

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

If yes, the Committee's comments: N/A

Report by: Simon Smith – Development and Special Projects Officer
 Rebecca Jones – Trails, Access and Volunteer Officer
 John Mills – Planning and Landscape Officer
 Andy Parsons - Chief Executive
 Mark Connelly – Land Management Officer

EXTERNAL BIDS

1. Full report attached as Appendix A, headlines include:
2. Development of “Big Chalk” cross regional nature recovery proposals on behalf of the National Association. This work will be outlined further in a presentation to the Board in October.
3. Green Ribbon of the Evenlode expression of interest complete.
4. Still waiting to hear from Ofgem re 3 Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) bids.
5. Following approval by Exec in May the EOI for the Lodge Park LEI proposal is now ready for submission once the next round is announced.

WALKING AND EXPLORING WORKING GROUP

6. The Walking and Exploring Working group met via Zoom on 4 June. All group members attended - Ed Macalister-Smith, David Kerr, Amanda Davies, Tony Merry, Alana Hopkins, Becky Jones.
7. The meeting provided an update on Covid-19 affected walking and exploring issues; warden activities, Gateways Project, Cotswold Way National Trail, website.
8. The group will look at key messages on walking and exploring to send out and ways to retain the new and more diverse walking and exploring audience that has enjoyed the Cotswolds countryside during Covid-19 restrictions.
9. The group agreed to review opportunities for disability and families with young children on the website and to bring ideas for new accessible routes or access points/ improvements in car parking to the next meeting.

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE WORKING GROUP

10. The Planning and Infrastructure Working Group (PIWG) had a meeting, via Zoom, on 13 May 2020. This was the group's first meeting since January 2020 and the first with

the group's new members (Brendan, Cate and Graham, plus Mandy as support officer).

11. The meeting primarily focussed on whether the group's Terms of Reference are still fit for purpose, taking into account new policy drivers that have come to the fore since the group was established in 2018.
12. The key new policy drivers were identified as being 'the climate and nature emergency' and the Landscapes Review. It was also noted that, internally, there is now a stronger emphasis on the Board developing positive partnerships, developing great relationships with local authorities and demonstrating the 'added value' that the Board provides (including on planning-related issues).
13. The PIWG Terms of Reference have been amended to take account of these policy drivers.
14. The group endorsed the proposed approach, put forward by John Mills, for addressing the planning-related aspects of the Landscapes Review.
15. The group also discussed how the group can be better engaged on planning-related issues. It was agreed that John would consult the group on all planning applications that match the Board's consultation criteria as soon as he is notified about them.

A417 STEERING GROUP

16. Since the consultation response in November 2019 the Board the following updates are worth noting:
 - a. In March the Department for Transport published RIS2 for the period 2020-25. The A417 'Missing Link' scheme is included in the investment plan.
 - b. The Board has been working with Highways England on a Statement of Common Ground to identify (1) matters which have been agreed and (2) matters currently outstanding (either subject to negotiation or not agreed).
 - c. The Chief Executive and Graham Hopkins (Board Member) have represented the Board at a Strategic Stakeholder Panel meeting in February.
 - d. The Board has worked in partnership with other environmental bodies to produce a collaborative statement that urges Highways England to ensure that plans for the scheme properly consider the natural beauty, diverse wildlife and unique heritage of the Cotswolds landscape.
17. Highways England were planning to submit a Development Consent Order to the Planning Inspectorate by the end of June 2020. This would, in effect, start the examination process.
18. However, at the end of May they announced that more time is required on design and development work on some elements of the scheme. The key changes were highlighted in a letter from Highways England that has been circulated to all Board Members.
19. The Development Consent Order application will now be delayed until 2021. The Board will use this time to continue its dialogue with Highways England (and other stakeholders) to learn more about the proposed changes and to ensure they meet the landscape-led objectives and sub-objectives.

GLORIOUS COTSWOLDS GRASSLANDS STEERING GROUP

20. The Steering Group met on 11 May via Zoom.
21. The group was appraised of the impact of Covid-19 on the project. Fortunately this is fairly minimal. Site surveys will go-ahead as planned but without volunteers. There is also concern about involving volunteers in seed harvesting and sowing but an offer from The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation has enabled the project to take on paid assistance, part-time from 15 June to 31 August. A few volunteers may become involved with appropriate measures and protective equipment provided. Two events have been cancelled; Managing Grassland for Horse Health and Biodiversity Workshop and the National Meadows Day Event.
22. The two front-runner tenders for the business plan to set up GCG as a self-sustaining entity were discussed. Areas to explore with both consultants were agreed for the Zoom calls with them later in the week. Since the meeting, WhiteAvon Consultants have been appointed and are now working on the business plan.
23. The promotional document, application form and guidance for the small grants scheme for communities, land managers, etc. were discussed and with some minor amendments endorsed. The small grants scheme has subsequently been launched.
24. The Steering Group's next meeting is 10.30, Monday 14 September via Zoom.

Supporting documents

Appendix A. External Bids Update

JUNE 2020