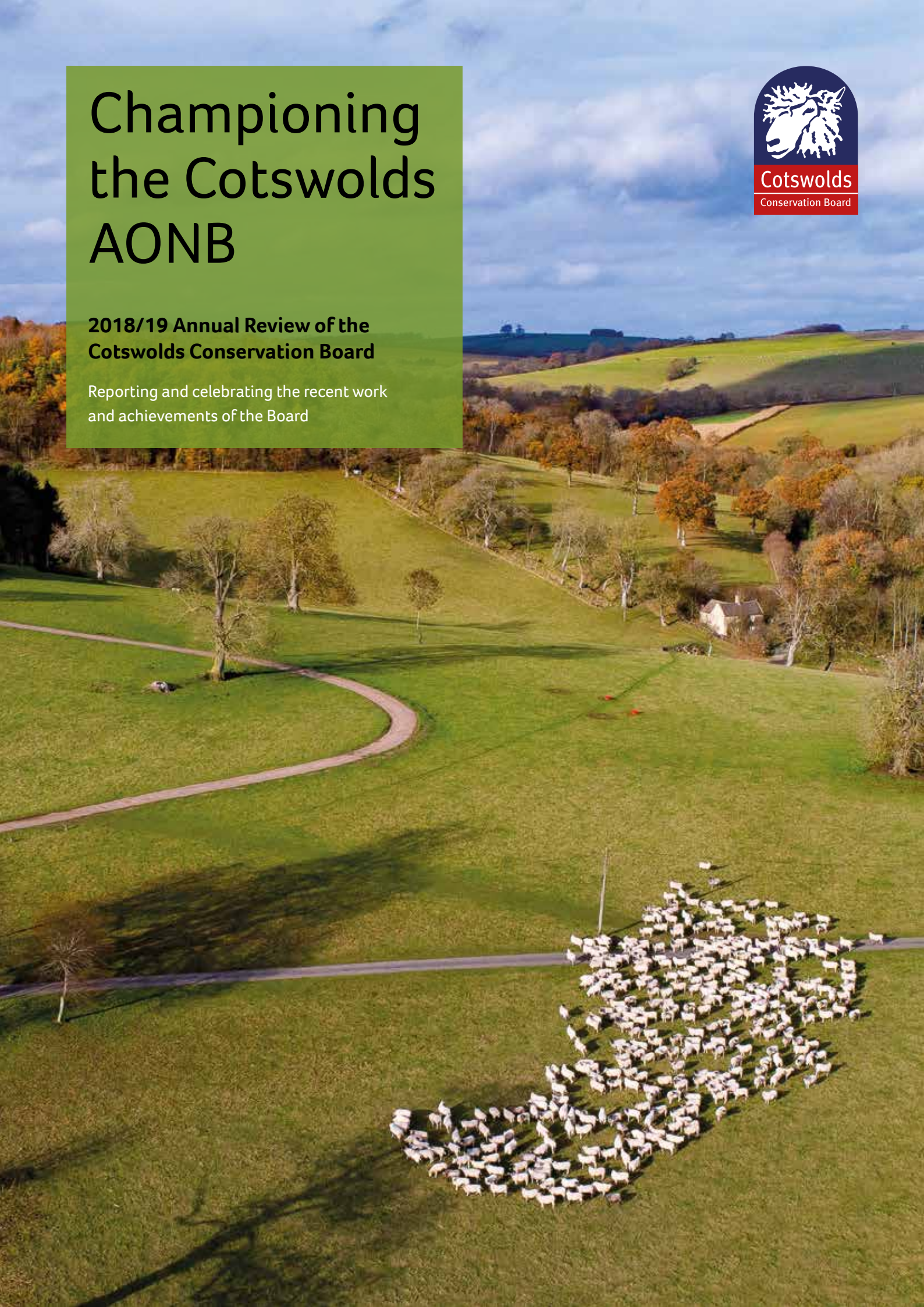




# Championing the Cotswolds AONB

## 2018/19 Annual Review of the Cotswolds Conservation Board

Reporting and celebrating the recent work  
and achievements of the Board



# 2018/19: The Best Bits



Cotswolds LEADER programme has so far supported 44 projects, with a grant value at **£1.4m** and a predicted 91 jobs created across the region



of conservation work by voluntary wardens equating to a value of **£317,687**



564 trainees attending



**76**

rural skills courses, learning 22 different skills



27 schools  
**685**

young people participated with countryside learning

**4,678**

people enjoyed free guided walks

led by our volunteer wardens



CARING FOR THE COTSWOLDS generated

**£19,582**

and supported 13 new projects, thanks to visitor and business contributions



**7,908**

Twitter followers with

**3,227**

likes

The Countryside Fund supported conservation projects valuing

**£19,925**



The Board secured

**£500,000**

from Network Rail for landscape enhancement projects



Cotswolds AONB Hare Trail 2018 raised **£35,000** for the Conservation Board – to contribute to the Caring for the Cotswolds scheme and Glorious Cotswold Grasslands



**4,101**

followers on Facebook



Sustainable Development Fund supported community projects valuing

**£50,342**



33 Participants in the annual hedgelaying competition, with **210 metres** of hedge laid



**£3.9 million**

secured in investment in the Cotswolds AONB

Every **£1** from an average single Local Authority turned into

**£408** of investment



## Chairman's Welcome

Nick Turner



Our review showcases how the Cotswolds Conservation Board continues its work to conserve and enhance, and increase the understanding and enjoyment of the Cotswolds AONB; not least through the addition of the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands initiative through our funding arrangement with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Cotswolds Hare Trail, and a generous private donor.

The achievements throughout 2018/19 are many, a successful year for Caring for the Cotswolds, significant developments in our work engaging with younger audiences, advancing improved solutions for the A417, and the adoption of the 2018-23 Management Plan for the AONB.

Sadly, our very first Chairman, Niel Curwen MBE passed away in 2018, he leaves behind a legacy

of work promoting the conservation of the Cotswolds and all its wonderful features: the stone walls, grasslands, commons and villages.

In the year ahead we wait to see what the EU negotiations will deliver in terms of environmental legislation and investment in the natural beauty of this, our most special landscape.

2019 marks the 70th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which led to the designation of our AONBs, National Parks, and National Trails.

This anniversary year will see the publication of the Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs. Having engaged fully with the review in 2018, we wait to see what ambitions it signals for the longer term and how those sit alongside the Board's own ambitions for the Cotswolds.

### Liz Eyre

*Chairman, Cotswolds Conservation Board*

## Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Cotswolds was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1966 and extended in area in 1990, in recognition of its rich, diverse and high quality landscape. Covering 2,038 sq km, it is the largest member of the family of the AONBs in England and Wales, and the third largest protected landscape in England after the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.



## The Board's role

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is an independent body established by Parliament in 2004 and has two statutory purposes:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB;
- to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.

In fulfilling these roles the Board has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of people living in the AONB.



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# Conserving and Enhancing

## Management Plan 2018–23 Adopted

The Cotswolds Conservation Board has a statutory requirement to prepare and review a management plan for the Cotswolds AONB at five-yearly intervals. The Board adopted the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2018–2023 on 20th September 2018 and the Plan was published in December 2018. The four key ambitions of the Management Plan are:

1. To promote the Cotswolds AONB as the Walking and Exploring Capital of England.
2. To secure the local design and delivery of a Cotswolds AONB package of agri-environment payments for public goods and services and rural development support.
3. To ensure that communities and businesses within and around the Cotswolds AONB identify and celebrate being part of a nationally recognised landscape.
4. To promote the case for the Cotswolds being designated as England's next National Park.



Find the Management Plan on the planning page of our website at [cotswolds-aonb.org.uk](http://cotswolds-aonb.org.uk)

## A417 Missing Link Update

On 14th March 2019, Highways England announced Option 30 as their preferred route for the A417 Missing Link and considers that it presents the best opportunity for them to deliver a landscape-led highways improvement scheme which meets their key objectives and delivers a return on investment.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board has repeatedly voiced concerns over the potential negative impact on the landscape presented by Option 30, and at various stages in 2018/19 offered several alternative options – which Highways England now acknowledge offer both environmental and economic advantages over their original designs. The Board believes that the sheer scale of impact of Option 30 on the AONB is being underestimated and will continue to call on Highways England to advance the genuine landscape led vision for the A417 jointly agreed in 2017.

## National Grid Enhancements

The Cotswolds Conservation Board issued an open invitation for projects in December 2018 for the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative. This £24 million grant scheme offers awards of up to £200,000 for projects to enhance landscapes containing, or impacted by, National Grid's existing electricity transmission infrastructure. In February 2019, the Board successfully submitted two expressions of interest for projects to the Landscape Enhancement Initiative – which are both now progressing to full application. With a project value of £466,617, the proposed work includes the restoration of Gretton Tower, dry stone walling across Nottingham Hill, and major landscape and grassland restoration on sites overlooking Cheltenham. A further call has been issued for projects for pylon lines ZF3 and 4TE1, for projects commencing in May 2020.

## Bathscape

The Landscape Partnership bid for the Bathscape project was approved at the September Heritage Lottery Fund board meeting. Thanks to lottery players, this £2.2 million programme will restore the landscape setting of Bath through engaging local people over five years. More details can be found by searching for 'Bathscape' at [bathnes.gov.uk](http://bathnes.gov.uk)



## Glorious Cotswold Grasslands

A grant of over £200,000 from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, boosted by a private donation, and fundraising from the Cotswolds Hare Trail, has allowed the Cotswolds Conservation Board to launch Glorious Cotswold Grasslands – to conserve, restore and create wildflower-rich limestone grasslands across the Cotswolds AONB. The intention is to create the largest network of wildflower rich Jurassic limestone grassland in the country. To break the cycle faced by many projects of ‘boom and bust’ due to the temporary nature of funding, this project aims to become self-financing over the delivery period.

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## Conserving and Enhancing

### Cotswold Farming Forum 2019

The annual farming forum took place on the 19th March 2019. Attended by around 80 guests, the forum covered the hot topics of recent months. Chaired by Graham Nichols, Chairman of the Gloucestershire NFU, the forum included discussions on: the new Environmental Land Management System (James Grisceff from DEFRA), Ash Dieback (Tim Shardlow and Nathan Fall from Nicholsons Nurseries), and an introduction to the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands project (Harvey Sherwood and Anna Field).



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### Underground Electricity

The Board has worked with Natural England, the Cranham Common Trust, Pitchcombe Parish Council, and other stakeholders to secure approval for Western Power Distribution to spend £344,000 on undergrounding electricity cables at Cranham Common and Pitchcombe. This funding is to reduce the visual impact of electricity distribution in protected landscapes. The two schemes will be delivered in 2019.

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### ELMS Update

The Board has been working with Defra to develop a proposal for a test to inform the design of ELMS. The test would work with farmers and land managers to identify new and innovative approaches to achieve national and local outcomes in the Cotswolds. These could include business advice, local payment rates and land management advice.

### Glover Landscapes Review

The final report from the Glover Protected Landscapes review is due to be published in autumn 2019.

This review, launched 70 years after the country's National Parks and AONBs were first established, will consider how our iconic landscapes meet our 21st century needs, including whether there is scope for the current network of 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks to expand. The review also aims to explore how access to these landscapes could be improved, how those who live and work in them can be better supported, and what their roles are in growing the rural economy. The Cotswold Conservation Board submitted a detailed response to the review in December 2018, and in so doing advanced its ambition to promote the case for the Cotswolds AONB to be designated as a National Park. The Board also published a Position Statement, and hosted a VIP visit from members of review panel including Dame Fiona Reynolds and Jim Dixon.



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## Duty of Regard Headlines

Under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, public bodies – including local planning authorities (LPAs) – must have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs. This is known as the ‘duty of regard’. The expectation of the duty of regard is that adverse impacts on AONBs will be avoided or mitigated where possible.

### Planning applications

- In 2018/19, LPAs made decisions on eight planning applications that the Board had objected to. Although some of the planning decisions were not in-line with the Board’s recommendations, they all addressed the Board’s comments and the potential impacts on the Cotswolds AONB. However, only two of the planning decision reports explicitly referred to the ‘duty of regard’.

### Local Plans

- In 2018/19, the Board responded to seven Local Plan consultations from five LPAs. Several of the LPAs have implemented a number of the Board’s recommendations (for example, undertaking further landscape and visual sensitivity studies) ahead of the next round of Local Plan consultations.

## Network Rail Funding

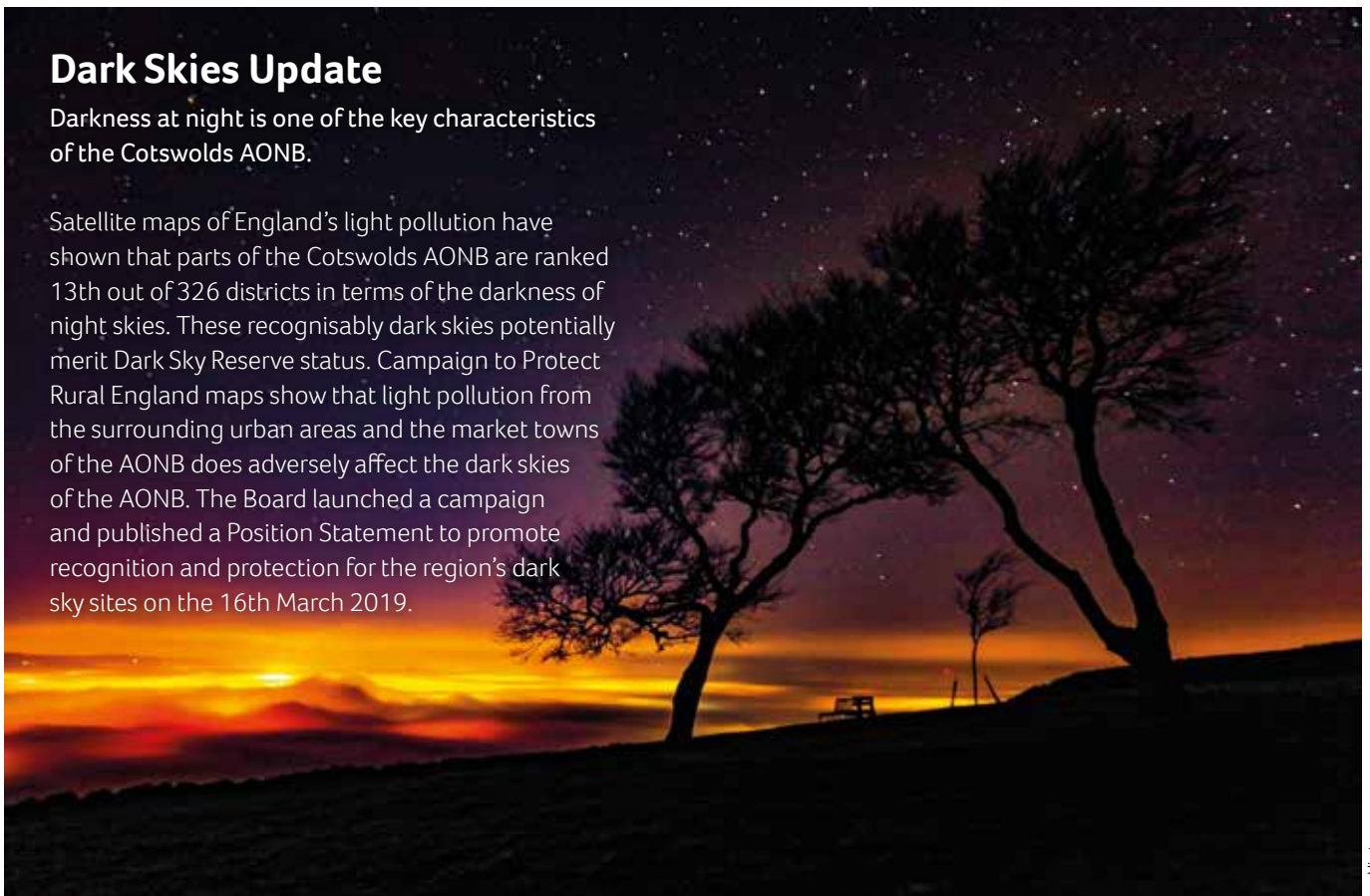
The Conservation Board secured £500,000 from Network Rail to compensate for the adverse impacts of Network Rail’s electrification works along the railway line between Old Sodbury and Alderton in the South Gloucestershire section of the Cotswolds AONB. This funding is in addition to the £3 million that Network Rail estimate they spent on direct mitigation when the works were implemented in 2017.

£250,000 will be spent on reducing the visual impact of the electrification works through appropriate lineside planting. The other £250,000 will be spent on enhancements to the Cotswolds AONB in the wider rail corridor. Projects will be developed during 2019 and implemented over the next few years.

## Dark Skies Update

Darkness at night is one of the key characteristics of the Cotswolds AONB.

Satellite maps of England’s light pollution have shown that parts of the Cotswolds AONB are ranked 13th out of 326 districts in terms of the darkness of night skies. These recognisably dark skies potentially merit Dark Sky Reserve status. Campaign to Protect Rural England maps show that light pollution from the surrounding urban areas and the market towns of the AONB does adversely affect the dark skies of the AONB. The Board launched a campaign and published a Position Statement to promote recognition and protection for the region’s dark sky sites on the 16th March 2019.



Ben Hirst

# Supporting Rural Business

## Cotswolds LEADER Programme

The 2018/19 year has seen the highest level of programme activity. 25 applications were approved, out of a total of 44 projects to date (57%). At the end of the year, contracted projects had exceeded £1.4million. The primary output for the programme is economic growth and job creation – and so far 25 jobs have been created with a further 66 jobs predicted for the near future.

A range of rural businesses have been supported. Moreover, the grants are widely distributed across the Cotswolds and beyond. Grant size varied from the minimum grant of £5,000 up to £100,000, and everything in between.

The Programme has performed well in its support of farmers and foresters. Many arable farmers were supported with direct drills, which reduce seed establishment costs and help improve and conserve the soil. Forestry projects have been supported with investments in harvesting equipment, which has provided the mechanism to manage previously neglected woodlands.



One of the programme's great strengths: the Local Action Group, seen here visiting Cotswold Organic Growers during spring drilling.





# Understanding and Enjoying

## Rural Skills

The Cotswold Conservation Board's Rural Skills programme has had a very busy year.

The annual Hedgelaying Competition took place in November 2018 – and 33 contestants took part and laid 210 metres of hedge. 564 people attended rural skills courses, across 22 separate training disciplines. In our core skills programme, 76 courses were offered – with blacksmithing maintaining its popularity. Two



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accredited dry stone walling courses ran, with nine new professional wallers accredited through the Dry Stone Walling Academy; a new aspiring waller was assisted through the Stepping

Stones project; and five accredited brushcutting courses were well attended.

## Sustainable Development Fund Update

2018/19 saw £12,988 of funding from the Cotswolds AONB Sustainable Development Fund awarded to two projects.

The fund is a regional grants scheme, available to individuals, groups or businesses who have ideas or projects that will improve the Cotswolds both now and in the future. The fund accepts applications which have an educational purpose or remit relating to the Cotswolds AONB – with specific reference to its landscape, geology, biodiversity, and/or the historical environment of the AONB. The 2018/19 funded projects were Hawkwood College, for work to improve public access to the site (with a trail and interpretation); and Welcome to Our Future, to run a roadshow of sustainable technologies and management opportunities for community buildings throughout the AONB.

## Walking and Exploring

The Cotswolds Gateways project continues to progress. Funded by £43,000 from the Growth Programme Tourism Fund, the project aims to improve access to walking and cycling routes from 10 'gateway' interpretation points in villages and towns across the region. Routes will be shown on interpretation boards and be available as downloadable PDFs.



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## Young Gloucestershire Pilot Programme

Cotswolds Conservation Board celebrated the conclusion of a pilot rural skills training scheme in partnership with Young Gloucestershire and The Princes Trust in 2018.

The 'Team' programme, offered by the Prince's Trust, and facilitated by Young Gloucestershire, aims to help young people in Gloucestershire prepare for work or further education with a range of practical activities. More than 70% of young people who complete the course go on to get a job or return to education or training. The 12 week programme is for young people aged 16-25 who are not in employment, education or training. The course develops work skills, group working, confidence, and builds motivation.

The Board trialled a new element of the course offering young people new, hands-on rural skills experiences. Participants tried thatching, woodland management and bushcraft, map reading, stone carving, dry stone walling, and blacksmithing. Following an evaluation of the pilot, both organisations are working together to identify ways of continuing to fund this work.

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## Rural Skills in Schools

The focus of engaging younger audiences with rural skills has gone particularly well this year – with 100 young people from a range of backgrounds taking part in a variety of activities and courses.

Rural Skills provision for schools was successful – a particular highlight was a long-term, ambitious project to restore a wildlife area for Burford School, which started in February 2019. The Board, working in partnership with the Wychwood Project and 80 students, sourced hedgerow plants, planted hedges, cleared vegetation, and constructed habitat piles. This was an exciting project as it gave all 80 students direct, hands-on experience in many of the techniques offered by the Rural Skills programme. The project built on a series of practical rural skills sessions the Board ran at the school in 2018.



Discussions are now underway to continue work in 2019/20 at Burford and Winchcombe Schools, plus a potential collaboration for 2019/20 with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and The Cotswold School – aiming at a year-long project at Greystones Nature Reserve.

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## Cotswold AONB Hare Trail

The Cotswold AONB Hare Trail 2018 had a successful year, and now covers the entire Cotswolds AONB.

The trail placed around 130 beautifully decorated hares, leverets, and springers at partner venues around the AONB. After a series of exciting launch events, lots of press coverage, a host of enthusiastic sponsors, and a very successful auction, the trail raised £35,000 for the Cotswolds Conservation Board. These funds were directed towards the Glorious Cotswolds Grasslands and Caring for the Cotswolds projects.



## Caring for the Cotswolds

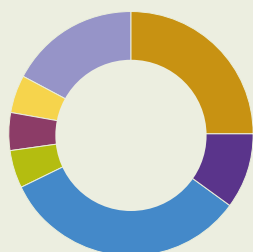
The Board celebrated a record year of contributions to its Caring for the Cotswolds visitor giving scheme in 2018/19.

Almost £20k was raised through the scheme, and after two rounds of grant applications, 12 local projects received grants totalling almost £17,000. The aim of Caring for the Cotswolds has always been to encourage visitors, tourism providers, and the wider business community to raise funds which can be put back into conservation, heritage, and wildlife projects across the AONB. 2018/19 grants were allocated to projects and businesses including Wild Woodland Charcoal, a woodland charcoal company; Avon Wildlife Trust, for an orchard planting and training project; Batsford Foundation, for a wildflower meadow restoration project; Chipping Norton Theatre, for a building restoration project; and Design for Lighting and Starlit Skies for Bath, to further work around Dark Skies in Bath.

# Financial Statement

Unaudited Summary Financial Statement  
1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019

	2017/18 £	2018/19 £
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>885,929</b>	<b>941,720</b>
Project Delivery	696,991	771,372
Corporate Management and Administration	146,527	145,195
Agency Operational Agreement (net)	42,411	25,153
<b>Income</b>	<b>(860,837)</b>	<b>(1,065,774)</b>
DEFRA Grant	(440,367)	(412,941)
Natural England	(64,177)	(67,294)
Local Authorities & Parish Councils	(139,374)	(145,579)
Rural Payments Agency	(72,368)	(87,127)
Heritage Lottery Funding	(32,701)	0
Other	(111,850)	(352,833)
<b>Deficit (Surplus)</b>	<b>25,092</b>	<b>(124,054)</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>		
Fixed Assets & Investments (re-stated)	0	25,000
Current Assets	277,356	322,997
Less: Current Liabilities	(139,154)	(82,741)
Net Current Assets	138,202	240,256
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>138,202</b>	<b>265,256</b>
<b>Financed by</b>		
Restricted Funds	73,902	193,768
Earmarked Reserves	71,341	24,135
General Fund	225,495	305,043
Agency Agreement	(232,536)	(257,690)
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>138,202</b>	<b>265,256</b>



Category	Percentage
Conservation of Natural Environment	25%
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	10%
Recreation Management & Transport	33%
Promoting Understanding	5%
Cotswold Voluntary Wardens	5%
Forward Planning	5%
Corporate Management	17%

## Looking ahead...

In 2019/20, we will be looking forward to:

- Celebrating the successful conclusion of the Cotswolds LEADER Programme.
- The Rural Skills Programme's continuing expansion – and plans to recruit an apprentice to help develop the programme. The Board will also work to grow the schools component of the programme.
- A second call for expressions of interest for projects aiming to enhance landscapes impacted by high voltage electricity transmission lines in the Cotswolds.
- Working with a range of partners, we will be submitting new expressions of interest to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF): a landscape scale project for the Evenlode Valley in Oxfordshire and a project focussed on the heritage of Cotswolds stone across the AONB.
- Encouraging comments on and reactions to the Cultural Capital Position Statement published in 2019.
- Developing a programme of activity and landscape investment linked to the Network Rail funds provided to compensate for the adverse impacts of rail line electrification in the southern part of the AONB.
- Researching and advancing a long term, self-sustaining Cotswolds Meadow Service.
- Partnering the Cotswold Hare Trail again in 2020.
- Advancing the Board's thinking on the Environmental Land Management System (ELMS) and an associated testing of ideas and approaches with farmers and landowners.
- Developing dark skies aspirations for the AONB.
- Having adopted the 2018 – 2023 AONB Management Plan in autumn 2018, the Board will look to advance its four key ambitions for the Cotswolds.
- And finally, we'll be saying goodbye to Martin Lane – having established the former Cotswolds AONB Partnership and the Cotswolds Conservation Board, he will be retiring at the end of summer 2019 and the Board will be recruiting a new Chief Executive. The Board thanks Martin for his many years of service to the Cotswolds AONB.

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