

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

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

TUESDAY 27 JUNE 2023

Present:

Brendan McCarthy (Chair)	Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)
Alastair Adams	Liz Hodges
Nigel Adcock	Paul Hodgkinson
Jo Barker	Graham Hopkins
David Broad	Martin Horwood
Martin Brown	Juliet Layton
Nicholas Bumford	Cate Le Grice-Mack
Phil Chapman	Ed Macalister-Smith
Sue Crawford	Martin Mitchell
Amanda Davis	John Swanton
Ellie Fujioka	Sarah Whalley-Hoggins
Andy Graham	

Also in Attendance:

Andy Parsons (Chief Executive)
Magda Glanowska (Head of Finance)
John Mills (Planning and Landscape Lead)
Simon Joyce (Planning Officer)
Alana Hopkins (Communications Lead)
James Webb (Partnerships and Fundraising Lead)
Mark Connelly (Land Management Lead)
Mike Cripps (Cotswold Head Warden)
David Powell (Independent Member of the Finance and Governance Committee)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies - apologies were received from Steve Bucknell, Katherine Chesson, Brendan Costelloe, Paul Crossley, Matt Darby, Ben Dent, Jane Hull, Emma Kearsley, Brendan McCarron, Tony Merry, Rosie Pearson, Isabel Ross, Ben Stokes.
- Introductions and announcements – the Chair introduced Mike Cripps (new Cotswold Head Warden), David Powell (Independent Member of the Finance and Governance Committee), Juliet Layton (new Cotswold District Council Member), Nigel Adcock (new Tewkesbury Borough Council Board Member) and Magda Glanowska (new Head of Finance).
He also issued a farewell and thanks to Clive Webster (outgoing board member from Cotswold District Council), and a special mention and gift was given to Ed Macalister-Smith – a long standing Secretary of State Board Member of ten years.
- Declarations of interest – there were no declarations of interest.
- Public questions - there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 21 FEBRUARY 2023

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board Meeting held on 21 February 2023 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions arising from the meeting - CEO noted that the Management Plan 2023-25 has been adopted by the Board, and since then he has written to all local authorities for their endorsement, with encouraging responses to date. Actions around work programme and risk management, salary benchmarking, etc. will be taken up by the Finance and Governance Committee, along with the revision of the CNL Constitution.

3. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 23 MAY 2023

The Board noted the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 May 2023.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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

- Protected Landscape Partnership – work continues to allocate the funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25, with a national launch expected in the autumn.
- Cotswold Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) – application for ‘Cotswolds Plus’ LVEP has been submitted to Visit England, with a decision expected mid-July.
- CEO added introductions to Lorna Baggett (Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team) and Nina Stubbington (New to Nature Grants and Outreach Officer).
- CEO updated the Board to inform them that a new Farming in Protected Landscapes Farming Engagement Officer is currently being recruited.
- CEO emphasised the full agenda and the importance of staying to time, by giving sufficient time to the ‘for decision’ section of the agenda.
- Comments – Graham Hopkins (GH) asked if LVEP workstreams would be integrated into CNL workstreams. CEO replied that CNL team members are on two of the LVEP working groups. Amanda Davis asked if this new system was in the public domain and the CEO confirmed that it was.
- Decision – the Board noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

5. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

5a. and 5b. To present the year-end Work Programme and KPIs for 2022/23

The CEO explained the context of the work programme and KPIs for new Board Members.

- Comments – the Board expressed their contentment with this area of work.
- Decision – the summary of the Work Programme and KPIs for 2022/23 were noted.
- Actions Arising – circulate updated KPIs for 2023/24 once finalised.

6. PLANS, STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR BOARD APPROVAL /ADOPTION

6a. Renewable Energy Position Statement (for adoption)

John Mills (JM) presented the Renewable Energy Position Statement (REPS) for adoption by the Board. JM explained that the previous REPS was adopted in 2014 and is therefore in need of significant update. A lot has changed since it was written, most notably the

global acknowledgement of a climate emergency. JM explained that the revised REPS seeks to find a balance between the need for renewable energy sources, and the statutory purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswolds. Using Landscape Sensitivity Assessment guidelines is a key feature in achieving this balance. JM explained that two CNL Board Member Working Groups have been instrumental in the drafting of the REPS: Climate Action and the Planning and Infrastructure. There has also been extensive external consultation. With all this in mind, JM encouraged the Board to formally adopt the Renewable Energy Position Statement.

- Comments – A robust and lengthy discussion followed, highlighting the diversity of thought amongst Board Members.

The Chair summarised the discussion as follows:

That the Renewable Energy Position Statement is a very well written paper. Doing nothing, and not updating the Renewable Energy Position Statement is not an option, especially in the face of a climate emergency - the 2014 statement must be updated. It is also important to acknowledge the anxiety and concerns in the room about renewable energy in the Cotswolds, most especially around the potential for large scale installations to be approved (and therefore potentially becoming more common and larger over time). The wording of the Board's position statements must be exacting and must ensure that the Board's statutory purposes are not undermined. He expressed a reassurance in knowing that the landscape sensitivity assessments offer a certain rigour for planning applications to be assessed against.

A vote was cast:

For adopting the Renewable Energy Position Statement: 12 votes

Against adopting the Renewable Energy Position Statement: 11 votes

Summary of the main discussion points:

Chair asked if there was a national standard to landscape sensitivity assessments. JM answered that there is a document published by Natural England which serves this purpose and is used as a guide/ basis. He explained that landscape sensitivity assessments for renewable energy are normally undertaken as part of the local authority's local plan process, rather than developers, so they are as unbiased as possible.

EMS reminded the Board of our statutory purpose to 'conserve and enhance' the natural beauty of the landscape, and that this must always be our primary goal. With regards to solar energy, he considered that anything larger than 0.5ha should be considered 'large' and should not be supported by the Board.

Andy Graham (AG) asked about thresholds of the scale of developments, explaining that an application for a large solar farm in his district of West Oxon has been submitted. He expressed significant concern over scale and the effect on the natural beauty of the Cotswolds. He also expressed concern over the use of the phrase 'case by case' in the context of application considerations, suggesting that this might be viewed by developers as a 'barn door' – with an opportunity for a 'yes' at the end of the process. He feared this phrasing would be interpreted and used to the advantage of developers.

JM responded to the comments from EMS and AG by explaining that the previous REPS had stated a threshold of 1ha for solar energy and it wouldn't be appropriate for

the new Position Statement to set a more restrictive threshold of 0.5ha, especially not during a climate crisis. JM added that 5ha is the smallest threshold that is commonly used in landscape sensitivity assessments (LSAs). The LSAs that JM has dealt with have identified that the landscape sensitivity of solar schemes smaller than 5ha is relatively low.

Phil Chapman (PC) – expressed concerns over a large scale site Cherwell District Council, again referencing the potential scale of renewable energy developments. However, he also stated that it would be better to have a renewed REPS to refer to, which could be regularly reviewed and updated, than one from 2014 which is out of date and may therefore have minimal weight in planning decisions.

David Broad (DB) made the point that discussion on wind and solar energy shouldn't get conflated as they have different impacts on the landscape, with each having individual attributes, drawbacks, and requirements for installation. JM responded by assuring DB that the landscape sensitivity assessments employs separate mapping techniques for wind and solar.

Martin Brown (MB) suggested a definition of 'in principle' is required in the REPS – if left as it is, he fears it may invite a degree of 'leeway' around thresholds, depending on the application. He went on to explain that he felt community-led proposals should be considered differently to commercial proposals and applications. JM agreed and explained that 'in principle' was intended only to apply after all other considerations have taken into account. JM also explained that community-led schemes should be given greater weight in planning decisions than schemes that are not community led but that this would still need to be weighed against the potential impacts of the scheme.

Cate Le Grice-Mack (CGM) expressed concern over the potential cumulative effect of accepted proposals and sites growing over time, and of the potential for battery storage barns in addition to solar arrays to extend the footprint and impact on the landscape. Later in the discussion, CGM also expressed concerns over ownership and stated the view that community-led renewable energy sites could potentially be smaller, better run, and offer less impact on the landscape (rather than large scale installations owned and managed by distant large commercial companies). JM explained that each planning application can only be assessed on its own merit, so pre-empting future growth is not possible.

Juliet Layton (JL) asked how much work CNL does with local councils and Local Plans. She stressed the importance of partnership working. JM explained that consultation is a two-way arrangement and generally works very well. Local authorities had been consulted during the writing of the REPS and JM is invited to comment on Local Plans (and similar planning-related policies). He assured JL that CNL position statements in general are intended to be a useful resource for local authorities in planning matters. JM added that he would liaise with relevant local authorities further following the adoption of the REPS.

Amanda Davis (AD) – made the point that parish and town council land is often a secondary option for solar arrays. The primary option is to site them on rooftops in industrial estates and municipal buildings, before taking the step to occupy green spaces with them.

Sarah Whalley-Hoggins (SWH) – praised the CNL team for their response to a large proposed development in Tysoe. However, she also gave a robust defence of CNL’s first statutory purpose - to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds - and expressed the view that this must not be sacrificed as part of the process of addressing climate change. She also drew attention to the ‘in the round’ effects of large scale renewable energy installations – on traffic and transport, pollution, and the effect on local residents. She made a final point that echoed earlier discussions – around a fear that once permission has been granted for a site, that site could easily apply to acquire more land in order to become larger. Overall, SWH expressed the view that in response to planning applications, CNL and local authority planning departments should be able to refuse, she explained further that she felt that in some instances not doing so was ‘bending to the green agenda’ (to the detriment of the protected landscape).

Jo Barker (JB) raised the question about small scale nuclear energy production sites. JM replied by saying this position statement does not cover nuclear. The Chair added that it may require a separate piece of work in the near future.

Martin Horwood (MH) contributed a comment around wind turbines. He agreed that solar arrays are better placed on rooftops than on green space, but objected to what he felt was a negative response to wind energy in the REPS. He expressed the view that wind energy must play a part in renewable energy production.

Ellie Fujioka (EF) said she felt it needed a vision for where it could lead in the future.

Sue Crawford (SC) acknowledged the polarised views of Board Members, and stated that compromise was required.

Nigel Adcock (NA) reminded those present that a key consideration should be mitigation – adaptation – suffering. And that longer term suffering through doing nothing may outweigh (shorter term) effects on the landscape. He also suggested including potential outputs from site as a consideration.

Alastair Adams (AA) expressed support of the REPS and described it as very well balanced.

Graham Hopkins (GH) seconded support of the paper, and reminded those present that the CNL can’t solve problems at a national level – that is for UK government. He said he felt the paper detailed acceptable tolerance levels for renewable energy in the Cotswolds while still addressing the statutory purpose of ‘conserve and enhance’.

Jo Barker (JB) said she thought that the balance was right in the paper, but that requirements should be future-proofed and that decisions made should always tip in the favour of the landscape.

Andy Graham (AG) said that he felt on p12 of the document, with respect to solar, that the position statement should not be too insular, and that it should instead have a broad view. He also noted that “exceptional circumstances” may leave too much room for interpretation. He said he would hesitate to support the paper without further tightening up of language and phrasing.

Vice Chair (Rebecca Charley) contributed that she felt that the landscape is fragile due to climate change and biodiversity loss, and that greater landscape resilience must be developed.

Juliet Layton (JL) reminded those present that solar arrays can be removed and are not permanent. She also stressed the importance of managing the landscape, agreed with comments made around community-led renewable energy sites, and stated a strong objection to biomass and anaerobic digestion methods.

JM stated that in reference to large scale wind and solar energy production applications, these would be classed as 'major development' and as such, in a protected landscape, should be refused, other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development would be in the public interest. JM added that the wording relating to major development / exceptional circumstances / public interest reflects national planning policy and is not a 'loophole'.

The CEO began to wrap up the discussion by acknowledging the views of the Board Members, but reminding all those present that, once adopted, position statements provide the collective view of the whole Board. He also reminded those present that as an independent body, our organisational position statements represent the view of our organisation, and may differ from that of other organisations. He congratulated JM and the working groups on a large and complex piece of work in drafting the position statement. He reminded everyone that Defra (our primary source of core funding) has a strong focus on climate action. In addition to fulfilling our statutory purposes Defra also request information on what the Board is doing to address to dual effects of the climate and biodiversity crises. He said he can confidently stand behind the REPS, especially knowing that it pushes us as an organisation and stretches us to find the right balance between many competing priorities. He also felt confident that the Board's working groups thoroughly and diligently considered all angles, and that 100% approval on some (very emotive) topics would seem unlikely. He also suggested that, subject to adoption, there should be a regular review of this particular position statement by the two working groups and, if substantive change is required, it should return to the Board for further discussion. It is accepted that renewable energy technology is fast moving and could affect the Board's future position, this went some way to addressing an earlier concern from EMS.

- Decision – after a lengthy discussion and a vote, the Board adopted the Renewable Energy Position Statement (12 for, 11 against).
- Actions Arising – draft a covering note to accompany the position statement which explains the intention to regularly review by the relevant working groups.

6(b) Neighbourhood Plans Position Statement (for adoption)

Simon Joyce (SJ) presented the Neighbourhood Plans Position Statement, explaining the context of reviewing the document, and setting out a summary of the updated details. He detailed the consultees and their contributions, and whether or not they were happy to endorse the Neighbourhood Plans Position Statement.

- Comments – Martin Brown (MB) stated he was on a steering group for the Neighbourhood Plan, and was very supportive of the position statement. Martin Horwood (MH) complimented SJ and said this was a very good piece of work. He stressed the importance of the setting of developments (even outside the boundary of the AONB) as these can also have an effect inside the AONB. David Broad (DB) said he had no issues with the paper itself, but stressed the importance of developments

being for the benefit of the community, rather than developers. Juliet Layton (JL) supported the paper.

- Decision – the Board unanimously adopted the Neighbourhood Plan Position Statement.
- Actions Arising – none.

6(c) Climate Action: Layman’s Guide of the SWC report (for approval)

In Ben Dent’s (BD) absence, Graham Hopkins (GH) presented the Layman’s Guide of the SWC report and the associated activity plan for 2023/24 for approval. He set out the context for the paper, and summarised the role of the working group. He also expressed praise for Ben Dent for the significant amount of time and effort he has contributed to the working group and producing the Layman’s Guide. GH summarised the paper, reminded the Board that the Executive Committee has approved the Layman’s Guide, and highlighted the point that as the initial report by Small World Consulting was done in 2019 and it is now 2023, we must waste no time in addressing the results of that report.

- Comments – the Chair praised the working group for the work they have been doing and the production of the Layman’s Guide and associated engagement activity plan. The CEO gave the context for the Small World Consulting report – for the benefit of new Board Members. Andy Graham (AG) stated that he would endorse the paper whole-heartedly. He suggested that Cabinet Members with the climate portfolio should be involved as they develop policies. The Board agreed that relevant Cabinet Members should be invited to attend the programme of engagement workshops. Cate Le Grice-Mack (CGM) remarked on the noted exclusions from the data set, which concerned her, she felt those exclusions should be discussed, even if they weren’t measured. GH explained that the data set could not be changed and that the report and paper were defined by the data selected for analysis. John Swanton (JS) noted his irritation around the high number of emissions in the Cotswolds from flights. He reminded the board that this was likely to be a small number of individuals and that the resident population of the Cotswolds was far more economically diverse than this emission figure implies. Amanda Davis (AD) contributed a mention of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) which she is now a member of. She felt the climate toolkit they are currently producing and the CNL Layman’s Guide would work well together.
- Decision – the Board approved the Climate Action: Layman’s Guide of the SWC report and the associated activity plan for 2023/24.
- Actions Arising – none.

6(d) National Landscapes: the national rebrand (for approval)

Alana Hopkins (Communications Lead) presented the work so far on a national rebrand for the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the individual AONBs in England and Wales.

- Comments – Board Members were unanimous in their support of the Board’s involvement in the national rebrand and applauded the collective ambition.
- Decision – the Board approved CNL’s participation in the national rebrand process.
- Actions Arising – proceed with national implementation process.

6(e) Annual Review: contents (for approval)

Alana Hopkins (Communications Lead) presented the proposed contents for the CNL annual review 2022/23 for approval.

- Comments – none.
- Decision – the Board approved the contents for the CNL annual review 2022/23.
- Actions Arising – proceed with design work.

7. FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Ed Macalister-Smith (EMS) and Magda Glanowska (MG) presented:

7(a) Annual Summary of key activity of the Finance and Governance Committee

EMS summarised this paper, and thanked the Finance and Governance Committee for their contributions. Governance has continued to significantly improve and EMS felt encouraged by the progress.

7(b) Minutes of the previous meetings and update on the key areas under discussion

EMS reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting. David Powell (DP) added a mention about the importance of improved processes in line with significant financial growth.

7(c) Year-end financial results (2022/23)

MG presented the year-end financial results, stating it had been a good financial year, with highlights being that we finished ahead of the budget and the previous year's position. This was in part thanks to Defra's Removing Barriers funding, and a very positive year for the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands programme. The CEO added that moving out of the Old Prison had also removed a significant element of financial uncertainty.

7(d) Treasury Management Strategy

MG presented the Treasury Management Strategy (prepared by Michele Holden), detailing the intention to close the Virgin Money Bank Account (the Board approved this decision), and the intention to consider green and ethical banking and investment options (which will form the basis of a future paper for the Board's consideration).

- Comments – Board Members were supportive of the updated Treasury Management Strategy.
- Decision – the Board approved all Finance and Governance recommendations, including the approval of the Treasury Management Strategy.
- Actions Arising – none.

8. FORWARD PLANNING

The Board noted the draft agenda for the October meeting.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair had no other matters he felt required discussion.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 17 October 2023, 10:00am-1:00pm, at Cirencester Baptist Church, Cirencester, GL7 1YE.

The Board Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed at 12.40pm.

CHAIR

ENDS

DRAFT