

MEETING OF
THE COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD

HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM MEETINGS

WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER 2020 (10.00am)

Present:

Brendan McCarthy (Chairman)	Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)
Garry King	Ben Dent
David Broad	Cate Le-Grice Mack
Nicholas Bumford	Charles Mathew
Phil Chapman	John Matthews
David Kerr	Liz Eyre
Paul Crossley	Dom Morris
Ben Stokes	Liz Hodges
Amanda Davis	Graham Hopkins
Ed Macalister-Smith	Jo Barker
Shaun Parsons	Norman Kay
John Swanton	Matt Darby
Steve Harvey	Sarah Whalley-Hoggins
Adrian Hardman	Nigel Colston

Also in Attendance:

Andy Parsons (Chief Executive)
Ann Wyatt (Head of Finance)
James Webb (Partnerships and Fundraising Lead)
Mark Connelly (Land Management Lead)
Ed Bonn (Rural Skills Officer) - observing

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies - apologies were received from Clive Webster, George Lambrick, Tony Merry and Mike Dean.
- Introductions and announcements – the Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- Declarations of interest - none.
- Public questions - there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 7 OCTOBER 2020

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board Meeting held on 7 October 2020 be approved as a correct record.
- Matters Arising – The actions arising were confirmed as either complete or in progress.

3. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 18 NOVEMBER 2020

The Board noted the Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 November 2020.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive (CE) presented a review of key actions since the last meeting and also set out priorities for the meeting. In particular the Chief Executive gave a summary of a recent meeting hosted by Defra, for all National Park and AONB Lead Officers, which focused on two themes: (a) Future Farming and the role of Protected Landscapes, and (b) the creation of a new National Landscape Service which has Ministerial support.

- Comments – Liz Eyre asked the CE three questions: (a) whether the Board needs to update its induction pack ahead of local authority elections in May 2021 and share with all Councillors, (b) what the terms of reference were for the National Association of AONB's Collaborative Working Group and (c) whether any more thought has been given to approaching potential 'champions', both within government and more locally. The CE said that a revised induction pack was a good idea and the Collaboration group was focused on methods to improve the internal networks of AONBs. The Chairman suggested that any approach to 'champions' should follow the 'visioning' work. In response to further questions, the CE confirmed that Defra is yet to respond on matters relating to planning; National Trails and formally changing the designation from AONB to National Landscape.
- Decision – that the Board notes the report.
- Actions Arising – review the induction pack ahead of local authority elections in May 2021.

5. Q2 FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL REVIEW

The Chairman introduced this item by thanking the Head of Finance for her professionalism in providing the Board with the reassurance that financial matters are being well managed. The Head of Finance gave a brief overview of the current position and the year-end forecast, with the reserves position having improved from the original budget.

- Comments – Norman Kay thanked the Head of Finance for keeping a close eye on the finances during a very difficult year. Cate Le Grice-Mack asked if there were any lessons learnt for the future around cost savings. The CE replied that there have been many, including mileage expenses, virtual meetings and property costs.
- Decision - resolved that the Board note the excellent efforts being made to ensure the Board's finances are being well managed during uncertain times.
- Actions Arising – none.

6. HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The CE introduced the item, giving a detailed summary of why the Board should form a new Working Group focused on health, wellbeing and social inclusion.

- Comments – there was a lot of positive discussion from a large number of Members. Topics of discussion included: transport; education and the (soon to be relaunched) Countryside Code; understanding networks and what is already happening in the Cotswolds to avoid duplication of effort; encouraging the power of partnerships; having a floating membership dependant on current focus; developing a rounded package that others can buy into. The Chairman stated that although membership to the working group will be limited this topic must be "everyone's business".

- Decision – resolved that the Board approves the proposal to create a new working group focused on health, wellbeing and social inclusion.
- Actions Arising – the Head of Finance to email all Board Members to ask them to register their interest in joining the group.

7. SAFEGUARDING POLICY

The CE gave an overview of the policy and the increasing requirement for the Board to have a policy and comprehensive set of procedures in place, which will require training and the appointment of a Safeguarding Lead and Deputy.

- Comments – Liz Eyre suggested that Board Members should be included in any training sessions. John Swanton recommended that both the CE and the Chairman sign the policy to underline its importance. He also had a number of other small corrections and agreed to email them to the CE following the meeting. Ed Macalister-Smith supported and commended the general progress made in improving the organisation's governance arrangements. Cate Le Grice-Mack asked whether there was any progress with the Employee Handbook and the CE confirmed that there had been and it will be presented at the next round of meetings for adoption. Amanda Davis encouraged the team to be dynamic in updating the policy and process should the need arise, rather than waiting for the periodic Board reviews.
- Decision - resolved that the Board adopts the Safeguarding Policy.
- Actions Arising – (a) John Swanton to email the CE with minor corrections, (b) the CE to arrange training, (c) appoint a Safeguarding Lead and Deputy.

8. FINANCIAL AND CONTRACT REGULATIONS

The Head of Finance summarised the need to make the amendments to the Board's Financial and Contract Regulations.

- Comments – the Chairman highlighted the importance of all Board Members being satisfied with the levels of financial authority. Ed Macalister-Smith and Rebecca Charley commented that they were entirely happy with the suggested amendments. Norman Kay asked about the three month deadline for submitting expenses and the Head of Finance replied by saying that there can be some flexibility in extenuating circumstances. Ed Macalister-Smith initiated a discussion on the need to set up an Audit Committee and it was agreed that this should be given further consideration.
- Decision – resolved that the Board adopts the proposed amendments.
- Actions Arising – consider the benefits of setting up an Audit Committee and report back to the Board in due course.

9. BUDGET ASSUMPTIONS 2021/22

The CE introduced the item, explaining that the paper was written to highlight key priorities and assumptions ahead of presenting the budget for adoption in March 2021.

- Comments – the Chairman reiterated the importance of being totally transparent about our various income streams and how they impact the overall financial position of the Board. Graham Hopkins commented that the Board needs to give consideration to the services we might provide in relation to 'Future Farming' and how that will be reflected in the budget. Ben Dent asked about the print v. digital considerations of the Cotswold Lion and the CE replied that the Communications Lead

continuously reviews this in light of the current situation. Cate Le Grice-Mack asked whether there is anything we can do to encourage government to give reassurances on our funding beyond the one year settlement. With regard to rural skills, Liz Eyre commented that: fully costed officer time should be included to get a true picture of profit/ loss; more focus on marketing rural skills through businesses would be beneficial and the Board should look at working with schools and Pupil Premiums to engage young pupil who are less engaged academically.

- Decision – resolved that the Board notes the paper.
- Actions Arising – consider the Board Member’s feedback when producing the final budget for 2021/22.

10. CARING FOR THE COTSWOLDS

The Partnerships and Fundraising Lead gave an excellent presentation on the work he has done to evolve Caring for the Cotswolds into the Board’s flagship grant giving scheme.

- Comments – there was a lot of support and encouragement from Board Members on the work that has been done over the past nine months. Graham Hopkins asked how the Board would target new businesses. It would be beneficial to have an effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to support this. There is also an opportunity to work with Destination Management Organisations, e.g. Cotswolds Tourism, to promote it to their members. Amanda Davis commended the Partnerships and Fundraising Lead for his commitment to developing youth networks. The Chairman suggested that the Partnerships and Fundraising Lead provides the Board with an annual progress report.
- Decision – resolved that the Board notes the progress.
- Actions Arising – none.

11. OURBORETUM

The Land Management Lead gave an overview of this partnership project and the fantastic progress to date. He explained the relationship with BBC Radio Gloucestershire and the new funding partnership the Board has developed with Ground Control. The project has engaged individuals, schools and organisations such as gardening clubs.

- Comments – there was good discussion amongst Board Members, who all agreed that it is a very worthwhile initiative and they congratulated the team on its involvement. Ben Stokes asked whether it could link up with the Countryfile campaign ‘Plant Britain’. The Land Management Lead replied that this is something he will be speaking to BBC Radio Gloucestershire about. Graham Hopkins suggested that the Board should give consideration to how it will respond to potential questions about the use of plastic materials, e.g. pots and tree guards.
- Decision – resolved that the Board notes the progress report.
- Actions Arising – give consideration to how the Board would respond to potential questions about the use of plastic materials, e.g. pots and tree guards.

12. AGRICULTURAL TRANSITION PLAN

The Land Management Lead gave a detailed and insightful presentation on the Agricultural Transition Plan (ATP) and the potential role of Protected Landscapes.

- Comments – Rebecca Charley, Matt Darby, Nick Bumford and Liz Hodges each gave insightful views on the ATP, highlighting the significant uncertainty and concern within our farming community. It was described as another massive change for farming and the role of the Board should be to support farmers and signpost them to all the relevant opportunities. The Board should also see this as a way of improving partnership working to ensure the best value-add for farmers and landowners/ managers. Ed Macalister-Smith suggested that the Chairman should consider how the voices of the local farming community are heard by the Board. The Chairman concluded the debate by saying that this topic will continue to be a central theme to much of what the Board does over the coming years and that regular Board updates will be important.
- Decision - resolved that the Board notes the presentation.
- Actions Arising – circulate the presentation to all Members.

13. GENERAL UPDATES

The Chairman asked for any comments on the paper.

- Comments – there were no comments.
- Decision - resolved that the Board notes the paper.
- Actions Arising – none.

14. FORWARD PLANNING

The draft agenda for the February 2021 Executive Committee Meeting was noted.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

- Dom Morris asked what the Board's position and involvement should be with regard to the significant ongoing concern of sewerage pollution in some rivers within the Cotswolds National Landscape. Charles Mathew suggested that Ashley Smith, Chairman of Windrush Against Sewer Pollution (WASP), could be invited to a future Board meeting to give an overview of their campaigning work and recent interaction with the Water Company and statutory bodies.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 24 March 2021 - 10.00am to 1.00pm.

The Meeting commenced at 10.00am and closed at 1.00pm

Chairman