



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Chilterns Conservation Board HELD ON Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at CCB offices, The Lodge, 90 Station Road, Chinnor OX39 4HA commencing at 10.00 AM.**

**Present:**

Colin Courtney	Board Member - Chair
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Paul Mainds	Board Member
Cllr Richard Newcombe	Board Member
John Nicholls	Board Member - Deputy Chair of the Board
Cllr Sue Rowland	Board Member
Cllr Sir Hector Sants	Board Member
Cllr Phillip Spicer	Board Member

**In attendance:**

Andrew Brock-Doyle	Head of Operations
Deirdre Hansen	Minute taker
Kate Heppell	Head of Landscape
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer
Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Matt Thomson	Head of Strategy & Planning
Annette Weiss	Head of Engagement & Partnerships- in part

The Chair welcomed all present.

**23/24.34. Apologies for absence.**

None.

**23/24.35. Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**23/24.36. Notice of Urgent Business**

The meeting was notified of some urgent business.

**23/24.37. Minutes of the previous meeting 14/11/23**

The minutes of the meeting 11/07/23 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair after the following correction was made: minute number 23/24 29.2 in the recommendation ENDOSED was amended to ENDORSED.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "CwL", is located at the bottom right of the page.

**23/24.38. Matters Arising**

All items covered on the agenda.

**23/24.39. No public present****23/24.40. Chair's update**

1. He had attended monthly **Boundary Review** meetings with Natural England's Management Advisory Group. Desirability assessments are ongoing and further CCB input is required. The consultation expected this summer has now been delayed by two months, which could be further impacted by a General Election.
2. Correspondence with Defra regarding Secretary of State appointments is ongoing, although no new appointments are expected in 2024.
3. He has regular contact with the CEO, Elaine King, the Senior Management Team (SMT), the Deputy Chair, John Nicholls, and various Board members on a whole raft of issues ranging from governance to commercial input.
4. There is a lot going on, meaning that the CEO, Elaine King, is having to carefully manage resources and deadlines. The CEO, Elaine King and her Team were thanked for their hard work and commitment whilst dealing with a wide range of pressures. Board members were thanked for their input, support and understanding.
5. He was pleased to see the new process being implemented for assessing potential sources of funding, meaning that, on occasion, the CCB decides not to go ahead with some proposed work, as demonstrated in the draft budget.
6. With the Deputy Chair he will conduct an exit interview with the previous Clerk, Deirdre Hansen.

**1. The Committee NOTED the Chair's update.****23/24.41. Chief Executive's update**

The CEO, Elaine King, had presented a comprehensive report and gave a few highlights.

1. She thanked the SMT and the whole team for their input and hard work.
2. Following the December Board meeting the CCB will launch its own rebranding on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Preparations included Vicki Pearce, Communications Manager, presenting the detail to the staff team. A communications and engagement plan for the launch has been developed and a comprehensive list of over 800 key contacts to be sent details of the rebrand.
3. She continues to hold conversations with the Lead Officers of the National Landscapes Association (NLA) on a range of matters including future funding, purposes and the implementation of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act.
4. Our Defra funding settlement for future years is still uncertain.
5. The Head of Operations, Andrew Brock-Doyle has been having conversations with Defra and the NLA emphasising the impact of inflationary and other pressures and how it affects our ability to carry out our duties.
6. Discussions have been held with NLA on the Statutory Consultee status for AONBs. The NLA is exploring requesting Statutory Consultee status for AONBs. All AONBs, except the Chilterns Conservation Board, Cotswolds National Landscape and Chichester Harbour Conservancy, are being managed by Local Authorities (LAs), who are decision makers on planning applications. That means in practice that their AONBs views can be sought internally by LAs and Statutory Consultee status is not a big issue for those AONBs. Conservation Boards have been forgotten.
7. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 will be a game changer.

Close

Members had some questions on rebranding and signage, progress on engaging with potential stakeholders for the proposed Board Advisory Group and the apparent lack of transparency of the NLA. On the latter point, the NLA website provides no evidence on their decision-making procedures and processes, including the rebranding exercise. **The CEO, Elaine King, to take this up with the NLA.**

1. **The Committee NOTED the CEO's update.**

## **23/24.42 Finance Report**

### **42.1. Quarter 3 Financial Update**

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, reported on the financial results to the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2024.

1. Core income was £591k, in line with expectations.
2. It was noted that recharges to projects of core staff costs and overheads cannot be shown as income in our accounting software so shows as both income and expenditure. Staff costs are £101k less than budget.
3. The CCB core finances show a £71k deficit resulting from the exceptional costs.
4. Income from projects to the end of January is £2.1m with costs of £1.4m, £693k to be transferred to project reserves. This is not a surplus, but reimbursement of costs paid out in advance as all projects are budgeted on a break-even basis.

**Audit:** as advised by the external auditors, the meeting considered the independence of the internal auditors, Hertfordshire Shared Internal Audit Services (Herts SIAS). It was acknowledged that the CCB and its Senior Management Team (SMT) are independent from HSIAS. **The S151 Officer, Graham Hurst will write to Herts SIAS asking them to confirm they are independent from the CCB and its SMT.**

1. **The Committee NOTED the CCB Financial Position on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024.**
2. **The Committee CONFIRMED that they had considered the independence of Herts SIAS.**

### **42.2. Budget Report**

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, and the Head of Operations, Andrew Brock-Doyle, had provided a detailed report on the CCB's 2024-25 budget connecting the budget to the Business Plan. A balanced budget was presented. Once we have been informed of the value of the additional Defra capital grant expected in 2024-25, specific capital expenditure can be planned in more detail.

The CCB requires an increase in staff capacity to fully deliver its planned work. The balanced budget includes two new roles and increased hours for an existing member of staff. Other roles will only be filled when funding becomes available.

Due to the uncertainty over core income from 2025-26, detailed budgets are not yet available for future years. However, work is being done to develop budgets for 2025-28.

Members examined and questioned the figures and assumptions. Members agreed to approve the 2024-25 one-year budget for recommendation to the Board and requested further detail for its next meeting on the budgets for future years including on all the proposed new staff positions.

1. **The Committee APPROVED the 2024-25 budget for RECOMMENDATION to the Board.**



### 42.3 Report on Q3 Delivery

The Head of Operations, Andrew Brock-Doyle provided a detailed progress report on Q3 Delivery.

Limited organisational resilience work is progressing but behind the intended timetable due to lack of capacity of the Head of Operations, Andrew Brock-Doyle, caused by unexpected matters needing to be addressed urgently.

The projects are generally on track.

1. The Committee NOTED the quarter 3 update.

### 42.4 Funding Strategy

The CEO, Elaine King, presented a detailed update on the progress with delivering the Funding Strategy including the agreed process for planning and assessing potential new work streams and funding applications. She also made some key observations on the CCB's funding pipeline.

The Head of Landscape, Kate Heppell, gave a brief report on other avenues of finance being explored with various partner organisations.

Members discussed and gave feedback on the updates and provided observations on the funding pipelines.

1. The Committee NOTED and OFFERED feedback on the updates on delivering the Funding Strategy and PROVIDED key observations on the CCB's funding pipeline.

### 42.5 Business Planning

Moved to the next agenda.

### 23/24.43 Strategy and Governance

#### 43.1 Management Plan Review

The Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson presented a paper updating the Committee on the work of the Management Plan Review TFG.

AONB Management Plans must be reviewed every five years. We are coming to the end of the 2019-24 Management Plan and the normal review date would have been end of March 2024. Lord Benyon, Minister of State for Climate, Environment and Energy offered in 2022 the option of a "light touch review" in light of the ongoing reforms.

The Board previously agreed to take this "light touch review" option and extend the current Plan 2019-24 by a year. A TFG has been established and have come forward with a suggested text of the proposed "light touch review" submission to Defra, due at the end of March 2024. They also agreed Terms of Reference, set parameters for future work on the Review and a timetable for publication. All to be approved by the Board at its March meeting.

In January Defra published long awaited Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, it includes 10 targets. All Protected landscapes including the CCB are expected to embed these targets in their Management Plans. This will require the CCB to work with partners.



The Committee discussed the paper and offered some additional wording for the text to be submitted to Natural England as proxy for Defra at the end of March.

**The Deputy Chair to contact Head of Strategy and Planning directly.**

- 1. The Committee CONSIDERED the paper and OFFERED observations on the approach agreed by the TFG to be taken with the Management Plan Review.**
- 2. The Committee APPROVED the "light-touch review" statement with some minor amendments for submission to Natural England/Defra to extend the application of the current Plan to the end of March 2025.**

#### **43.2 CCB's Constitution**

The Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson presented a paper summarising the progress to date on reviewing the Board's constitutional documents. He outlined the approach and matters to be considered during the review.

The CEO has the responsibility of "writing" the constitution, which is approved by the Board. The CEO, Elaine King, has delegated reviewing the constitution to the Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson.

- 1. The Committee CONSIDERED the paper and OFFERED observations on the approach proposed to be taken and the matters to be considered.**

#### **44.3 Monitoring Officer**

The Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson presented a paper summarising the statutory role of the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer (MO/DMO), how it is fulfilled and options for the future appointments.

Our current MO is a legal officer at Buckinghamshire Council, but he is leaving the Council. Our DMO left the CCB in December 2023. Matt Thomson and the CEO, Elaine King, held a meeting with our current MO and a colleague at Buckinghamshire Council to explore future options for the two roles.

The Board approve the appointment of the MO, which is a statutory role, and the paper provided several options for fulfilling the statutory role of MO and members discussed the options.

A DMO could then support that function, as it had done until recently, and continue to be performed by an officer of the CCB. The preferred option was for Buckinghamshire Council to provide an MO and for the Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson, to take on the DMO role.

- 1. The Committee CONSIDERED the content of the paper and RECOMMENDS to the Board that they appoint Buckinghamshire Council's nomination as the Board's Monitoring Officer, subject to details being finalised with the Council, with the support of the Board's Head of Strategy and Planning as Deputy Monitoring Officer.**

#### **45.4 Complaints and Feedback Procedures**

The Head of Operations, Andrew Brock-Doyle asked members to review the updated Complaints and Feedback procedure and come back to him with comments.

#### **45.5 Governance TFG**

The Deputy Chair, John Nicholls, Chair of the TFG, informed the Committee that a previous Board member, Lynn Lloyd, has agreed to join the Governance TFG, as she has vast local government experience.

The TFG is still open to new members, interested Members to contact the Deputy Chair.



The first three tasks will be to agree Terms of Reference; review and adjust existing governance documents to ensure compliance with the recently agreed principles of delegation; and to draft Terms of Reference and suggest initial membership for the proposed Board Advisory Group. Recommendations would be made to the June Board meeting, and a timetable for the work to be presented to the March Board meeting.

The aim is to ensure the current operational arrangements agree with the Code of Governance.

**1. The Committee NOTED the update.**

**23/24.46 HR Strategy update and HR Advisory Group (HRAG).**

**46.1 HR Strategy and Implementation Plan**

The CEO, Elaine King, presented the committee with an updated HR Strategy and implementation plan for 2024/25 and sought feedback from the committee. The Implementation Plan contains 14 key deliverables.

Some elements of the 2023 Strategy are not complete due to the pressure of other work. This includes finalising the HR handbook, which needs more work following staff feedback. The HR Advisor, Jo Moss, has been commissioned to review and redesign the HR handbook.

Members had the opportunity to raise questions. An updated copy of the staff organogram was requested. Action CEO.

**1. The Committee APPROVED the new HR Strategy and Implementation Plan and RECOMMENDED them to the Board.**

**46.2 HR Advisory Group Update**

Board Member, Paul Mainds, Chair HRAG, made a few observations. He will meet with the CEO, Elaine King and the Head of Operations, Andrew Brock-Doyle before the next Board meeting. It is the intention to present in full to the Board in June.

The HRAG Chair, Paul Mainds, expressed frustration at the lack of progress on HR matters, identifying that people should be a top priority for the CCB's and dealt with as a matter of urgency. Both the CEO and Head of Operations agreed that people were a top priority for the Senior Management Team and the Head of Operations outlined a number of areas where work had been progressed, including insurance and contract management, which are key people elements, whilst also noting that the requirement to spend so much time firefighting and the lack of HR capacity was impeding progress on work such as HR policies.

The HRAG Chair acknowledged issues with capacity and identified that prioritising workload was important. He then raised a question on how the Terms of Reference for the HRAG were amended in December 2023 and queried the amount of paperwork presented in the Board papers, asserting that he felt these could be simplified. It was agreed that these matters would be dealt with in a separate meeting. It was also agreed that the HRAG will meet before the June Board meeting.

**1. The Committee NOTED the update.**

*12.30 Paul Mainds left the meeting.*

**23/24.47. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update.**

The Head of Engagement and Partnerships, Annette Weiss, had presented an updated report on EDI progress since the last meeting.



She was pleased to report that the CCB is increasing its activities in the Northern Chilterns, including a forthcoming report from the University of Bedfordshire, commissioned by the CCB, examining the barriers to using greenspace and the countryside by the diverse communities in Luton and Dunstable.

The Nature Calling project, based in Luton, is also now underway and she is working with the NLA to secure £20k match funding as our contribution to this project. Defra's Access for All funding has also enabled us to implement a successful disability and equality training session for staff led by Mik Scarlet, the Co-CEO of the PHAB charity. A repeat session will take place in March for remaining staff and Board members.

1. The Committee NOTED the update on EDI in particular the need for additional resource for Nature Calling and the opportunity for increased engagement in Luton.

**23/24.48. Urgent Business**

1. The question was raised if Lynn Lloyd, who left the Board in June, had received any acknowledgement for services to the Board? The CEO, Elaine King, confirmed that a card, signed by Board members and a gift were still in her office. She will get in touch with Lynn and present her with those.
2. It was noted that Sarah Wright had left the Ridgeway National Trail and acknowledged that she had been an exceptional officer and had worked well with the CCB.
3. The board member allowances scheme is not being made clear to new Board members. There was some discussion, and the matter will be brought to the next Board meeting.
4. The request was made for the programmes for TFGs to be brought to the next agenda.
5. It was asked if the CCB had a policy on Woodland Lotting. The matter to be brought to the next Planning or the next Executive Committee meeting.

**23/24.49. Next Board Meeting Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**23/24.50. Next ExCo meeting: Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024- at the CCB offices in Chinnor.**

**Further meetings: Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2024 at 2pm and Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at 2pm.**

The Chairman.....



Date.....

16 May 2024