

MEETING OF
THE COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

HELD AT THE CONSERVATION BOARD OFFICES, NORTHLEACH

THURSDAY 21TH SEPTEMBER 2017

Present:

Chairman	-	Liz Eyre
David Broad (until 12:55.p.m)		Ed Macalister-Smith
Nigel Colston		Tony Merry
Mike Dean (from 10:10.a.m.)		Mark O'Sullivan
Nick Holliday		Martin Veal
Sue Hope		Richard Wakeford

Apologies:

Val Kirby

Also in Attendance:

Mark Connelly	Land Management Officer
Martin Lane	Director
Richard Watson	Cotswolds Trail & Access Officer/Visitor, Interpretation & Events Officer
James Webb	LEADER Programme Manager

E 3.1 INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Anna Clarke and Ben Amor (Cotswold District Council) to the meeting.

The Chairman announced the following changes to Board membership- Chris Saint had been replaced by Jo Barker; Tony Ilott had replaced Ken Atack. In addition Margaret Read (DEFRA) had been replaced by Dan Jones.

A meeting had been arranged with Lord Gardner, Minister at Defra, for 8th November 2017 which Mrs Eyre, Mr Lane and Mr Holliday would be attending. Another meeting with Andrew Sells, Chairman of Natural England had also been arranged for Monday 23rd October.

Mrs Eyre had written to all MP's in the AONB area and had arranged meetings with Nadhim Zahawi MP (Stratford-on-Avon) for Friday 20th October 2017, Nigel Huddleston MP (Evesham Vale) for Friday 13th October 2017 and Luke Hall MP (Thornbury and Yate) for Friday 10th November 2017.

Meetings had already taken place with David Drew MP (Stroud), Michelle Donelan MP (Chippenham) and Robert Courts MP (Witney) who had all been very enthusiastic. James Gray MP (North Wiltshire) had written very positively, but felt there was no requirement to have a meeting at this time.

Mr O'Sullivan suggested that Wera Hobhouse should be approached as the new MP for Bath.

Mrs Eyre said she hoped to meet with them all alongside Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP (Cotswolds) whose constituency had the largest area within in the AONB.

Mr Lane also suggested that Lord Plumb and Mr Veal suggested that Lord Strasburger (Liberal Democrat) be invited.

E 3.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

E 3.3 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

E 3.4 MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee held on 20th June 2017 be approved as a correct record.

Arising thereon:-

Mr Lane provided an update on the A417 and explained how he felt it was the opportune moment to update the Executive Committee. Mr Lane also provided an explanation of the different options and the implications relating to each of these.

Mr Lane explained that Highways England would host a Steering Group on Friday 6th October and that, during the middle of October, Highways England would also host an internal meeting when the decision on which options to consult upon would be determined. The consultation would be released prior to Christmas.

Mr Macalister-Smith enquired as to the budget, and Mr Lane explained that the original costing of £250 to £255 million was based on workings for the Brown or Loop scheme in 2014 and that all options were now in excess of this costing.

Mr Wakeford enquired as to whether it would be sensible to research costing for similar projects in other countries, and this was supported.

Mr Macalister-Smith stated that, having looked at the benefit cost ratio, he did not feel that any of the proposals were viable. Mr Lane replied that the Board was on record as saying that status quo was not acceptable.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee held on 21st July 2017 be approved as a correct record.

Arising thereon:-

Mrs Hope told members of the committee how she felt the item relating to National Parks should be on pink pages owing to their confidential nature and that too shorter a time was permitted for Members to read the information relating to the agenda item. Mr Lane responded that the information for the report was not available in time to be despatched with the agenda papers and therefore had been emailed direct to all Members of the Executive Committee.

Mr Broad also enquired whether emailing the unconfirmed minutes to Members upon their completion would be possible, prior to the paper copies being sent out with Agenda.

Mr Wakeford said that, with regard to Cotswold @ 50, he had not been able to meet with Janet Dwyer yet to finalise.

E 3.5.a LIVING & WORKING SUB-COMMITTEE

i. Oral Update

Mr Veal deferred the update to Mr O'Sullivan, owing to his absence at the last meeting.

Mr O'Sullivan gave an update to Members where the main issues of the Network Rail electrification and West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan had been discussed. Mr O'Sullivan also drew Members' attention to two controversial applications which both were either within the AONB or within view of it.

Mrs Hope asked as to whether representations were allowed through the Chairman to members of the public and whether there was a procedure for dealing with applications such as those highlighted. Mrs Hope also highlighted the fact she had been unable to access papers from the last meeting of 5th September 2017 on the website.

Mr Veal explained that if members of the public wanted to be present and make representations, this would be allowed informally at the beginning of the meeting. If the item was considered serious enough, the item would be discussed during the meeting without the member of the public present.

Mr Wakeford drew Members attention to the recent announcement by the Secretary of State that nearly all district councils would be required to provide 50% higher amount of housing sites within AONB's and expressed his concern to Members. .

Mr Merry highlighted that the announcement excluded National Parks.

E 3.5.b ENJOYING & APPRECIATING SUB-COMMITTEE**i. Action Points from last Meeting, 21st July 2017**

Mr Wakeford updated members of the successful meeting, though expressed his great disappointment at Natural Capital report.

Mr Wakeford also provided an update on the post-Brexit farming and rural development.

Mr Macalister-Smith asked that on the basis National Parks were promoting healthy exercise, whether Healthy Cotswolds should follow suit. Mr Macalister-Smith volunteered to complete work on the idea for which he was thanked by the Chairman and fellow Members.

E 3.5.c CONSERVING & MANAGING SUB-COMMITTEE**i. Oral Update**

This was held over in the absence of Dr Kirby.

ii. Magnificent Meadows, Flowers on the Edge and Glorious Grasslands

Mr Connelly presented an update in respect of the Save Our Magnificent Meadows project. He explained that the end date, following the completion of the first three years of the project, had been extended from June to 6th October 2017. Mr Connelly also explained the project had been very successful in restoring grass on existing sites, though the second ambition of the project to restore 1,000 hectares of grass had not been met due to a variety of reasons, including a later go-ahead date.

Mr Connelly then presented an update in regards to the Magnificent Meadows project. He explained that a new submission for a separate but follow on project was planned by Plantlife, with a submission deadline of March 2018. If Stage 1 of the submission was successful, then a 12 month development stage would start from August 2018, before a full four-year stage to 2022.

Mrs Hope thanked Mr Connelly for the update and questioned whether areas on verges could be identified, with the assistance of local authorities, and worked on. Mr Connelly responded that work would have to keep within 30mph speed limits owing to risks with contracted workers, but he would look into this as an idea.

Mr Wakeford enquired as to why the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust was not listed as a partner. Mr Connelly response explained that they had not chosen to be a national delivery partner in Magnificent Meadows but he had been in contact with them in regards to this project.

Mr Connelly then provided an update on the Flowers on the Edge project and explained how this had involved 24 AONB's, with 10 delivering practical action, of which one of these was the Cotswolds.

Mr Wakeford expressed concern that £32,000 was not a high level of return, and Mr Connelly agreed.

Members expressed concerns regarding who was responsible for the management of verges and asked to challenge Gloucestershire County Council, who had stated that they were not responsible.

Mr Connelly provided an update on the Glorious Grasslands project and how a generous donation from a private donor had been received.

An update was then presented on the Highways England Environmental Designated Fund by Mr Connelly. Mrs Hope expressed her delight that the site on the A46 at Tormarton was one of the sites suggested for action.

Mr O'Sullivan informed Members that he had attended the selection panel meeting to appoint a new Chair for the Bath Partnership Board though it was accepted by members that the name could not yet be released.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

E 3.5.d GRANTS SUB-COMMITTEE

Mr Holliday informed members that the Sub-Committee had not met and that they would reconvene in early autumn and therefore there was no update to provide.

E 3.5.e THE COTSWOLDS DISCOVERY CENTRE, NORTHLEACH

Mr Lane updated members on the recent events including a camping weekend in August and the recent successful evening events. Mr Lane also updated members on the meeting in August with the Friends which Mrs Eye, Mr Lane and Mr Holliday had attended.

The Friends had declined to match fund for the play equipment and the associated LEADER bid. Mr Lane also informed Members the Friends had been invited to put forward a Growth Fund Bid for the site.

RESOLVED that the latest progress report be noted.

E 3.5.f COTSWOLDS LEADER PROGRAMME UPDATE

Mr Webb presented an update report on the progress of the Cotswolds LEADER programme.

Mr Webb informed members that the Expressions of Interest figure had seen five more completed in two weeks. Applications on Desks included two approved and two submitted.

Mr Webb also provided an update on Promotion and explained he had contacted all Chambers of Commerce in the region and had since attended the breakfast meeting of the Cirencester Chamber of Commerce on 21st September 2017.

Mr Holliday enquired as to who else, aside from Chambers of Commerce, had been contacted to which Mr Webb confirmed that he had also been looking at businesses.

Mr Webb then provided an update on the Accountable Body role and responsibilities. Mr Colston enquired that as the programme would now end in 2019, would the European money be a struggle to spend. Mr Wakeford commented that he agreed with Mr Colston. Mr Webb responded that he was now asking applicants to submit draft applications in the hope of eradicating unnecessary delays.

Mr Webb then provided a brief update on Projects, as 13th September 2017 there were 11 contracted projects, equating to 13 jobs at a value of £325,000.

RESOLVED that the updated LEADER progress report be noted.

E 3.6 COTSWOLDS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW 2018-2023

As Ally Rood was absent, Mr Lane provided an update.

Mr Lane informed Members that the draft plan had been through stage 1 of the consultation process and had been released for consultation at the end of July 2017. This process had since been completed, on 8th September 2017.

Mr Lane explained the plan had focused on the DEFRA group, Historic England and the 15 Local Authorities. Responses had been received from all agencies and 4 out of 15 of the local authorities.

Mr Veal asked if Executive Members could be copied in to responses.

Mrs Hope asked why the Highways England was not included, to which Mr Lane responded that the focus for the Stage 1 consultation had been agreed by the Executive Committee at an earlier meeting.

Mr Holliday expressed his disappointment with the Officers at local authorities. Mrs Eyre invited Members to discuss the plan further with their Officers.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

E 3.7 ELECTRIFICATION OF GREAT WESTERN RAIL LINE.

Mr Lane updated Members on the project, including the creation of an Advisory Group following complications with the works at Goring. Mr Lane also informed Members that complications had arisen between the Advisory Group and Network Rail.

Mrs Hope said she felt the works had been a mitigated disaster and blamed Network Rail for not following their own procedures. Mr Colston said the issue arose from the fact all works were contracted out.

Mr Broad enquired as to whether there was a chance funding would not be available for southern parts of Gloucestershire. Mr Lane responded that there was a risk.

RESOLVED that:

(a) the report be noted.

(b) based on the experiences of the current electrification project, the Executive Committee agrees to write to Ministers regarding Network Rail's approach to undertaking works through the Cotswolds AONB; the letter to suggest that a Highways England style 'Design Manual for Roads and Bridges' should be produced and applied by Network Rail when undertaking works in Protected Landscapes;

(c) other AONBs and National Parks be 'recruited' as counter-signatories to the letter.

E 3.8 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AONB'S CONFERENCE REPORT 2017

Mr O'Sullivan commented he felt it would be more helpful if it could be more clearly stated what lessons had been learnt in the paper. Mrs Eyre responded that she would pass on the suggestion.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

E 3.9 COTSWOLD GATEWAYS PROJECT

Mr Watson provided an update of the project which now included research into a cycle route alternative to the Cotswold Way. Mr Watson also explained he had not yet been able to meet with GWR to discuss the signs and that £20,000 of the £120,000 had been match funded by Cirencester Town Council.

Mrs Eyre enquired as to whether Heritage Railways could also be approached. Mr Watson said that he would research this suggestion.

Mr O'Sullivan asked whether any areas around the North and East of Bath had been considered. Mr Watson informed members he had attended a meeting at Bradford-on-Avon on 19th September 2017.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

E 3.10 BOARD SITE VISITS, WORKSHOPS AND BRIEFINGS, 5TH OCTOBER 2017

Mr Lane updated Members that Sandy Marcal had received 5 apologies and 5 nil returns for the workshop and site visits on 5th October 2017, resulting in 27 attendees (though some only for the afternoon). The LAG Executive had also been invited.

The three Site Visits had seen an even spread of attendees.

RESOLVED that the draft programme be noted.

E 3.11 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN FOR 2017/18-2018/19

Mr Lane informed members that the Steering Group for Cotswold @50 was still to meet.

Mr O'Sullivan suggested that an item relating to communication between Board Members and land owners be discussed at a future meeting. Mr Lane responded that this would probably be after the November Meeting.

Mr Holliday updated Members that the CPRE report on housing and development in AONBs would be available for discussion at the February 2018 meeting.

RESOLVED that the updated Forward Plan for 2018 be noted.

E 3.12 OTHER BUSINESS.

There was no other business that was legally or constitutionally urgent

The Meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and closed at 1.00 p.m.

Chairman