



Communications Strategy & Outline Delivery Plan 2020-2023

'Engage, involve, influence'

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1.0 Introduction

Communication, education, and engagement are vital in bringing what we do to a wider audience, and in raising awareness and understanding of the importance of the Cotswolds AONB as an internationally important and protected landscape.

This Communications Strategy and Outline Delivery Plan builds on, and updates, the previous communications strategies from the Board. It also takes into account the Business Plan Framework 2020 – 2023.

Communication is a shared responsibility for all employees, members, and voluntary wardens of the Board, and the reputation of the Board is determined by all aspects of communication – from the way we answer the phone and write emails; deliver events, activities, and projects; through to the publications we produce and how we are portrayed in the media. Delivering effective communication helps us to improve our relationships with our key audiences: local residents, partner organisations, local authorities, government departments and agencies, businesses, and visitors – and it helps us to build and maintain confidence in the Board. Our ability to obtain funding for future projects is also improved through effective communication.

In a wider context, continued pressures on public sector budgets have resulted in a greater need for the Board to raise its profile to new audiences and prove its worth to the public and private sector, as well as to residents and visitors. The coronavirus epidemic in 2020 has wreaked havoc on the UK economy, at the same time as introducing a large number of audiences to the countryside. There is an opportunity in late 2020 to begin to engage with those audiences who are just starting to discover the countryside, and welcome them. There will now be a reinvigorated effort from all protected landscapes to engage with these new audiences and encourage them to forge long lasting relationships with the landscapes they are now discovering. The challenge may be how to do this effectively with budgets under such continued (and new covid-19 related) pressures.

A continuing dialogue around the government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment produced the Protected Landscapes review, led by Julian Glover, which was published in September 2019. The report made many positive and ambitious proposals, including that all AONBs rename themselves as national landscapes, and that the Cotswolds be among those national landscapes considered for national park status.

1.1 Our purposes

The Board was established by Parliament in 2004 and has two statutory purposes:

- a) *to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and*
- b) *to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.*

In fulfilling these roles, the Board has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of people living in the AONB.

The purpose and objectives of the Communications Strategy:

- To promote awareness, understanding, and enjoyment of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), its special qualities, and its designation as a protected landscape
- To maintain a positive profile for the Board and the Cotswolds AONB, and engage with audiences
- To promote and develop a better understanding of the work and role of the Board
- Where possible, to reflect the Key Issues and the Ambitions of the Cotswolds Conservation Board, as set out in the Management Plan 2018 – 2023
- To foster support for the purposes and ambitions of the Board
- To be realistic and practical in terms of employees resource and budgets

1.2 Our principles of good communication

The Cotswolds Conservation Board will endeavour to produce engaging communications that follow the principles of plain English. Communications should be accessible to all members of the community, easy to understand, and clearly identifiable as belonging to the Cotswolds Conservation Board or about the Cotswolds AONB.

Key messages about the Cotswolds AONB and the Board

The following lists detail facts and figures about the Cotswolds National Landscape and the Cotswolds Conservation Board. They are useful to refer to as background for our key message and secondary messages – which can be found in the 2020 Cotswolds National Landscape Brand Guidelines. The messages found in the guidelines provide a consistent foundation which can be edited or expanded to suit a particular audience or requirement. By using them, Board members and the employee team speak as one.

The Cotswolds AONB is:

- A member of the AONB family, the protected landscapes family (AONBs and National Parks), and the third largest protected landscape in England
- A designated AONB in recognition of its high quality and diverse landscape
- Part of an international family of protected areas, and internationally recognised as an important landscape.
- The Cotswolds is worthy of consideration as a new National Park (Glover report, September 2019)
- Home to a variety of internationally important habitats and wildlife
- A place where the local rural economy and tourism rely in part on the natural beauty of the landscape
- A walking and exploring treasure trove, and home to two of England's National Trails (the Cotswold Way and the start of the Thames Trail), seven other long distance routes, and over 3,000 miles of walking, cycling and riding routes (Ambition 1).

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is:

- An independent statutory organisation established by parliament to look after the Cotswolds AONB
- The only organisation to look at the AONB as a whole and to speak as one voice of the Cotswolds AONB
- Working in partnership to conserve and enhance the AONB's natural beauty
- Working to increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB
- Inviting domestic communities to explore and enjoy the AONB
- Aiming to foster the social and economic well-being of its local communities
- Committed to helping deliver innovative projects
- Working to help people understand the protected landscape designation better
- Working to encourage communities and businesses within the Cotswolds AONB to celebrate being part of a nationally recognised landscape (Ambition 3)
- Committed to its ambition of promoting the case for the Cotswolds being designated as England's next National Park (Ambition 4)
- Encouraging its policies and governance to be widely adopted/used and positioning itself as an authoritative and trusted voice of the AONB landscape.

Our communications should:

- Identify the Cotswolds as a National Landscape – in line with Glover Review
- Convey or relate our key and core messaging, or reflect our values
- Where possible, promote/ signpost to the website as a key source of information about the Board and the AONB
- Refer to our statutory purposes of conserving and enhancing, and increasing understanding and enjoyment of the Cotswolds AONB
- Be consistent, at a high standard, and in line with the new Cotswolds National Landscape brand guidelines
- Balance the audiences' needs and understanding with the Board's purposes, ambitions, and budget
- Use appropriate channels to reach the desired targeted audiences
- Be honest and open
- Be committed to confidentiality where required
- Have a clear, consistent, and easily identified purpose and call to action
- Speak to a diverse audience and be easily accessible

The delivery of the Communications Strategy will be led by the Communications Officer working in collaboration with colleagues, Board members and volunteers.

1.3 Our identity

The Board seeks to uphold an effective, confident, and attractive identity that enables awareness, appreciation, and familiarity. All information, regardless of format, should be consistent with and enhance the Board's identity. All such information should be up to date, accurate and subject to regular review.

Following recommendations in the Landscapes Review, published by Julian Glover in 2019, a refreshed logo and new name were adopted at the Board Meeting in June 2020. The new logo and name – Cotswolds National Landscape – replace the previous CCB and AONB logos.

1.4 Communication tools

The Board uses a variety of approaches to engage, involve, and influence its audiences. They include:

Communications

- Cotswold Lion magazine
- Press and media
- Enewsletters
- Social media
- Website
- Partnership working
- Limited print runs (project specific)

Board publications and responses

- Annual Review
- Management Plan
- Position statements
- Landscape character assessments
- Landscape Strategy and Guidelines
- Consultation responses (e.g. Planning, Land Management, responses to large external projects e.g A417 missing link)
- Use of Section 85, Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, duty to have regard to the purposes of AONB designation (where relevant authorities have a duty to have regard to the purposes of AONB designation when carrying out their responsibilities / activities)

Engagement activities

- Visits: by Defra / agency visits / Glover review panel
- Forums (e.g. Annual, Farming, and Access)
- Select committees
- Special events (e.g Stargazing with Will Gater to promote Dark Skies, National Meadows Day)
- Attending seminars and conferences
- Cotswold Voluntary Wardens activities (walks etc) and events (conference)
- Special events

1.5 Our audiences

The Board's activities and projects across the AONB are many and varied – and so are our audiences. Our key stakeholders are people or organisations that are involved with, have an interest in, or are affected by the Board and its activities throughout the AONB. They include:

Priority audiences influencers:	Political and media influencers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers and landowners • Funders • Government departments and agencies (e.g. Defra, DCMS, Natural England) • Local authorities (county, unitary, district, borough, town, and parish councils) • MPs, MEPs, and local authority leaders and members • Developers • Partner organisations (e.g. Wildlife Trusts, Forestry Commission, National Trust, Natural England, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), National Farmers' Union (NFU), CPRE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign for National Parks • DEFRA Select Committee • Environmental bloggers • Green Alliance • Highways England • National Association of AONBs and other AONBs • National Park • National Parks England • National Parks and AONBs Review 2018 Advisory Group • Local and national media
External audiences	Internal audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and national media • Businesses (e.g. visitor attractions) • Residents in the AONB, and residents living in urban neighbouring areas (e.g. Cheltenham, Gloucester, Bristol, Oxford, Stratford, Banbury etc) • Visitors (domestic and international), walkers, cyclists, horse riders • Suppliers and contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members • Employees, including contractors and work placements • Cotswold Voluntary Wardens • Volunteers

1.6 External communication

The Board uses a variety of communication methods and channels to target individual audiences. To ensure successful communication, the Board should undertake regular reviews of all delivery methods, refining and strengthening these where appropriate. The Board is committed to confidentiality where required.

1.7 Internal communication

Colleagues, Board members, and volunteers (Wardens) are all ambassadors playing a crucial role in building our reputation. The way we behave and how we think about the Board can have a huge impact. Good *internal* communication is important in helping us achieve our objectives.

The Board's employee team consists of 14 people. Around 350 active voluntary wardens contribute a significant number of hours of practical conservation and promotional work for the Board. There are 37 members of the Board, 15 of whom are appointed by local authorities, 14 by Secretary of State and eight nominated by parish councils. Board members bring a diverse portfolio of experience, and a range of strengths and interests that help the Board carry out its duties.

Employees, Board members, and volunteers are all representatives of the Board and the AONB, therefore good internal communication is essential so that we all:

- Feel valued, supported, and motivated
- Are proud to act as 'ambassadors' for the Board;
- Are informed about the Board's activities, policies, and plans
- Are able to clearly communicate to external audiences what the Board is and what it does
- Create a 'can do' culture and build a committed and high performing organisation focused on achieving the Board's objectives;
- Learn and are inspired: colleagues and volunteers are a vital source of information and ideas.

All employees, Board members, and volunteers receive regular e-newsletters, copies of the Cotswold Lion magazine and other relevant publications. Copies of all press releases are available on the Board's website. Regular Board, Executive and Sub-Committee meetings take place between members and appropriate officers. A monthly meeting takes place with the chief executive and line reports. The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have regular meetings with volunteers across the AONB. A WhatsApp group has been set up for board members.

1.8 Measuring success

The Board is ambitious, and it is important to keep the business plan framework outputs and outcome in mind day to day. As stated in the Business Plan, we want to:

- **Welcome more diverse domestic audiences who don't normally visit the countryside** – *meeting output 4: promoting and broadening access opportunities; and output 1: great people, inspiring others*
- **Deliver a successful Glorious Cotswolds Grasslands project, a succession plan for what follows, and associated communications work around the project; continue to work towards a landscape led solution for the A417; continue to work to mitigate the effects of Ash Dieback** – *meeting output 3: Delivering for landscapes and nature*

- **Increase our partnership working and engagement with businesses** – *meeting output 5: value-added partnerships that benefit the AONB*
- **Increase our understanding of audience data: what are our audience demographics? What do they understand about the AONB designation? How are they engaging with the AONB and the work of the Board?** – *meeting output 2: continuous improvement leading to effective working*
- **Evaluate outcomes of how our messages and position statements are influencing our audiences (e.g. landowners, farmers, local authorities, developers, planners)** – *meeting output 2: continuous improvement leading to effective working*

1.9 Monitoring and evaluation

The Communications Strategy should be monitored and evaluated to gauge the effectiveness of the Board's communications and ensure overall aims and objectives are being achieved.

This should be carried out by using the following tools:

- Website analytics: visits, dwell time, bounce rates, self-guided walk and cycle route downloads, position statement downloads
- Recording social media followers every quarter
- Recording attendance at events (forums, consultations etc)
- Recording media coverage, including the amount of take-up of news releases issued
- Monitoring comments, complaints, and compliments received by the Board
- A new internal survey among members, volunteers, and officers should be carried out to determine any gaps in existing internal communications and identify areas for improvement
- Appointing a marketing research agency to run a survey among internal and external audiences every 2-3 years
- Appointing a marketing research agency to run a residents, visitors, and landowners online survey, which is carried out every 5 years.

1.10 Photography & video

All images/film that are owned by the Board and which are used by external organisations must be credited as 'courtesy of Cotswolds Conservation Board'.

When commissioning photographers/videographers it is important to ensure that the Board will own the rights to use the resulting images/film and that the agreement is reached on how to credit them and their use. This information should be kept with the photographs/film.