

# Annual Review 2023/24



**Cotswolds**  
National  
Landscape



# A message from our Chair

Looking back over 2023/24, as in previous years, provides me with real pleasure. Once again, we seem to have ended the year with a very positive list of outcomes and in a stronger financial position than 12 months earlier. I'm very proud of all that our team and volunteers have achieved and particularly how the various initiatives through the year have supported each other.

Our work with Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme has successfully funded many projects promoted by landowners and farmers already working with our very successful Glorious Cotswolds Grasslands operation. In turn, our Grasslands work has been helped by the recently agreed deal on the A417 Missing Link road scheme, where money has been provided to ensure lasting benefits for nature for the next 30 years.

These are just a few initiatives (which you can read more about below) but to me they exemplify just what Cotswolds National Landscape team is all about. We join the dots across 790 square miles of some of the best countryside in England to build projects with resources from a variety of pots, to achieve really significant change. No one else can quite do this on such a scale.



I'm genuinely pleased that this is being increasingly recognised by Government and the private sector as we all strive to lighten our respective environmental footprints and make a real difference to the world that we live in.

This year has also seen the rebranding and name change for all Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in England. The Cotswolds decided to drop the reference to AONB to become a National Landscape in 2020 and it is heartening to see this wider change. It gives real impetus to the continuing duty we all share to promote these wonderful places to the widest possible audiences. It also makes for better sharing of expertise across the country and nationally, providing a strong voice on matters of policy, resources and feedback to government.

One such issue that is troubling us all in the UK, is that of water quality in our rivers. Here, the issue is as prevalent as anywhere. Our Everyone's Evenlode project is increasingly seen as an exemplar on how to bring attention to the impacts of poor water quality and what can be done to bring about change. To create the change we need, we have to be working with those who face an almost insurmountable, historic problem – rather than simply complaining. Arguably, Everyone's Evenlode is really helping here, particularly with the younger generation who will inevitably inherit some of these issues from us.

*Front cover image: Wildflowers growing as part of the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands programme.*

© Anna Field

*continues overleaf*





Putting all the above in its true context is our developing work on the Climate Crisis and what this really means for the Cotswolds landscape – our food and our farming, our energy production needs, our transport and our future development. Again, more to read below but last year saw our organisation leading some powerful, collaborative workshops, drawing in people from across the Cotswolds, to set out an agenda for the future. More to follow on this during 2024/25 and beyond but it was good to see such a strong alignment of views and a willingness for change.

As ever, I want to thank all those who have helped make it such a successful year. Our team, with a number of new appointments, continues to strive for improvements in everything they do each year and achieve great things with limited resources. Our 400+ volunteers who turn out in all weathers to lead walks, and carry out repairs and maintenance are a tremendous force for good and without them the Cotswolds landscape would be a poorer place. Finally, our many partners, who provide resources, expertise and enthusiasm, enabling the Cotswolds National Landscape to flourish in an ever more challenging environment. A very big thank you to you all.

**Brendan McCarthy**  
Chair, Cotswolds National Landscape Board

## Cotswolds National Landscape

The Cotswolds National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 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 Cotswolds National Landscape is looked after by a small employee team, with support from 37 Board members and over 400 Voluntary Cotswold Wardens.

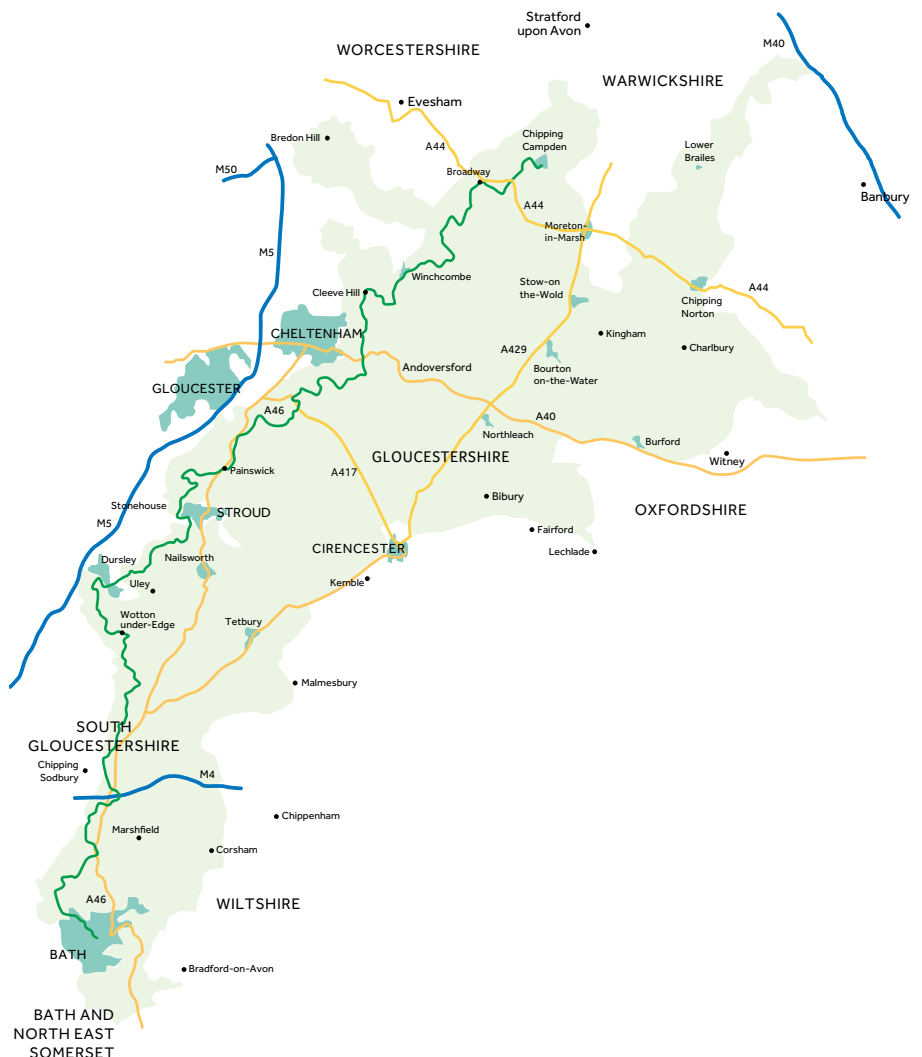
### Our role

We are an independent statutory body, established by Parliament in 2004.

We have 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 we have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of people living in the AONB.





## Climate Action

2023/24 has been a big year for the CNL team's climate action work. With the aim of building a meaningful dialogue with those who understand the Cotswolds, throughout winter 2023 we ran a successful series of public workshops, hosted by 3Keel Sustainability Consultants.

The workshops explored the recommendations of the Small World Consulting report, and were themed around energy, transport, food and drink, and land use and management – with key stakeholders invited to each. Over 250 people attended the workshops, representing parish, town, district, unitary and county councils; farmers and land managers; visitor economy businesses; environmental charities; transport operators; energy businesses and more. 3Keel used the results from the workshops to produce a report: "achieving consensus on a pathway to



net zero and resulting action plan", which the CNL Board approved in February 2024. The report provides a clear mandate for our team to lead, co-ordinate and support climate action in the Cotswolds National Landscape.

The resulting report and recommendations were adopted by the CNL Board in February 2024, and will influence our next Management Plan, covering the period 2025-30.

## Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

October 2023 saw one of the most significant changes to legislation relating directly to national landscapes and other protected landscapes in almost 25 years.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 ('the LURA'), became law on 26 October 2023. It includes a new statutory duty on relevant authorities, including all public bodies, to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of national landscapes. An equivalent duty now applies to other protected landscapes in relation to their purposes.

This duty, which is known as the 'seek to further' duty, came into force on 26 December 2023. For national landscapes, it is enacted through Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It replaces the previous 'duty of regard'. It is anticipated that Defra will publish guidance on the 'seek to further duty' later in 2024.

The 'seek to further' duty is a strengthened duty and is more outcome-focused than the 'duty of regard'. For example, as stated in the Government's press release when the LURA was enacted, 'the Act will enhance our national network of beautiful, nature-rich protected landscapes'.

The LURA also makes provision for the Secretary of State to specify, through regulations, how relevant authorities should comply with the 'seek to further' duty; and contribute to the preparation, implementation and review of protected landscape management plans. It is anticipated that these regulations will be drafted and consulted on over the next year or so.

Since January 2024, our Planning Lead, John Mills, has been on a part-time secondment with the National Landscapes Association (NLA) in relation to the 'seek to further' duty.

One of the main outputs from this secondment has been a survey which John circulated to all protected landscapes in England, asking for their views on the implications of the 'seek to further' duty and the potential opportunities that it might provide. John has compiled a report on the survey responses on behalf of the NLA. As part of the secondment, John has also produced a report, for the NLA, on the potential implications of the 'seek to further' duty for national planning policy.

The report on the seek to further duty has been shared with all protected landscapes teams in England and with Defra. It is hoped that the report will help guide the future work of the NLA (and other protected landscape teams) in relation to the 'seek to further' duty. It is also hoped that Defra will have regard to the report when they develop secondary legislation on this duty.

# Farming in Protected Landscapes – the third year

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) is part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan and was developed with the support of National Landscape and National Park teams from across England. It's a multi-million pound grant programme that launched in July 2021, which closes in March 2025.

The third year of the programme went very well in the Cotswolds, and we successfully allocated our full 23/24 budget. This put us in a strong position to enter the fourth and final year of delivery, which was made possible due to the programme's widely recognised success at national scale, leading to Defra boosting the available funding and extending the programme to March 2025. More details about the programme's interim evaluation findings can be found [here](#)

The programme funds projects led by farmers and land managers that:

- support nature recovery
- mitigate the impacts of climate change
- provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage
- protect or improve the quality and character of the landscape or place



In 2023/24, we continued to see a huge variety of projects supported. Strong themes have emerged, such as the management and restoration of species-rich grasslands – FiPL has funded over 35 grasslands-related projects to date, from field to catchment scale. Market gardening has proved popular too, with FiPL grants helping new entrants and existing farmers alike meet a rising demand of sustainably grown local fruit and veg.

Two huge wetland creation projects are well underway at Cornwell and Chipping Campden, bringing long stretches of watercourses and floodplains back to life. And we've set up our own Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme, taking 25 farmers and advisors on an intensive series of workshops, farm walks and other events, aiming to deepen the adoption of regenerative farming practice and agroecological thinking in the Cotswolds.

## Key project numbers 2023/24

- 52 projects approved for funding
- £1,749,323 in allocated grants
- Total projects value £3,590,643

## Key project numbers Years 1, 2 and 3

- 133 projects funded
- £4 million in allocated grants
- Total projects value £7.2 million



The Chipping Campden wetland project during construction in 2024



*We've set up our own Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme, taking 25 farmers and advisors on an intensive series of workshops, farm walks and other events, aiming to deepen the adoption of regenerative farming practice and agroecological thinking in the Cotswolds.*

# Glorious Cotswold Grasslands

The Glorious Cotswold Grasslands (GCG) team has continued to thrive in spite of very challenging weather conditions throughout 2023. Continued wet weather through the summer made their work challenging, and has required the team and volunteers to work responsively and flexibly due to these the conditions.



*Orchids are thriving across many GCG sites*

The major development within the GCG team this year has been the extraordinary work on the Biodiversity Improvement Project. This is being facilitated through the National Highways Designated Funds Programme, which is standalone from any road scheme, and aims to address environmental issues. In partnership with the National Trust, we submitted a proposal in August 2022 valued at £7.66 million for 320ha of grassland restoration. The target was to create biodiversity units to count towards National Highway's Biodiversity Key Performance Indicator.

The CNL Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team target was to restore 120ha over 3 years at a total cost of £2.12 million.

The GCG team has been working hard to engage with land owners and managers to commit to this project. It takes the form of a three year project, but with a 30 year commitment – to guarantee the future of the restoration. The resulting paperwork around agreements, including legal and financial complexities, has been significant.







*Wildflower seed spreading on site*

The proposition is unusual, and new to many – and so the team has been working hard to engage with people, reassure them, and encourage their participation. All this at the same time as running the practical work – surveying potential sites, and for signed-up landowners, running the preparation and management of the grasslands.

In summary, this new project offers huge opportunity for increasing grassland coverage in the Cotswolds, as well as offering the potential for a tremendous increase in biodiversity. The 30 year management period, though complicated, offers an unusually reassuring aspect to the future management of nature recovery in the Cotswolds.

*The GCG team has been working hard to engage with land owners and managers to commit to this project.*

#### Key programme numbers 2023/24

- 84.1 hectares: area where restoration has been initiated
- 24: number of donor sites (across 34 individual fields)
- 36: number of recipient sites
- 125: highest number of species recorded at one site
- 11.5 hectares: largest single site participating in 2023/24
- 1807kg: wildflower seed harvested over project

#### Key programme numbers overall

- 379.7 hectares: area where restoration has been initiated
- 116: number of donor sites (on a cyclical harvesting schedule)
- 239: number of recipient sites
- 125: highest number of species recorded at one site
- 385: number of plant species recorded in all surveys over 6 years
- 35 hectares: largest participating site
- 7181kg: total wildflower seed collected over programme



Children identifying aquatic wildlife

## Everyone's Evenlode

The Everyone's Evenlode team continues to deliver work at pace. 2023/24 has seen a steady continuation of events, guided walks, school visits and field trips (at all levels of education), community engagement, library outreach visits, an increasingly pro-active group of Duke of Edinburgh volunteer students, involvement in developing a Natural History GCSE, and relationship building with partner venues and organisations.

Highlights this year have included the formation of an Outdoor Learning Network, participation in a film about the work of Evenlode Catchment Partnership, the annual Riverside Festival in Charlbury, participation at Daylesford's summer festival, a face-to-face meeting with MP Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown to discuss river quality, bat evenings, and a successful all-day demonstration to 156 students with the EmRiver table at Burford School.

At the heart of the Everyone's Evenlode work is the ambition to inspire river communities in the Evenlode river catchment to care about their stretch of river, so another notable achievement has been signing up two entire school cohorts as 'citizen science schools'. All the pupils at Wychwood Primary School and Enstone Primary School will conduct monthly river water testing, and will run regular assemblies about the river.

### Key project numbers 2023/24:

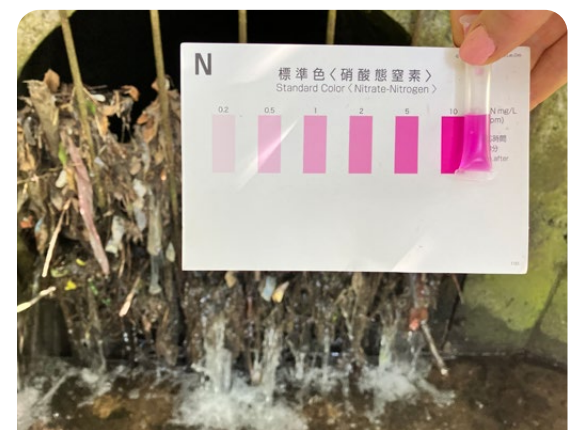
#### Education

- Delivered 39 sessions on the river enabling 849 children (5 - 15 yrs old) to experience outdoor education
- Worked with 110 young people (16 - 25 yrs old) on river-based projects
- From 20 schools and universities inside and outside the catchment
- Benefitted from 155 volunteer hours

#### Community Outreach

- Engaged with 2,537 people in the community at 46 different events, including:
  - 5 guided walks
  - 17 community visits
  - 13 fairs, festivals and shows
  - 10 knowledge exchange events
  - 1 large river community event
- Benefitted from 352 volunteer hours

The Everyone's Evenlode team has recruited a number of citizen scientists, including school children, to help monitor water quality



# Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

Our Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have set a new record for themselves in 2023-24: over 50,000 hours of voluntary work between them across their five districts in the Cotswolds.

Come rain or shine, the wardens work all year round, and contribute a huge amount to the landscape. They work on maintaining the many thousands of miles of routes criss-crossing the Cotswolds: checking routes, replacing stiles, repairing foot bridges, clearing scrub, installing gates, fixing steps and installing hand rails, improving signage and waymarking, and litter picking.

They plant trees, lay hedges, create habitats for nature, clear waterways, and work to repair our famous dry stone walls. They attend talks, shows and events to help spread the word about what they do, and about the Cotswolds National Landscape. And not forgetting – they lead hundreds of guided walks, for free, and open to everyone, almost every day of the year!

## Key numbers 2023/24:

- 51,351 hours of work
- 319 guided walks, attended by 3,634 people
- 7,867 miles of path patrolled
- 1,433 trees planted



Wardens volunteer their time across a huge range of activities including route maintenance, access improvements, and guided walks

## New to Nature

Nina Stubbington joined our team as part of New to Nature; a scheme funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Groundwork UK. The scheme aims to increase the diversity of young people entering the environmental sector by providing paid work placements in nature and landscape organisations. The New to Nature programme supports young people by allowing them to gain real, hands-on experience, helping them to grow personally and professionally.



Having taken to the role with enthusiasm and a demonstrable willingness to get involved, Nina has impressed the whole CNL team. During her placement year, Nina gained experience managing our Caring for the Cotswolds grant scheme and has worked with a range of our partner organisations, including the Cotswold Way Association. Nina also supports CNL's communications by working across its social media, where her consistent posting schedule has resulted in a steady increase in followers and engagement.

*Nina is now responsible for a much larger grants portfolio as part of the Access for All: Removing Barriers in Protected Landscapes programme, funded by Defra.*

From April 2024, Nina's role will be funded by the British Mountaineering Council, meaning she is able to stay on in the CNL team for another year. Her new role, Grants and Access Officer, builds on the experience gained over the last year. Nina is now responsible for a much larger grants portfolio as part of the Access for All: Removing Barriers in Protected Landscapes programme, funded by Defra.

Nina has taken advantage of a range of training opportunities in her time at CNL so far, including volunteering for the GCG team and helping with seed harvesting, completing a PRINCE 2 project management certification, and a range of training sessions focusing on access and inclusion.

## Caring for the Cotswolds

This year we have been able to support 11 new projects across the Cotswolds, covering the scheme's four core themes of habitats and species, heritage, access, and education. Highlights include the creation of a new community orchard in Leckhampton, which sparked multiple articles of coverage in local media; and the restoration of several Great Western Railway benches in Tetbury, led by members of the community.



Youth Panel

This year, Caring for the Cotswolds offered an opportunity for our New to Nature trainee; Nina Stubbington to deliver the scheme as part of her placement. Nina took a fresh look at the scheme, and undertook a review to identify any areas for improvement. With this additional employee resource, we were able to better support our business members, visit more projects, and recruit a Youth Panel in collaboration with Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group.

The Youth Panel brought together ten young people to learn about the grants process, review new projects, and provide feedback and recommendations to the Grants Panel. This insightful feedback was warmly received by the Grants Panel and guided them in the decision process.



*Tetbury Men in Sheds members restoring a number of GWR railway station benches*

Caring for the Cotswolds continues to grow because of its business members, who donate annually. As ever, huge thanks to them for their continued support and loyalty.

#### **Key numbers**

- 11 new projects supported
- £19,284 allocated in grants
- £82,572 total projects value
- 10 young people included in the youth panel

*The Youth Panel brought together ten young people to learn about the grants process, review new projects, and provide feedback and recommendations to the Grants Panel.*



*Weavers Field, a community orchard in Leckhampton*

# Celebrating our team

## Simon Smith

The Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership (GLNP) is playing a leading role in developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council. To support this work a governance board and a steering group has been formed to oversee the preparation of the strategy. In addition, the GLNP Board has approved the retention of two LNRS Expert Advisors – Juliet Hynes (Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust) and Simon Smith, our Nature Recovery Lead. The time commitment for Simon is around one day a week until December 2024.



## Becky Jones

Becky Jones, our Access and Volunteer Lead celebrated 30 years in the CNL team at the end of March 2024. Becky joined as a fresh graduate from the Royal Agricultural College as a ranger across the Cotswolds. She then went on to look after the growing band of volunteer wardens, and now handles funding applications, and continues to work on improving physical access across the countryside – Becky's role has continued to grow within the organisation. She is well respected locally, nationally, and even internationally – but what also stands out is her genuine approach to her work. Becky is a colleague who cares about the work she does, and the people around her, and the thoughtfulness she applies to both is evident every day.

## New team members

### Jonathan Rogers



Jonathan Rogers arrived as our new Management Accountant in December 2023. Jonathan joined us from Severn Trent Green Power, where his role of Management Accountant gave him financial responsibility

for three main recycling plants. He has worked across the world and has gained huge experience in many varied commercial businesses during his 30+ years working in finance.

### Ellie Robinson



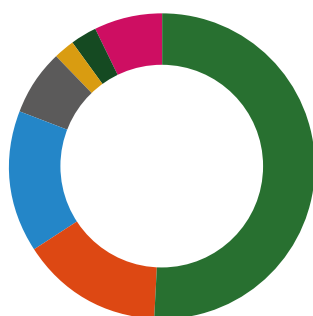
We also appointed Ellie Robinson as our Farming in Protected Landscape Admin Support in December 2023. Ellie has a great range of administrative and customer relationship experience. She has a

love of the outdoors, and has settled into the FiPL team well.

# Financial Statement

Income and Expenditure Account  
For the year ending 31 March 2022

	2022/23 £	2023/24 £
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>2,485,984</b>	<b>3,089,008</b>
Project Delivery	2,340,886	2,876,857
Corporate Management and Administration	145,098	212,151
<b>Income</b>	<b>(2,504,627)</b>	<b>(3,673,043)</b>
DEFRA Grant	(529,743)	(529,743)
DEFRA – FIPL	(994,589)	(1,366,236)
DEFRA – Removing Barriers	(234,993)	(51,343)
Natural England	(106,669)	(102,687)
Local Authorities & Parish Councils	(137,538)	(139,266)
Rural Payments Agency	(4,468)	0
National Grid LEI	(59,292)	(496,747)
Thames Water	(112,878)	(129,564)
Severn Trent	(60,000)	(60,000)
National Highways – Biodiversity	(49,793)	(643,943)
Highways England	(25,900)	(7,480)
Groundwork UK		(26,987)
Other	(188,764)	(119,047)
<b>Deficit (Surplus)</b>	<b>(18,642)</b>	<b>(584,035)</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>		
<b>As at 31st March 2021</b>	<b>31.03.23</b>	<b>31.03.24</b>
	£	£
Net Assets:		
Fixed Assets & Investments	0	0
Current Assets	1,346,125	2,275,875
Current Liabilities	(685,393)	(1,031,088)
Net Current Assets	660,732	1,244,787
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>660,732</b>	<b>1,244,787</b>
Financed by:		
Restricted Funds	433,210	1,007,816
Earmarked Reserves	151,166	157,650
General Fund	76,357	79,321
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>660,732</b>	<b>1,244,787</b>



## Gross Expenditure %

Conservation of Natural Environment	51%
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	15%
Recreation Management & Transport	15%
Promoting Understanding	7%
Cotswold Voluntary Wardens	2%
Forward Planning	3%
Corporate Management	7%



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