

**MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE BOARD -**

HELD AT SUMMERFIELD SPACE, ROBINSWOOD HILL COUNTRY PARK, GLOUCESTER

Tuesday 23 January 2024, 10:00am

Present

Brendan McCarthy (BM, Chair)
Sue Crawford (SC)
Ben Stokes (BS)
Paul Crossley (PC, dialling in)

Graham Hopkins (GH)
Cate Le Grice-Mack (CGM)
Martin Mitchell (MM)

Ben Dent (BD, dialling in, Chair of the Climate Action WG)

Also in Attendance

Andy Parsons (AP, CEO)
Magda Glanowska (MG, HoF)
Mark Connelly (MC)
Scott Brown (SB)
John Mills (JM)

Alana Hopkins (AH)
James Webb (JW)
Rebecca Jones (RJ)
Simon Smith (SS)
Jonathan Rogers (observing)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies – Rebecca Charley, Phil Chapman, Andy Graham
- Introductions and announcements – BM welcomed Jonathan Rogers, the Board's new Management Accountant.
- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 19 September 2023 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising – all actions arising were either completed or in progress.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 17 OCTOBER 2023

- The Executive Committee noted the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 17 October 2023.
- There followed a brief discussion about progress in encouraging local authorities to adopt the 2023-25 Management Plan. Seven local authorities are outstanding with this (South Gloucestershire, Wychavon, Worcestershire, Wiltshire, Tewkesbury, BANES, and Oxfordshire).
- Action Arising – the Chair is to write to local authority Board Members, to request that they work to encourage their local authorities to adopt the Management Plan.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The CEO gave a verbal update on key activity (not covered elsewhere in the agenda) since the previous meeting:

Board Members:

- There are four Secretary of State vacancies for the 2024 recruitment.
- Two nominations have been received for the Parish Group 5 vacancy (following departure of Brendan McCarron).

Team Members:

- Starters – Olivia Blackwell (FiPL Farming Engagement Officer), Ellie Robinson (FiPL Admin Asst), Jonathan Rogers (Management Accountant).
- Leavers – Mandy Pressland (Nov), Harvey Sherwood (Feb), Heidi Gibbs (Feb).
- Nina Stubbington now has a new role of 'Grants and Access Officer', with JW successfully applying to the British Mountaineering Council, she is now contracted with the Board until March 2024.
- Vacancies – Climate Action Lead (interviews on Friday) and Glorious Cotswold Grasslands Programme Assistant going live this week.

Niel Curwen Legacy and Friends of the Cotswolds:

- An update was given on the current position.

National updates:

- The Chair, Vice Chair, CEO and AH attended a very successful National Landscapes launch event in November.
- The team have submitted a bid into the Water Restoration Fund (total £5m across all protected landscapes in 2023/24) to improve the water environment and water quality in the Sherborne Brook and River Windrush (National Trust owned land).
- The CNL Board has provisionally been allocated £383,000 from the £10m capital funding pot for 2024/25 (for the 44 National Parks and National Landscapes).
- The CEO presented to the National Parks' Climate Change and Energy Group about the work we have been doing with 3Keel and the pathway to net zero.

Financial growth

- The growth of the organisation continues, with turnover forecast to be £3.5m this year and
- increasing further to £4.4m in 2024/25.
- There is a significant concern of what non-core funding will be available post March 2025, with many current projects/programmes due to end.

National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)

- Earlier this month the CEO, JW, SS and RJ met Richard Bellamy (Head of Engagement, NLHF) and Kelly Spry-Phare (Senior Engagement Manager, NLHF) at Robinswood Hill.
- The main discussion was around the new Strategic Initiative for Protected Landscapes, which will have a total funding of £150m to deliver 20 exemplar projects. The launch is expected in April and JW will lead on the development of an Expression of Interest.
- There may also be the opportunity to become a local delivery partner of the NLHF to deliver a small grants scheme via Caring for the Cotswolds. We have been invited to bid up to £250k, which will include admin and marketing costs.

- Comments – there was a short discussion about which skills and experience are desirable in new Secretary of State Board Member recruitment: finance, climate action, farming and countryside, comms and public relations were all suggested. BS raised the issue of updating the risk register in the light of increased grants and funding activity. The CEO assured the Committee that this work was underway and the risk register is being updated to reflect this.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the update.
- Actions Arising – The Chair will contact the Chair of the Friends of the Cotswolds to express the CNL Board's current position.

5. FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

The Head of Finance (HoF) gave a thorough summary of the current financial position, covering Q3. The CEO then updated members on the Key Performance Indicators YTD 2023/24. Finally, the HoF gave an overview of the budgeting process for 2024/25.

- Comments – the Committee were complementary about how the financial information was presented and praised the work of the HoF.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – the Chair will contact the two Board Members who haven't attended a Board meeting for over 12 months.

6. CLIMATE ACTION – DEVELOPING A PATHWAY TO NET ZERO

BD and CEO invited the opportunity to review and discuss the draft 3Keel report ahead of seeking full Board adoption in February. BD explained that he has identified four key lessons: principles, pioneering, pace and priorities. The next step will be to take the pathway to net zero to the full CNL Board meeting in February 2024. CEO gave his view that the 3Keel report is of excellent quality, and that the first page of the Executive Summary should clearly identify the priority actions for the organisation – so that Board Members know what is they are being asked to endorse. These priorities will be discussed with the Climate Action working group ahead of the Board meeting.

- Comments – CGM praised the report, but remained uncertain about where the boundaries are drawn for how net zero is to be achieved, e.g. transport. The Chair queried who is being referred to when 'responsible for' is mentioned, since the CNL Board doesn't own any land or ultimately control anything. He stated he felt the work will need to focus on influencing others. BD responded by explaining that a significant proportion of the pathway will fall to local authorities, who will ideally need to take responsibility for climate action pledges and commitments. CNL Board's area of influence is expected to be greater in the context of land use and land management. CGM asked how we engage with those outside our remit, e.g. retail and food processing. BD responded by saying that we would be advised to focus our energy on influencing consumer choice. BS mentioned that he felt education involving schools and young people was a theme missing from the report. He felt this could be achieved using local authorities as a conduit, and asked if an engagement/liason role could connect schools and local authorities. The Chair observed that the budget allocated to this work, and the priorities given to the

new Climate Action Lead will determine priorities and pace. GH suggested that clear definitions are required in the report about what 'lead', 'co-lead' and 'support' mean. CEO reported that some parish councils have been in touch about our climate action work, and that they are already requesting support and advice to achieve their own work in response to the climate emergency. This could offer a significant opportunity for local delivery and impactful on-the-ground action.

- Decision – the Executive Committee supported the report and, with the improvements noted, felt that it should be recommended for Board adoption.
- Actions Arising – (1) Members of the Executive Committee are to email any further feedback to the CEO by 31 January, (2) Refinements will be fed back to 3Keel, (3) the Working Group will review the recommended priority actions for the Board, (4) a final version of the report will be presented for adoption to the full CNL Board at the next meeting in February.

7. FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

MC, supported by SB, provided a detailed update on team structure and focus, grants awarded, strength of pipeline and levels of confidence in allocating the full award by March 2025. The programme is going very well, although this quarter is expected to be exceptionally busy due to year end juggling of the grant budget with underspend from existing projects and new applications as well as dealing with a lot of claims. The overall aim is to return as little funding to Defra as possible by allocating as much as possible by 31 March. Having Olivia Blackwell on the team has helped a lot, and Ellie Robinson has now started to support the administrative work. The assessment panel has met five times so far this year, and next meets on 5 February. Engagement remains high with daily enquiries about the programme, resulting in a strong pipeline. Next year is Year 4 of the programme, and we have £1.7m to allocate, of which almost £1m has already been allocated.

- Comments – BS offered the view that the legacy of the programme has the potential to be very powerful. MC responded by saying the FiPL team is considering a new engagement role over the next 12 months, to offer a physical legacy by way of case studies, events, etc. The Chair offered the view that short films for social media could be useful. SC suggested asking other similar organisations (FWAG, GWT, etc.) to endorse and recommend the programme. GH asked if it might be possible to include an educational legacy element via the programme, e.g. via a partnership with RAU encouraging course content specific to farming in a protected landscape. The CEO again referred to the risk register to explain that both FiPL (ending in March 2025) and Everyone's Evenlode (ending in July 2025) have brought talented team members to the organisation – and there is a risk we may lose them when the programmes end.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – consider the suggestions to develop a worthy legacy for what has been an exceptionally successful programme.

8. NATIONAL HIGHWAYS DESIGNATED FUNDS – BIODIVERSITY PROJECT

SS provided a detailed report on the Biodiversity Improvements project – reflecting on Year 1 and looking ahead to Year 2. Challenges and successes were highlighted,

as well as adjustments to the expectations of the project. Year 2 will have a big focus, and it's worth noting that the 120 hectares referenced is a ceiling rather than a target. In spite of the challenges that have been faced, the CNL team is embracing this opportunity as it offers such a positive outcome to balance the effects of the A417 scheme. The legal agreement (both between the CNL Board and National Highways, and between the CNL Board and the landowners) are being reviewed by Ladders solicitors, with Hazlewoods providing advice on the VAT position.

- Comments – the Committee were impressed with how the team have continued to move the project forward with all the challenges that they have faced.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

9. LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION ACT

JM gave an overview of the Act, as it relates to Protected Landscapes, and to discuss the potential implications (especially around the strengthened duty on relevant authorities to “seek to further”) for the Cotswolds National Landscape. JM explained the background to the Act, and its overall ambition. JM detailed the next steps, which will involve engaging with parishes, local authorities, and working with the National Landscapes Association (on a short-term secondment). Guidance about the new Act, prepared by Natural England, is currently being reviewed by the Minister and is expected shortly.

- Comments – there was a short discussion about the importance of parish and local authority-appointed CNL Board members promoting the new Act and the strengthening of the purpose in their communities and among their networks.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – consider methods to promote awareness of the new legislation to parish councils and local authorities, and other interested parties.

10. THAMES WATER AND THE EVENLODE CATCHMENT PARTNERSHIP

MC provided an update to the Committee on recent activity and to seek support for the CNL team's position. Background was given about the Thames Water Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) Initiative, and the CNL Board's involvement with it to date. Detail was also provided about the continued discomfort felt by some SWC Steering Group members about being funded by Thames Water when so much press recently has highlighted the poor condition of the Evenlode and other English rivers. Having explained the results of a recent SWC Steering Group meeting in which a majority decided to withdraw from Thames Water funding post-2025, the CNL Board position was outlined and discussed.

- Comments – BS asked if there was any potential reputational damage to being in perceived opposition to ECP's position. MC explained that there's a small possibility of that, but the greater risk would be cancelling the working arrangement with Thames Water. MC also pointed out that whilst it was the SWC Steering Group which recently made the decision to withdraw, there are many other members of the wider ECP, and there is a feeling that some will share our view. SC suggested communicating to the ECP members who may be receptive that the CNL Board intends to remain open to continuing a positive and collaborative relationship with Thames Water, which may give

other ECP members confidence. The CNL Executive Committee agreed with the CNL Board position, but with a note that the organisation should not endorse Thames Water while the rivers are in a poor state. MC reassured the Committee that the CNL Board has never endorsed Thames Water in that way, it simply acknowledges the funding provided.

- Decision – the Executive Committee noted and approved the position.
- Actions Arising – none.

11. MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-30

SS presented a timeline for the consultation, development and production of the 2025-30 Plan. He explained the schedule, the function of a Steering Group (to be set up in the next two months), and invited comment.

- Comments – a brief discussion followed about incorporating changes relating to (1) the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, (2) updated Defra guidance and national targets, (3) pathway to net zero ambitions. The Plan is scheduled for Board adoption in February 2025, with the proposal to go live at the commencement of the new financial year on 1 April 2025.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

12. TRAILS, ACCESS AND VOLUNTEERING

RJ gave an update on recent activity relating to trails and access, particularly the Cotswold Way National Trail. The new charity, National Trails UK (NTUK), is now active, and one of its priorities will be to secure longer term funding for national trails. The CNL team is hosting the NTUK Summit in Cheltenham in May 2024, which will celebrate 75 years of national trails. Nina Stubbington is now supporting the Removing Barriers grants programme. Demand for this is high – receiving over £700k of funding bids (much greater than the £254k available). The team is also seeking innovative projects, in addition to the essential surfacing and infrastructure improvements. The CNL team's access element of Bathscape has now officially concluded. The Cotswold Voluntary Warden numbers continue to grow and recruitment is now starting to be more targeted (e.g. there are plenty of work party volunteers, but more needed for guided walk leading and education). The Wardens' conference will be held on 14 June 2024, with the theme of 'rivers and waterways'.

- Comments – SC offered a link to Cheltenham Literature Festival (also celebrating 75 years) – possibility of linking in with their programme and the NTUK Summit.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

13. WORKING GROUP UPDATES

The following papers were submitted for information-only:

- (a) Planning and Infrastructure
- (b) Projects and Fundraising
- (c) Wellbeing and Inclusion

14. FORWARD PLANNING

- The agenda for the Board meeting on 20 February 2024 was noted.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

- SC briefed Executive Committee Members on the current situation at Juniper Hill Fields.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Tuesday 21 May 2024, 10:00am-1:00pm at Greystones Farm, Bourton-on-the-Water, GL54 2EN

The Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed at 1.17pm.

Chair

DRAFT