

BUSINESS PLAN 2019/20 QUARTER 2 REVIEW

Summary: To review progress in Quarter 2 of the financial year 2019/20.

Recommendations:

That the Quarter 2 Review be noted.

Officer Ref: Simon Smith - Project Development and Business Planning Officer

Background

Process

1. The officer team undertook a review of progress against the work programme on 8th October 2019. This review identified areas of significant progress or where things have developed differently. It does not focus on areas of work which are performing as originally expected in the business plan.
2. This report does not attempt to celebrate the role or work of the Board. That task is achieved through updates, the annual review, press releases and digital media.

Financial Outcome

3. The Board's current forecast (green in *Appendix A*) is now predicting a year end surplus of £15,139 compared to a budget of £-5,090, a variance of £20,229. The significant variances reported at quarter 1 (mitigation income, hare trail and recruitment expenses) are still affecting the figures however the new forecast is £17,531 lower than the surplus of £32,670 predicted at the quarter 1 review. The reasons for these changes between the quarters are:
 - There have been more than predicted calls on the communications activity, it is now forecasting a £3,800 overspend against the original budget and Q1 forecast. Costs incurred include;
 - £1,165 National park booklet
 - £500 brand guidelines
 - £3,260 reprint and design of the map and guide
 - £2,335 distribution of the map and guide
 - £4,800 of Cotswold Lion distribution costs arrived later than expected in Q1 and have now been put back into the budget.
 - The re-letting of the police station incurred unbudgeted costs of £3,711 in repairs, advertising and legal expenses.
 - Rural Skills is now forecasting a surplus £4,693 before the hedgelaying competition and £80 after. This is £5,000 less than forecasted at quarter 1 (£10,430 & £5,323). There are three main reasons for this;
 - Impact of the withdrawal of rural skills courses from the Old Prison. An estimated ten blacksmithing courses have cancelled due to this and there has also been an impact on lime mortar and stone carving courses. We are learning that the Old Prison was a popular venue, helping to drive bookings.

- Bookings for the autumn hedging course have been lower than usual. The exceptionally wet late summer may be a factor though a recent increase in course fees may also be having an effect. We are monitoring this closely and a decision on pricing will be taken in early November.
- Schools and community work has been quiet with a key contact being away on paternity leave. He will return and this has in part been made up by a programme for Cogges historic farm.
- Consultancy costs have been increased by £3,000 reflecting the extension of the contract for the Finance Officer.
- A new restricted fund for Dark Skies contributions has been created and a project balance of £2,977 transferred to it.

Collectively these changes more than account for the £17,531 variance between quarters 1 and 2. Any other variances are explained in the notes in *Appendix A*.

4. The Board's useable funds (earmarked reserves and general fund combined) available at year end is now forecasted to be £86,627 which is £40,986 more than budgeted and £17,531 less than forecasted at Q1 (£104,158).
5. As well as project balances a breakdown of the earmarked reserves and restricted funds has also been provided.

Operational Progress

6. Areas of significant progress or deviation from the original work programme are outlined below.

CROSS CUTTING

Working Together

- The Board has continued to promote the case for the Cotswolds being designated a **National Park** with some success. The Summer Special edition of Cotswold Life carried a three page article on the prospect of the Cotswolds becoming a National Park. The final report of the Landscapes Review published in September describes the Cotswolds as a "leading candidate" to become a National Park.
- The Planning and Landscape Officer objected to **Landscape Review** proposal (pre-publication) to allow entry-level exception sites in protected landscapes. This proposal was subsequently not included in the review report. Inclusion may have led to inappropriate development.
- The Planning and Landscape Officer is currently coordinating a proposed meeting for **quarry stakeholders** (quarry operators, parish councils, county council, the Board) in relation to the cluster of quarries between Naunton and Ford - meeting anticipated in December 2019.
- **LEADER** is now fully allocated as of 30th September with a project spend of £1.1 million. A DEFRA policy team visit was a great success in demonstrating the programme and its lessons to senior policy makes. Officers used it as an opportunity to make the case for the Board hosting an Environmental Land Management System. A report on the environmental benefits of the programme is being worked on.

CONSERVING AND ENHANCING

Biodiversity

- The Colchester Declaration (an NAAONB document [downloadable from their website](#)) requests AONBs have a **Nature Recovery Plan**. The draft Business Plan now proposes a Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan during 2020/21.
- Progress is being made on encouraging **woodland management** when looked at across our operations; 740 Ha of woodland at Bathurst has been brought into management with LEADER investment. Rural skills courses and charcoal burning operations support management in several woodlands as does the voluntary warden's coppicing workdays, which produce an array of woodland products including hedging stakes for the hedgelaying competition.
- The **Glorious Grasslands** project has added to its outstanding first season. 1,300k of seed has been harvested and 45.3 ha of grassland has been over-sown. The steering group has approved the basis of a tender to be drafted for the business revenue consultancy.

Rural Land Management

- The Board has received the contract for its **ELMS** (Environmental Land management System) test and a contractor has been engaged following a tendering process.

Development and Transport

- The Board's Planning and Landscape Officer gave a presentation at a south west **RTPI Rural Planning Seminar** on 18/09/19. The subject was "Putting the purpose of the AONB designation at the heart of planning". The event was attended by 120 planning officers, a third of whom were from the Cotswolds.

UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYING

Access and Recreation

- Major surface improvement works began on the **Cotswold Way** at Shiners Wood (BANES). Two closures and diversions are planned. One at Haresfield due to Ash Dieback works and one at Crickley Hill due to geotech work.
- 15 women from inner city Gloucester have had a new experience of **walking** in the Cotswold countryside thanks to a Cotswold Voluntary Warden working with the Gloucester Friendship Café. This will be featured in the next copy of the Lion.
- Two **films** were released in Sept 19. One on "[The wonderful outstanding Cotswolds](#) AONB" received 1,100 views and one on "[The Cotswolds a new National Park](#)" received 382 views. A LEADER film is being planned.

7. This quarter saw no changes in personnel in terms of Officers though there was one in October and there were changes to the Board:

Officers

Leaver:

Martin Lane, Director (October)

Starter:

Andy Parsons, Chief Executive (October) – on a p/t contract basis until December 2019

Board Members

Leavers:

Martin Horwood, Cheltenham Borough Council

Christopher Kenney-Herbert, Parish Councillor (PC3) Moreton in Marsh

Andy Parsons, Secretary of State appointee

Starters:

Brendan Costelloe Secretary of State appointee

Paul Crossley, BANES

Amanda Davis, Parish Councillor (PC3) Bourton-on-the-Water

Steve Harvey, Cheltenham Borough Council

Graham Hopkins Secretary of State appointee

Dominic Morris Secretary of State appointee

Clive Webster, Cotswolds District Council

Supporting Papers:

Appendix 'A' - 2019/20 Quarter 1 Finance Report