

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

**HELD AT EDUCATION ROOM, GREYSTONES FARM, GREYSTONES LANE, BOURTON-ON-
THE-WATER, GLOS. GL54 2EN**

Tuesday 21 May 2024, 10:00am

Present

Brendan McCarthy (BMc, Chair)
Rebecca Charley (RC, Vice Chair)
Sue Crawford (SC)

Graham Hopkins (GH)
Ben Stokes (BS)

Also in Attendance

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

James Webb (JW)
Simon Smith (SS)
Fred Constantine Smith (FCS)
Olivia Blackwell (observing)
Ray Sanderson (observing)

Alana Hopkins (AH)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies – Phil Chapman, Paul Crossley, Andy Graham, Martin Mitchell, Cate le Grice-Mack.
- Introductions and announcements – the Chair welcome Fred Constantine Smith (Climate Action Lead) and Ray Sanderson (Parish Council Member).
- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 23 January 2024

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 23 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising from Previous Meeting – all actions arising were either completed or in progress.
Re: Management Plan endorsements, only two are now outstanding: Wiltshire Council, and Bath and North East Somerset. This item prompted a short discussion about which local authorities had increased their contributions, and which hadn't. The Chair asked that the increases be tracked – in order to identify those who do/do not increase contributions. BS suggested including value-add highlights when approaching local authorities to confirm contributions.
Re: Niel Curwen legacy, the Chair wrote to the Friends of the Cotswolds in January to clearly outline our position and is yet to receive a response.
- Actions Arising – the Chair to write to the four local authorities who didn't increase their contribution for this FY.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 20 February 2024

- The Executive Committee noted the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 20 February 2024.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on key activity since the previous meeting:

Team

- Fred Constantine Smith (Climate Action Lead) started on 1 May.
- Tom Harcourt (GCG Programme Assistant) started on 13 May.
- Maria Carter (FiPL Comms and Engagement Officer) starting on 29 May.

Recruitment for new Chief Executive:

- Brendan McCarthy has appointed the selection panel and is currently speaking to a number of recruitment consultants.
- A draft candidate pack has been written and being reviewed by the panel.

Board

- David Powell has now been confirmed as a Secretary of Statement appointee.
- There will be three Secretary of State vacancies for 2024 but recruitment is yet to get underway.
- Phil Chapman will, likely, be leaving the Board in the near future, so Cherwell DC will need to appoint a replacement.
- The Board Member position for Wiltshire Council is still vacant.
- Tony Merry didn't stand for re-election in May, so we will need to find a replacement for Parish Group 2.
- Ray Sanderson has joined the Board, representing Parish Group 5.

National Activity

- Targets and Outcomes Framework:
 - Natural England has released a wealth of data covering, e.g. habitats, hedgerows, designated areas, trails, geological features, population, ethnic groups, business, etc. (24 sets in total)
 - The process to apportion individual PLs' contributions to national targets will be underway very soon.
- The CNL team have hosted the following:
 - The National Landscapes Association 'Nature-based Solutions' team on 7 March (visiting the National Grid and National Highways projects).
 - The Protected Landscapes Partnership visited Cleeve Common to discuss Big Chalk on 15 May.
 - The first National Trails UK Summit was held in Cheltenham on 16 May.
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Act – covered by John Mills later in the meeting.
- Comments – none.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the update.
- Actions Arising – keep Board Members and Team updated on the CEO recruitment process.

5. FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

The Head of Finance (HoF) gave a thorough summary of the financial position at year-end, confirming that the financial picture has improved over the past 12 months. The Chief Executive then gave a brief overview of the Key Performance Indicators 2023/24.

- Comments – the Chair complimented MG on the clarity of her reporting, and the improvements made since she has arrived in post. The Chief Executive credited much of the currently strong financial position to the GCG team, who have worked tirelessly to ensure the National Highways Designated Funds agreements are robust and secure. GH asked about the Cotswold Champions scheme, and specifically why it was that it has been so difficult to spend those funds. MC provided the answer that as the land the funding relates to sits largely within one expansive estate, which was not interested in accessing the funding, it has been challenging to allocate it. That estate is now more open to conversations about how to use the funding, so there is a feeling that the funding will be fully allocated this financial year.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

6. DEFRA FUNDING 2024/25

The Chief Executive gave an overview of the uplift funding (capital and revenue) from Defra, and informed the Executive Committee about the priority projects / spending, which have been identified by the team.

- Comments – there was a short discussion about boundary stones, and the most practical and efficient way to update these. SC also made an observation that some kind of signage should be considered around the boundary near the new A417 road scheme.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

7. MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-30

SS updated the Executive Committee on the first version of the Management Plan.

- Comments – the Chair asked about the potential to standardise the Management Plan format across the National Landscapes family. SS explained that the varieties of landscapes would make this difficult, but that the recently published national guidance for management plans is a deliberate attempt ensure core elements are included in all management plans. SC initiated a brief discussion about how progress is measured/ tracked. She also suggested a short introductory paragraph ahead of each policy. GH commented that he finds the flow-down structure leading from the Statutory Purposes positive and meaningful. He sees the policies as vehicles for influence, therefore difficult to measure. He feels the organisation is responsible for influencing others, but not outputs. GH also asked about relationships with water companies, and how the Management Plan relates to them – this led to a short discussion about methods to prevent overflow into rivers, and the associated planning considerations. BS asked if the Management Plan is an appropriate place to explore and promote

further opportunities for young people, in the context of access and inclusion. He feels if so, then this theme could be stronger within the Management Plan. SC furthered this thought by saying she feels there is a need for research around access opportunities for communities living in urban areas surrounding the Cotswolds – to understand how to improve their access. The Chief Executive contributed that the current government ambition is that nobody should live less than 15 minutes from green spaces – whether that is within a protected landscape, a town or a city. The Vice Chair also mentioned that developers should have more pressure on them to incorporate green spaces into housing developments – wherever they are. SS stated he would be open to receiving comments by email from the Executive Committee for the next two weeks.

- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – send any further comments to SS by 4 June.

8. REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE (RAAP)

SB provided an overview of the CNL-led Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme (funded by FiPL). He stated that there is a lot of potential for a longer term continuance of the programme, and that there is a demonstrable appetite amongst the farming community for this. He has said that the clearest finding so far is how useful it is to bring farmers together thematically, as well as by geography.

- Comments – the Executive Committee were very complimentary about the RAAP. The Vice Chair observed that developing longer term partnerships may be the way to maintain momentum with this area of work.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

9. FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

MC provided a report on key activity and updates. In particular, he mentioned updates which have happened since his paper for the meeting was concluded, namely: that FiPL administrative roles are to be extended to the end of September 2025; and that FiPL technical/advisor roles will be extended until March 2027, with the intention of these roles helping with the transition to ELMS. This extension of advisor roles may be the best opportunity to extend the Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme. He also explained the rationale behind appointing a new FiPL Comms and Engagement Officer as a way to create some legacy from the programme. Maria Carter will arrive in post on 29 May, and will be four days a week, creating case studies, events and activities.

- Comments – there were very few comments on this paper, as it was so thorough. The Executive Committee was very complimentary about the volume of work achieved by the team, and the success and investment it has attracted into the farming community of the Cotswolds.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

10. CLIMATE ACTION

The Chief Executive and FCS provided a report on key activity and updates. FCS explained a little about his background and previous roles, and then talked the

Executive Committee through his agreed priority areas of work, and his progress so far (which has largely been scoping out each priority).

- Comments – the Executive Committee welcomed FCS and wished him well with the role.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

11. PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

JM provided a report on key activities and updates. In particular he drew attention to the percentage of planning decisions made in line with CNL advice – which has dropped slightly lower than hoped. He assured the Committee that Simon Joyce is reviewing those decisions made against advice to understand why this might be. JM also has meetings lined up with several local authorities to discuss local plans and the seek to further duty.

- Comments – discussion followed around the impact on the landscape of the A417 (initiated by the seek to further duty), how to maintain relationships with agencies such as National Highways and developers appointed to carry out approved works. There was concern in the room that there needs to be mechanisms in place to track evidence of how well developers adhere to agreed details within large scale projects such as this. GH asked if in future, it might be possible to have a short update on A417 at Executive Committee (realistic, rather than the updates which are issued by the appointed PR agency for the scheme). The Chair recommended compiling a list at the end of the project to demonstrate the areas over which CNL had a lasting positive impact/ influence for the landscape. He also suggesting the possibility of inviting Kier and/or National Highways to present at a full Board meeting. GH also mentioned water infrastructure as an ongoing concern for planning and infrastructure.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – (1) provide regular updates about the A417 to the Exec Committee, (2) invite National Highways / Kier to a future Board meeting.

12. PROJECTS AND FUNDRAISING

JW provided a thorough report on key activities and updates. He drew attention to the areas of work which related to earlier discussions in the meeting, such as wellbeing and inclusion, and creating opportunities for young people.

- Comments – none.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

13. WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

The CEO ran briefly through the paper in RJ's absence, which provided a report on key activities and updates.

- Comments – BS mentioned that the repeated changes in lead and supporting officers in this group has been challenging for Board members – as each appointed officer brings something different, which can change the established

direction of work. The CEO explained that whilst the team changes in this group have been unfortunate, they have been for good reason – and that he anticipates Nicole Daw to bring stability in this regard.

Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.

- Actions Arising – none.

14. TRAILS, ACCESS AND VOLUNTEERING

The Chief Executive presented this paper on behalf of RJ, which provided a report on key activities and updates. The updates included highlighting the astonishing number of volunteers hours achieved in 2023-24, and the successful coverage of this on BBC Radio Glos. During the interview for the radio, the team met an individual who was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, and the conversation with that person reaffirmed the importance of continuing to work hard on improving access across the Cotswolds. It was also encouraging to see first-hand what a positive difference this work makes for people.

- Comments – the Chair congratulated the Wardens and RJ on their outstanding achievement, and acknowledged a comment from MC that these hours are often under-recorded, and so are very likely a great deal more.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

15. FORWARD PLANNING

- The Committee noted the draft agenda for the Board meeting on 25 June 2024.

16. OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Tuesday 17 September, 2024 10:00am-1:00pm, Location: to be confirmed.

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

Chair