

**Wildlife
Welfare
Wellbeing**

**Wildlife and Countryside Link Strategy
2020–2030**

1.0 Chief Executive's Summary

In ten years' time, environmental law and policy will look very different.

Whether our statute book has moved forward to a greener future, or turned back toward more destructive ways, will depend on us. We must make the case not just to maintain the laws that defend nature, but also to strengthen regulatory requirements for the restoration of our natural environment.

But while the law is changing, we must also focus on implementation. The years ahead will be vital in adapting a host of new plans and policies to the real world. There are new local tools like Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies, new national targets and designations, and new international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and other multilateral environmental agreements. All of these will require detailed design work and ongoing scrutiny to ensure that they make a difference in practice.

Great policy, tight coordination, and compelling collective messages are our weapons in the fight to turn around the state of nature, protect and respect animals, and ensure that everyone has equitable access to a healthy natural world.

Wildlife and Countryside Link has been a stalwart of policy excellence, cooperation and communication for four decades now. Link has been at the forefront of many decisive policy debates.

But to make the most of the transformative days ahead, we must redouble and refine our efforts – adding new value to our members' work and offering strategic leadership in the sector to capitalise on the best chances for change.

In the period ahead, we will retain the best of Link's heritage of deliberative, cooperative working, but we will modernise and streamline our work to fit the demands of current political and policy circumstances.

We will aim to work more closely than ever with our partners in Environment Links UK, learning from one another, sharing best practice and ensuring that all four countries take the strongest possible action for our shared natural world.

Let's be ambitious and make Link a place where we can find strength in numbers and confidence to be bolder than any of us could alone.

In this strategy – Wildlife, Welfare, Wellbeing – we set out our priorities for the crucial days ahead.

We look forward to working with friends old and new and, together, creating the policy, unity and clear messages needed to set policy and politics on a more sustainable course.

Richard Benwell

Our Strategy

Our goal	We will strengthen law, policy and political consensus to contribute to nature’s recovery and climate change mitigation and adaptation, better animal welfare, and equitable access to a healthy natural world: wildlife, welfare and wellbeing.
Our ethos	We will create a space of unity and ambition, amplifying our members’ voices, and allowing each to go further and faster than they could individually.
How we will achieve it	<p><u>We will be a policy powerhouse for the sector:</u> keeping a broad overview, but targeting a small number of strategic areas where we can generate new, detailed and ambitious policy proposals that will influence policymakers.</p> <p>Our policy groups will forge progressive consensus: aiming for strong, common positions that complement individual members’ work.</p> <p><u>We will be an amplifier for our individual voices:</u> highlighting great work in our membership and lending focus and coherence to our common messages in the press and in political advocacy.</p> <p>Our communications will reflect and reinforce members’ communications: creating opportunities for members large and small, as well as providing a collective identity in the media and in Westminster.</p> <p><u>We will be a strategic hub and institutional touchpoint:</u> providing leadership in agreeing cross-sector strategic direction, supporting our members in Westminster, and acting as a nodal point for working with other groups.</p> <p>Our secretariat will lead and serve: adding value to members’ interactions by identifying strategic opportunities, creating alliances and providing professional policy insight.</p>
What we will look like	<p>By the end of this strategy period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • our coalition will be stronger, • our working groups and operational processes will be more dynamic, responsive, and goal-orientated, • we will have modernised and reinforced our corporate governance and business practices, so that we are a resilient, digital, well-resourced operation.
What the world will look like	<p>By the end of this strategy period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we will be able to point to “words on the page” policy changes that would not have taken place without Link; • our influence will have begun to shape the next big policy debates for our natural world at the national level; and • we will follow through to ensure these lead to changes on the ground, ensuring policy victories translate into better practice.

Policy

Our policy work will focus on protecting and enhancing wildlife and nature, raising standards of animal welfare, and improving people's wellbeing through access to our natural world.

Our policy output will be more than the intellectual sum of our members' contributions.

By creating a space for bold, collaborative thinking, we will generate new, cutting edge policy ideas.

We will match the ambition of our calls to action to the scale of need: nature and the climate are in crisis, animal welfare abuses and wildlife crime continue, and people are suffering from lack of access to a healthy environment. So, we will be objective, science-led and proportionate, but we will be unequivocal in our message that public authorities must take decisive action.

Our greatest resource is our membership and we will aggregate and amplify the policy thinking of members large and small. We will be a leading voice for the environment in Westminster, becoming a powerful influence across government departments approach and facilitating effective knowledge exchange between the sector and decision makers. We will aim to be inclusive and to attract the best people from our members.

Link staff will add value as convenors and as contributors in their own right, drawing on subject-specific knowledge and analytical skills, as well as the benefits of an umbrella view of the policy landscape.

We will keep the current set-up of "standing" working groups under review, with "select", time-limited task and finish groups for particular projects, in line with our strategic goals. When groups have completed their work, they will be disbanded or adapted to focus on new priorities. For example, the *Nature and Wellbeing Strategy Group* is a new Link group, and an evolution of the 25 Year Plan Working Group. The importance of the natural environment to people's health and wellbeing has shot up the public and political agenda as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clearer now than ever before that improving people's connection with a thriving natural world will be critical to the future of nature conservation.

We will continue to be responsive, routinely responding to consultations and inquiries on behalf of our members. While no single organisation can cover every policy area, we will aim to keep a broad coverage of policy across our main interest areas. In some areas, we will take a light touch, helping to share the detailed work of individual organisations with the most expertise, adding the value of collective strength. In other areas, we will take more of a lead in galvanising and shaping policy ideas to add to our shared understanding, based on input and expertise from working groups and always grounded and owned by the membership.

We will complement our responsive policy capacity with a small number of policy priorities: targeted, longer-term, objective-based projects that either seek to influence a significant "known" decision point (such as legislative change) or seek to create our own narrative and advocacy moment—coming together when we need to as a movement in joint campaigns to raise an opportunity or raise the alarm. These projects may be led by standing groups or dedicated task and finished groups. We will determine these priorities in consultation with our members via the working groups, in line with the broad strategic goals set out in this strategy.

The exact mix of responsive and proactive work will shift with the ebb and flow of political risks and opportunities. As we have with our successful State of Nature campaign, at times we will dial up our agenda-setting work. In other circumstances, we will prioritise short-term urgent work, as we did to secure the Green Recovery Challenge Fund with our compendium of projects and State of the Sector work when the Covid-19 crisis struck. At all times, though, we will ensure that we carve out enough time for agenda-setting work.

In this way, Link will continue to be a backbone of policy thinking in the sector, routinely covering a wide range of issues, but we will also begin to shape the policy narrative and public debate in the longer-term.

We will measure our success by the visibility of Link proposals in Government policy and in statute, delivering real change for wellbeing, welfare and wildlife.

Objectives

Link's work is extremely broad and part of our strength lies in our ability to maintain a wide policy portfolio across the animal welfare, health and wellbeing and wildlife focus areas. This helps us to support the sector in achieving a wide coverage of law and policy for the environment and animals.

In setting our objectives, we must remain responsive to emerging opportunities and risks in a highly changeable political environment. However, as we aim to shape environmental politics and to capitalise on current trends, we will pursue the following high-level objectives.

The five core outcomes we hope to achieve in the next ten years are:

1. **Secure the law, policy and funding needed to reverse nature's decline by 2030: land, sea and freshwater.**
2. **Ensure the scale of nature-based solutions and carbon removals is significantly increased alongside, not instead of, reduction of industrial emissions to meet climate change mitigation and adaptation targets.**
3. **Improve legal and practical protection for the conservation and welfare of animals** and ensure the Government uses its influence to secure improvements to animal welfare internationally.
4. **Boost wellbeing with laws to support equitable access to a thriving natural environment for everyone.**
5. **Support the environment movement to become measurably more diverse, inclusive and representative of society.**

Our core indicators of progress in the next 18 months are successfully securing:

- A. **A binding target in law for nature's recovery** in England by 2030, on land and at sea, backed by more detailed targets for water, air, waste, habitats and species (*contributing to core outcomes 1 and 2*).
- B. **Planning reforms focused on nature's recovery**, including: (1) staving off any weakening of the Habitats Regulations, Wildlife and Countryside Act, and the Town and Country Planning Act; and (2) ensuring that 30x30 is interpreted in line with the Lawton Principles, making more space for nature's recovery. (*contributing to core outcome 1*)
- C. **Standards in law to ensure everyone has access to a thriving green and blue spaces**, urban, rural, coastal and freshwater, in new and established communities (*contributing to core outcomes 1 and 4*).
- D. **Standards for emerging markets for nature-based carbon removals (including offsets)** to ensure they are robust and do not lead to harm or provide a fig leaf for ongoing industrial emissions (*contributing to core outcome 2*).
- E. **A commitment to effective management of the marine environment**, ensuring that nature can recover alongside marine renewables, sustainable fisheries and other offshore activities, with 30% of English seas fully or highly protected (*contributing to core outcome 1 and 2*).
- F. **Strong regulation and payments support regenerative farming, animal welfare and large-scale habitat creation, restoration or rewilding**, with a strong new baseline and pervasive and dissuasive enforcement (*contributing to core outcomes 1, 2 and 3*).
- G. **A robust Animal Sentience Committee is established in law**, free to cover all areas of Government policy, and that decapods and cephalopods are recognised as sentient alongside vertebrates (*contributing to core outcome 3*).
- H. **A roadmap for improving ethnic diversity in the environment sector**, with specific and measurable milestones for large and small organisations to improve their diversity (*contributing to core outcome 5*).

These are not exhaustive lists of Link's policy goals, and we will continue to set strategic objectives for working groups as a way to structure and target our policy and advocacy work, ensuring that individual policy goals can be linked back to and guided by our overarching priorities wherever possible.

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of our day-to-day work through indicators including: citations by Parliamentarians; references by Select Committees; briefings sought and delivered; our reach and impact in media and social media; and, ultimately, the changes to regulation and policy for which we advocate

The decade ahead will be focused on delivery of global and national goals for nature's recovery, following a period of prolific policy and legislative action, so we will ensure that we play an active role in monitoring implementation and in holding government to account for real world delivery of these plans.

Communications

Our communications will amplify the collective voice of our members.

In our public communications, our tone will be simple, challenging and objective.

In our advocacy, we will play to our strengths of simple clear and compelling articulation of complex policy arguments. Evidence and evidence-based policy will be front and centre of our work. We will build Link's reputation amongst parliamentarians as an authoritative source of high quality environmental policy proposals and analysis.

In our membership communications and meetings, we will facilitate efficient knowledge exchange and convene stakeholders from within and beyond Link's membership with one another and with decision-makers.

We will increase our use of tried and tested policy communications, leading on the publication of policy reports and advocacy events in our target policy areas. These reports and events will give voice to the latest policy thinking developed by our membership. They will help to create a unified voice for the sector, as well as giving more prominence to the individual voices of members large and small.

We will create richer, more newsworthy content to embellish and enhance our policy work by integrating communications planning in our long-term policy programme and by undertaking original research to underscore our policy proposals, led by the insights and input of Working Groups and evidence gaps they have identified.

We will add to these traditional communications by building on our effective online and social media work. Our blog and social media feeds will adopt a collective voice and provide a shared channel for our members, sharing their content and providing original content based on coalition views. In combination with policy briefings for civil servants and parliamentarians, these communications channels will be fast-moving and responsive.

We will measure our success by the prominence of Link-inspired messages in the media, in civil society and in Government rhetoric and responses.

Corporate structure

With over 60 members, Link is a broad and varied coalition.

In the period ahead, we will focus on enriching our relationship with our current membership, rather than actively seeking to broaden our membership further.

With the agreement of current members, we will still welcome new members to the coalition where they share our values and convictions and can add to our collective voice or benefit from our shared approach. In addition, we will explore new ways to work with other sectors, such as businesses, and to collaborate with other partners where our interests can be aligned. We will aim to make our movement—and Link itself—more diverse, inclusive and equitable.

We will build a diverse income base, combining membership subscriptions and project finance with grant funding opportunities. We consider that it is prudent for membership subscriptions to continue to provide the largest component of Link funding, with an important component delivered by unrestricted grant funding where possible, clearly maintaining Link's status as an independent membership body, with priorities defined by the members.

We will aim to improve the core corporate resilience of Wildlife and Countryside Link, investing in our operational procedures, governance, infrastructure and staff. In doing so, we will take a progressive and responsible approach to our own operations, improving our sustainability through better procurement and practices.

To achieve our policy aims, we need to be more able to: lead the development of strong policy positions (reactive and proactive) at the right time in the political cycle; communicate those recommendations more effectively through advocacy and media; support our members in becoming more influential; and monitor the implementation and effectiveness of law and policy. To do that effectively, Link will need to become more professionalised in its corporate governance, and grow our capacity to support policy work.

We will aim to build the team in number and in expertise to increase our core policy capacity, our corporate functions and to support our members more effectively. We will invest in developing our team to ensure that we are a high standard, supportive workplace.

Link is ideally placed to be an early career portal for the best policy professionals, many of whom will go on to be lynchpins of the green movement. We will reinforce that capacity-building role, focusing on attracting a diverse, representative and capable team and developing our in-house skills and capabilities.

In particular, we are determined to make ourselves a more diverse, inclusive and representative workplace and to help our sector become a better place to work for everyone. We will seek out opportunities to improve opportunities and accessibility for young people and people with different skills and backgrounds.

In our operations, we will retain the best of Link's deliberative, consensual and cooperative approach, while streamlining our day-to-day working practices so that we can work rapidly and responsively, in line with the demands of modern policy and politics.

We will measure our success by the levels of engagement and satisfaction among our members, employees and partners.