

Link2Nature: Wiltshire & Swindon Local Nature Partnership (WSLNP)Board Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013 – 9am–12pm**  
**RWEnpower Trigonos Building, Swindon**

**1. Present:**

**Diane Brooke (DB)** – RWE npower [representing Steve Waygood]  
**Hugo Brooke (HB)** – Trustee, Butterfly Conservation  
**Frances Chinemana (FC)** – Consultant in Public Health, Wiltshire Council [representing Maggie Rae]  
**Gerry Hamersley (GH)** – Area Manager, Natural England  
**Jenny Hawley (JH)** – Environmental Intelligence Officer, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust [providing temporary cover as WSLNP Coordinator]  
**Gary Mantle (GM)** – Director, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (Chair)  
**Toby Sturgis (TS)** – Cabinet Member for Waste, Property, Environment and Development Control Services, Wiltshire Council  
**Melanie Wright (MW)** – BAP Development Officer, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

<b>Abbreviations used within this document:</b>		
LNP	Local Nature Partnership	
WSLNP	Wiltshire & Swindon Local Nature Partnership	
SWLEP	Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership	
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	
NE	Natural England	
WWT	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy	
NIA	Nature Improvement Area	
JSA	Joint Strategic Assessment	
EU	European Union	
<b>Minutes</b>		<b>Action</b>
<p><b>1. Welcome and Apologies</b>  GM welcomed those present and introductions were made by each individual.</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Maggie Rae (Director of Public Health &amp; Public Protection), Philippa Read (Chief Executive, Community First), James Sheppard (Vice Chair of Wiltshire NFU) and Steve Waygood (Head of Environment &amp; Chemistry, RWE npower).</p>		
<p><b>2. Minutes</b></p> <p>The Minutes of the meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January were approved with no amendments.</p>		
<p><b>3. Matters Arising</b></p> <p><b>3.1</b> GM noted changes in the Board membership as Bill Dowling is no longer with us and Cllr Rod Bluh stepped down as Leader of Swindon Borough Council in April 2013. Swindon Borough Council's seat on the Link2Nature Board has been filled by Cllr Dale Heenan, Cabinet member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability. GM commented that there is a need to identify other new Board members in the coming months to ensure better representation from a range of different sectors.</p> <p><b>3.2</b> GM reported that the Executive Group has adopted the task of establishing a</p>		<b>ALL</b>

Fundraising Working Group.	
<p><b>4. Link2Nature's role in Local Plans and proposed developments across Wiltshire and Swindon</b></p> <p><b>4.1</b> GM stressed that this was an important area for Link2Nature and referred to the South West Environment Network briefing. GH commented that it has been left to LNPs and Local Planning Authorities to determine how the Duty to Cooperate will work in practice, beyond the specific wording in the legislation. He distinguished between the Duty to Cooperate between statutory bodies and the Duty to Cooperate between statutory and non-statutory bodies. He recognised that it may be challenging to achieve consensus and agree a collective response from Link2Nature on some issues.</p> <p><b>4.2</b> There was discussion on the scope of the Duty to Cooperate, for example whether it applies to river catchment management planning through the Environment Agency. This was unclear but GH commented that there was nothing to prevent Link2Nature from providing a collective response to any consultation and that this single unified voice for the natural environment could be a powerful influence. It was agreed that it would be helpful if Link2Nature could play a supportive role in providing early input to plans and strategies, to help prevent confrontation and objections at later stages. Link2Nature could prepare a collective Statement of Common Ground on behalf of all partners in relation to key plans and strategies.</p> <p><b>4.3</b> The draft Memorandum of Understanding between Wiltshire Council and the WSLNP was discussed and it was agreed to check that this is consistent with the wording of the WSLNP Terms of Reference. JH agreed to collate any further comments from Board members and send these back to Jon Taylor at WC. TS agreed to thank Jon Taylor for providing the draft MOU.</p> <p><b>4.4</b> JH informed the Board that Link2Nature has received a letter from Swindon Borough Council on progress regarding the Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 and the Duty to Cooperate Statement. The Statement includes a list of prescribed bodies 'which it is considered are of most relevance to the preparation of the development plan for Swindon' and this list omits any reference to the WSLNP/Link2Nature. It was agreed that GM will respond to this letter by 28 May asking for this omission to be corrected and for Link2Nature to be recognised as a relevant prescribed body in relation to the Local Plan 2026.</p>	<p><b>ALL, JH, TS</b></p> <p><b>GM</b></p>
<p><b>5. EU funding</b></p> <p><b>5.1</b> The Board viewed a short video interview from the launch of the Ecosystem Markets Task Force report with John Cridland, the Director General of the CBI, talking about the importance of the green economy. This is available here: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDKjiqqXww5hWDCKQMVA2CSUhV-DaEkUS">www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDKjiqqXww5hWDCKQMVA2CSUhV-DaEkUS</a></p> <p><b>5.2</b> GM stressed the need for a closer working relationship between Link2Nature and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, as is the case in areas such as Avon and Cornwall, to help deliver sustainable development and green growth. The role of LEPs in preparing and implementing investment strategies for new EU funding provides a vital opportunity to do this.</p> <p><b>5.3</b> GH stated that LEPs are required to consult widely on their investment strategy with partnerships and stakeholders, including LNPs. GM confirmed that he has not</p>	

<p>been contacted to date. GH stated that the first draft of the strategies would be completed by the end of June. TS stated that Wiltshire Council will be taking the lead on this and a meeting with the rural stakeholders group will be organised very soon. It was agreed that Link2Nature should urgently seek a more direct relationship with the LEP as well as participating in this group if invited.</p> <p><b>5.4</b> GM informed the Board that the SWEN had appointed a short-term consultant to advise on a framework for LNPs to work with LEPs. He suggested that the LEP could be asked to use part of their £250,000 p.a. funding (for preparing the investment strategy) to enable the LNP to engage fully in the investment strategy process. GH stressed that an approach to the LEP would need to be based on an analysis of the SWLEP's Business Plan against the EU funding criteria. It was agreed that GM would coordinate approaches to the LEP in the coming weeks and keep the Board informed and involved as appropriate.</p>	<b>GM</b>
<p><b>6. Adoption of the landscape framework for conservation in Wiltshire and Swindon</b></p> <p><b>6.1</b> MW gave a presentation of the landscape addition to the Wiltshire and Swindon Biodiversity Action Plans. The final version of this framework will be published on the Link2Nature website shortly.</p> <p><b>6.2</b> The uses of this framework in terms of identifying Nature Improvement Areas and other conservation priorities were discussed.</p> <p><b>6.3</b> The relevance of Landscape Biodiversity Areas to Wiltshire's Community Area (CA) Partnerships was discussed. The Board identified the opportunity to communicate this through the new CA Joint Strategic Assessments later in 2013, as Link2Nature will provide the environmental evidence for these, through the WWT Environmental Intelligence Officer. Each Community Area has a website which could also be encouraged to promote the landscape framework.</p> <p><b>6.4</b> The Board approved the designation of the Landscape Biodiversity Areas and agreed that they should be promoted as the framework for future conservation activity.</p>	
<p><b>7. Designation of Nature Improvement Areas</b></p> <p><b>7.1</b> GM gave an overview of NIAs and invited the Board to consider how to take forward the identification of more NIAs in future. It was clarified that the pilot NIAs, including the Marlborough Downs NIA, will produce useful monitoring and evaluation results, but that this is no cause for delay in identifying new NIAs.</p> <p><b>7.2</b> GH informed the Board that NIAs are a top priority for agri-environment scheme funding and that Higher Level Scheme target areas may be reduced in future, making NIA status even more important. GH advised that new proposals for NIAs should engage the business, health and other sectors, as outlined in the Defra NIA criteria. NIA status may help to attract other sources of funding, particularly where they include social and economic objectives.</p> <p><b>7.3</b> It was agreed that Link2Nature should prioritise new NIAs as far as possible as funding will be limited and it is better to do the prioritisation at a local level. It was agreed that the Executive Group should work with the Biodiversity Working Group to bring forward proposals for consideration by the Board. David Blake was thanked</p>	

for agreeing to lead on this.	
<p><b>8. Approval of the revised Terms of Reference and Strategic Plan</b></p> <p>These were approved without amendments and GM extended his thanks to all involved in preparing the documents. It was agreed that they could be updated without further Board approval, to ensure that they remained current.</p>	
<p><b>9. LNP Coordinator role</b></p> <p><b>9.1</b> GM informed the Board that funding for this role has been confirmed from Public Health Wiltshire, Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council, and that the Executive Group concluded that this is sufficient to fund an LNP Coordinator working 4 days a week until the end of March 2014. They did not feel it was sustainable to recruit a full time coordinator with the funds currently available. The Executive Group is finalising the job description so that the post can be advertised as soon as possible. GM agreed to send the job description to FC for comments.</p> <p><b>9.2</b> FC questioned whether other Link2Nature partners could be asked to provide the funds needed to allow recruitment of a full-time coordinator. GM agreed to send another request, specifying the amount needed. GM will also explore funding from the LEP in the context of the discussion on the EU investment strategy under item 5.</p>	<p><b>GM</b></p> <p><b>GM</b></p>
<p><b>10. Brief Updates</b></p> <p><b>10.1 State of the Environment report 2013</b> JH gave an overview of preparations for the 2013 State of the Environment report, which was welcomed by the Board.</p> <p><b>10.2 Communications</b> There was feedback and discussion on the Link2Nature community workshops held in April: while the turnout was lower than hoped for, the workshops were attended by many enthusiastic individuals who appreciated the work of Link2Nature and its partners. Board members stressed the need to engage new audiences and it was agreed that organising a Link2Nature presence at existing community events might be a more effective way to do this than organising separate events.</p> <p>HB, GM and JH gave feedback on the Business Breakfast held on 14 May, where Link2Nature was launched to the business community alongside the presentation of Wiltshire Wildlife 2013 Corporate Green Awards. This was a very positive event, attended by dozens of local businesses, and it was successful in raising the profile of Link2Nature. Paul Bowtell from RWE npower had given the keynote presentation, on behalf of Board member Steve Waygood, which was very well received.</p> <p>There was general discussion about future communications work and HB agreed to take this forward with input from JH, bearing in mind Link2Nature's limited capacity with no coordinator in post. GH suggested producing a short article about Link2Nature which could be sent to Link2Nature partners, encouraging them to place it in their own newsletters/magazines and on their websites, linking to the Link2Nature website. He also suggested an online survey to engage Link2Nature partners and others in debate around conservation priorities and NIAs.</p>	<p><b>HB, JH</b></p>

<p><b>10.3 Executive Group and Working Groups</b></p> <p>GM informed the Board that the Executive Group would continue to meet prior to Board meetings to help inform the Board's work and support decision-making. The Executive Group is hoping to expand its membership to include expert members, for example a public health professional from Swindon Borough.</p> <p>The Working Groups are not expected to make significant progress in the coming months due to the LNP Coordinator role being vacant.</p>	
<p><b>11. Dates of next meetings</b></p> <p>GM informed the Board that he will be on sabbatical from late June until 20 September and sought their agreement to cancel the Board meeting planned for July. The Board agreed to this but remained flexible on the need for the Vice-Chair to call a meeting if necessary, in particular in the light of the discussion on EU funding.</p> <p>Availability for dates in late 2013 is being checked via Doodle poll and will be confirmed shortly.</p>	<b>JH</b>
<p><b>12. Any other business</b></p> <p>GH recommended that the Executive Group invite a Natural England representative to attend one of their meetings to brief them on CAP reform and the transitional arrangements for agri-environment schemes in 2014 and 2015.</p> <p>GH informed the Board that the Defra agencies had been asked to approach LEPs with an 'Offer' in relation to their regulatory role on planning and sustainable development. GH is leading on this for Wiltshire and Swindon with Andy Reading from the Environment Agency.</p>	
<p><b>Summary of action points</b></p> <p><b>All Board members:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to help identify new Board members to ensure better representation from a range of different sectors;</li> <li>• to send comments to JH on draft MOU from Wiltshire Council on the Duty to Cooperate, to be collated and sent to Jon Taylor.</li> </ul> <p><b>Toby Sturgis</b> to thank Jon Taylor for providing the draft MOU.</p> <p><b>Gary Mantle:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to respond to Swindon BC by 28 May asking for Link2Nature to be recognised as a relevant prescribed body under the Duty to Cooperate in relation to the Local Plan 2026.</li> <li>• to coordinate approaches to the LEP about the EU investment strategy in the coming weeks and keep the Board informed and involved as appropriate.</li> <li>• to send the Coordinator job description to FC for comments.</li> <li>• to send a request to Link2Nature partners asking for funds to make up a full-time post and explore funding from the LEP.</li> </ul> <p><b>Hugo Brooke (with input from Jenny Hawley)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to take forward communications strategy and activities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Jenny Hawley</b> to confirm dates of future meetings.</p>	