

MEETING OF
THE COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

HELD AT COTSWOLDS DISTILLERY

TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2021, 10:00am

Present

Brendan McCarthy (BM) (Chair)

Rebecca Charley (RC) (Vice-Chair)

David Broad (DB)

Phil Chapman (PC)

Graham Hopkins (GH)

Ed Macalister-Smith (EMS)

Clive Webster (CW)

Also in Attendance

Andy Parsons (Chief Executive)

Scott Brown (Farming Engagement Lead)

Mark Connelly (Land Management Lead)

Rebecca Jones (Access and Volunteers Lead)

Simon Smith (Nature Recovery Lead)

James Webb (Partnerships and Fundraising Lead)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies – apologies were received from Paul Crossley, Mike Dean and Cate Le Grice Mack.
- Introductions and announcements – Phil Chapman was welcomed to the Executive Committee.
- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 25 MAY 2021

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 25 May 2021 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising – all actions from the May meeting had been completed.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 22 JUNE 2021

- The Executive Committee noted the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 22 June 2021. CW suggested that the minutes under Item 11 be expanded to give a fuller explanation with regard to the Discoverer Scheme.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The CEO gave a verbal update to update the Executive Committee on key activity since the last Board meeting, with main points being:

- Eight new Board Members have joined, with two vacancies remaining (Secretary of State and Wiltshire Council);

- Ann Wyatt has started her maternity leave (likely to be at least 12 months) and Diane Bassett is providing maternity cover;
- The launch of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme;
- Alana Hopkins is now a Certified Digital Marketing Practitioner, after recently passing her final exam;
- The new Finance and Governance Sub-Committee met for the first time;
- Ministerial visit to the Cotswolds on 2 August and positive feedback from Defra on the work of the team;
- Developing partnerships with corporates, including Severn Trent Water (Great Big Nature Boost), Thames Water (Smarter Water Catchments), Ground Control (Ourboretum and woodland creation in Tetbury), John Lewis and Robert Welch (celebrating 50 years of the Cotswold Way);
- Significant recruitment activity, including Farming in Protected Landscapes officers, a Planning Officer and two roles (in Education and Community Outreach) as part of the Thames Water Smarter Water Catchments programme.

He also summarised his thoughts on the priorities for discussion at this meeting.

- Comments – GH asked about progress in implementing a CRM system and Scott Brown replied by saying that his team are using/ trialling HubSpot with a view to rolling out across the organisation. BM commented that the breadth of work and activity was very impressive.
- Decision – resolved that the update was noted by the Executive Committee.
- Actions Arising – None.

5. OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

EMS gave a detailed overview of the work of the Finance and Governance Sub-Committee, who met for the first time on 10 September. In particular, the Terms of Reference for the group were agreed and will be presented to the Board for adoption. Meetings will take place quarterly to coincide with the end of financial quarters. EMS also mentioned that the group would be looking to appoint an external member from a professional finance background, as we don't have this skillset amongst current Board Members. The Internal Audit programme was also agreed for Board adoption. The Chief Executive then gave a short update on Q1 financial and operational performance, which indicated that there are currently no significant concerns.

- Comments – GH initiated a discussion about the risk management process and the difference between 'corporate' and 'landscape' risk. The Finance and Governance Sub-Committee agreed that, going forward, the risk management framework should include only corporate risks, with the Management Plan being the main document for identifying risks to the landscape, and ways of mitigating them. PC added that the Vision is the starting point as it clearly highlights the challenges faced. DB asked about the group's decision-making powers and EMS confirmed that it was a 'recommending' body that would seek approval/ adoption from the full Board. CW asked for a matrix that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all groups, including Executive Committee and full Board. It was agreed that the terms of reference for the Board and Executive Committee will be updated and the Working/Steering Groups will each have 4-5 key bullet points outlining their work priorities.

- Decision – the Executive Committee were supportive of the remit of the Finance and Governance Sub-Committee, which will allow them to focus on important operational matters across the whole organisation.
- Actions Arising – (1) update the terms of reference for Board and Executive Committee, (2) provide 4-5 bullet points to highlight the focus of each Working and Steering Group.

6. FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

The Land Management Lead introduced the paper, giving a detailed summary of all the activity since the programme launched in July.

- Comments – there was widespread discussion on matters including: the role of the assessment panel; farm diversification; communicating the programme; clarity on who can (and can't) apply, i.e. the definition of 'farmer' and 'land manager'; links to the Agricultural Transition Plan; potential re-profiling of spend across the three years; sharing of good practice at a national level. The team was congratulated for working at pace since the programme launched.
- Decision – resolved that the paper was noted by the Executive Committee.
- Actions Arising – none.

7. FUNDRAISING WORKING GROUP

The Partnerships and Fundraising Lead started by thanking the Working Group for their continued support (including conducting Caring for the Cotswolds site visits). He also thanked Ben Dent for taking on the role of Chair for LEADER. Key areas of work included Caring for the Cotswolds (CftC), Rural Skills, the Kingfisher Trail and the new Smarter Water Catchments programme.

- Comments – PC said that, having met CftC grant recipients, it was clear that our grants levered other investment in the projects. RC suggested that we shouldn't be overly concerned that the corporate business for Rural Skills remains low as it is still strange times for many businesses, who haven't returned to co-working, etc. BM was encouraged by the financial performance of Rural Skills during the first few months of the year. The upcoming auction is the main focus for the Kingfisher Trail and the four page article in Cotswold Life has really helped spread the word. BM requested that the Board Members are informed very soon about the auction, which is taking place on 21 October. The auction sales will determine the financial success of the project.
- Decision - resolved that the paper was noted by the Executive Committee.
- Actions Arising – inform all Board Members about the plans for the auction and ensure invites to potential attendees are sent out at least four weeks before the date.

8. PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE WORKING GROUP

In the absence of the Planning and Landscape Lead, GH introduced the paper. He thanked Mike Dean and Matt Darby for their involvement in the group, both of whom stepped down at the June AGM. The key activity was linked to the Planning-related KPIs, e.g. performance against being a statutory consultee. The group has also been involved in climate change discussions (and the cross over with the writing of the new Climate Change Strategy) and are starting to look at sustainable building designs.

- Comments – Members were pleased with the recent appointment of a part-time Planning Officer who is starting in November. It is important that we continue to balance our reactive and proactive workload/ focus and an additional role should help with this. It was generally agreed that our Planning-related KPIs are relevant for 2021/22 but that they should be reviewed to become more ‘outcome’ focused from 2022/23.
- Decision – resolved that the paper was noted by the Executive Committee.
- Actions Arising – none.

9. A417 MISSING LINK STEERING GROUP

The Chief Executive gave an update on the Development Consent Order and the upcoming examination. We have registered as an Interested Party and submitted our Relevant Representation. It is very likely that we will submit Written Representation/s during the examination. The Chief Executive asked the Executive Committee to endorse the proposed approach of focusing only on Option 30 during the examination, promoting the desired outcome of achieving the best possible scheme for landscape, the nature and for people. There is no intention to promote previous proposals that haven't been taken forward in the proposed scheme, including tunnels.

The Chief Executive also updated Members on the Designated Funds programmes – Cotswolds Vision and Biodiversity Net Gain - with our organisation playing a key role in the strategically focused Partnership Panel.

- Comments – CW asked about the possibility of more freight being transported by rail and whether that put into question the need for the scheme. GH responded by saying that rail freight in the Cotswolds has huge issues and complications, and shouldn't be a consideration in the A417 Missing Link road scheme.
- Decision – resolved that the Executive Committee endorsed (1) the Relevant Representation and (2) the approach of focusing only on the proposed scheme, i.e. Option 30, during the examination process.
- Actions Arising – none.

10. GLORIOUS COTSWOLDS GRASSLANDS STEERING GROUP

- The report was noted.

11. COTSWOLDS CHAMPIONS STEERING GROUP

- The report was noted.

12. TRAILS AND ACCESS

The Access and Volunteers Lead gave an overview of current activity and priorities, this included: (1) Cotswold Way National Trail - unprecedented usage, review of funding formula, current year underspend, disability access routes, proposed creation of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation to oversee all National Trails, and the relay/ event to celebrate 50 years of it being a long distance walking trail); (2) Voluntary Warden activity – including the restarting of the guided walks programme and the increase in parish wardening, (3) Bathscapes – great progress in completing the circular walk in time for the September Walking Festival; (4) Bourton-on-the-Water – creating two new trails to disperse visitors from the town centre (funded by Cotswold District Council).

- Comments – all Members were impressed with the scope and breadth of work undertaken by the Access and Volunteers Lead (much of which is supported by the Cotswolds Voluntary Wardens). They supported the need to have regular updates at each meeting as this is such an important area of our work and clearly demonstrates the positive impact of our work on the ground, making a difference to peoples' lives and enjoyment.
- Decision – resolved that the paper was noted by the Executive Committee.
- Actions Arising – none.

13. MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Nature Recovery Lead summarised some of the key outputs from July's Forward Planning Day and said that this, along with the Vision, has given him a good start in preparing the next Management Plan (2023-28).

- Comments – RC asked about the timeline for the production of the Plan, ensuring that Board Members would have multiple opportunities to feed into its development ahead of final sign off in June 2023. The Nature Recovery Lead confirmed that this would be the case.
- Decision – resolved that the report was noted by the Executive Committee.
- Actions Arising – none.

14. FORWARD PLANNING

- Draft Agenda – the agenda for the October 2021 Board Meeting was reviewed.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 25 January 2022 - 10.00am to 1.00pm. At Tetbury Goods Shed Arts Centre, Old Station Yard, Cirencester, Tetbury.

The Meeting commenced at 10:04am and closed at 12:59pm

Chair