



Chilterns National Landscape

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CONSERVATION BOARD FOR THE CHILTERNNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Held at the Paralympic Room, The Gateway Offices, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury,
Buckinghamshire HP19 8FF (Buckinghamshire Council Offices)

on Thursday 14th March at 10.00am

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Philip Spicer
Cllr David Bartholomew
Cllr Richard Newcombe
Cllr Sally Symington

Appointing Body

Central Bedfordshire Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Dacorum Borough Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Colin Courtney
Gemma Harper
Paul Mainds
John Nicholls
Simon Mortimer
Joseph Stewart
Geeta Ludhra

Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr Charles Hussey
Cllr John Griffin
Cllr John Harfield
Cllr Sue Rowland

Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Bedfordshire
Oxfordshire

CCB Staff

Lorna Coldwell
Graham Hurst
Elaine King
Matt Thomson
Eloise Small
Andrew Brock-Doyle

Clerk to the Board
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Chief Executive Officer
Head of Strategy and Planning.
Administration Officer
Head of Operations

Other

Simon Kearey
Tom Beeston
Professor Gurch Randhawa

Chairman Chiltern Society
Chief Officer Chiltern Society
University of Bedfordshire

No members of the public were present.

The Chairman welcomed those present in person and online. All those present introduced themselves.

23/24.36 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from *James Norman, South Oxfordshire District Council, *John Shaw, Secretary of State appointee, Cllr Adrian Watney, Hertfordshire Parish Councils, Cllr Hector Sants, Buckinghamshire Parish Councils, Cllr Paula Hiscocks, Hertfordshire County Council, Cllr Steve Jarvis, North Hertfordshire District Council, Cllr Jane MacBean, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council.

Chilterns National Landscape Staff:

*Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape.

*(Those * listened in on the meeting online)*

23/24.37 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest on any agenda item were made.

23/24.38 Notice of Urgent Business

The Chair had an item of urgent business regarding the AGM in June.

23/24.39 Minutes of the Board Meeting 12th December 2023.

The minutes of the Board meeting 12th December 2023 were **approved** as a true record and signed by the Chair after the following amendment was made:

- The year in minute 23/24.27.2 was altered from 2014 to 2024.

23/24.40 Matters Arising

No matters arising, not covered by the agenda.

The meeting was closed to allow for public questions.

23/24.41 Public Question Time.

No public questions.

The meeting was reopened.

23/24.42 Chair's Update

The Chair, Colin Courtney, reported on his activities since the last meeting on 12th December 2023, highlighting the following:

1. Boundary Review – monthly meetings **have** continued with Natural England's Management Advisory Group. The **public consultation** was anticipated in the summer but has **been delayed** by approximately **two** months due to a lack of resources in DEFRA **this** FY. The work is expected to **continue** as planned in the upcoming FY. The upcoming General Election may **also** potentially impact on the timetable
2. He has **had** various correspondence **with** DEFRA regarding Secretary of State member **appointments**. He does not **envisage** any new appointments in 2024.
3. There has **been** lots of dialogue with the CEO, Elaine King, and the Senior Management Team over a raft of matters, **which** are covered later in the meeting. He and EK **finalised** the new logo, as **authorised** by the Board at its previous meeting.



- All should have received the details. Thanks were given to Vicki Pearce, Communications Manager for all her hard work on the rebranding.
4. He joined a staff training session on Disability and Equality, and thanked Annette Weiss, Head of Engagement and Partnerships for organising.
 5. The February Executive Committee meeting focused on the 2024/2025 budget. The Risk Register will be carried forward for approval by the Board at its next meeting in June.
 6. He gave thanks to Elaine and all the team for their hard work and commitment under challenging circumstances and despite lots of pressures, along with Board Members for their input and support.
 7. Deirdre Hansen, the Clerk left after the December meeting. An exit interview was conducted in February. Lorna Coldwell joins as the new Clerk.
 8. Apologies were given due to an administrative error meaning not all Board members received the agenda papers in a timely fashion. This will be rectified for the next Board meeting.

1. The Board NOTED the update.

23/24.43 Chief Executive's Update

The CEO, Elaine King, had given a comprehensive report on activities since the 12th December Board meeting. She highlighted the following:

1. EK currently line manages the four members of the Senior Management Team, plus the Clerk, Communications Manager, and the Senior Administration Officer. All mid-term reviews have been completed and, across the whole team, annual appraisals should be completed by the end of the financial year. The Senior Management Team (SMT) meet weekly to discuss a range of matters, and in particular elements of next year's business plan.
2. New staffing to note is Sarah Hebbes – Project Support Officer joined the Mend the Gap programme on 2nd January, and Lorna Coldwell as new Clerk to the Board on the same date.
3. Delays mentioned by the Chair to the Boundary Review is in part due to the scrutiny that they were asked to do by the Chilterns National Landscapes team. Whilst this is frustrating, it is due to the amount of additional work being done.
4. Nick Graham, who was the Board's Monitoring Officer since December 2021, has left Buckinghamshire Council. Thanks were given to him for his work.

He was supported by the Board's former Clerk, Deirdre Hansen in the role of Deputy Monitoring Officer. Buckinghamshire Council has offered the services of Jenny Caprio, Head of Non-Contentious Legal Services on similar terms. The CEO intends to appoint Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, who already covers many of the DMO functions and is a good strategic fit as the new DMO. The MO is appointed by the Board, the DMO by the CEO in agreement with the MO.

5. External legal support has been explored for work such as developing and reviewing contracts and landowner agreements. A relationship has been established with a local law firm.
6. She has attended a range of meetings with partners and stakeholders including being invited this week, on International Women's Day, to speak with Board Member Geeta Ludhra at a webinar, giving their reflections on leadership in a protected landscape.



7. The rebranding, following approval of the new logo, was launched on 6th March, with a guidance toolkit supplied to over 800 contacts.
8. Thanks were given to the Senior Management Team for their support and hard work, and the whole staff team who are very busy with a huge amount of work being carried out. Thanks were given to the Chair and Vice-Chair for support, leadership, and insight on a wide range of matters.

The CEO was thanked by the Chair.

1. The Board NOTED the update.
2. The Board APPROVED the appointing of Jenny Caprio as the Monitoring Officer, proposed by John Griffin and seconded by Philip Spicer

23/24.44 Finance and Business Planning

1. Quarter 3 Finance Report:

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, had provided a summary report on core funding and project funding for the 10 months to 31st December 2023.

Core funding:

1. Core income was £591k in line with expectations.
2. Staff costs are £101k less than budget after adjusting for exceptional costs.
3. Exceptional costs of £70k as previously advised are included in staff costs and legal costs.
4. After exceptional costs there is a core deficit of £71k. If the exceptional costs were not incurred, the 10 month financials would be in line with the budget.

Project Funding:

Income received from projects year to date is £2.1m with costs of £1.4m leaving £693k to transfer to project reserves. This does not represent a surplus, but reimbursement of costs paid out in advance, as all projects are budgeted on a break-even basis.

Audit:

The external auditors in the 2022/23 report advised the independence of the internal auditors should be considered. ~~The external auditors in the 2022/23 report advised that the Board independence of the internal auditors should be considered.~~ This was discussed at the February Executive Committee meeting and no independence issues were noted.

LMC
CJL

1. The Board NOTED the financial position as of 31st January 2023
2. The Board NOTED the independence of the Internal Auditor has been considered with no issues arising

2. Quarter 3 Delivery Report

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle, presented a report on the progress against the Delivery Plan in Quarter 3. A full report was presented and discussed at the Executive Committee in February.

CJL

Work is progressing well. The **only** area that has become significantly delayed since the previous quarter is **communications**, due to the need to focus on the rebrand. Highlights as follows:

- A new "Key Documents" folder giving staff a one-stop shop for all information requirements
- A new full time **Communications Officer** was appointed in October, which will increase operational **communications** and their alignment with projects
- Chalk, Cherries and **Chairs** – legacy planning has started for the project ending in November 2024.
- Mend the Gap: **Community Hubs** are now active in Pangbourne, Goring, Whitchurch South **Stoke** and Cholsey, with small grant projects in **delivery** and larger projects **progressing** to sign off.
- Chilterns Chalk **Stream Project**: action plan for Ewelme Brook completed, and for the Misbourne **greenway**. All training courses for volunteers are completed.
- Farmer Clusters/**Farming** in Protected Landscapes: a grant application for £200k to the Rothschild **Foundation** was successful. Year three FIPL funding is being delivered on track.

Key risks/issues remain the **same** as Quarter 2. The biggest risk is capacity constraints and therefore the SMT is **scrutinising** the efficiency of work and what is being prioritised. The Board complimented the **clear** and **easy** to understand Delivery Progress table as a **great** way to keep the Board **up** to date and see what is happening in a concise way. **Reputational risk** will be **discussed** at the next Executive Committee meeting when the risk register will have been **reviewed**.

1. The Board NOTED the Quarter 3 update and PROVIDED feedback

3. 2024/2025 Core Budget

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, and the Head of Operations, Andrew Brock-Doyle, had provided a report on the 2024/25 budget connecting the budget to the Business Plan alongside a balanced budget with a **£84** surplus. The draft budget was initially presented to the Executive Committee in February, for recommendation to the Board. It was requested that work that had been undertaken on a four (4) year outlook budget (next financial year and the three years after) be presented at the next Executive Committee meeting to enable a better understanding of the roles the organisation wants to recruit and ensure financial sustainability going forward.

1. The Board APPROVED the budget for 2024/2025

4. 2024/2025 High-Level Delivery Approach and Plan

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle, presented a detailed paper on how the SMT and staff intend to structure the delivery plan, and monitor and report on the delivery of work completed. Key points to note include:

- The SMT holds regular strategy meetings.
- The new **draft** delivery model was presented to and endorsed by the Executive Committee in November 2023. Discussions include ensuring that we don't try to do too much, and identify where partners are in a better position to lead the work.
- The Head of Operations will work on **developing** a more detailed Delivery Approach and Plan **building** on the High Level Delivery Approach presented.



- Cllr Hussey commented on the role that partners play in developing and delivering the Management Plan, and pointed out the opportunities arising from a new understanding of the Management Plan following the rebranding, and the amendment to section 85 of the CRow Act 2000. New Natural England guidance on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 will also set out how public bodies will have a statutory duty to further the objectives of the AONB Management Plan. Delivering the Management Plan may need a different skill set in future.

1. The Board APPROVED the High-Level Delivery Plan

5. Funding Update

The CEO, Elaine King, presented a report updating on the funding strategy. Key points to note include:

- The process for assessing proposals for New Work and New Funding is now fully operational, which means that new work and funding streams have greater visibility and are being assessed and delivered more consistently.
- The Board decision in December 2023 to approve the principles of a Scheme of Delegation has further improved the decision-making process and enabled the CEO and SMT to make effective decisions in a more timely manner. Proposals are brought to the attention of the Executive Committee as required.
- Ensuring all staff are aware of the new process is work in progress, and the direction of travel is good. The new process has been applied for six potential funding sources, of which four have been taken forward with bids developed.
- Due diligence was carried out regarding applying for a grant from a corporate body. Part of the work included seeking advice from Defra lawyers on the circumstances under which the Conservation Board is permitted to raise funds, according to the legislation.

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

1. The Board NOTED the update

23/24.45 Strategy and Governance

1. Management Plan Review

A paper was tabled by Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, which set out the work that has been undertaken by the Management Plan Task and Finish Group. Gemma Harper, the Group's Chair, gave thanks to members of the group, whose comments have been very helpful with regards to the "light touch review."

Natural England has confirmed that the resulting statement meets the requirements of Lord Benyon's letter to protected landscapes in July 2022.

Now the statement is approved, the next stage will be mainly factual updates. No major changes are expected, but any changes will help to streamline the process for stage three, which will be a large scale review. Long term work to develop a vision is already underway, and this will incorporate any new areas resulting from the boundary review, once they are known.

- 1. The Board APPROVED the "light touch review" statement**
- 2. The Board AUTHORISED the CEO to sign off any final edits**
- 3. The Board APPROVED the MPR TFG Terms of Reference**

4. The Board APPROVED the broad approach to the refresh of the current plan during 2024/2025

2. Governance Review

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and , along with Jon Nicholls, Chair of the Governance Review Task and Finish Group had supplied a comprehensive paper which outlines the work being undertaken by the TFG towards Governance Review.

New members are always welcome to join the group. Please contact John Nicholls directly. MT will continue work on reviewing and updating the Board's Constitution, which was begun by the outgoing MO and DMO. One key task is to ensure all Constitution documents which define delegations accurately reflect the new Principles of Delegation agreed by the Board in December 2023.

Another key activity is to implement a "Board Advisory Group" to support the strategic work of the Board, as agreed in December 2022. Officers have begun work on identifying candidates for this group, with a view to have a pilot group to meet in June with the Board. This group would then assist with the Management Plan review.

- 1. The Board APPROVED the approach to the review of the Constitution**
- 2. The Board APPROVED the implementation of a Board Advisory Group**
- 3. The Board APPROVED the membership of the TFG**

23/24.46. Strategy Update and HR Advisory Group

1. HR Strategy and Implementation Plan

It was moved to set aside the proposal and the revised papers will be brought back to the June Board meeting, following a meeting of the HRAG in May. The SMT will rework the HR strategy and implementation plan, and develop a more realistic timetable that better accounts for limited capacity. The Group is always open to new members.

- 1. The Board NOTED this update and AGREED to defer until June**

2. HR Advisory Group Update

The CEO gave a verbal update.

1. The HR handbook is being refined by the HR advisor, who joined in July.
 2. Many HR policies and procedures already exist in a completed form, others are being created or amended.
 3. The new HR Strategy will be developed by the Senior Management Team, with advice being sought from the HR Advisory Group, then being brought to the Board.
- The Chair gave thanks to all involved.

- 1. The Board NOTED the update**

23/24.47 Report of Planning Committee

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, gave a verbal update in addition to the circulated paper.

1. No decisions were taken, as the meeting was not quorate. This continues to be an ongoing issue, albeit relieved with Simon Mortimer, a Secretary of State appointee, joining the Committee. Whilst attending online can be beneficial for travelling time, it is a statutory requirement for in-person attendance to ensure the Committee is quorate. The alternative is to have an "advisory group" which is an option to avoid

the statutory constraints, but it is recognised that having comments approved by a committee adds impact to any responses submitted. Notes of the meeting have not yet been circulated due to clerical delays.

2. Capacity in the planning team continues to be an issue, and recruitment for a part-time planning officer is ongoing.
3. Mike Stubbs, Planning Advisor, gave the staff team an excellent presentation regarding discussions at the examination for Luton Rising (Luton airport planned expansion). Mike did a vast amount of work in supplying evidence, which resulted in the panel of Planning Inspectors requesting a "Special Qualities Assessment" which uses a new methodology developed with the Chilterns National Landscape and Natural England. This assessment is very innovative and has potential for national ramifications on future applications.
4. Recommendations on the application from the Inspectors must be reported to the Secretary of State for Transport in May, for a decision in August. The CEO will ask Mike Stubbs to do an online presentation for Board Members regarding this work, and commented to the Board what an asset he is.
5. The impacts of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 on planning are still being assessed, and key impacts will be reported when possible.
6. 12 comments were made on planning applications since the October committee meeting. Board members were advised that the list of types of planning applications that the Planning Committee will consider is listed in the Development Chapter of the Management Plan. Due to the sheer number of applications in the AONB, it is usually not possible to look at smaller householder applications. The larger applications are focused on. There is an agreed protocol with Local Authorities as to which applications they will consult the team on.
7. There was a discussion on SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) and the way in which they can deflect pressure away from natural and heritage sites to other areas. This is currently an important issue in Dacorum, Herts, which also affects Buckinghamshire. The subject will be included on the agenda for the next Planning Committee meeting, along with biodiversity, as there is a big overlap between the two.

The Chair gave thanks to the planning team Matt Thomson and Mike Stubbs.

1. The Board NOTED the report

23/24.48 Any urgent Business

1. The Chair flagged that the AGM will be held before the Board meeting on 20th June starting at 5pm. A site visit is being arranged which will start approx. 2pm. He will not be standing for Chair again. Both the Chair and the Deputy-Chair will leave the Board in May 2025, following their nine year term. Whilst being Chair is a significant time commitment, it is very rewarding, and the Chair asked for members to consider the role.
2. Simon Kearey, the Chairman of the Chiltern Society, said that the Trails Officer at The Ridgeway National Trail has left, due to reduced funding. He will advise when the position has been filled. The Thames Path National Trail and Ridgeway Volunteer Co-ordinator have also left, and they are recruiting for replacements.



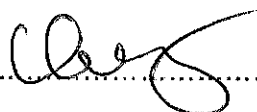
23/24.49 Meeting dates.

The next Board meeting is on Thursday 20th June 2024 at 5pm, location TBC. There will be a site visit beforehand, beginning at approx. 2pm. Further details are to come.

Future meeting dates:

Planning Committee Meetings	Executive Committee Meetings	Board Meetings
Thu 25 th April 2024 @ 10am Location TBC	Thu 16 th May 2024 @ 10am Chinnor	Thu 20 th June 2024 @ 5pm (site visit from 2pm) Location TBC
Thu 25 th July 2024 @ 5pm Location TBC	Thu 15 th August 2024 @ 2pm Chinnor	Thu 19 th September @ 2pm Location TBC
Thu 17 th October 2024 @ 2pm Location TBC	Thu 7 th November 2024 @ 2pm Chinnor	Thu 12 th December @ 10am Location TBC

The Chairman.....



Date: 20 June 2024

Following the meeting, Professor Gurch Randhawa, Professor of Diversity in Public Health & Director of the Institute for Health Research, University of Bedfordshire gave a presentation on their research report, commissioned by the Chilterns National Landscape as part of its Chalkscapes project, *Co-creating Spaces for Supporting Diverse Communities to use Greenspaces and the Countryside*. The report will be published on 20th March..

The research is the UK's largest study exploring this subject. Community researchers were employed to gather information from the diverse communities of Dunstable and Luton. A total of 906 questionnaires were completed, and identified some of the barriers people face to accessing greenspace and the countryside. The next step is to co-create solutions with these communities. Funding is being sought to do this.

The Board considered the findings of the report and discussed ways to engage with diverse communities, encourage the use of green spaces, and best address the reasons for people feeling uncomfortable.