

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

HELD AT CIRENCESTER BAPTIST CHURCH, CHESTERTON LANE, CIRENCESTER, GL7 1YE

TUESDAY 17 OCTOBER 2023

Present:

Brendan McCarthy (Chair)

Alastair Adams

Nigel Adcock

David Broad

Martin Brown

Nicholas Bumford

Phil Chapman

Amanda Davis

Ellie Fujioka

Paul Hodgkinson

Jane Hull

Paul Crossley

Tony Merry

David Powell

Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)

Graham Hopkins

Martin Horwood

Juliet Layton

Cate Le Grice-Mack

Martin Mitchell

John Swanton

Isabel Ross

Sarah Whalley-Hoggins

Katherine Chesson

Brendan Costelloe

Ben Dent

Rosie Pearson

Also in Attendance:

Andy Parsons (Chief Executive)

Magda Glanowska (Head of Finance)

Nicole Daw (Trails and Access Officer)

Simon Smith (Nature Recovery Lead)

Alana Hopkins (Communications Lead)

James Webb (Partnerships Lead)

Mark Connelly (Land Management Lead)

John Mills (Planning Lead)

Becky Jones (Access and Volunteer Lead)

Della Morris (Team Support Officer)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies - apologies were received from Steve Bucknell, Liz Hodges, Margaret Reid, Sue Crawford, Matt Darby, Andy Graham, Jo Barker, Ben Stokes and Emma Sims.
- Introductions and announcements – the Chair welcomed the Board and introduced David Powell (co-opted Member) as well as welcoming Emma Sims (Wychavon District Council) and Margaret Reid (co-opted) who were both unable to attend. The Board was informed that Brendan McCarron has stepped down as a Board Member for Parish Group 5 and this vacancy is currently being recruited.
- Declarations of interest – there were no declarations of interest.
- Public questions - there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 27 JUNE 2023

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board Meeting held on 27 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions arising from the meeting – all actions have been completed.

3. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

The Board noted the Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 September 2023.

4. PRESENTATION 1: THE 'BATHSCAPE' LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

Nicole Daw, Trails and Access Officer, gave a thorough presentation detailing the work completed so far on the access strand of the Bathscape scheme. She introduced the scheme and its background, including all the objectives relevant to the work she and the volunteers have completed. She explained the work completed on the Circuit of Bath route, the other 18 walking routes, the maps and guides produced, the guided walks, and the engagement with the local community. She emphasised the importance of the routes including as many accessibility considerations as possible, and described the various community groups who have been consulted and engaged with as part of this. She showed one of ten intended films, which hope to introduce people to the walking routes in a friendly and informative way. Nicole also highlighted training programmes that have been completed as part of the Bathscape scheme, e.g. brushcutting, sight support, first aid, and health and safety. Nicole explained the huge contribution from volunteers in delivering the work, and explained that part of the legacy work of the scheme will be to recruit volunteers or 'route rangers' who will continue to work on route maintenance.

- Comments – the presentation was very well received, with Board Members feeling uplifted by the considerable team effort involved in the scheme, and the many examples of positive feedback from participants of Bathscape and users of the routes. David Broad (DB) asked if specific wheelchair way marking discs were in use for the accessible routes. Nicole answered no, not yet, but this type of disc has been ordered, and will be in use where possible for future routes. Rosie Pearson (RP) asked if the routes described were new or using existing public rights of way. Nicole answered that they mostly use existing routes, with some permissive sections. Katherine Chesson (KC) commended the scheme and the work of Nicole and the volunteers. KC asked if there was a way to assess how many of the participants from guided walks return to walk by themselves. ND answered that with organised groups, this information is available anecdotally, but not officially – because many of the groups want to preserve the privacy of participants. With family groups, it's harder to assess. With minimal staff resource, this data is challenging to track with consistency. Alastair Adams (AA) asked if Google analytics were used to track the project. ND answered that Bathscape use analytics and that the Circuit of Bath route pages are the most popular pages of the website. Amanda Davis (AD) offered to put guide dog walking groups in touch with Bathscape (with reference to the sight support training, and users with visual impairments).
- Decision – the Board wholeheartedly commended the fantastic work in delivering the access project for Bathscape.
- Actions Arising – none.

5. PRESENTATION 2: THE 'BIG CHALK' PARTNERSHIP

Simon Smith, Nature Recovery Lead, gave an informative and enthusiastic presentation about the Big Chalk project. He covered the decline of wildlife and biodiversity in the UK, and the adaptation of wildlife prompted by climate change – highlighting the importance of wildlife corridors to facilitate wildlife migration. He explained about hostile and hospitable habitats, referencing the Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan and the Lawton report. Simon also explained about calcareous landscapes across southern England, and how these are well known to be species-rich and internationally important. By showing maps which highlight geology, habitat, and habitat potential, Simon demonstrated the part the Cotswolds has to play in calcareous habitat regeneration, along with neighbouring protected landscapes who share this landscape characteristic (including the Mendip Hills and North Wessex Downs). Simon explained that Big Chalk is a programme not a project – with a view to build in sustainability into the future. He explained that as the programme spans multiple regions, authorities, and conservation works, the emphasis is on synergy rather than duplication. Existing projects are championed as well as new partnerships and proposals being supported where feasible and appropriate. This is a multi-participants programme of partnership work. There is continued financial input, including from DEFRA. A Big Chalk Lead Officer is currently being recruited, and Simon explained the short to medium terms aims of the programme – with a view to developing longer term aims.

- Comments – the Board was very receptive to the presentation, which was viewed as a positive and ambitious programme of work to address the serious issues of nature's decline and the effects of climate change on wildlife. Nick Bumford (NB) asked how ambitious the programme is, where funding will sit, and how farmers and landowners are expected to (or planning to) reconcile giving land over for nature recovery with business needs of a working farm. NB qualified these queries by stating that on his farm, much work is already underway to support nature and run a profitable farm business. Martin Horwood (MH) asked about whether urban areas had been taken into account as part of the programme. A discussion followed about the value of urban spaces for nature recovery, including private gardens and public green spaces. Graham Hopkins (GH) asked if there was any prospect of Big Chalk extending northwards where there are fewer protected landscapes. SS explained that this consideration was planned as part of the second phase of Big Chalk. Nigel Adcock (NA) asked how existing projects could register themselves as part of Big Chalk. SS referred people to the online application form on the Big Chalk page of the website (under 'Our Work').
- Decision – the Board fully supported this ambitious programme and acknowledged that looking beyond boundaries is vital for nature restoration and climate action.
- Actions Arising – none.

6. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive updated the Board on his recent activity, especially around national and regional themes.

- Comments – the Chair asked for an update on how many local authorities have endorsed the Management Plan. The Chief Executive explained around half have given endorsement to date. The Chair urged all local authority members to encourage

endorsement. MH asked about Cotswold Beechwoods becoming a more prevalent consideration in planning applications, due to a recent change in policy which requires mitigation around impact on Beechwoods. John Mills (JM) is aware of this but will look into it in more detail. There followed a brief discussion with several Board Members detailing their experience of similar mitigation procedures around recreational disturbance assessments). Mark Connelly (MC) added at the end of the discussion that Defra has announced an amount of £5million on the table for the restoration of historic buildings, distributed through FiPL. The funding would likely be restricted to farm and agricultural buildings, due to its association with FiPL.

- Decision – The Board noted the report.
- Actions Arising – (1) Chief Executive to update local authority Board Members on the current status of Management Plan endorsements, (2) John Mills to look at the Cotswold Beechwood planning consideration in more detail.

7. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

The Chief Executive introduced the paper on Work Programme progress and KPIs for the current year.

- Comments – AD observed that some of the work on the CNL Constitution could positively impact KPI1 (for example if Board Members can offer substitutes for Executive Committee meetings when they themselves are unable to attend). The Chief Executive noted the feedback and will give it further consideration.
- Decision – the Board noted the report and current performance levels.
- Actions Arising – none.

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

8a. Updated Board Constitution (for adoption)

The Chief Executive gave an update on the work which has been done to review and improve the Constitution, including details on those who have supported this process and advised throughout. He also highlighted the key changes/improvements which have been made to produce this revised document.

- Comments – DB noted that although the Constitution references the inclusion of local people, he feels that some of the wording in the Constitution may inadvertently suggest that that opposite is actually happening. He also noted that pages 76-79 (detailing rules on motions and debates) demonstrated a difference between the detail in the Constitution and the procedure the Board follows in practice. He observed the two should ideally match. A full discussion followed around the financial limits proposed for the Chief Executive, with some concern raised about the amount of the increases proposed for 'Virements' and 'Entering Contracts'. There was discussion over whether those limits now proposed were too high, and increased the personal risk to the Chief Executive, and around how they would be handled if they were set lower. David Powell (DP) stated that it is important to find a balance point with these limits. He also pointed out that the Finance and Governance Committee is not for approval, but for advice and recommendation to the Board. He suggested a way forward might be to report virements and new contracts as a standing item at each Board meeting, to enhance transparency. Martin Horwood (MH) also suggested a sign off procedure by the Chair of the Board would provide more assurance. It was

also suggested that any changes to the appendices of the Constitution should be reported to the Board.

- Decision – the Constitution was not adopted by the Board as the above concerns needed to be addressed first.
- Actions Arising – (1) make changes to the wording on motions and debates to reflect current working practices, (2) work with the Finance and Governance Committee, Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer to review and amend the financial regulations highlighted in the discussion above, (3) liaise with AD to add in additional points of clarity, (4) email the revised Constitution to the Board Members for retrospective adoption of the document, (5) add a new standing item at future Board meetings on Virements and Contracts.

8b. Health and Safety Policy (for adoption)

The Chief Executive presented the revised Health and Safety Policy, informing Board Members that there were no wording changes to the Policy from the 2022 version, other than an update to job titles. He also summarised the H&S Process (for information only) and the reactive and proactive H&S activity during the past year (for information only).

- Comments – the Vice-Chair highlighted that although Becky Jones now has organisation-wide responsibility for health and safety matters, it remains everyone's individual responsibility to play their part in creating a positive H&S culture. Jane Hull (JH) stated she felt that overall it is a good policy, but that the emphasis on people should be moved to the start of the document, to foster a culture of all team members looking out for themselves and each other – people come first. She also suggested that including near miss reporting as a KPI could help track health and safety performance and emphasise the importance of peoples' wellbeing. GH mentioned the Network Rail motto of 'Everyone home safe, every day' and emphasised the opportunity to learn from recording near misses. He also pointed out that recording accidents offers opportunity for review, recording near misses offers opportunity for assurance. Mike Cripps (MC) mentioned that the Voluntary Warden health and safety policies and procedures are also being reviewed. Becky Jones (RJ) suggested that near miss forms should include an action where appropriate to minimise risk of repeat occurrences. AD mentioned the differing lengths of time for record keeping depending on the context (for example when recording accidents/near misses involving minors). She advised that this policy would need to cross reference the data retention policy. Ellie Fujioka (EF) pointed out that the Health and Safety policy would also overlap the Safeguarding Policy, and that the Safeguarding Policy shown on the website may need updating.
- Decision – the Health and Safety Policy was adopted by the Board, with a recommendation that the references to 'people' are moved higher up the Policy in future versions.
- Actions Arising – (1) re-order the bullet point list in the Policy for future versions to emphasise the focus and priority on people, (2) ensure the Safeguarding Policy on the website is up-to-date, (3) cross check the retention of health and safety documents with the Board's Retention Policy.

9. FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

9a. Minutes of the previous meetings and update on the key areas under discussion

David Powell (DP) and Magda Glanowska (MG) presented an update on Finance and Governance since the last Board meeting. DP offered great reassurance that processes are continually improving, and that there are no red flags following the Q1 Management Accounts and Reforecast 1. MG then explained the timelines for preparing the Q2 Management Accounts and Reforecast 2. MG also noted that the External Audit has now concluded and the associated document is on the website.

9b. Process and priorities for setting the 2024/25 budget

MG ran through the planned timings and priorities for budget setting. This excellent paper covered core and non-core funding; team resources; other costs, e.g. property, vehicles, rebranding.

- Comments – the Vice Chair said that it was reassuring to receive the financial overview from DP, on behalf of the Finance and Governance Committee. John Swanton (JS) asked how much money the organisation has to invest at any one time. The Chief Executive replied by explaining the BNG funding from National Highways (to restore 40 hectares of grassland and maintain it for the next 30 years) would mean that we will have £500k to invest over a long time period, and that this will likely be repeated in 2024/25 and 2025/26. The Chief Executive explained the 80/20 rule with respect to funding from DEFRA being conditional on it being no more than 80% of our overall core funding. The remaining 20% of core funds comes from local authorities. This is a potentially significant concern for the future. Cate Le Grice-Mack queried the duration of agreements for the current office arrangements. The Chief Executive replied that the agreements with both Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and Cotswold Business Centre are short-term (no more than two years) which provide flexibility for the future. Paul Hodgkinson (PH) queried if the increase in local authority contributions was an assumption or a request. He pointed out that it would be unlikely that councils will be able to meet an increase in contribution in line with inflation, as it is currently in excess of 5%. Sarah Whalley-Hoggins (SWH) pointed out that a careful watch should be kept on councils' debts – especially with reference to their contributions. The Chief Executive reiterated that the current approach of demonstrating the CNL team's value-add to local authorities is a much better way to approach requesting their contributions, and easier for them to engage with.
- Decision – The Board members noted they were happy with the planned processes and priorities for the budget setting, and with the overall current financial position.
Actions Arising – circulate the current local authority contributions to all local authority Board Members, including historical context and DEFRA's core grant.

10. FORWARD PLANNING

The Board noted the draft agenda for the February 2024 meeting.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 20 February 2024, 10:00am-1:00pm, at Cirencester Baptist Church, Cirencester, GL7 1YE.

The Board Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed at 1:10pm.

CHAIR

ENDS

DRAFT