

TRAILS, ACCESS AND VOLUNTEERING

Summary: To report on key activity during the period

Recommendation: That the Executive Committee notes the report

Report by: Rebecca Jones, Access and Volunteers Lead

MEMBERS OF THE COTSWOLD TRAILS AND ACCESS PARTNERSHIP (CTAP)

- Becky Jones, CNL Access and Volunteers Lead
- Ed Macalister Smith, Board Member and Chair
- Tess Jackson, Natural England
- Mike Cripps, Head Warden
- Margaret Reid, Cotswold Warden
- John Bartram, Chair Cotswold Way Association
- Michele Holden, Gloucestershire Ramblers
- Alan Bentley, Gloucestershire Rights of Way
- Cheryl Hannan, BANES Rights of Way
- Fiona Argyll, Worcestershire Rights of Way
- Lindsay Purdie and Karen Hayes, South Gloucestershire Rights of Way
- Sally Graff, Cotswold Tourism

MEMBERS OF THE WARDEN'S EXECUTIVE

- Head and Deputy Warden – Mike Cripps and Sarah West
- Chairs of all five districts
- Access and Volunteers Lead

MEETINGS SINCE THE LAST EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- CTAP meeting held on 7 February 2023 and in person meeting due on 6 June 2023.
- The Cotswold Wardens held an executive meeting on 20 February 2022 and the next is due on 22 May 2023.

ACTIVITY IN THE PERIOD**1. Cotswold Way National Trail**

- Additional uplift funding of £12,240 and a further £30,000 was made available by Natural England in November, in addition to the core grant of £63,929. Projects completed by end March were focused on resurfacing of the Trail at Painswick Beacon, Dovers Hill, Lansdown, Broadway Hill and Leckhampton.
- Improvements and installation of new gates were carried out at Lansdown towards the creation of an off-road mobility scooter route as part of an ongoing project to create accessible loop/s.
- Nicole has successfully completed the Cotswold Way teacher pack, available with links to the resource on the CNL, CWA and National Trails website. It is hoped to expand the resource to include historic sites when funding is made available.
- The CNL team greatly appreciates the ongoing and increasing support from the Cotswold Way Association and is working with them and Natural England to finalise a formal sub licence for the Cotswold Way National Trail logo to support the sale of merchandise to raise funds for the Trail.

- The Cotswolds VIP undergrounding project is progressing. We will be working with National Grid to organise a further update workshop in late July/ August 2023.
- A huge thanks to Ed Macalister Smith who will be stepping down as Chair of the group. Ed has been a huge support and mentor and amazing champion for the Trail. Ed has represented us at all the discussions at the National Trails forums, helped us through the 50th anniversary celebrations, seen us through the Covid years, welcomed in the new National Trails UK charity and managed to keep us all in order at our regular CTAP meetings. We all wish him well in his new roles, I am sure that they will benefit enormously from his support and professionalism.

2. “Access for All” funding

- The Removing Barriers funding has provided us with a fantastic opportunity to work on over 20 projects with at least 15 partners, including charities, landowners and Councils who otherwise just would not have had the funds to carry out the access improvements that they wanted. The feedback from Worcestershire County Council was typical of the many positive responses received - *‘thank you again for the grant, we wouldn’t have been able to fund any of this work without it!’*
- £234,992 of funding was distributed to the projects and a completed report submitted to Defra this month.
- The CNL has been selected as one of the National Landscapes to submit further financial information as part of their auditing process and so this further evidence of spend will be submitted on 20 May.
- The funding has also provided an opportunity to focus on the three main barriers to access identified; social/cultural, physical and digital. One particular piece of work with the Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership has involved the production of a feasibility study on providing ‘Calm Corners’ at Cotswold railway stations, to help those with unseen neurodivergent disabilities or specific cultural needs. This could now open the doors for future work on providing a safe and inclusive space for people travelling into the area. There are many towns and cities bordering the CNL, but many residents of these urban areas do not venture into the countryside. The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have worked for over five years with a predominately Muslim women’s group at the Friendship Café in Gloucester to offer them women-led and women only guided walks and sessions in their café on safe walking in the countryside and map reading. As a result of this relationship, Removing Barriers funding was used to purchase waterproofs, rucksacks, first aid kits and walking poles to encourage them to start walking in the Cotswolds as an independent group. The equipment available for the group will help their growing number of members, including refugees, to enhance their health and wellbeing through walking.
- Other projects have included surfacing for mobility scooters at Leckhampton and improvements to Council and charity owned countryside sites including Fish Hill and Elmley Castle (Worcs) and Toghill (South Glos), Foxburrow Wood (Oxon), Coaley Peak (Glos), Haresfield and Sherborne with picnic benches and/or disability parking. The National Trust have also carried out an access audit of their Gloucestershire countryside sites to guide future improvements.
- Funding has also benefited volunteer groups at Beckfords Tower, Cleeve Hill and the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens to enable them to carry out practical access improvements on the ground.

3. Bathscapes

- Our main contract to deliver the access element of the Bathscape Project will be completing in August 2023.
- Nicole will be creating a series of ten video trails, based on the most accessible of the 18 routes created to target a range of audiences around Bath, as part of a short-term Bathscape funded contract.
- The new Circuit of Bath Volunteer Rangers are now active in their new roles and being supported by Nicole and the Cotswold Wardens.
- All the agreed 18 walks around Bath and the Circuit of Bath routes are now on the CNL website and Bathscape website at [Walking Archives - Bathscape Landscape Partnership](#)
- Nicole has done an amazing job forging new partnerships with communities in Bath through a series of walks and activities for groups including Bath Mind, the Carers Centre, Carr's Wood Day Service, Age UK Dementia Group, Girl Guides, Sight Support and Lansdown Park Academy. More recently Nicole has worked with a Ukrainian refugee group with whom she will be organising a series of regular guided walks.

4. Volunteering

- It has been an amazing year for the wardens, with warden hours back to pre-Covid levels at 48,970 hours, including 282 free guided walks led over the year and 26,783 hours spent on practical access and conservation work in the CNL. These figures are always an underestimate and do not reflect every individual's generous donation of their time and expertise to improving and interpreting the Cotswolds for everyone to enjoy.
- The annual Cotswold Voluntary Wardens Conference for 2023 will be held on 9 June at the RAU, Cirencester with the theme of woodlands and trees in the Cotswolds. There will be three speakers from the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and an Estate Woodland Manger with site visits in partnership with Natural England, Woodland Trust, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Bathurst Estate and private landowner Alex Robinson.
- The Cotswold Wardens Constitution, written in 2005, has been updated and agreed by all districts (subject to some minor amendments that will be discussed at the May Wardens Executive meeting).
- AGMs were held in March to elect new committees and a Head and Deputy Head Warden.
- A warm welcome to the new Head Warden, Mike Cripps who was elected together with Deputy Head Warden Sarah West.
- All new warden committees elected a new Chair, so we welcome Ian Hutchinson in Avon, John Milroy in Central, Linda Shelley in East, Rory Macdonald in North and Sally in South.
- We would all like to thank Margaret for her amazing achievements as Head Warden over the past three years. Margaret has helped the wardens to steer through the challenges of Covid, develop new ways of working and completed a review of the constitution, no small task. Alongside this, Margaret continued her excellent work with the Friendship Café in Gloucester that really has become a very rewarding and enjoyable partnership. Heartfelt thanks for all her support, advice and friendship.

DECISIONS REQUIRED

- None