

**MEETING OF THE BOARD OF
COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE**

HELD AT COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL, TRINITY ROAD, CIRENCESTER, GL7 1PX

TUESDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2023

Present:

Brendan McCarthy (Chair)	Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)
Ben Dent	Liz Hodges
David Broad	Alistair Adams
Nick Bumford	Cate Le Grice-Mack
Katherine Chesson	John Swanton
Brendan Costelloe	Sue Crawford
Amanda Davis	Clive Webster
Graham Hopkins	Jane Hull
Ed Macalister-Smith	Sarah Whalley-Hoggins
Rosie Pearson	Isabel Ross
Ben Stokes	Martin Mitchell
Paul Crossley	Matt Darby
Paul Hodgkinson	Tony Merry
Ellie Fujioka	Martin Horwood

Also in Attendance:

Andy Parsons (Chief Executive)
Michele Holden (Interim Head of Finance)
Simon Smith (Nature Recovery Lead)
Anna Field and Harvey Sherwood (Glorious Cotswold Grasslands [GCG] team)
Mark Connelly, Scott Brown, Heidi Gibbs and Caroline Regan (Farming in Protected Landscapes [FiPL] team)
Della Morris (Finance and Admin Assistant)
Rebecca Jones (Access and Volunteer Lead)
James Webb (Partnerships and Fundraising Lead)
Alana Hopkins (Communications Lead)
Margaret Reid (Head Voluntary Warden)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- **Apologies** - apologies were received from Jo Barker, Steve Bucknell, Phil Chapman, Andy Graham, Brendan McCarron, Martin Brown, Emma Kearsey.
- **Introductions and announcements** – Jenny Exley (Bisley with Lypiatt Parish Council) was in attendance. The Chair introduced the FiPL team and GCG team, as well as Alastair Adams (new board member) and Michele Holden. The Chair gave tribute to Board member Mike Dean, who has recently stepped down – thanking him for many years of service. Thanks were also given to Margaret Reid, Head Warden, for her very positive and productive three year term as lead of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens.
- **Declarations of interest** – none.
- **Public questions** - there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 11 OCTOBER 2022

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board Meeting held on 11 October 2022 be approved as a correct record. Taken as read. No public questions.
- Matters Arising – the Chief Executive (CEO) gave an update on the actions from the previous meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 24 JANUARY 2023

The Board noted the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 January 2023.

4. PRESENTATION 1: GLORIOUS COTSWOLD GRASSLANDS

Anna Field and Harvey Sherwood gave a very positive, detailed, and informative presentation on the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands work programme.

Anna described the background to the programme, achievements so far, and the process of site assessment and surveys. Harvey gave an insight into the operational processes of the programme, emphasising the value of the data gathered to farmers and landowners as well as to CNL. Both Harvey and Anna highlighted a number of very impressive statistics relating to their work (two tonnes of wildflower seed collected in 2022, 300+ hectares developed to date, 344 different wildflower species surveyed, 100 donor sites).

- Comments – there were very positive responses to the presentation. Cate Le Grice Mack asked about how weeds like nettles are prevented from returning. Harvey explained the approach of the work follows a ‘no till’ principle, and as such the weeds are prevented from regrowing. CLGM also asked if there were training opportunities for landowners and farmers – the response was that the GCG team is constantly working with and advising farmers and landowners (often on an individual basis) as a key part of their ongoing work for the programme. Martin Horwood asked how the GCG work connects to wider landscape biodiversity and nature corridors. Response was given that the emphasis of GCG is to work at a local level, but that naturally, as more landowners work with the team, those patches of land will begin to connect over time. Road verges also identified as a connecting feature. Clive Webster asked about cattle farming (in relation to climate change and carbon emissions) and whether encouraging cattle conflicts with climate action aims of the Board. It was explained that conservation grazing is very different to larger scale cattle farming, and that conservation grazing is very beneficial to the GCG programme.
- Decision – the Chair congratulated the team on an inspiring presentation.
- Actions Arising – none.

5. PRESENTATION 2: FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Scott Brown, Heidi Gibbs and Caroline Regan gave a thorough and informative presentation about the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. The team described the background to the programme, what it is, who it’s for, intended outcomes, application and assessment processes. The team highlighted some challenges, and praised a selection of successful funded projects. The programme has impressive statistics: £1.9million allocated from original available funds of £2.2 million, 79 projects approved from 88 applications, 500 farms positively impacted.

- Comments – Sue Crawford asked about the payment in arrears system and how that impacts applicants’ cash flow. She also queried whether ‘hobby farmers’ are missing

out on information because they might be unaware of the programme. Scott Brown answered that the engagement process is thorough, as is the network of advice and support for farmers and landowners. It was also acknowledged that the payment in arrears system (specified by Defra) isn't ideal, but as payment schedules can be set for each applicant, most are working well within this system. Amanda Davis asked if there is more potential for parish and town councils to access FiPL funding. Scott Brown answered that the programme is open to them, but often team members at these authorities don't have the capacity to fully progress applications. Suggestion made that local authority/parish council board members could help with this. Graham Hopkins suggested a 'How to Farm in Protected Landscapes' guide could be an output from the programme. Rebecca Charley, Vice Chair, warned against this – saying it could easily be misconstrued by farmers and therefore become a reputational risk for CNL. Matt Darby asked about the comparison between FiPL and Countryside Stewardship. He asked if either could be identified as a better system. Scott Brown explained that they run in parallel with each other – and have been working well alongside each other (rather than competing).

- Decision – the Chair congratulated the team on an informative presentation.
- Actions Arising – none.

6. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive updated the Board on recent activity, including:

- Ann Wyatt (Head of Finance) left at the beginning of February
- Michele Holden has joined as Interim Head of Finance until March when Magda Glanowska starts as the permanent Head of Finance
- A new Biodiversity Net Gain Officer has been successfully recruited
- 13 applications were received for the New to Nature Grants and Outreach Officer role. James Webb and Rebecca Jones will be interviewing a shortlist of candidates.
- The CEO will be on annual leave for three weeks from 24 March, James Webb will deputise in his absence
- The CEO expressed heartfelt thanks to Margaret Reid as outgoing Head Warden for the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens. He identified learning a lot from Margaret, and has enjoyed working with her.

The CEO also gave a brief update on property matters, confirming that the team will be vacating the Old Prison at the end of April 2023. A full and final offer has been made to the Friends of the Cotswolds (as landlords). Three new locations have been secured at Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust sites in Bourton-on-the-Water and Gloucester, and at Cotswold Business Park, Upper Rissington.

He finished by emphasising the importance of reading the appendix to his report, which details the many ways in which various CNL team members are involved in national-level projects and programmes – furthering the voice and influence of CNL across national dialogues around landscape and conservation.

- Comments – Jane Hull congratulated the CNL team on their national influence across various workstreams.
- Decision – The board noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

7. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

The Chair encouraged Members to take the papers as read and invited questions.

- Comments – Ben Stokes asked about Cotswold Champions being off track, and requested an update. It was explained that work outside the six mile corridor was completed, and the lineside mitigation work is the blocker to progress. This has been associated with one large estate within the area, but the hope is that a new estates manager may help move this work along.
- Decision – The board noted the update.
- Actions Arising – none.

8. PLANS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR APPROVAL/ ADOPTION

8(a) Management Plan (2023-25)

Simon Smith introduced the item with an emphasis on the extensive consultation undertaken as part of the process of writing the Management Plan. Simon reiterated that the goal of presenting the plan today was to have it adopted. Acknowledgement was made about two specific areas of tension identified in the consultation feedback: 1) between local plans created by local authorities and the Management Plan and 2) between climate change action and the first statutory purpose and statutory nature of special qualities within the AONB designation. Simon emphasised that adoption of the plan is subject to the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment.

- Comments – An enthusiastic discussion featured comments around: biodiversity net gain (Rosie Pearson), endorsement anticipation (Ben Dent), a suggestion around plain English and accessible language (Isabel Ross), clean air policy inclusion (Isabel Ross), reconciliation between climate action and special qualities and landscape character (Brendan Costelloe), and a suggestion that more emphasis be made to CNL commitment to climate action in the Chair's Foreword (Sue Crawford). Amanda Davies requested that the more accessible public version of the plan signposts to specific technical wording in full plan – for ease of reference for planning colleagues in local and parish councils. Ben Stokes suggested that local authority board members should be promoting the Management Plan within their local authorities to Strategic Site Leads. Cate Le Grice Mack applauded the plan's grounding in reality, whilst still maintaining ambition. Martin Horwood praised the Management Plan, but warned against asking only for endorsement from local authorities, citing Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury's *commitment* to the plan. He suggested commitment shouldn't be watered down. Sarah Whalley-Hoggins suggested that as many new councillors will join local authorities in May, there is a training need for these people to bring them up to speed on the Management Plan and the work of the CNL team. Brendan McCarthy thanked Simon Smith for his work on the Management Plan and associated consultation.
- Decision – the Board adopted the Management Plan 2023-25.
- Actions Arising – (1) consider the use of more accessible language in the public version, (2) update the Chair's Foreword to put more emphasis on the agreed process for climate action, and also correct a typo, (3) consider putting together a training pack to aid understanding with local authorities – especially for new councillors, (4) confirm the role of the CNL Board's local authority members in promoting the Plan internally.

8(b) Work Programme 2023/24

The Chief Executive presented the annual work programme for adoption.

- **Comments** – Graham Hopkins suggested tighter connections between work programme, management plan, and risk register. Ellie Fujioka suggested funding be sought to host more than the 2-3 visioning workshops outlined in the programme, and to thereby broaden the participation in those.
- **Decision** – the Board adopted the Work Programme 2023/24.
- **Actions Arising** – (1) consider how to continually improve the connectivity between the Management Plan, Business Plan Framework and Key Risk Register, (2) consider funding options to expand the programme of visioning workshops.

8(c) Committee, Working Groups and Steering Groups 2023/24

The Chief Executive presented a summary of status of current committees, working groups and steering groups, with recommendations around which groups should cease, and which should continue into the new financial year.

- **Comments** – Amanda Davis suggested bringing the working and steering groups closer together and encouraged more communication between Board Members about these. She also suggested that the groups should be identified on the work programme. Isabel Ross queried whether the annual self-nomination to groups was too bureaucratic. The CEO replied that it was important for all Board Members to be given the opportunity to be part of these groups, not least considering that they are remunerated for doing so. Brendan Costelloe queried whether a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) group should be initiated. The CEO responded by emphasising CNL team member involvement in six LNRS', potentially negating the need for a specific steering group, but agreed to discuss this idea with Simon Smith.
- **Decision** – the Board approved the proposed Committees, Working Groups and Steering Groups for 2023/24.
- **Actions Arising** – consider setting up a steering group focused on Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

9. FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Ed Macalister-Smith, as Chair of the Committee, introduced the item by reviewing recent activities. Thanks were expressed to Ann Wyatt and the Committee members for their work.

9(a) Minutes of the previous meetings

The Board noted the Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 November 2022 and 31 January 2023.

9(b) Budget 2023/24

The Chief Executive and Interim Head of Finance introduced the item. The Head of Finance gave a succinct summary of the budget position – concluding that it was a prudent budget and that the organisation is in a stable position, with identifiable opportunities for growth through future funding. The CEO expressed his thanks to Michele Holden for her swift familiarisation with the organisation's financial management and position.

- Comments – There was discussion (initiated by Ben Dent) around the risks associated with employee pay awards, as well as general queries around who decides pay awards. AP responded by saying that the Board’s pay awards follows the local authority model and in its case, Publica. It was also confirmed that many employee costs are within the externally funded project areas (e.g. FiPL and Everyone’s Evenlode), thereby reducing the risk to core funds. The Chair and CEO noted that the growth in turnover over the last three years has been managed well by the team, and is a credit to team members given that it represents dramatic change. It also emphasises the importance of the Head of Finance role being filled by someone with chartered accountancy qualifications.

Decision – the Board adopted the Budget for 2023/24.

- Actions Arising – none.

9(c) Risk Management Framework

The Chief Executive provided an update on the key changes to the Key Risk Register.

- Comments – Ben Stokes identified that the Practitioners’ Guide has been updated twice since the last version. He urged the Board to refer to the 2022/23 version – which has up-to-date content. Graham Hopkins asked if the ‘live’ risk register document should be reviewed more frequently than once a year. AP explained that as a live document, risk is considered at every Finance and Governance Committee and all Members are encouraged to consider it and share any thoughts or concerns. Amanda Davis requested more detail on pensions and benchmarking employee costs. Brendan McCarthy responded by suggesting the CEO should prepare a future paper to cover this. Brendan Costelloe queried whether biodiversity net gain should be considered a risk. Graham Hopkins asked if the Register could include reference to risk appetite, i.e. is a risk at an acceptable level?
- Decision – the Board adopted the updated Key Risk Register.
- Actions Arising – (1) update the Risk Management Framework to reflect the current version of the Practitioner’s Guide, (2) write a paper on benchmarking of salaries and differentials between employees and present to a future Board meeting - via the Finance and Governance Committee, (3) consider including detail on the risk register around acceptable levels.

9(d) External Audit 2021/22

The Interim Head of Finance presented the opinion of the external auditor report – concluding that nothing was identified as a concern.

- Comments – none.
- Decision – The Board noted the audit opinion.
- Actions Arising – none.

10. FORWARD PLANNING

The Board Members noted the draft agenda for the June 2023 Board Meeting.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

- Mark Connelly urged everyone to participate in CPRE’s Star Count 2023.
- Harvey Sherwood expressed personal thanks to the GCG Steering Group.
- Amanda Davis highlighted the current Thames Water consultation.

- Nick Bumford applauded Anna Field for her work as a member of the Gloucestershire Raptor Monitoring Group.
- Jenny Exley noted that she was impressed by the work of the CNL team, and the thoroughness of the workings of the Board meeting.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 27 June 2023, at Council Chambers, Cotswold District Council, Trinity Road, Cirencester, GL7 1PX.

The meeting will be followed by the Annual General Meeting.

The Board Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed at 12:50 pm.

Chair

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