

GENERAL UPDATES

Summary: To provide the Board with an update on activities across the organisation.

Recommendation: That the Board notes the various updates.

Reviewed by the Executive Committee: Yes / No (although the paper has been revised).

If yes, the Committee's comments: the Board's A417 consultation response was unanimously endorsed by the Executive Committee.

Report by: James Webb – Partnerships and Fundraising Lead
 Rebecca Jones – Trails, Access and Volunteer Lead
 John Mills – Planning and Landscape Lead
 Andy Parsons – Chief Executive
 Mark Connelly – Land Management Lead

EXTERNAL BIDS

1. National Grid potentially interested in considering a new area near Cheltenham for undergrounding overhead lines. However, this is the same area as one of the proposed Landscape Enhancement Initiatives so further discussion needed to understand impact for this project.
2. Work continues on the development of the Big Chalk project with the partner National Landscapes meeting in early December.

WALKING AND EXPLORING WORKING GROUP

3. The group has not met within the last quarter. In view of the existing Cotswold Trails and Access Partnership remit that focuses on the National Trail and wider access across the Cotswolds, a proposal has been put forward to close the group, with a new group created to focus on the health and wellbeing elements of this group (see Item 6).

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE WORKING GROUP

4. The Planning and Infrastructure Working Group (PIWG) met on 27 October 2020. They covered a range of issues, including: the Government's proposed reforms to the planning system; our statutory duty to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities, the extent to which the statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of AONB designation is taken into account in local authority licensing decisions; and resourcing of the Board's planning-related work.
5. With regards to the Government's proposed planning reforms, our key concern is that the proposed reforms could potentially undermine the purpose of AONB designation. For example, the Government's proposed standard method for calculating housing need would potentially lead to a three-fold increase in annual housing need figures in the AONB (on top of the three-fold increase in housing provision that has already happened in the AONB since 2012). We have submitted responses to the consultation on 'Changes to the Current Planning System' ([link](#)) and to the consultation on the Planning White Paper ([link](#)).

6. PWIG will next meet in January / February 2021 (date to be confirmed) to coincide with the end of the external consultation on the Board's draft Planning & Development and Housing Position Statements (which all Board members have been sent a copy of).

A417 STEERING GROUP

7. The Steering Group met on 25 September, 6 October and 9 November.
8. Other A417 meetings during the period included:
 - Collaboration Workshop (4) – 17 September
 - Common Land and SSSI Strategy – 28 September
 - Strategic Stakeholder Panel – 7 October
 - Landscape Connectivity Around Structures – 12 October
 - Biodiversity Net Gain – 28 October
9. The Board submitted its consultation response on 11 November, Appendix B.

GLORIOUS COTSWOLDS GRASSLANDS (GCG) STEERING GROUP

10. The group has met twice; 14 September and 5 October. The latter was specifically to discuss the GCG business plan priorities.
11. Impacts of Coronavirus include postponing the National Meadows Day event and the Equine Day; reduced volunteering on surveys and seed harvesting; co-ordinating work with organisations that furloughed staff contacts. The project, however, continued and by the end of September had collected seed from 38 donor fields and over-sowed 24ha. More sites for sowing are lined up for the autumn.
12. The GCG Small Grants Scheme was launched and applications are now coming in.
<https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/our-grasslands-projects/glorious-cotswolds-grasslands/>
13. A small tine harrow and scarifier have been purchased, expanding the service of the project offers to include site preparation of smaller seed recipient sites.
14. The GCG Business Plan is progressing and the Steering Group commented on an early draft of proposed priorities.
15. Date of next Steering Group meeting: 7 December 2020.

Supporting documents

Appendix A. External Bids Update

Appendix B. The Board's Consultation Response to the A417 Road Scheme

DECEMBER 2020