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"Bringing together organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside."



Wildlife and Countryside Link
89 Albert Embankment, London
SE1 7TP

T: 020 7820 8600

F: 020 7820 8620

E: enquiry@wcl.org.uk

W: www.wcl.org.uk

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Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members,

During this quarter Link has spent some time looking into the future, focusing on the next planning period of 2007 - 2009. The Forward Planning Review has been undertaken by the consultant Doreen MacIntyre and I hope that you have all had the opportunity to input into this process. Link's Management Committee will be discussing the outcome of this review, together with the results of the Annual Review surveys, at their meeting in the next quarter, after which we will report back to all members at our AGM in December.

This quarter has seen much activity for the Land Use Planning Working Group, with the release of Kate Barker's interim report on her review of land use planning in England, which focused on understanding how the planning system impacts on economic growth and employment. Link members have been engaging closely with this report, and during the quarter submitted further comments for consideration in the compilation of the final Barker report, which is due later in 2006. In addition, Link's long-awaited Spatial Planning Guidance has now been published, following months of work by the LUP Working Group.

This quarter has also brought to light information of great concern to many Link members, in the form of the Defra budget cuts, which will of course also affect the newly established Natural England. Link has written to both Defra and the Treasury on this issue. We will continue to watch how the establishment of Natural England is affected by these potential cuts, as the new organisation beds in for the final quarter of the year.

Best wishes,



Dr. Hilary Allison

Working Groups



Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair: Nick Collinson, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Farming and Rural Development

The Farming and Rural Development (FRD) group held a meeting in July to discuss, amongst other things, progress on the next ERDP and Link's input to this process via Defra's Policy Advisory Group. Due to ongoing discussions at the European Commission, the start of the next ERDP has been delayed and will now possibly not start until April 2007. Environmental Stewardship and the recent meeting of the Agri-Environment Steering Group were also discussed, together with an update on the recent meeting of the Cross Compliance Stakeholder Group.

In July the informal sub-group working on developing a Vision of the CAP took off for two away-days in Suffolk to concentrate on drafting a detailed policy document setting out Link's position. The document has been worked on throughout this quarter and is expected to be circulated for comment by the end of 2006. The final document is expected to be launched in early 2007.

Also this quarter, Link commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to undertake a 6 month project to investigate the environmental implications of increased bioenergy production and its use in the UK. This project is expected to be completed in December and a report will be published shortly afterwards.

Bovine TB and Badgers

In July, Defra published two reports summarising the responses to the consultation on proposed badger culling. The first report summarises the 47,000 written responses whilst the second summarises the citizen's panels that were held during the consultation period. 95% of respondents were opposed to a cull of badgers, whilst the citizen's groups were reportedly marginally in favour of a cull but with many conditions.

During the quarter the number of reported cases of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) in cattle fell significantly. Defra's Chief Veterinary Officer investigated this noted decline, concluding that there has been a real reduction in the number of new TB incidents, but that it is too early to determine whether this is a temporary phenomenon or likely to become a sustained trend. Defra is therefore reluctant to commit to the next stages in the badger culling consultation procedure and decisions on a national badger cull are currently on hold.



Chair: Mike Wood, RSPB
Vice Chair: James Cooper, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Woodland

The Woodland group held a meeting in June to discuss Link's response to the England Forestry Strategy, which Link then submitted in August. Also this quarter Link met with Keith Kirby from English Nature to share positions and discuss Natural England's future policy on woodland and forestry issues. The group's next meeting will take place in October.



Acting Co-Chair: Ruth Chambers, Council for National Parks
Acting Co-Chair: Ed Pomfret, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Annie Smith

Land Use Planning

In June, the Land Use Planning (LUP) group held a workshop on planning & climate change, following a Government announcement that a Planning Policy Statement (PPS26) is to be produced on this issue. The workshop brought members together to discuss what PPS26 should contain, and during the quarter Link representatives attended TCPA Stakeholder events centred on the development of the PPS. Through a coalition of NGOs, the LUP group contributed to a mock PPS26 launched in mid-September, which intended to promote debate about the scope and content of the forthcoming PPS26. ...

Working Groups

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In early July, Kate Barker published the interim report of her review of land use planning in England (known as Barker II). This report setting out the initial analysis, focuses on understanding how the planning system impacts on economic growth and employment, and will be submitted to the Chancellor and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in late 2006. Link members are alarmed at the report's proposals to reconsider the use of price mechanisms in planning and the emphasis on deregulating the planning system, which could mean that large projects, such as out of town retail developments, may be pushed through without public consent.

The LUP group met in late July to discuss Link's response to Barker II, and also the implications of the Energy Review for planning. Link wrote to Ruth Kelly to welcome her to her new position at DCLG and to request a meeting to discuss Link's priorities for the new Department. Letters were also sent to newly-appointed key officials within DCLG to introduce them to the work of Link. Link's response to Barker II was submitted in early September.

Link's Spatial Planning Briefing, intended to assist local authorities and others implement the changes brought about by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, was finally published at the end of this quarter. Full colour copies can be downloaded www.wcl.org.uk/Spatial_Planning_Guidance.htm or to request a hard copy please contact annie@wcl.org.uk.

Henry Oliver left CPRE at the end of August and therefore stood down as Chair of the LUP Group. Link would like to thank Henry for his contribution to the group over the years and wish him the best of luck for future endeavours. Ruth Chambers (Council for National Parks) and Ed Pomfret (Woodland Trust), the LUP group's Vice Chairs, have agreed to take over his role until a new Chair is appointed at Link's AGM in December.



Chair: Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Wildlife and Trade

The Wildlife and Trade Working Group met in early August to discuss the recent changes at Defra and progress towards the next CITES Conference of Parties (CoP), which will be held from 3rd - 15th June 2007 in the Netherlands. Feedback was also given on the recent meeting of the CITES Animals Committee, particularly with regard to the decision taken to remove the Narwhal from the Significant Trade Review process and the decision to conduct a periodic review into the Fin Whale to determine whether this species is on the correct appendix. Discussions also continue on Link's representation on the UK delegation of CoP14 and Link continues to maintain dialogue with Defra on issues surrounding CoP14, with a joint Link / Sustainable Users Network meeting taking place in late September.



Chair: John Frizell, Greenpeace International
Vice Chair: Virag Kaufer, WSPA
Vice Chair: Leah Garces, WSPA
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Whales

Whaling

The Whales subgroup met in July to discuss the International Whaling Committee meeting that took place last quarter in June in St Kitts and Nevis, at which Link members were represented on the UK delegation. Despite efforts by Link and its members in advance and at IWC58, little progress was made on many issues. Link maintains its position that action is needed by the Prime Minister, and across Government, to counter the actions of Japan and other pro-whaling nations who recently intensified their work at the IWC.

The group wrote to David Miliband MP, urging the UK to step up diplomatic efforts to prevent the imminent takeover of the IWC by the pro-whalers. As a result Ben Bradshaw MP offered a meeting to discuss next steps in the run up to IWC59. Link also wrote to UK seafood retailers regarding the sourcing of fish products from countries with whaling programmes, encouraging the retailers not to source their products from these countries.

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Working Groups

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Sakhalin II

In September Russia removed Sakhalin II's environmental permit due to continuing violations. It is unclear whether the permit withdrawal and the subsequent process of contractual renegotiation will halt construction work at the site.

Sonar 2087

In the first quarter of this year, the group wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence requesting information the MoD may have on the beaked whale strandings in Spain. The reply from the Royal Navy denied any involvement and as Link judged this response to be unsatisfactory, we wrote again asking for further information. The group received a detailed response to the original request and intends to write again seeking clarification on particular details.

Seals

Following concerns raised by the Link Whale subgroup about the culling of Seals in the Moray Firth and the wider implications this may have on Government policy for other marine mammals, Link hosted a one-off meeting on seal culling in August. This meeting brought together those working on seals, both members and non-members of Link, to gain a shared understanding of the current situation and discuss next steps. An informal email list was set up to allow continued discussion amongst all parties and a further meeting will be held on 23rd November in Edinburgh.



Task Forces



Chair: Martin Harper, RSPB
Vice Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Secretary: Annie Smith

Biodiversity

At the end of the last quarter, the Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) responded to the Defra consultation on Conservation (Natural Habitats, &C.) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006. Also that month Link was represented at the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference in Belfast, at which John Everitt (TWT) and Heather Thompson (Ulster Wildlife Trust) gave a presentation on behalf of Link building upon the challenge set out in the Joint Links 2010 leaflet.

The BTF met in July to review progress in advocating the three key messages agreed during the second quarter: renewed commitment across Government to a reinvigorated BAP; targeting of resources to the right conservation priorities in the most efficient way; and increased resources for biodiversity delivery. As Link's planned meeting with Biodiversity Minister, Barry Gardiner MP, had been postponed until mid-October and given that this is a crucial time for biodiversity funding, the BTF wrote to the Minister regarding investment in biodiversity conservation and to raise some of the issues Link had hoped to cover at the meeting.

Members of the BTF continue to contribute to the BAP Review. A Link sub-group has now been established to co-ordinate Link's input to the next stages of the process, which will focus on delivery mechanisms for BAP priorities. Link met with representatives from JNCC in August to discuss roles and responsibilities for the next phase of the Review, and it was agreed that JNCC and Link would liaise at regular intervals as the Review progresses. The group therefore met the JNCC again in September to discuss the next stage of the Priority Review.

Also this quarter, Paul Walton of RSPB acted as Link representative on the GB Non Native Invasive Species Strategy Working Group. Through this forum, Link inputted its comments on a draft of the Strategy and the Working Group will meet in November to discuss the next draft.

Task Forces



Campaign Chair: Ben Stafford, RSPB
Policy Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair (Campaign & Media): Anthony Field, WWF
Vice Chair (Policy): Melissa Moore, Marine Conservation Society
Secretary: Annie Smith

Marine

In June, Link submitted a substantial response to the Defra consultation on the Marine Bill. It is understood that Defra plan to consult on more detailed proposals for the Bill in 2007. Link also submitted both written and oral evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry in to the Marine Bill, and many of our points were reflected in the Committee's recommendations.

The Marine Task Force (MTF) continues to meet regularly with key stakeholders, and to engage with a number of Government Departments. This quarter, representatives of the group met with Malcolm Wicks, Minister for Energy at the Department for Trade and Industry, to discuss elements of the proposed Bill. The MTF met in late July to discuss the next steps for its Marine Bill campaign and where best to channel funds recently donated by Charitable Trusts to further Link's work on the Marine Bill. A number of projects were agreed for the interim fund, and the MTF is now working with the Joint Links to develop a detailed campaign strategy (with associated costs attached). Link has since contracted a consultant to develop the strategy - Michael Singh - and met with him to discuss each Sister Link's proposals at the end of this quarter.

Throughout this quarter, Link worked on a number of Marine Bill bulletins, including a summary of its detailed consultation response published in the form of both a policy bulletin and a parliamentary bulletin. The MTF also responded to the consultation on Several and Regulating Orders and wrote to Ben Bradshaw on the modernisation of Sea Fisheries Committees.



Chair: Ali Ross, Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society
Vice Chair: Lissa Goodwin, Marine Connection
Secretary: Annie Smith

Bycatch

The Bycatch group received a reply from Ben Bradshaw MP to its letter of 8th May regarding cetacean bycatch and pingers. The Minister has suggested Link pursue its concerns with his officials through the recently established Fisheries Cetacean Stakeholder Group

Members of Link's Bycatch sub-group attended the inaugural meeting of the Fisheries Cetacean Stakeholder Group in July. This new forum, which evolved from the fisheries sub-group of the Cetaceans and Turtles BAP, has been repackaged into a more general cetaceans and fisheries discussion group with the first meeting focusing on the use of pingers on gill and tangle nets (as required by EC Regulation 812/2004). The group was also updated on: Seafish trials on pingers; discussions of the Defra Internal Fisheries Group; and a review of information on the success of pingers in similar fisheries in other countries. The Fisheries Cetacean Stakeholder Group is due to meet again in October.



Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB
Vice Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Water

Last quarter Link wrote to the Environment Agency (EA), both centrally and regionally, to support the proposed NGO nominations to the River Basin District (RBD) Planning Liaison Panels, and to press the case for an increase in the number of panel seats allocated to the environmental sector in certain RBDs. All Link supported nominations were accepted with allocations for additional seats in some cross border areas. The Water Task Force (WTF) provided the NGO representatives with an introductory briefing to River Basin Planning, and a series of Link briefings are planned for the future. Members of the WTF are also currently discussing the possible appointment of an external full-time co-ordinator to support the NGO reps for the medium to long term. ...

Task Forces

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In July, the WTF wrote to the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, Baroness Young, and the Minister of State, Ian Pearson MP, on the issue of WFD additional waters of biodiversity significance. Replies were received, with the Agency highlighting a number of recommendations made to Defra in a joint submission with Natural England whilst Defra assured us they intend to give "priority consideration to this issue". This quarter Link also submitted comments on an early draft of a Defra paper on mechanisms to control the impacts resulting from changes to hydromorphology.

The WTF met late in the quarter to discuss recent WFD developments reported at the Defra WFD Stakeholder meeting held in September, the calendar for the RBD Planning process, additional water bodies, UKTAG standards and conditions, and Defra's River Basin Planning Guidance. Link was also updated on developments in the Blueprint for Water, which, although not a Link initiative, many Link members are involved with.



Overarching



Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Natural England

This quarter, Link worked on plans to mark Natural England's vesting day at the beginning of October. Natural England's Strategic Direction 2006-2009 was published in July and in September the Executive Leadership Group and managers of Natural England were announced. However, in August it had been reported that the Government is demanding substantial budget cuts that threaten the successful establishment of the new wildlife agency.

In a letter to David Miliband MP, Sir Martin Doughty - Chairman of Natural England - warned that a cut in budget "risks the wheels coming off the organisation before it even reaches October's launchpad", prompting Link to write to both the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to raise its concerns. We received a response from Stephen Timms MP at the Treasury stating that it is a matter for Defra.



Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Commons Bill / Act

In late June, the Report stage and Third Reading in the House of Commons took place and the Bill then passed into the House of Lords for the remaining stages. All amendments tabled by the Government were agreed and the Lords' Consideration took place in July with the Commons Bill receiving Royal Assent on 19th July. Defra reported that the Act received strong cross party support in Parliament and has been widely welcomed by stakeholders.

The full Commons Act 2006 can be viewed at www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/20060026.htm



Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

This quarter NIEL has been heavily involved in trying to influence the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Implementation Plan through meetings with government and others. In September NIEL organised a series of events - one on Community Planning and one on Climate Change, which included a private showing of the Al Gore film, 'An Inconvenient Truth'. A major conference on Planning and the Landscape, organised by The National Trust and NIEL, is scheduled for 28th November in Belfast.

Work continues on providing input to the Review of Environmental Governance whose first report is due out in October and attempting to influence the process of Community Planning, as well as continuing work through task forces and committees. NIEL is also working on a Fact Sheet on Community Planning due out in the New Year.



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

At LINK's AGM in June John Mayhew was elected Chair, succeeding Lloyd Austin (RSPB) who stepped down after 3 years. John is Head of Policy & Planning at the National Trust for Scotland and was previously Vice-Chair. Fred Edwards was re-elected President and Deborah Long (Plantlife Scotland) elected Vice-Chair. Plans for LINK's everyone campaign for the May 2007 Holyrood elections progressed. Ylva Haglund was appointed to the 3-day week post of Campaign Coordinator. The Campaign Delivery Team, led by Julia Harrison (RSPB), has worked with advertising professionals to develop the campaign 'asks', distilled from LINK's environmental manifesto, and is preparing for a November launch. Workshops were held to explore how members can engage their memberships, and on media training.

LINK is attending the Scottish Parties' autumn conferences where the focus is on marine. LINK continues to press for real rights in planning as the Planning Bill progresses through the Scottish Parliament and held a workshop for members on renewables before responding to the SE consultation. Preparations have been ongoing for LINK's Forward Planning meeting (October 31), the Members' Congress (24 & 25 November), and Scottish Environment Week in the Parliament (5-12 February 2007).



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

This quarter, WEL organised a seminar on Structural Funding, which was attended by members of WEL, staff of the Welsh Assembly, the Wales European Funding Office, CCW, EA Wales and the Forestry Commission. WEL set up a Task & Finish Group to submit responses to consultations on Convergence Funding, and has increased its number of working groups to now cover Agriculture, Election Campaign, Energy, Environment Strategy, Health & Environment, Marine, Planning, and River Basin Planning.

The WEL Election Campaign Group has updated WEL's Policy Priorities Paper for the 2007 Assembly Elections in response to recent policy developments and feedback from initial meetings with Party officials. The Group is maintaining contact with Party policy officers, providing information and suggestions for their environmental manifesto commitments. The Paper with a list of 'questions to ask candidates' for the public, are to feature on the WEL website, and in WEL members' newsletters and websites.

A seminar has been organised for WEL members on the new Government of Wales Act and its implications for the environmental voluntary sector. Speakers include the editor of Wales Legislation Online and the Clerk of the Assembly's Environment Committee.

News from the Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The third Management Committee meeting of 2006 was held on 27th September at Link's offices. Issues discussed at the meeting included Link's quarterly accounts, Link's Forward Planning review, and plans for our AGM, which is to be held at the National Trust's London office on Friday 8th December.

As reported in our Q2 report, Link's Treasurer Frank Syratt confirmed that he will be standing down at the end of the year. We hope to have the new Treasurer voted in by the membership at our AGM in December. Furthermore, Link's Management Committee currently has one seat empty with a further two seats becoming available for 2007. If you would be interested in becoming a Trustee of Link and would like more details about what this entails, please contact Alexia (alexia@wcl.org.uk).

The next Management Committee meeting is scheduled for 14th November.

Other Link news

Link's Forward Planning is well underway. With our current workplan due to end at the end of 2006, we have been seeking views from all our members on our future workplans and where Link should be focusing in the future. Thank you to all who have contributed to this process to date.

A report setting out the results of the initial survey was produced in August, and was followed shortly afterwards by a Forward Planning workshop in September at the London Wetland Centre (thanks to WWT for hosting this event). The results from the workshop and the survey formed a Forward Planning Review discussion paper, which was discussed at the Management Committee meeting held in September.

At this time Link is also carrying out its annual review of current Working Groups and Task Forces. If you haven't yet done so already, please ensure your views have been submitted to your group secretary no later than 31st October. These results, together with the Forward Planning Review document, will help inform our future workplan for 2007 and beyond.

In addition, Alexia has been co-ordinating the process for pulling together a UK strategy for our Marine Campaign, on behalf of the UK Link organisations. This is being prepared with the assistance of the consultant, Michael Singh, and the strategy will be submitted to a coalition of funders later this year. It is hoped that through this process the UK Link organisations and our members will succeed in getting additional funding support for our Marine Campaign work.

This quarter saw some changes to the Link Secretariat. After three years as a valued member staff, Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator - Helen Meech - left Link on 8th September, taking a well-earned break and jetting off to Australia, New Zealand and SE Asia for three months. As a result of Helen's departure, Link recalled Annie Smith from her secondment at RSPB to rejoin Link on the 2nd October, slightly earlier than originally planned. Furthermore, Jodie Bettis will be staying on as Information and Office Co-ordinator on a permanent basis.

The redesigning of Link's library continues slowly but surely. We have finished re-cataloguing all Working Group & Task Force documentation and hope to complete the final General Policy section by the end of October. Sabina Korzonkiewicz-Scheich from the Open University, is currently taking end of year exams but hopes to return to Link in November. In the meantime, Peter Beckenham, an experienced librarian, joins the project as we move into the next stage of development.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

