-term elections and the Tea Party movement of disparate right wing interests.

European agenda

European Commission President José Manuel Barroso will continue to receive support from EU civil society (environment) groups through his engagement in initiatives such as the Spring Alliance but Barosso will attract negative press from green groups if he fails to counteract the accusations that he prioritises short term economic policies over long term sustainable development. Janez Potocnik, Environment Commissioner, who has so far shown that he understands his brief, will continue to be vocal during the International Year of Biodiversity. However, like the UK's Environment Secretary, the proof will be in whether the messages are understood and acted upon by their fellow members in the Commission/Cabinet as their relative powers are weak in comparison to other departments (DGs).

The UK Government will continue to engage in Europe, particularly around the Common Fisheries Policy and Common Agricultural Policy debates, but for economic rather than environmental reasons i.e. protection of farm and fisheries income and jobs. Pressure from developers, particularly energy (all forms), will put conservationists at loggerheads with the Government over weakening and circumvention of EU Environmental Directives e.g. Habitats Directive. However, recent ruling on the Aarhus Convention in favour of civil society

claimants may help empower local communities to use the courts to challenge deviations from EU (and UK) law in environmental cases.

Next year Hungary and Poland will both hold the EU presidency for the first time and the UN will be marking 2011 as the International Year of Forests.

Domestic agenda

The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) will continue to occupy the minds of the environment department and conservation groups until late spring after which point a white paper on water will also be published. Reform of conservation policy, for example the England Biodiversity Strategy framework for delivery and policies surrounding habitat (re)creation at a landscape scale, will be worked up early in the new year but so far no new primary legislation has been proposed through the NEWP process. However, legislation to complete the ambitions of the 2009 Floods and Water Management Act will be introduced once consultation on the water white paper is complete.

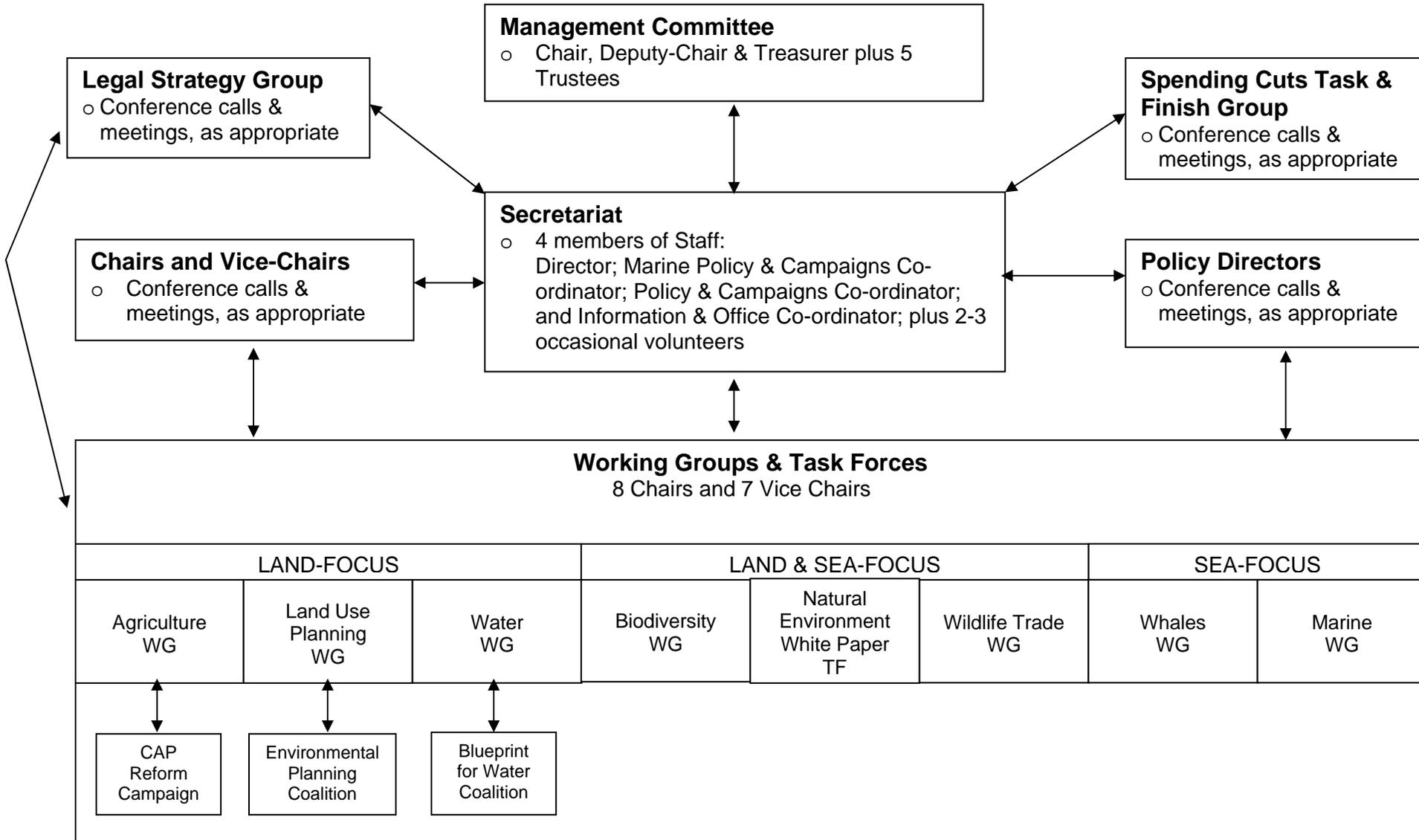
With all these initiatives there is a danger that, in the absence of new sources of revenue and with the deregulatory climate in vogue, these become little more than paper exercises sapping the energy and inspiration from civil society groups.

The Localism and Public Bodies Bills, coupled with the spending cuts, will affect how much of the NEWP and Water WP will be delivered by the state, i.e. not much, and how optional action on these by local authorities will be freed up from centralised strategy and targets operating under a general power of competence. The forthcoming National Planning Framework will also be shaped by the economic and political context within which it is being discussed and some clarity on the role of Big Society and localism should be forthcoming in early 2011 as dialogue opens up between interested and affected groups.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act implementation could falter and be plagued by rumours of extensions as some sea users continue to struggle with the timelines set by the previous administration, particularly the deadline for the designation of an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas. As work to designate Marine Conservation Zones progresses, sea users' concerns regarding impacts on socio economic interests will heighten. Political taste for coastal access wanes and structural reform of Arms Length Bodies plays out distant from realities on the ground (in the sea). Funds for the coastal path around England look set to be withdrawn and programme work by Natural England on access and recreation shelved making designation of a full path unlikely in this parliament.

It is worth noting that over the next six months the organisational matrix of nature conservation will change radically. As NGOs and as Link we may need to redefine our niches to ensure that we remain relevant and effective in this period of real change.

Appendix 3: Link Organisation Chart 2011



Appendix 4: Natural Environment White Paper

2010		2011		2012	
Responding to Discussion Document	Influencing White Paper	Advocating WP asks across Govt	Lobbying for legislation (tbc)	Parliamentary campaigning (tbc)	

Link members welcomed Defra's early and clear prioritisation of a White Paper on the natural environment, and were encouraged by the broad scope of the resultant discussion document. In response to the Invitation to Shape the Nature of England, Link set out our ongoing commitment to the natural environment, the outcomes we seek from the White Paper process and an indication of the roles we could play to deliver our collective ambitions within the next decade. Link called for the recommendations of Sir John Lawton's report *Making Space for Nature* to be taken forward by the White Paper and used our response, in part, to outline how this can be done.

The Link response can be viewed at

http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2010/Link_response_Natural_Env_White_Paper_05Nov10.pdf

2010

During 2010, Link's Management Committee agreed that Link's resources should be used to prioritise work on the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP). A previously established NEWP group made up of a small number of Link members and partners was provided with Secretariat support and became a steering group for Link's NEWP activities. The aim of the steering group was to lead on Link's response to Defra's discussion document consultation and develop ideas and principles of what should be included in, as well as the outcomes required from, the White Paper.

A Defra report summarising responses to the NEWP discussion document and a draft White Paper are expected before year end, although the latter will not be made available for public consultation.

2011

The NEWP will remain a Link priority and work will continue in 2011. The Steering Group will be opened out to a Task Force and will seek to influence the NEWP through collective advocacy activities. It will also consider the need for legislative change to empower the recovery of England's natural environment and will work with other Link Working Groups in the delivery of its aims. The Task Force will be overarching and strategic, whilst working groups will focus and feed in on their specific policy area, when required.

Link expects the White Paper draft will be submitted to key policy leads within Defra in early January and will go to other Whitehall departments in early February. By mid February the Cabinet Office will approve the White Paper for its publication in March.

2012

Given the delay on the next Queen's speech, 2012 is the earliest opportunity to introduce new legislation in this parliament. During 2011, Link will consider the need for legislation and if necessary will conduct a parliamentary campaign to ensure that our asks for an integrated delivery framework and the importance of the natural environment to receive the legislative underpinning and policy support they require.

Appendix 5: CAP Reform Campaign

2010		2011		2012	
Advocacy of Beyond the Pillars	Drafting BtP II	Launch BtP II	Advocacy of BtP II	Campaigning & advocacy	Lobbying (re EU budget)

After the launch of Link's *Beyond the Pillars* (2008), which set out the Link's policy perspective on the future of the CAP, the Farming and Rural Development (FRD) Group concentrated on the CAP Health Check and the technical details that emerged from that process. Its annual workplan became too broad for the group to realistically deliver, therefore at the end of 2009, it was agreed that Link should streamline its agricultural policy work and develop a campaign focused on the forthcoming round of CAP reforms taking place from 2010 to 2013. The reform process will run concurrently with the EU Budget Review, which will set out the framework and finances to be spent on the EU's key policy priorities up until 2020.

The outcomes of the budget review process are likely to have major implications for the amount of funding spent on providing support for farming and rural development, and consequently on funding allocated to agri-environment measures.

2010

During 2010, the group continued to advocate their policy perspective *Beyond the Pillars*, met with MEPs and have begun production of a new CAP Reform document. This is an opportunity for Link to influence the UK domestic audience, as well as European decision makers, on the need for progressive CAP reform. Link is calling for the CAP to be reformed to ensure public money delivers environmental public goods and supports environmentally beneficial farming systems. The CAP has a huge potential to be the solution to a range of environmental problems and the AWG will continue to promote this messages. Activities in 2010 also included disseminating Link policy documents to the new intake of MEPs, new European Commissioners and to MPs and Ministers following publication of the European Commission's communication on the CAP.

2011

During 2011 the group will finalise, produce and launch this new CAP Reform document to a Parliamentary audience in advance of legislative proposals from Europe, expected in the summer of 2011. The document will be disseminated to a broad range of policy makers; it will be used to influence the UK Government's CAP reform negotiations as well as being presented to select European Commissioners, MPs and MEPs.

2012

During 2012 the campaign will continue its lobbying work around the final draft proposals for reform of the CAP and the EU Budget. The group will continue to lead the campaign, continuing to lobby key decision makers during the latter half of 2012 in the last stages of negotiations on new EU Budget and CAP reform before the decision in 2013.

Appendix 6: Blueprint for Water coalition

The Blueprint coalition continues to be a successful partnership of organisations that do not traditionally work together. The breadth of interests it covers makes it difficult for policy-makers and decision-takers to dismiss 'the 10 steps' as a fringe interest.

The original Blueprint for Water was launched in November 2006 by a unique coalition of environmental, water efficiency, and fishing and angling organisations to call on the Government and its agencies to set out the necessary steps to achieve "sustainable water" by 2015. However four years on, our rivers lakes and pond remain our most threatened habitats and during 2010 the coalition launched a new 10 step action plan to ensure this precious resource is protected.

2010

The General Election in May 2010, marked the time of the biggest turn-over of MPs since the Second World War. This provided Link with both a challenge and an opportunity to introducing the Blueprint as a relevant, powerful voice for water and to re-establish its credibility. The 10 steps in the original document were still relevant, although many of the targets were out of date and with many Blueprint for Water Parliamentary champions stepping down, it was agreed that a new document should be produced to influence the coalition Government and to identify new Parliamentary champions to continue the Blueprint campaign.

The document was launched by the Minister for Water, Richard Benyon at an event hosted by Blueprint champion Martin Horwood MP. Copies were distributed to MPs, Government departments and industry contacts.

2011-2012

During 2011, the Blueprint will continue to advocate the 10 steps and work closely with the Government in the lead up to the Natural Environment and Water White Papers, the latter of which is expected in early 2011. The Blueprint aims to ensure that the Blueprint asks are reflected in any decisions made by Government in both the Water and Natural Environment White Papers. The group will look to revisit progress made on the Blueprint after a year, in November 2011.

In short, the aim of the Blueprint for Water coalition over the period of the Operational Strategy 2010-2012 will be to continue to be visible and recognised by decision makers as the voice for successful sustainable water policy.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BtP	Beyond the Pillars (I & II)
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
COP	Conference of Parties
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DECC	Department of Energy and Climate Change
DG	Directorate General
DfT	Department for Transport
EA	Environment Agency
EAC	Environmental Audit Committee
EEB	European Environment Bureau
EU	European Union
FC	Forestry Commission
F&WM Act	Floods and Water Management Act
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWC	International Whaling Commission
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LAA	Local Area Agreements
LDEDC Act	Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act
M&CA Act	Marine and Coastal Access Act
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NE	Natural England
NEWP	Natural Environment White Paper
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNR	National Nature Reserve
Ofwat	Water Services Regulation Authority
PoM	Principles of Management
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RDPE	Rural Development Programme for England
RPI	Retail Price Index
SMART	Specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time-bound (plans)
SNR	Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (analysis)
TCPA	Town and Country Planning Association
TF	Task Force
VAT	Value Added Tax
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WG	Working Group

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