

BUSINESS PLAN 2019/20 QUARTER 3 REVIEW

Summary: To review progress in Quarter 3 of the financial year 2019/20.

Recommendations: That the Quarter 3 Review be noted.

Officer Ref: Simon Smith, Project Development and Business Planning Officer

Background

Process

1. The officer team undertook a review of progress against the work programme on 5 February 2020. This review identified areas of significant progress or where things have developed differently. It does not focus on areas of work which are performing as originally expected in the business plan.
2. This report does not attempt to celebrate the role or work of the Board. That task is achieved through updates, the annual review, press releases and digital media.

Financial Outcome

3. The Board's current forecast (green in *Appendix A*) is now predicting a year end surplus of £14,883 compared to a budget of £-5,091, a variance of £19,974. The significant variances reported in previous quarters (mitigation income, hare trail, police station and recruitment expenses amongst others) are still affecting the figures. This Q3 forecast has not changed significantly from the Q2 forecast of £15,139.
4. The Board's useable funds (earmarked reserves and general fund combined) available at year end is forecasted to be £86,371 which is £40,730 more than budgeted.
5. This report now includes project balances and a breakdown of reserves. You will note that the project balance for LEADER includes both a positive balance and hosting costs. This is because we have been able to claim for some additional Chief Executive and Communications Officer time.
6. The Executive Committee also asked to see the salary costs as a percentage of overall expenditure. This figure is forecast to be 45% for 2019/20.

Operational Progress

7. Areas of significant progress or deviation from the original work programme are outlined below.

CROSS CUTTING

Working Together

- The Chief Executive has sent letters to all local authority Leaders and CEOs/ Heads of Paid Service, asking for an introductory meeting. To date, eight local authorities have responded and seven meetings are scheduled.
- An independently facilitated quarrying stakeholder meeting was held on 29 January. 43 people attended from quarry operators, Parish, County and Borough Councils and the Board. A consensus was achieved that the 8 quarries and their cumulative impact need to be considered collectively. We are now looking at a steering group to take this forward.
- The Board supported Cotswold Tourism's latest Discover England Fund bid and commented on transport around the Cotswolds.
- The winter 2019 e-newsletter was sent in December to a list of 3,431. It had an open rate of 37% which compares favourably to an industry average of 25%

CONSERVING AND ENHANCING

Landscape

- The 2019-20 hedge-laying competition was well-attended by 25 competitors, along with judges and spectators and 210 yards were laid. Support was provided by the Voluntary Wardens, who provided 1,000 stakes and 1,000 hetherings by coppicing woodlands throughout the Cotswolds, as well as event stewardship on the day. Cate Le Grice-Mack & Ed Macalister-Smith attended.

Dark Skies

- Pilot surveys being planned for Q4 in two areas of the AONB. Cotswold Astronomical Society and Chipping Norton Amateur Astronomical Group have agreed to help.

Biodiversity

- Since the project's starting date of February 2019 in excess of 50ha of floristically improved grassland has been initiated by the Glorious Grasslands Project. In excess of 1300kg of seed was collected by brush harvester and sown onto over 40 recipient areas. 60kg of seed has been freezer treated for vernalisation and 2020 sowing
- Currently distributing 2,000 trees donated by the Woodland Trust. They are for planting outside of woodlands throughout the AONB and Vale of Gloucester in mitigation for Ash dieback.
- The Cotswolds Ecological Networks Forum meeting held in December brought together people working on Nature Recovery Strategies from several local authority/local nature partnership areas to compare notes and take a

Cotswolds perspective. Members found it so useful that they have increased the frequency of meetings.

Rural Land Management

- The farming forum date has been set for the 17 March.
- The inaugural meeting of the Green Ribbon of the Evenlode Working Group was held in December. Good links have been made with communities downstream through Oxford City Council.
- Environmental Land management System test has started. 6 workshops have been held between November and February. A pilot, 4 main and a follow on.

Development and Transport

- An appeal decision granted planning permission for the removal of planning conditions at Cotswold Hill Quarry. However, despite the appeal decision not going our way, it did provide good coverage of the Board's Tranquillity Position Statement (the first time that this Position Statement has been referred to in a planning appeal decision).
- This year to date the Board has commented on the Oxfordshire Plan, the Stratford on Avon Site Allocations Plan, the Tewkesbury Borough Plan and the South Worcestershire Development Plan. Work is currently being undertaken on a submission to the Stroud Plan. This work has helped to ensure a more appropriate level of development across the AONB and its setting.

UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYING

Access and Recreation

- Our impact through digital media continues to grow. We have 4,940 Facebook followers which is 953 (24%) more than at Q3 last year. We have 8,062 Twitter followers which is 256 (3%) more than at Q3. We also now have 358 Instagram followers since the first post to our new account in January 2019.

Health and Wellbeing

- A tender with a contract value of £90k was successfully submitted for access work to the BATHSCAPE project in late December. We are currently negotiating the contract. The tender was revised following the submission of a project proposal form. The first time this new procedure has been used.
- The Gateways project has proven to be challenging. Negotiating a variation with the RPA to extend it has led to the project being frozen for 6 weeks from mid-December. The variation includes better quality and value interpretative board materials.
- The Rural Skills Programme continues to develop its work with schools. We have received a £1,000 grant from Oxfordshire County Council towards work with Burford School and a meeting has been arranged with the principle of Chipping Camden School.

Financial Management

- Throughout 2019 the Board participated in the NAAONB lottery funded 'Taking the Lead' programme with an Officer attending a cross AONB External Funding Topic Group. The publication of an AONB Income and Funding Toolkit is imminent.

8. There have been two recent changes within the Officer team:

Officers

Leaver:

Martin Lane, Director. October

Starters:

Andy Parsons, Chief Executive. October on a p/t contract basis starting full time in December 2019

Scott Brown, Rail Corridor Enhancement Project Officer. January.

Board Members

Other than Andy Parsons no Board Members left or started this quarter

Supporting Papers:

Appendix 'A' - 2019/20 Quarter 3 Finance Report