



Chilterns National Landscape

Members of the Executive Committee of the Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are hereby summoned to a meeting of the

Executive Committee

On Monday 24th February 2025 at 10.00am at

**The Brunel Suite, Regus, Kingsmead Business Park, 1 Aston Court, High Wycombe, HP11 1JU
and by remote video conferencing.**

Voting (Executive Committee) members are encouraged to attend in person to ensure the meeting is quorate; voting is not permitted for remote attendees. Remote access will be available for non-voting members.

The online session will be available from 9.45am

AGENDA

1. Standing Items

- 1.1 Apologies for absence
- 1.2 Declaration of interest in any of the agenda items
- 1.3 Chair's announcements
- 1.4 Notice of urgent business
- 1.5 Approval of minutes of the previous meeting (07.11.24)
- 1.6 Matters arising
- 1.7 Consideration of motions submitted by members
- 1.8 Public questions

2. Items for Decision

- 2.1 Summary of Items for Decision
- 2.2 Background for Items for Decision
 - 2.2.1 2025/26 Budget
 - 2.2.2 Executive Committee functions

3. Items for Noting / Information

- 3.1 Quarter 3 Finance Report
- 3.2 Quarter 3 Delivery Report
- 3.3 Annual Planning
- 3.4 Funding Strategy update
- 3.5 Chief Executive Officer's Report

4. Any Urgent Business

5. Next Meeting: 1st May 2025

Future Meeting Dates 2025

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thursday 17 th April @10am Location Chinnor Offices Thursday 23 rd October @10am Location Chinnor Offices	Thursday 1 st May @10am Location tbc Tuesday 9 th September @10am Location tbc Thursday 13 th November @10am Location tbc	Thu 27 th March @ 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury Thursday 19 th June @10am Location tbc Thursday 25 th September @10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury Thursday 11 th December @10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

*Elaine King, CEO***Summary of Actions Required**

Agenda No	Agenda Item	Actions Required
1	Standing Items	
1.1	Apologies for absence	
1.2	Declaration of interest in any of the agenda items	
1.3	Chair's announcements	
1.4	Notice of urgent business	
1.5	Approve minutes of the previous meeting (07.11.24)	APPROVE
1.6	Matters arising	
1.7	Consideration of motions submitted by members	
1.8	Public questions	
2	Items for Decision	
2.1	Summary of Items for Decision	
2.2	Background for Items for Decision	
2.2.1	2025/26 Budget	APPROVE
2.2.2	Executive Committee functions	APPROVE
3	Items for Noting / Information	
3.1	Quarter 3 Finance Report	NOTE

3.2	Quarter 3 Delivery Report	NOTE
3.4	Annual Planning	NOTE
3.5	Funding Strategy Update	NOTE
3.6	Chief Executive Officer's Update	NOTE
4	Any Urgent Business	
5	Next Meeting: 1 st May 2025	



Chilterns National Landscape

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Chilterns Conservation
Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
HELD ON Thursday 7th November 2024 in The Chilterns Room, the Village Centre, Chinnor
OX39 4DH commencing at 2.00 PM.**

Present:

John Nicholls	Board Member – Chair of the Board
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Paul Mainds	Board Member
Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member
Cllr Louise Price	Board Member
Cllr Richard Newcombe	Board Member
Geeta Ludhra	Board Member
Cllr Sue Rowland	Board Member – online
Cllr Phillip Spicer	Board Member – online (part)

In attendance:

Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer
Matt Thomson	Head of Strategy & Planning and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager
Annette Weiss	Head of Engagement and Partnerships – online

The Chair welcomed all present after introductions.

24/25.27. Election of Chair

Cllr Hector Sants was proposed and seconded as Executive Committee Chair for 2024/25.

Cllr Louise Price was proposed and seconded as Executive Committee Vice-Chair for 2024/25.

Cllr Sants took over as Chair of the meeting.

24/25.28 Apologies for absence

Cllr John Griffin – Parish Councils

Professor Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape – Chilterns National Landscape

Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations – Chilterns National Landscape

24/25.29. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

24/25.30. Chair's Announcements

None at this meeting. Cllr Sants welcomed any feedback from members at any time regarding any matter.

CCB Executive Committee Meeting 2024

Thursday 7th November 2024**24/25.31. Notice of Urgent Business**

None.

24/25.32. Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 15/08/24

The minutes of the meeting 15/08/24 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

24/25.33. Matters Arising

All items covered on the agenda.

24/25.34. Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members

None at this meeting.

24/25.35. Public Questions

No members of the public were present.

24/25.36. Items for Decision

None at this meeting.

24/25.37. Items for Noting/Information**37.1. Quarter 2 Finance Report**

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, reported on the accounts to 30th September 2024.

1. Total income was £1,773,179 and total expenditure was £1,411,195. This excess is not “profit” but results in the timing differences between receiving income in advance of expenditure.
2. The CCB core finances show it is operating with its budget.
3. Core income, adjusted for timing differences, was £484k which compares to budget of £443k resulting in a surplus of £41k. The main contributors to this surplus are:
 - unbudgeted project income of £22k;
 - Defra Access grant income of £13k which is used to offset expenditure incurred;
 - interest received of £5k, which is due to higher than budgeted interest rates.
4. Income from projects for the four months to September was £1,048k and project expenditure was £980k resulting in a £68k surplus arising from the timing effect of receiving income in advance of expenditure. In particular, the Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project received a total of £658k, largely funded by Thames Water.

The Finance Officer commented that the Finance Advisory Group met on 17th September and discussed banking and investment arrangements, CCSP overhead recharges and reforecasts and HR support. The next meeting is scheduled for November. More members are needed for the group, and all are invited to join. The newly appointed Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster will be looking at the budget for next financial year and a re-forecast to the end of this financial year. The recent announcement regarding increases in employer NI payments has led to some reports suggesting that the increase did not apply to public bodies. This is incorrect, all public bodies have to comply with the NI legislation so are affected by the increase, but the effect has been mitigated by the large increases in budgets given to the public sector. It is unknown whether DEFRA will be increasing National Landscapes funding to help mitigate the increase in costs.

It was confirmed that the pension invoice received from Buckinghamshire Council discussed at the previous Executive Committee meeting has been paid, and the situation would arise again if any other pensions were to be taken earlier than retirement age.

CCB Executive Committee Meeting 2024

Thursday 7th November 2024

A question was asked regarding Local Authority contributions, some of which are outstanding although all were received last financial year. It was noted that Buckinghamshire Council always pay swiftly. It was agreed to write to all Local Authorities detailing what work the Chilterns National Landscape team achieve with the help of the contributions, and what responsibilities would fall to the Local Authority if the statutory requirements were not fulfilled by the team with thanks given where appropriate.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the Financial Position at year end on 30th September 2024.**
- 2. It was AGREED for the CEO to write to Local Authorities regarding contributions**

37.2. Quarter 2 Delivery Report

The Chief Executive Officer, Elaine King, had circulated a paper to update the Executive Committee on the progress of the Chilterns National Landscape team between July and September against the financial year 2024/25 Delivery Plan. The amount of work being undertaken is impressive, and whilst some items have slipped on the timeline the recent recruitment of the Senior Finance Manager and Lucy Dowson, the Operational Effectiveness Support Officer means that this will improve, and Q3 is expected to be more aligned with the planned timeframe.

Natural England have said this week they expect public consultation for the Boundary Review to take place in March/April 2025. It is likely that capacity issues are causing the delays, the CEO will speak with Natural England as staff and Board Member hours are being put into the project.

Full explanations by staff were given for any items that are “red” in the delivery report, and the Senior Management Team are continually assessing prioritisation and balance of workloads for all staff.

The staff survey results are in the process of being analysed and a report will be given to the Board in due course.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the Q2 Delivery report and OFFERED FEEDBACK**

37.3. Funding Strategy Update

The Executive Committee was provided with a paper detailing progress on delivering the Funding Strategy. One of the key issues facing all protected landscapes is uncertainty over future government funding. There are concerns that funding in future years will not increase in line with inflation or reflect the increasing requirements being placed on protected landscapes by the government. It is unlikely that the settlement for 2025/26 will be known until March or April 2025, which means some assumptions will need to be made for budget forecasting. Diversifying sources of funding is important, whilst ensuring that any “compensation money” received adheres to ethical codes. Members of the team continue to explore the opportunities offered by green finance, which includes discussions with the National Landscape Association.

- 1. The Committee NOTED and OFFERED FEEDBACK on the Funding Strategy update**

37.4. Chief Executive Officer's Update

A comprehensive paper was circulated by the CEO, with highlights including:

- 3 new members of staff have been recruited
- Advertising for a Planning Officer is ongoing
- The Boundary Review Team continue to support Natural England as it explores an extension to the Chilterns AONB boundary
- The CEO continues to meet with external stakeholders to engage with external stakeholder parties
- The Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Project is shortlisted for a Buckinghamshire Culture award, and has received much positive feedback

The Risk Register will be discussed at the December Board meeting, the CEO welcomes any comments for any adjustments to be made as necessary.

The Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson gave an update on the “Luton Rising” application at Luton Airport. Further urgent representations were submitted to the Secretary of State that make it clear that that Chilterns National Landscape do not believe that the airport is able to meet the Section 85 obligation, and that there are no ways to mitigate the harm to the AONB the expansion will cause. Matt Thomson and John Nicholls, Chair of the Board both gave apologies to Cllr Sue Rowland, Chair of the Planning Committee for not sending the final comments to her for review before submitting to the Secretary of State. A copy will be supplied to her.

1. The Committee NOTED the CEOs update and PROVIDED FEEDBACK

37.5. HR Strategy Update; Strategy, Policies and HR Advisory Group (HRAG)

An update was provided to the Executive Committee on progress with delivering the HR Strategy Implementation Plan for 2024/25. A comprehensive update was provided to the Board at the meeting on 19th September, where six policies were approved. Since then then development and approval of HR policies has progressed in line with the agreed timetable. 4 more are with the HRAG for review since 1st November and brought to the Board for approval in December. A further 6 policies will be submitted to the HRAG on 14th November for recommendation for approval at the December Board meeting. A staff engagement survey has been circulated to the staff team, the anonymous results have been collated by the HR Advisor and will be reviewed by the Senior Management Team, shared with the staff team with a view to develop an action plan to address the feedback. This will be shared with the HRAG in due course.

1. The Committee NOTED the HR Strategy update and OFFERED FEEDBACK

24/25.38. Any Urgent Business

None, all items covered in the agenda.

24/25.39. Next Executive Committee meeting

It will be discussed at the December Board meeting the number of meetings annually going forward. It is likely that Board meetings decrease to 3 full meetings, with a 4th meeting more for strategy and site visits. A significant amount of staff time is taken up with preparing papers for meetings. A discussion ensued around Executive Committee meetings, and how having 4 aligns with financial reporting on a quarterly basis. It was suggested it would be helpful to plan a timetable for an annual work programme of items that need to be discussed at each quarterly meeting. The Executive Committee meeting dates for 2025 will be confirmed at the December Board meeting, the Senior Management Team will determine potential dates.

Further meeting Dates:

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
		Thu 12 th December @ 10am The Gateway, Buckinghamshire Council Offices, Aylesbury (TBC)

The meeting was closed at 15.38.

The Chair.....

Date.....

Item 2.1	Summary of Items for Decision
Author	Elaine King, CEO
Purpose of Report	To summarise the two agenda items requiring a decision by the Executive Committee.

Summary

The three agenda items requiring approval are as follows:

1.5 Approval of minutes of the previous meeting (07.11.24)

2.2.1 2025/26 Budget

This item requires approval regarding a proposed Core Budget for 2025/26.

Specific recommendations are as follows:

- 1. That the Executive Committee APPROVES the budget for recommendation to the Board.**

2.2.2. Executive Committee functions

This item requires approval to take recommendations to the Board that clarify the respective roles of the Executive Committee (ExCo) and the Board in considering and making decisions.

Specific recommendations are as follows:

- 1. That ExCo takes decisions prescribed to it in the Constitution, without routinely referring them to the Board for further discussion. In particular, ExCo should continue its detailed consideration of quarterly finance and project delivery reports but report on them to this Board on an exception basis. Routine referral of the complete reports to the Board would cease.**
- 2. That ExCo identifies any further areas to which this principle could be applied and proposes them at a future Board meeting.**
- 3. That the CCB's Officers' recommendations to ExCo, and the Committee's decisions on them, should only recommend referral on to the Board where this is either a constitutional requirement or where issues are raised which ExCo believes need Board consideration.**
- 4. That future Board agendas focus more clearly on leadership, scrutiny, policy and strategy, and briefing on 'on the ground' delivery, including reporting on the latter at local authority level.**

Item 2.2.1**Budget Report**

Author: Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose: To set out a proposed 2025-26 Core Budget envelope for recommendation to the Board.

1. 2025-26 Budget Envelope – Overview

Details are included in Appendix 1.

£'000s	2023/24	2024/25	£628k Defra	£513k Defra	Reduced Defra (90% of £513k)
Income	798	1,130	920	805	754
Costs	(821)	(1,067)	(891)	(891)	(891)
Surplus/(deficit) in year	(23)	63	29	(85)	(137)
24/25 surplus			63	63	63
Total 24/25 & 25/26			92	(22)	(74)

- A first draft budget envelope for 2025/26 has been prepared following consultation with the CEO, Head of Operations and CCB Senior Leadership Team (SLT). This has been completed at a high level with reference to staffing/resources and an overall/historic review for our other cost categories.
- We still have no confirmation of our one-year Defra funding settlement for 2025/26 so have modelled budgets on three scenarios – £628k Defra funding (as for 24/25 comprising a Core grant of £513k and a Revenue uplift of £114k), £513k Defra funding (historic flat settlement) and £513k reduced by 10%, in line with media reports towards the end of last year
- As the table above shows, only the enhanced Defra funding in line with our 24/25 settlement allows us to cover our costs with a small surplus of **£29k**. Reduced Defra funding shows deficits of **£85k or £137k**.
- The forecast surplus for 24/25 is £63k and we are therefore proposing that the Board approves a net deficit of **£22k** as our budget envelope.
- A cost analysis has shown that **£260k** of the CCB's costs are extra costs incurred as an independent Conservation Board eg rent, utilities, HR, finance, governance, Health & Safety and administration costs. This puts us at a significant disadvantage compared to local authority-hosted National Landscape teams in the face of potential Defra funding restrictions.

2. Income

- We have assumed £129k local authority contributions for 25/26. This is in line with current contributions and incorporates increases for those authorities who are accommodating uplifts in line with our Defra grant and thus maintaining the required 80:20 ratio of contributions between Defra and local authorities. Note that if we received all we are due from local authorities, we could receive a further £30k of income in 2025/26 which would make a significant contribution to our budget shortfalls.
- Project recharge income is £120k - this reflects ad hoc recharges of Core staff to projects and other core recharges, for example overheads.
- Interest income £20k – this is conservative but reflects declining interest rates and reducing project cash balances held.

3. Expenditure

- The CCB's largest cost is its staff. A 3% inflationary pay rise for all staff has been included in this budget. This adds a cost of approximately £21k.
- Staff costs outlined represent Core (non-project) staff only and are net of any costs directly recharged to projects. Where appropriate the project recharges income includes staff recharges.
- The budget includes the increased Employer's National Insurance contribution, effective 1 April 2025. This adds approximately £15k to Core staff costs.
- We have several FTE reductions in our budget to reflect our budget challenge.
- The only new roles included in our budget for 25/26 are:
 - Part time Planning Officer – we have been unsuccessful in recruiting to this role in 24/25 but there is a continuing requirement of £32k.
 - North Chilterns Engagement and Partnership Officer – this role was filled in November 2024 and is budgeted to continue for a 12month contract.
- Other potential staff and consultancy support costs have been identified in order to effectively deliver our priorities. These total c. £140k. These have not been included in the budget, but it needs to be recognised that an inability to resource in these areas will put at risk delivery of some of our identified priorities.
- We have assumed that the design costs for the revised Management Plan and the Nature Recovery Plan will be incurred before 31 March 2025. The costs are included in our forecasted out-turn for 24/25. If there is a slippage, we will have a higher deficit in 25/26 and improved surplus in 24/25.
- We have budgeted to continue with consulting costs for Health & Safety, Planning and HR.
- We have made the decision not to produce Outstanding Chilterns magazine in 2025/26 and our budget income and costs have been reduced accordingly. We have retained some costs to potentially produce an enhanced annual report - circa £5k.
- Our insurance costs are increased significantly year on year following a large increase at renewal in September 2024. This is a combination of increased costs of management liability insurance and extra premium on our commercial insurance to ensure our water-focussed projects are adequately covered.
- All other costs have been reviewed on a line-by-line basis by the Senior Finance Manager and Head of Operations.

4. Financial Control

- For 25/26 our Core budget will be broken down into our key Core areas:
 - ✓ Corporate Services
 - ✓ Landscapes
 - ✓ Planning
 - ✓ People & Society
 - ✓ Marketing & Communications
- All budget holders will have a clear view of their budgets and be expected to track them on an ongoing basis.
- The same approach is being taken for all our Project budgets. Each budget will be loaded into our accounting system (Xero) and budget variance reports run on a monthly or quarterly basis to monitor cost control.
- Work will continue ahead of the new financial year to expand on the detail of our budget. We will continue to reforecast our 24/25 year end position and provide an update on this and any changes to our budget for 25/26 at the Board meeting on 27th March.

5. Budgets 2026- 2029

- Once the one-year Defra funding settlement is known for 25/26, we expect to also be advised on a three-year settlement from Defra for 26/27 onwards. Until there is clarity on this, it is not appropriate to commence any cost restructure.
- Once we are advised on the three-year settlement, we will develop a new three-year business plan for 26/27- 28/29 including cost restructuring as appropriate.
- In addition to the Core income uncertainties faced by the CCB beyond 25/26, there are large uncertainties over the Smarter Water Catchment project, given Thames Water's financial position.

Recommendation

- 1. To APPROVE the budget envelope for recommendation to the Board.**

DRAFT BUDGET FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026 **Chilterns Conservation Board** **Profit and Loss**

	Full Year Forecast 24/25 (9+3)	Full Year 23/24 Actuals	2025/26 Budget		
			£628k Defra	£513k Defra	Restricted Defra (90% of £513k)
Income					
Advertising Income	7,792	8,166	-	-	-
DEFRA CORE	628,144	513,896	628,144	513,896	462,506
DEFRA Capital Grant	86,135	-	-	-	-
Donations Received	60	-	-	-	-
Interest Income	26,166	18,792	20,000	20,000	20,000
Local Authority Contribution	126,054	124,448	129,666	129,666	129,666
Project Income	32,350	19,760	21,700	21,700	21,700
Fee Income from Project recharges	223,318	112,979	119,937	119,937	119,937
Sale of merchandise	255	235	200	200	200
Total Income	1,130,274	798,276	919,647	805,399	754,009
Costs					
Advertising & Marketing costs	18,699	496	1,000	1,000	1,000
Bank Fees	114	150	120	120	120
Board Meetings	1,461	828	1,500	1,500	1,500
Cleaning	3,113	3,305	3,200	3,200	3,200
Computer and IT Equipment	0	3,850	-	-	-
Consulting	76,935	42,425	54,000	54,000	54,000
Defra Capital Spend	86,135	-	-	-	-
Employers National Insurance	56,205	41,139	64,962	64,962	64,962
Event costs	3,452	866	1,200	1,200	1,200
Finance costs	5,870	5,880	6,000	6,000	6,000
General Expenses	4,001	7,074	4,500	4,500	4,500
Insurance	15,651	15,944	22,000	22,000	22,000
IT Software and Consumables	8,437	7,594	9,500	9,500	9,500
IT support and maintenance	8,026	7,456	8,000	8,000	8,000
Legal Expenses	15,755	20,000	7,000	7,000	7,000
Light, Power, Heating	5,459	7,739	6,000	6,000	6,000
Magazine costs	13,638	16,506	5,000	5,000	5,000
Medical Insurance	3,835	5,146	4,000	4,000	4,000
Members Allowances	11,038	6,356	8,000	8,000	8,000
Nature Recovery	13,200	5,000	-	-	-
Office Equipment	0	312	500	500	500
Pensions Costs	111,573	77,893	106,999	106,999	106,999
Postage, Freight & Courier	987	475	400	400	400
Printing & Stationery	2,195	1,344	1,500	1,500	1,500
Rates and Water rates	8,165	6,127	8,400	8,400	8,400
Recruitment	3,245	2,909	1,500	1,500	1,500
Rent	18,500	20,500	22,000	22,000	22,000
Repairs & Maintenance	4,402	3,052	3,000	3,000	3,000
Research & Survey Expenditure	0	5,000	-	-	-
Salaries	530,438	458,943	511,959	511,959	511,959
Staff expenses	993	640	1,000	1,000	1,000
Staff Training	12,946	5,907	12,000	12,000	12,000
Subscriptions	5,729	5,898	6,500	6,500	6,500
Telephone & Internet	3,425	3,182	3,500	3,500	3,500
Travel Expenses	3,405	2,479	3,500	3,500	3,500
Website running costs	616	2,163	2,000	2,000	2,000
Project Donations	10,000	27,000	-	-	-
Total Administrative Costs	1,067,643	821,576	890,740	890,740	890,740
Operating Profit	62,631	(23,300)	28,907	(85,341)	(136,731)

Analysis of Costs:			
Other expenditure	359,427	162,693	206,820
Total Staff Costs (Salaries, NI's and Pensions)	698,216	577,975	683,920
Payroll Recharges to Projects	(105,303)	-	(32,433)
Net Staff costs	592,913	577,975	651,487

Item 2.2.2**Referrals from Executive Committee to the Board****Author**

John Nicholls, Chair

Purpose of Report

To review and clarify the matters referred to the Board by the Executive Committee, with a view to streamlining Board agendas.

Summary

At present, it is our custom to refer a lot of material discussed by the Executive Committee (ExCo) verbatim to the next Board meeting. This paper seeks the ExCo's views on whether this is necessary and desirable.

Discussion

The CCB's Constitution defines ExCo's functions as set out below. A review of these will be encompassed in current work on the Scheme of Delegation.

- drafting the annual review and capital budget to recommend to the Board for approval
- preparing the annual budget and accounts and assuring proper financial management, including audit
- monitoring and reviewing implementation of strategy, in the Management Plan, Business Plan and Budget
- overseeing HR policies and practice
- any other organisational or administrative matters referred to it by the Board.

The Constitution therefore requires the Board to set policy, budgets and the scope of the CCB's project activity, which ExCo should then monitor through quarterly finance and delivery updates, referring any significant issues back to the Board.

Current practice takes us well beyond these Constitutional requirements. In particular, ExCo discusses in detail quarterly reports on finance and project delivery, but these are then referred in full to the next Board and discussed again. This is our established practice rather than being a requirement, and this paper asks whether this should continue. There are advantages and disadvantages in doing so.

Advantages

- all members are fully briefed on financial and project issues, in particular assuring local authority representatives that their Council's financial contribution is being properly managed
- all members can question any aspects of these reports, so the process is open, transparent and engages all Board members

Disadvantages

- discussion of these topics at Board meetings will duplicate, or may contradict, detailed discussion at ExCo
- Board meetings are over-focused on detail, at the expense of its broader strategic remit. Much of the Board agenda is taken up with procedural matters like these.

- it lengthens an already over-full agenda. The September agenda ran to 152 pages, of which 16 comprised finance and project delivery reports which had already been considered by ExCo. This is not necessarily the best use of members' time.
- It creates additional work for an already over-stretched staff team.

What we do about this is a matter for the Board, and this paper aims to assist a discussion.

One solution would be for ExCo to consider finance and project reports in detail, as it does at present, and then report to this Board on an exception basis: either to confirm that all is going to plan, or a brief report identifying problems and recommend solutions.

It might also be worth exploring this approach in other areas, such as our Risk Register, which occasionally takes up a lot of agenda space. If the Board wishes, ExCo could explore such further potential topic areas and report back.

The agenda space created by these changes could be used to brief members more fully on CCB's remarkable project work, and I have asked our team to start recording the project funding we attract and the outputs we achieve by local authority area, so members can see the benefits to their areas and advocate accordingly.

The overall aim is to focus Board meetings more on its role of leadership, scrutiny, policy and strategy, and on what is being achieved on the ground, and less on procedural detail.

It is **RECOMMENDED** that the CCB amends its customary practice as follows:

- 1. That ExCo takes decisions prescribed to it in the Constitution, without routinely referring them to the Board for further discussion. In particular, ExCo should continue its detailed consideration of quarterly finance and project delivery reports but report on them to this Board on an exception basis. Routine referral of the complete reports to the Board would cease.**
- 2. That ExCo identifies any further areas to which this principle could be applied and proposes them at a future Board meeting.**
- 3. That the CCB's Officers' recommendations to ExCo, and the Committee's decisions on them, should only recommend referral on to the Board where this is either a constitutional requirement or where issues are raised which ExCo believes need Board consideration.**
- 4. That future Board agendas focus more clearly on leadership, scrutiny, policy and strategy, and briefing on 'on the ground' delivery, including reporting on the latter at local authority level.**

Item 3.1**Finance Report****Author:**

Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose:

To provide the Executive Committee with a Finance Report for Quarter 3 2024.

1. Management Accounts to 31 December 2024**1.1 Core Financial Results for Quarter 3 – 31 December 2024**

Appendix 1 shows the full detailed Core Performance versus budget for the 9 months to 31 December 2024 along with our full year forecast and budget.

Adjustments have been made to income where appropriate to match revenue and costs eg our Defra Core grant received at the beginning of the year has been deferred to match our monthly core costs, largely salaries.

The CCB shows a Core profit of **£62k** for the 9-month period versus a budgeted surplus of **£30k**. We have completed work to forecast our out-turn for the full year and anticipate this surplus to be maintained at **£63k**, with a full year budget out-turn of **£10k**. This provides a healthy boost to reserves as we move into a challenging financial year in 25/26.

Income (excluding Defra Capital income which nets off costs) is **ahead of budget by £72k**; this surplus is driven by additional interest income (£10k), unbudgeted project income (£16.5k) and internal fee income (£40k). The internal fee income represents staffing and overhead cross charges from Core to projects. Work has been done to ensure that we maximise these opportunities to properly reflect true project costs and ensure that all historic charges have been processed.

Costs are **£39k over budget** (excluding the Defra Capital Spend). The overspend relates largely to staff costs +£35k but this is more than offset by internal fee income from projects relating to staff costs (£50k) which is included within income. Note these recharges were offset against the salaries line in the budget. After project recharges we have net savings on staff costs due to delays in our recruitment plans and roles not recruited to (Planning Officer) despite the extra costs of £13k regards the Pension Strain payment for an ex-employee.

Our full year forecast includes the costs of the Management plan (**£7.5k**), Nature Recovery Plan (**£13k**), elements of the Operational Effectiveness work (**£18k** plus IT work **£7k**) and developing a Communications Strategy (**£10.5k**) all of which we can absorb due to the revenue uplift to our Core Defra funding in 24/25.

1.2 Defra Capital Funds

The CCB received additional capital funds from Defra of **£114k** for 24/25. We have spent these monies on appropriate Core and Project activities. As at 31 December, **£19k** of spend had been made. During Quarter 4 we have spent or plan to spend the balance of these monies on further items such as a large drone (**£26k**), water monitor equipment (**£11k**), IT upgrades (**£14k**) and bank repairs on the River Chess (**£5k**). The large drone will be managed by our Heritage and Archaeology Manager, Dr Wendy Morrison, and a business plan is in place to cover the annual running costs of the drone which are approximately £4k. There is significant demand for drone footage and,

alongside the LIDAR skills we can offer, we are very well placed to capitalise on this revenue generating opportunity.

1.3 Projects

Appendix 2 shows the overall CCB position as at 31 December. Project income is **£2.68m**, costs of **£1.87m** and “profit” on projects of **£808k** overall. This represents income received in advance of expenditure, particularly for projects including the Chess Smarter Water Catchment, FIPL and Access for All funding.

We have now confirmation of funding for the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment project for 25/26 from Thames Water. This gives a degree of certainty for the next financial year as we await further developments on the future of Thames Water and the potential impact on our work. We have an underspend on 24/25 funding which Thames Water has allowed us to retain and the additional £149k of funding will be paid in two tranches - one by 31 March 2025 and one in April 2025. We are currently waiting on Purchase orders from Thames to allow invoicing of the first tranche.

2. Financial Approvals – interim amendments to Financial Regulations (For information, Board approval required)

The CCB's Financial Regulations currently form part of the Constitution which is being reviewed. This is a large piece of work and may result in the Financial Regulations being separated from the Constitution. This work will be completed in 2025 and was subject to a Board paper in December 2024.

In the interim, changes are needed to approval levels to better reflect inflationary increases in costs. The Senior Finance Manager also needs to be added as an approver to coincide with the Finance Officer reducing their hours. This will aid operational efficiency whilst still ensuring good financial control.

It was agreed at the Finance Advisory Group that interim changes need to be approved by the Board with an information note to the Executive Committee. We will therefore be seeking approval of the changes outlined below at the Board meeting on 27th March.

Note that all the approvals below are for expenditure within budget.

Purchase orders

- Three Quotes to be required for orders over £5k (currently £2k). This is consistent with the Cotswolds Conservation Board.
- Senior Officers (the Senior Leadership Team) can approve orders up to £15k (Our current policy states that for orders £2k-£15k, approval from the budget holder plus the line manager is required). This is therefore a simplification of the current approvals.
- Sign off for orders from £15k-£50k – add Senior Finance Manager alongside Chief Executive Officer and Finance Officer.
- We would also like to allow a budget holder to requisition and approve Purchase Orders, provided the PO is £2k or lower. This a practical adjustment - budget holders are held fully accountable for their budgets but often may be the ones to also raise the Purchase Orders.
- All orders over £50k would continue to require Chair/Deputy Chair approval alongside the Chief Executive Officer.

Payments

- Senior Officers can approve payments up to £5k for their budget areas (current policy states budget holder and line manager approval is required for payments of £2k-£5k). This is again a simplification of current approvals.
- Single signatures of Chief Executive Officer and Finance Officer up to £10k. Add Senior Finance Manager to this level.
- Co-signature of Chief Executive Officer, Finance Officer or Senior Finance Manager for payments to £25k (currently over £10k requires co-signature with a board member).
- Above £25k, the co-signature must include either Chair or Deputy Chair of the board. Currently it is required for payments over £10k.

3. Local Authority Contributions

LA	Split	24/25	Proposed 24/25	Proposed 25/26	Paid 24/25
Buckinghamshire	35%	55,455	58,228	61,139	6 Dec 2024
Central Bedfordshire	18%	10,000	25,496	26,771	30 Dec 2024
Hertfordshire	11%	16,499	15,713	16,499	25/26 raised in advance
Oxfordshire	12%	17,311	17,311	18,177	6 June 2024
South Oxford DC	7%	10,607	10,607	11,137	7 June 2024
Dacorum	6%	8,499	8,499	8,924	Invoice raised 14 Feb 25
North Herts	3%	5,222	5,222	5,483	5 Feb 2025
Luton	6%	1,016	8,499	8,499	24 May 2024
Three Rivers	2%	2,833	2,833	2,975	Invoice raised 10 Feb 2025
Total	100%	127,442	152,408	159,604	
Actual expected		126,656	126,656	129,666	

As noted above, we continue to have challenges with two of our local authorities (Luton and Central Bedfordshire) not contributing the full amount as required by the government, whereby the Defra Core grant represents 80% of the CCB's income and local authorities are required to contribute 20%. Two others (Dacorum and Three Rivers) have not yet contributed as required for the 24/25 financial year.

Central Beds and Luton are falling severely short of the required contributions and, for others, such as Buckinghamshire we have not received increases to contributions, in part because Defra needs to advise us of the following year's grant settlement as early as possible and before Council budgets are agreed. Note that the expected increases over the next few years were communicated to all local authorities in 22/23.

As indicated above, if the CCB received the level of local authority funding that it should, this would amount to an additional income of £30k per annum in 25/26.

4. Banking and Treasury

The CCB now has an account manager contact at HSBC who has been extremely helpful in getting us through the customer review process and mandate alterations.

The Senior Finance Manager is now a signatory for HSBC and Nationwide and we have been able to move £2m of funds into a Money Market account at HSBC so benefitting from better interest rates. With additional work on cashflow projections we plan to benefit further from managing funds to capitalise on interest earning opportunities. It is estimated we will earn an additional £14k over a 4-month period on the changes we have already made.

5. Chinnor Office Lease

The lease on The Lodge is due for renewal in September 2025. We currently pay **£18,500 per annum** for rental including the car parking. We are awaiting renewal terms from our landlord and are tentatively exploring alternative options.

6. Finance Advisory Group

The Finance Advisory Group met on 4th February and discussed:

- CCB Banking and investment arrangements
- Interim changes to approval limits
- Management accounts to 31 December 2024 and full year forecast
- Budget 2025/26
- Chinnor Office Lease

Recommendations

1. To NOTE the CCB financial reports as at 31 December and project full year out-turn
2. To NOTE the proposed changes to approvals and advise on any suggested amendments to this ahead of a proposal to the board
3. To NOTE other finance matters highlighted.

CORE Budget Variance Report

Chilterns Conservation Board

Management Accounts for the 9 months ended 31 December 2024

Core is Corporate Services, Countryside Management, Development and Funding, People and Society, Planning.

Account	Year to date Actuals	Year to date Budget	Variance	Variance %	Full Year Forecast 9+3	Full Year Budget	Full Year budget Variance
Trading Income							
Access Grant	0	0	0	0.00%	-	-	-
Advertising Income	7,792	7,020	772	10.99%	7,792	7,020	772
Defra Capital Grant	19,819	0	19,819	0.00%	86,135	-	86,135
Defra Core Grant	471,109	471,105	4	0.00%	628,144	628,144	(0)
Donations Received	60	0	60	0.00%	60	-	60
Interest Income	19,626	9,306	10,320	110.90%	26,166	12,408	13,758
Internal Fee Income	128,684	88,074	40,610	46.11%	223,318	117,428	105,890
Local Authority Contribution	94,389	90,621	3,768	4.16%	126,054	120,824	5,230
Project Income	16,500	0	16,500	0.00%	32,350	-	32,350
Sale of merchandise	255	198	57	28.83%	255	269	(14)
Total Trading Income	758,233	666,324	91,909	13.79%	1,130,273	886,093	244,180
Gross Profit	758,233	666,324	91,909	13.79%	1,130,273	886,093	244,180
Operating Expenses							
Advertising & Marketing	4,645	225	(4,420)	1964.65%	18,699	302	(18,397)
Bank Fees	114	153	39	-25.38%	114	206	92
Board Meetings	711	900	189	-20.99%	1,461	1,200	(261)
Cleaning	2,377	1,791	(586)	32.73%	3,113	2,390	(723)
Consulting	44,331	38,727	(5,604)	14.47%	76,935	51,640	(25,295)
Defra Capital Spend	19,819	0	(19,819)	0.00%	86,135	-	(86,135)
Employers National Insurance	40,923	30,341	(10,582)	34.88%	56,205	41,978	(14,227)
Event costs	1,952	2,736	784	-28.65%	3,452	3,650	198
Finance costs	5,870	4,248	(1,622)	38.18%	5,870	5,665	(205)
General Expenses	2,247	3,339	1,092	-32.70%	4,001	4,451	450
Insurance	10,362	8,100	(2,262)	27.92%	15,651	10,794	(4,857)
IT Software and Consumables	6,316	8,541	2,225	-26.05%	8,437	11,386	2,949
IT support and maintenance	6,025	3,798	(2,227)	58.63%	8,026	5,064	(2,962)
Legal Expenses	7,755	7,875	120	-1.52%	15,755	10,500	(5,255)
Light, Power, Heating	3,209	5,904	2,695	-45.64%	5,459	7,866	2,407
Magazine costs	13,638	12,564	(1,074)	8.55%	13,638	16,750	3,112
Medical Insurance	2,635	1,750	(885)	50.57%	3,835	2,509	(1,326)
Members Allowances	7,738	9,477	1,739	-18.35%	11,038	12,638	1,600
Nature recovery					13,200	2,000	(11,200)
Office Equipment	0	162	162	-100.00%	-	220	220
Pensions Costs	81,762	57,440	(24,322)	42.34%	111,573	80,506	(31,067)
Postage, Freight & Courier	693	342	(351)	102.64%	987	459	(528)
Printing & Stationery	1,295	1,161	(134)	11.55%	2,195	1,545	(650)
Rates and Water rates	6,134	6,147	13	-0.21%	8,165	8,200	35
Recruitment	3,245	2,628	(617)	23.49%	3,245	3,500	255
Rent	13,875	13,875	0	0.00%	18,500	18,500	0
Repairs & Maintenance	3,352	4,077	725	-17.78%	4,402	5,437	1,035
Salaries	385,594	384,566	(1,028)	0.27%	530,438	533,617	3,179
Staff expenses	93	738	645	-87.43%	993	979	(14)
Staff Training	9,446	10,515	1,070	-10.17%	12,946	13,019	74
Subscriptions	3,866	5,265	1,399	-26.57%	5,729	7,015	1,286
Telephone & Internet	2,598	3,114	516	-16.57%	3,425	4,156	731
Travel Expenses	2,505	2,880	375	-13.04%	3,405	3,834	429
Website running costs	616	3,087	2,471	-80.06%	616	4,116	3,500
Project Donations					10,000	-	(10,000)
Total Operating Expenses	695,741	636,466	(59,275)	9.31%	1,067,643	876,092	(191,551)
Net Profit	62,492	29,858	32,634	109.30%	62,630	10,001	52,629

OVERALL- PROFIT AND LOSS - CORE AND PROJECTS
Chilterns Conservation Board
Management Accounts for the 9 months ended 31 December 2024

Account	CORE	PROJECTS	TOTAL
Turnover			
Access Grant	0	261,481	261,481
Advertising Income	7,792	0	7,792
Defra Capital Grant	19,819	10,482	30,301
Defra Core Grant	471,109	913,796	1,384,905
Donations Received	60	50	110
Interest Income	19,626	63,098	82,724
Internal Fee Income	128,684	10,875	139,559
Local Authority Contribution	94,389	32,580	126,970
Project Income	16,500	1,387,114	1,403,614
Sale of merchandise	255	362	617
Total Turnover	758,233	2,679,839	3,438,072
Gross Profit	758,233	2,679,839	3,438,072
Administrative Costs			
Access grant expenditure	0	53,467	53,467
Advertising & Marketing	4,645	2,318	6,963
Bank Fees	114	1	115
Board Meetings	711	0	711
CCB recharges	0	139,559	139,559
Chess SWC Landowner Grant	0	117,349	117,349
Cleaning	2,377	0	2,377
Computer and IT Equipment	0	54	54
Consulting	44,331	18,345	62,677
Defra Capital Spend	19,819	10,482	30,301
Employers National Insurance	40,923	24,128	65,051
Equipment and materials (activity)	0	11,826	11,826
Equipment and materials (capital)	0	12,279	12,279
Evaluation	0	31,438	31,438
Event costs	1,952	19,234	21,186
Finance costs	5,870	0	5,870
FiPL Grant Year 3 23/24	0	85,536	85,536
FiPL Grant Year 4 24/25	0	156,242	156,242
Full Cost Recovery (NLHF Projects)	0	3,335	3,335
General Expenses	2,247	438,862	441,109
HLF New Staff Costs	0	97,472	97,472
HLF Training for staff	0	395	395
HLF Travel for staff	0	1,474	1,474
Insurance	10,362	0	10,362
Irrecoverable VAT	0	20,465	20,465
IT Software and Consumables	6,316	1,612	7,928
IT support and maintenance	6,025	1,090	7,114
Legal Expenses	7,755	0	7,755
Light, Power, Heating	3,209	0	3,209
Magazine costs	13,638	0	13,638
Medical Insurance	2,635	1,097	3,732
Members Allowances	7,738	0	7,738
Nature Recovery	0	34,009	34,009
New building work (NLHF)	0	4,574	4,574
Other costs (activity) NLHF	0	26,079	26,079
Other costs (capital) NLHF	0	3,327	3,327
Other costs NLHF	0	4,662	4,662
Pensions Costs	81,762	52,021	133,783
Postage, Freight & Courier	693	118	811
Printing & Stationery	1,295	938	2,233
Professional fees (activity)	0	182,608	182,608
Professional fees (capital)	0	5,992	5,992
Publicity and promotion	0	490	490
Rates and Water rates	6,134	0	6,134
Recruitment	3,245	2,003	5,249
Rent	13,875	1,250	15,125
Repair and conservation work	0	12,489	12,489
Repairs & Maintenance	3,352	0	3,352
Research and survey expenditure	0	18,901	18,901
Salaries	385,594	250,042	635,636
Staff expenses	93	548	641
Staff Training	9,446	5,199	14,644
Subscriptions	3,866	65	3,931
Telephone & Internet	2,598	1,841	4,439
Training for volunteers	0	6,713	6,713
Travel and expenses for volunteers	0	31	31
Travel Expenses	2,505	5,654	8,158
Website running costs	616	3,905	4,520
Total Administrative Costs	695,741	1,871,515	2,567,256
Operating Profit	62,492	808,324	870,816
Profit on Ordinary Activities Before Taxa	62,492	808,324	870,816
Profit after Taxation	62,492	808,324	870,816

Item 3.2**Quarter 3 Delivery Report**

Author: Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations

Purpose of Report: To update the Committee on the progress of the Chilterns National Landscape team between October and December 2024 against the FY24-25 Delivery Plan.

Overall Progress

- The Delivery Plan approved for FY24-25 was split into five workstreams and contains 28 delivery areas and 102 delivery lines. Appendix 1 sets out a summary of delivery on individual delivery lines.
- In Q3 (October-December 2024):
 - 49 (44 in Q2) delivery lines reported as progressing on track (42) or completed (7) (48%)
 - 29 (35 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness (28%)
 - 12 (16 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness (12%)
 - 12 (0 in Q2) delivery lines have been postponed for reconsidering in FY25-26 planning (12%)
- Note that “completed” refers to delivery lines where work has now been fully finished and is not expected to continue in the following year (e.g. projects that have been completed). It does not refer to the completion of work identified in a particular quarter or the whole year (these are reported as “on track”).
- This quarter a new descriptor of “postponed” has been used. This refers to delivery lines where it has been decided to postpone work and to reconsider it in the planning for next year either because:
 - dependencies on which the work was relying this year are not in place to allow progress this year, or
 - because a decision has been made to postpone because of a lack of capacity to deliver.

Breakdown by Workstream

- **Improve Strategic Alignment** (Workstream 1) reported three delivery lines on track, five slightly delayed, three significantly delayed and two postponed. Those significantly delayed or postponed were:
 - 1.1.2 Long Term Vision: postponed through needing to wait for the potential new areas to be published by Natural England as part of the Boundary Review, and a focus on other priority strategic and operational work.
 - 1.1.3 Boundary Review: delays to public consultation - now expected in June 2025. The project is Natural England’s, so the timetable is not in our control, but there are associated reputational risks. However, progress has been made with LUC completing the Desirability to Designate Analysis of Candidate Areas with results from these shared with the Management Advisory Group and the Technical Advisory Group.
 - 1.2.1 Governance Review: the Forum is still in development, so engagement has not yet been embedded, with a need to clarify the best way to proceed and the timing. However, the first version of the revised Constitution (a tidied-up version of the existing Constitution with some enhancements) was approved by the Board in December.

- 1.4.2 CNL Team Evaluation Framework: work in this area has been postponed as clarity is first required on the other monitoring and evaluation metrics (e.g. Protected Landscapes Target Operating Framework, PLTOF) that we are being asked to report against.
- 1.4.4 **CNL State of the Environment Indicators**: work in this area has been de-prioritised because of the need to respond to the PLTOF and there being insufficient time to devote to developing CNL indicators.
- **Increase Operational Effectiveness** (Workstream 2) reported seven delivery lines on track, slightly delayed and eight significantly delayed. Those significantly delayed or postponed were:
 - 2.1.2 **Staff Handbook**: whilst the staff handbook has been drafted, it needs to align to HR policies. The handbook will therefore be reviewed, to check for alignment and a consistent depth of information, once the majority of policies are approved by the Board.
 - 2.1.6 **Organisation Design & Development**: whilst discussions have continued regarding organisational design, there has not been enough capacity to effectively pull together a training plan for the organisation. In addition, HR training and finance training that was planned cannot take place until further progress has been made in these areas.
 - 2.2.1 - 2.2.4 **All Processes and Procedures**: postponed until next year due to capacity constraints and the need to focus on HR policy development, information management transformation and health and safety requirements. The review of HR policies has taken considerably more time than originally anticipated.
 - 2.3.1 **HR System**: whilst still significantly behind plan, progress was made in Q3 with three companies asked to demonstrate their systems. A preferred candidate has now been identified, but with the amount of other transformation work going on in the organisation, a decision to move forward has been put on hold until it can be done in a more manageable way.
 - 2.3.2 **Finance Systems** / 2.4.2 **Finance Policies** / 2.6.2 **Programme Finances**: a decision was made to delay this work until a Senior Finance Manager was recruited. This was achieved in October and, having settled in, these areas now actively being addressed, including ways to improve our finance systems to improve budgeting and financial tracking. It is expected that the Q4 report will show that these delivery lines are no longer significantly delayed.
 - 2.3.3 **Governance Systems**: postponed due to the financial constraints - plans to introduce a governance system have been shelved as being too expensive. Interim measures were already in place to allow improved sharing and collaboration through a Board Teams Channel and this will be looked at as part of the overall Information Management Transformation Programme that is now in its Planning Phase.
 - 2.4.1 **HR Policies**: whilst this delivery line is reporting as significantly delayed against the plan that was put in place at the beginning of the year, it is delivering in line with a revised plan that was agreed by the Executive Committee and, in December, three more policies were approved by the Board. There is a risk of delay with some of the remaining policies where we need to address fundamental questions about the CCB's ability to change the policy should it wish to (eg leave and retirement policies).
 - 2.4.2 **Governance Policies**: work on this area, which focuses on internal day-to-day governance rather than areas such as delegated authority, has been postponed and will be addressed again in planning for FY25-26 because of a lack of capacity and a need to focus on delivery of other operational effectiveness areas.

- **2.4.4 Operations Policies:** work in this area has been postponed and will be addressed in planning for FY25-26. Current work is focused on Health and Safety, especially putting in place and embedding effective ways of working and training on risk assessments.
- **2.5.1 Contact Management:** work is ongoing against this delivery line but the amount of work required to get it established is significantly higher than first envisaged and the Communications Team have not had the capacity to progress as fast as planned. There is currently a focus on simplifying the way in which Hubspot is being set up. Whilst this will take longer to deliver, it will result in HubSpot being easier to embed and use once the work is completed.
- **2.6.1 Managing Successful Programmes:** further work in this area has been postponed to consider again in planning for FY25-26 due to workload in other areas and a lack of capacity in the Operations Team.
- **2.6.3 Programme Governance:** whilst delivery of programme governance on the ground is taking place generally as planned, work on improving the overall programme governance framework is delayed due to capacity issues in the Operations Team and a need to focus on delivery in other areas.
- **Conserve & Enhance Natural Beauty** (Workstream 3) reported 10 delivery lines on track or delivered, 11 slightly delayed and two significantly delayed or postponed:
 - **4.1.2 Climate Adaptation:** the Head of Landscape has not had sufficient capacity to progress this work, due to needing to focus on Local Nature Recovery Strategies across the four counties of the Chilterns National Landscape, developing a Nature Recovery Plan and the considerable amount of time needed to lead and manage the Landscapes team. It was therefore decided to postpone this work and reconsider it as part of the planning for FY25-26.
 - **3.4.1 Woodland Strategy Development:** positive discussions with Forestry Commission colleagues continue, with a Woodland Strategy forming a key part of the emerging Nature Recovery Plan.
- **Improve Understanding & Enjoyment** (Workstream 4) reported 13 delivery lines on track or completed with three slightly delayed.
- **Effectively Communicate** (Workstream 5) reported five delivery lines on track and two slightly delayed:
 - **5.3.1 Brand & Profile:** whilst reported as delivering on track, a decision was made to reduce the scope of this delivery line to remove areas relating to improving opportunities on sponsorship, advertising and merchandising, as the perceived value of this was considered to be low.

Recommendation

1. To NOTE and offer feedback on progress made in Quarter 2 against the Delivery Plan

Appendix 1

Status of Individual Delivery Lines

Key

Delivered (Everything planned in this delivery line has been delivered with no continuation of the delivery line)
On Track (Everything is being delivered to plan but the delivery line is expected to continue into next year)
In Progress (Not started when planned to or slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness)
In Progress (Not started when planned to or significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness)
Not scheduled to have started

Postponed to reconsider in FY25-26 planning

Delivery Area / Delivery Line	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Q3 (Oct – Dec)	Q4 (Jan – Mar)
Workstream 1: Improve Strategic Alignment				
1.1 Strategic Development				
1.1.1 Management Plan Review				
1.1.2 Long Term Vision				
1.1.3 Boundary Review				
1.1.4 Protected Landscape Reform				
1.2 Organisational Governance				
1.2.1 Governance Review				
1.3 Strategic Engagement / Influence				
1.3.1 Local, Regional & National Government & Agencies				
1.3.2 Protected Landscapes Network				
1.3.3 Chilterns National Landscape Forum and Strategic Partners				
1.4 Monitoring & Evaluation				
1.4.1 Management Plan Evaluation	Subsumed under 1.1.1 Management Plan Review			
1.4.2 CNL Team Evaluation Framework			Postponed	
1.4.3 Defra Protected Landscape Target Outcomes Framework				
1.4.4 CNL State of the Environment Indicators			Postponed	
1.5 Financial Stability				
1.5.1 Funding Strategy				
1.5.2 Fundraising Activity				
Workstream 2: Increase Operational Effectiveness				
2.1 People				
2.1.1 HR Strategy				
2.1.2 Employee Handbook				
2.1.3 Staff Engagement				
2.1.4 Working Environment				
2.1.5 IT Equipment				
2.1.6 Organisation Design and Development				
2.2 Process & Procedures				
2.2.1 HR			Postponed	
2.2.2 Finance			Postponed	
2.2.3 Governance			Postponed	
2.2.4 Operations (inc Health & Safety)			Postponed	
2.3 Systems				
2.3.1 HR System			Postponed	
2.3.2 Finance System				
2.3.3 Governance System			Postponed	
2.3.4 Health & Safety System				
2.4 Policies and Internal Governance				
2.4.1 HR Policies				
2.4.2 Finance Policies				
2.4.3 Governance Policies			Postponed	
2.4.4 Operations Policies (inc Health & Safety)			Postponed	
2.4.5 Annual Planning				
2.4.6 Financial Management				
2.4.7 Internal Monitoring and Reporting				
2.5 Information Management				
2.5.1 Contact Management				
2.5.2 Image Library				
2.5.3 Internal Information Management				
2.6 Programme & Project Management				
2.6.1 Managing Successful Programmes			Postponed	
2.6.2 Programme Finances				
2.6.3 Programme Governance				
Workstream 3: Conserve and Enhance Natural Beauty				
3.1 Core Strategy Development				

3.1.1 Nature Recovery				
3.1.2 Climate Adaptation			Postponed	
3.2 Farming & Landowners				
3.2.1 Strategy Development				
3.2.2 Farming Clusters				
3.2.3 HS2 Landscape and Biodiversity Connectivity				
3.2.4 FiPL				
3.2.5 CCC				
3.2.6 MTG				
3.3 Water				
3.3.1 Strategy Development				
3.3.2 SWC: Involving People				
3.3.3 SWC: Working Together				
3.3.4 SWC: Managing the Flow				
3.3.5 SWC: Water Quality				
3.3.6 SWC: Invasive Non-Native Species				
3.3.7 SWC: Wildlife Corridors				
3.3.8 CCSP				
3.3.9 CCC				
3.3.10 MTG				
3.4 Woodland				
3.4.1 Strategy Development				
3.4.2 Deer Management				
3.4.3 Treescapes				
3.5 Landscape Character				
3.5.1 Strategy Development				
3.5.2 UK Power Network				
3.5.3 HS2 Review Panel				
3.5.4 MTG				
3.6 Heritage				
3.6.1 Strategy Development				
3.6.2 Chilterns Heritage & Archaeology Partnership (CHAP)				
3.6.3 Heritage Advice				
3.6.4 CCC				
3.6.5 SWC				
3.7 Citizen Science				
3.7.1 Strategy Development				
3.7.2 Tracking the Impact				
3.7.3 CCSP				
3.7.4 SWC				
3.8 Planning				
3.8.1 Planning Policy				
3.8.2 Development Management				
3.8.3 Planning Support				
3.8.4 HS2 Review Planning				
3.8.5 CCC				
4. Improve Understanding & Enjoyment / Social & Economic Wellbeing				
4.1 Strategy Development				
4.1.1 Strategy Development				
4.2 Access & EDI				
4.2.1 Defra Access Fund				
4.2.2 Walking Festival				
4.2.3 Information Provision & Promotion				
4.2.4 Partnership Projects				
4.2.5 CCC				
4.2.6 MTG				
4.2.7 SWC / CCSP				
4.3 Engagement				
4.3.1 Partnership Engagement				
4.3.2 Nature Calling				
4.3.3 Local Business & Partnerships Promotion				

4.3.4 CCC				
4.4 Health & Wellbeing				
4.4.1 Health & Wellbeing				
4.5 Volunteering				
4.5.1 New Shoots				
4.5.2 CCC				
4.5.3 Volunteering Network				
5. Effectively Communicate				
5.1 Communications Strategy & Ways of Working				
5.1.1 Strategy Development				
5.1.2 Ways of Working				
5.2 Communications Delivery				
5.2.1 Strategic Communication				
5.2.2 Ongoing Communications Delivery				
5.2.3 Project Communications				
5.3 Brand & Profile				
5.3.1 Brand & Profile				
5.4 Internal Communications				
5.4.1 Internal Communications				

Acronyms

Common acronyms used in the table are given below:

CCC = Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership
 CCSP = Chilterns Chalk Stream Project
 CHAP = Chilterns Heritage & Archaeology Partnership
 CNL = Chilterns National Landscape
 CNLF = Chilterns National Landscape Forum
 Defra = Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
 FiPL = Farming in Protected Landscapes
 H&S = Health & Safety
 HS2 = High Speed 2
 LR&N = Local, Regional & National
 MTG = Mend the Gap
 NRP = Nature Recovery Plan
 PLTOF = Protected Landscape Targets & Outcomes Framework
 SWC = Smarter Water Catchment

Item 3.3**Annual Planning****Author:****Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations****Summary:**

This paper sets out progress that has been made on annual planning for FY25-26 including an identification of priorities for next year and the proposed way forward to sign off a delivery plan.

1. Focus on Capacity

A key area that has been given greater focus during annual planning this year has been the issue of capacity. Capacity has for some time been identified as one of the highest organisation risks that the CCB faces, and this was backed up by the results of the staff engagement survey in September 2024.

As such a significantly more robust approach to prioritisation has been built into annual planning. This started with a Senior Leadership Team offsite in December where half a day was focused on identifying priorities for the organisation, followed in January-February by a series of prioritisation meetings conducted by the CEO and Head of Operations with each workstream lead (see below). These meetings sought to understand why specific work areas were considered a priority for the organisation, as well as the impact on cost and capacity to deliver and challenged whether implementation could be delayed without significant impact.

1. Improve Strategic Alignment (Matt Thomson)
2. Increase Operational Effectiveness (Andy Brock-Doyle)
3. Conserve and Enhance Natural Beauty (Kate Heppell)
4. Improve Understanding and Enjoyment (Annette Venters)
5. Effectively Communicate (Vicki Pearce)

A further consolidation meeting is being held in the w/c 17th February to consolidate this information (note that this is not included in this document)

2. Prioritisation

Priorities for the CCB in FY25-26 have been classified according to the table below to identify both the priority level (critical priority, high priority, priority) taking into account both risk and reward to the organisation, what the organisation has a statutory requirement to deliver as well as identifying the prioritisation rationale.

A	<p>Critical priority for the organisation because it:</p> <p>A1 - RISK - significantly addresses a high-risk rating in the risk register a key area under the staff engagement survey</p> <p>A2 - REWARD (STRATEGIC) - significantly improves strategic clarity and understanding of the way and scale in which the CCB should deliver on its duties</p> <p>A3 - REWARD (DELIVERY) significantly improves delivery on the ground against the CCB duties</p> <p>A4 - REWARD (OPERATIONAL) - addresses an operational issue that impacts the organisation significantly on a daily basis</p> <p>A5- RISK - has been progressed to a point where an inability to progress it further would lead to significant reputational damage or a strategic lost opportunity</p> <p>A6 - REQUIREMENT - is a priority where there is no option but to deliver this year either because of deadlines, secured funding or because it is a legal requirement</p>
B	<p>High priority for the organisation because it:</p> <p>B1 - RISK - either addresses a high risk rating in the risk register to a certain extent or significantly addresses a medium risk rating in the risk register or something consistently identified in the staff engagement survey</p> <p>B2 - REWARD (STRATEGIC) - improves strategic clarity and understanding of the way and scale in which the CCB should deliver on its duties but not to the extent it would significantly or immediately change ways of working</p> <p>B3 - REWARD (DELIVERY) - improves delivery on the ground against CCB duties</p> <p>B4 - REWARD (OPERATIONAL) - addresses an operational issue that will have a visible improvement on ways of working</p> <p>B5 - RISK - has been progressed to a point where an inability to progress it further would lead to a clear lost opportunity</p>
C	<p>Priority for the organisation because it:</p> <p>C1 - RISK - addresses a medium risk rating in the risk register to some extent or something identified in the staff engagement survey</p> <p>C2 - REWARD (STRATEGIC) improves strategic clarity and understanding of the way and scale in which the CCB should operate but not to the extent it would significantly or immediately change ways of working <i>but which could be pushed to the following year without significant consequences</i></p> <p>C3 - REWARD (DELIVERY) - improves delivery on the ground against CCB duties <i>but which could be pushed to the following year without significant consequences</i></p> <p>C4 - REWARD (OPERATIONAL) - addresses an operational issue that will have a visible improvement on ways of working <i>but could be pushed to the following year without significant consequences</i></p>

3. Identified Critical Priorities for the CCB in FY25-26

The table below sets out a provisional list of the identified critical priorities for the organisation (other priorities exist and are categorised as B and C but are not listed here)

1. Improve Strategic Alignment			
Priority	Work Package	Deadline	Priority
Management Plan: Publish Management Plan adopted by the Board	1.1 Strategy Development	Jun 25	A6
Boundary Review: Respond to consultation on new boundary	1.1 Strategy Development	Sep 25	A6
Nature Recovery Plan: Complete and sign off Nature Recovery Plan	1.1 Strategy Development	Jun 25	A2
Climate Adaptation Plan: Draft a Climate Adaptation Plan	1.1 Strategy Development	Mar 26	A2
Constitution: Finalise writing and approval of Constitution (including schemes of delegation between the Board, Executive Committee and Officers)	1.2 Organisational Governance	Mar 26	A4
Topic Groups: Ensure CNL topic groups are more effectively involved in strategic work (as required)	1.3 Strategic Engagement & Influence	Mar 26	A5
Targets: Agree targets for wildlife rich habitats and tree cover	1.4 Monitoring and Evaluation	Jul 25	A6
Income Diversity: Improve financial sustainability and diversification of income	1.5 Financial Sustainability	Mar 26	A1
New Funding Opportunities: Support preparation and submission of pre-project bid for Lottery Nature Ridge Corridor proposal development and delivery of pre-project delivery phase	1.5 Financial Sustainability	Jun 25 / Mar 26	A1 / A5
New Funding Opportunities: Secure matched funding for CCSP especially through potential of HS2 AP	1.5 Financial Sustainability	Mar 26	A3
New Funding Opportunities: Develop and submit Landscape Recovery funding bid	1.5 Financial Sustainability	tbc	A1 / A3
Funding Extension: Clarify future of SWC in light of Thames Water funding	1.5 Financial Sustainability	Mar 25	A1 / A3
Funding Extension: Develop funding opportunities with water companies under AMP 8	1.5 Financial Sustainability	Sep 25	A1 / A3
2. Increase Operational Effectiveness			
HR Policies: Complete and sign off all HR policies and ensure staff have opportunity to review	2.1 HR	Mar 25 (Jun 25)	A1 / A4 / A6
Staff Handbook: Update Staff Handbook and ensure alignment with HR policies as well as contract terms and conditions	2.1 HR	Jun 25	A1 / A4 / A6

HR Policies / Staff Handbook: Undertake staff review and consultation on changes in policies and handbook	2.1 HR	Sep 25	A1 / A4 / A6
HR Policies: Put in place all the requirements identified in the agreed HR policies	2.1 HR	Mar 26	A1 / A4 / A6
Staff Engagement: Address outcomes of the staff engagement survey and put in place both focus groups and pulse surveys	2.1 HR	Mar 26	A1
Working Time Analysis: Undertake working time analysis to understand and where possible address capacity issues	2.1 HR	Dec 25	A1 / A4
Budget Management and Tracking: Embed effective ways of working around budget management and tracking across the CCB with clearly identified budget owners	2.2 Finance	Mar 26	A1 / A4
Financial Regulations: Review and simplify financial regulations for the organisation including sign off thresholds	2.2 Finance	Mar 26	A4
Approvals: Review and put in place new approval workflows across the CCB in line with agreed thresholds and budget ownership	2.2 Finance	Sep 25	A4
Information Management: Develop clear and consistent filing system and ways of working which allows effective collaboration and transition CCB from physical drive to use of Teams / Sharepoint	2.3 IT and Information Management	Mar 26	A4 / A5
Compliance: Ensure that the organisation is compliant with data protection requirements including GDPR and Cyber Essentials	2.3 IT and Information Management	Dec 25	A1 / A6
Risk Assessment: Embed new ways of working with Risk Assessor to ensure consistent recording of and addressing risk within the CCB	2.4 Health & Safety	Sep 25	A5 / A6
Compliance: Agree way forward to tackle outstanding issues of compliance around health & safety	2.4 Health & Safety	Dec 25	A6
Processes and Procedures: Review and put in place processes and procedures being developed by Risk Fluent	2.4 Health & Safety	Mar 26	A6
Incident and Accident Reporting: Put in place more effective procedure around incident and accident reporting ensuring the ability to effectively address risk in this area	2.4 Health & Safety	Jun 25	A6
3. Conserve & Enhance Natural Beauty			
Nature Recovery Plan: Develop overall delivery plan for Nature Recovery Plan and support delivery of plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies	3.1 Workstream Strategy Operationalisation	Mar 26	A3 / A5

Farmer Clusters: Clarify ambition, approach and ways of working around farmer clusters	3.2 Land	Mar 26	A2
FiPL: Understand changes to FiPL and move from delivering grants to other work such as ELMS	3.2 Land	Mar 26	A6
Natural Beauty / Nature Recovery: Work with other organisations to enhance natural beauty and deliver nature recovery through farming leadership	3.2 Land	Mar 26	A1
Natural Beauty / Nature Recovery: Work with other organisations to enhance natural beauty and deliver nature recovery in water-dependent habitats including chalk streams	3.3 Water	Mar 26	A3 / A6
CHAP Sustainability: Ensure effective transition of CHAP to a position where it is capable of funding itself rather than being underwritten by CNL	3.6 Heritage	Mar 26	A1 / A5
4. Increase Understanding & Enjoyment			
Walking Festival: Deliver the Chilterns Walking Festival and clarify its future	4.2 Access & EDI	Jun 25	A3 / A5
North Chilterns Engagement: Effectively deliver Nature Calling project	4.3 Engagement	Dec 25	A2 / A3
North Chilterns Engagement: Identify legacy activity and strategic priorities following Nature Calling	4.3 Engagement	Mar 26	A5
North Chilterns Engagement: Support development of the North Chilterns Partnership	4.3 Engagement	Mar 26	A2 / A5
5. Communicate Effectively			
Contact Management: Sort contact management data and assign ownership within the CCB	5.1 Operationalising Strategy	Mar 26	A4
Images: Develop effective processes / procedures around image storage and use	5.1 Operationalising Strategy	Mar 26	A4
Strategic Publications: Design, publish and distribute the Management Plan	5.2 Comms Delivery	May 25	A5
Strategic Publications: Design, publish and distribute the Nature Recovery Plan	5.2 Comms Delivery	Jun 25	A5

Note that the designation of a Mar 26 deadline reflects either an activity that:

- a) has a specific deadline of Mar 26,
- b) has no specific deadline but is expected to happen over the course of the year
- c) is likely to go across into FY26/27

4. Next Steps

Following discussion and feedback from the Executive Committee, other actions are planned to complete annual planning:

- a) Hold an alignment session with Senior Managers to get their input into the prioritisation exercise (Feb)
- b) Hold a budgeting alignment session to ensure that priorities are fully reflected in the budget (Feb / Mar)
- c) Develop the draft delivery plan on the priorities set out in this document against which reporting will occur in FY25-26 (Mar)
- d) Submit the draft delivery plan and updated budget envelope to the Board (Mar)
- e) Review the draft delivery plan and budget against the Defra Grant when this is made public (Mar / Apr)
- f) Resubmit a finalised delivery plan and budget to the Executive Committee (May) and Board (Jun) if required

Recommendations

- 1. To NOTE the process and timeframe being followed around the business planning**
- 2. To NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK on the priorities identified for the CCB to address in FY25/26**

Item 3.4 Funding Strategy Update**Author:** Elaine King, CEO**Purpose of Report:** To update the Executive Committee on progress with delivering the Funding Strategy.**Background**

This paper provides an update on the CCB's Funding Strategy and sets out key observations on the current pipeline of externally funded projects.

Future Funding

A key issues facing all protected landscapes remains uncertainty over future government funding, especially that funding in future years will not increase in line with inflation, the increase to Employers' National Insurance contributions, or reflect the increasing requirements being placed on us by the government.

We have still not been advised of our Defra grant settlement for the forthcoming financial year and may not receive confirmation until March or April. Confirmation on a further three year settlement, from 2026/27, is expected around the same time.

While we wait for clarity, the SLT is exploring the potential implications of receiving less funding than in previous years and has budgeted for three funding scenarios, two of which would result in a significant shortfall to our requirements. We continue to collaborate and share information with the National Landscape Association and have also flagged the implications of receiving insufficient funding to Defra officials.

Diversifying income

The uncertainty created by lack of visibility of future government funding makes the need to diversify our sources of funding more urgent. We continue to work to secure funds that enable us to recharge to cover core overheads. This includes recharging from projects – where funder rules allow – and from other sources of restricted income.

Funding applications take considerable time to develop, especially those developed in collaboration with partners, and we need to carefully balance the imperative to secure additional funding with the pressure this can put on the staff team, along with the implications of taking staff away from their other work.

Considerable time therefore continues to be spent exploring with funders and our partners the best options for securing funding. Most of these are outlined below, with a small number still involving discussion or are commercially sensitive at this stage.

Funding pipeline

The Funding Pipeline is populated and regularly updated and reviewed by the SLT. The bullet points below highlight some key observations that we believe will be of interest to the Executive Committee, focussing especially on risk.

Heritage and nature recovery

- **Affinity Water (Secured):** Affinity Water is funding a Farming and Landowner Adviser – a new full-time role for 12 months - to support the CCB's Nature Recovery Manager, Nick Marriner, in continuing to develop and deliver work with the emerging North Chilterns Farmer Cluster. Melinda Dresser joined the team in this role in October 2024.
- **Affinity Water (Secured):** Since securing funding for the Farming and Landowner Adviser role in the North Chilterns above, Affinity Water expressed interest in supporting the Farming and Landowner Adviser role in the Chess and Misbourne area in FY2025/6 and £30k funding to support this role has been secured.
- **Rebel Restoration (Secured):** £104.3k of funding has been secured from the charity Rebel Restoration (which receives its funding from Rebel Energy) to employ a member of staff for 18 months to continue the 'Tracking the Impact' citizen science monitoring programme, initially established through the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project. David Willis joined the team in this role in January 2025.
- **Not Bourne Yesterday (Secured):** £351,083 was secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund in June 2024 for the 18-month Development Phase of this project. The project team has been recruited and expect to apply for funding for a full Delivery Phase in May 2026.
- **HS2 Additional Projects (Submitted):** Allen Beechey has submitted an application to the HS2 Review Group for the 'Mending the Misbourne' project and we are waiting the outcome. The aim is to develop and deliver a strategic river catchment plan for the River Misbourne using a similar delivery template to River Chess Smarter Water Catchments initiative.
- **HS2 Chilterns Review Group** – the group was set up under Select Committee assurance in 2019 to develop detailed design principles and oversee allocation of the £3M Additional Project budget. Originally, we were able to recoup our staff input costs against an administrative budget but since March 2020 we have not been able to do so. Other attendees have been able to claim against separate agreements with HS2 Ltd. We are currently pursuing back payments for March 2020 to December 2024 of £15k and negotiating a funding formula for the next two years which might secure a further £15k.
- **FDRI initiative - citizen science to support chalk stream management (Under development):** The [Floods and Droughts Research Infrastructure](#) team (UK CEH, BGS, Imperial, Uni Bristol) are continuing their preparatory work on the River Chess which will be the location of one of their three national observatories. We are exploring potential funding routes with UKCEH, which leads the initiative.
- **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** - the grant funding element of the [FiPL](#) programme ends in March 2025 (while continued funding is allocated for staff to provide technical support in this area for a further 18 months). In 2024/25 the CCB was allocated £944k and we are on track to spend the remaining budget by year end. We and other National Landscapes are advocating for Defra to further extend the programme, which has delivered huge benefits in the Chilterns and other protected landscapes. Further news on this is expected soon.
- **Landscape Connections:** Launched in July 2024, [Landscape Connections](#) is the NLHF's 10 year, £150m grants programme, focussing on nature recovery, heritage and people in protected landscapes. A series of meetings have been held with NLHF and a number of partners to discuss the programme. As a result of those

conversations, we will be acting as a key partner on a 'preliminary project planning' bid led by North Wessex Downs National Landscape to develop a plan for a Ridgeway Nature Corridor through both National Landscapes. The 'Project Enquiry Form' is under development for submission to NLHF this month and this will be used by NLHF to evaluate the project feasibility and to determine whether we can move forward with a pre-development project application.

Chess Smarter Water Catchments (Secured): We have been successful in securing one-year interim funding of £334k from Thames Water to support the Chess Smarter Water Catchments programme (to include both staff and project costs). We hold £185k of the funding as under-spend from FY2024/25 and Purchase Orders are being raised for two further payments by 31 March and in April 2025 (totalling £149k). A further £50K of funding for CCSP has been ring-fenced by Thames Water for applications to fund projects in 2025/6.

Diversity Equity and Inclusion

- **Defra Access for All funding:** this programme is aimed at improving access to protected landscapes for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. This financial year we have received £261,480 with all of it now allocated, including funding some CCB-led accessibility projects.
- More information and detail of previous projects funded are on our [website](#).

Risk: The SMT consider risk to be low, as we have a clear track record of successful delivery of and reporting on the programme, having allocated funding in years 1 and 2 to a wide range of impactful projects. There is a small risk of delays to projects not being fully delivered by 31 March.

- **Nature Calling:** This [project](#) brings together the 34 National Landscapes in England, local arts organisations, and community groups to find creative ways to connect and deepen people's engagement with the countryside on their doorstep. The Chilterns National Landscape is one of six hubs nationally, focussing on underserved communities in Luton. Arts Council England is providing £532k over two years and Defra has committed £300k match funding.
- **Risk:** Our applications to the Wixamtree Trust and Luton Rising Small Grants Fund were unsuccessful but we will continue applying for funding so we can maximise the potential of the project and will be looking for opportunities linked to health and wellbeing. We now have extra capacity with the appointment of Raheed Salam, our new North Chilterns Engagement & Partnerships Officer, who is supporting Nature Calling and contacting potential funders and partners.
- The [Chalkscapes research](#) *Co-creating Spaces for Supporting Diverse Communities to use Greenspaces and the Countryside* explored the barriers facing ethnic communities in accessing greenspace and the countryside and recommended that a next step be to implement a Collaborative Targeted Outreach Programme (CTOP) in Luton and High Wycombe. Exploratory conversations to source funding have been held with Buckinghamshire Council about a CTOP in High Wycombe and we are liaising with Luton Council regarding opportunities to deliver this work in Luton (see below).
- We supported Luton Council with a multi-partner £1 million bid to the **National Lottery Heritage Fund's Nature Towns and Cities fund**. The EOI was successful

and a full application is being developed, to be submitted by 14 April for a decision by mid-July. The bid is focused on nature recovery and providing better physical and emotional connections and more equal access to public green spaces. This would be done through a new design that removes physical and perceived barriers, improves accessibility, signage and safety, while creating a strong sense of place and pride. The CTOP proposal has been incorporated within the bid, and we are developing proposals for other CCB led activity to be incorporated into the bid.

Recommendation:

- 1. To NOTE and offer feedback on updates on delivering the Funding Strategy.**

Item 3.5**CEO Update**

Author: Elaine King, CEO

Purpose of Report: To update the Executive Committee on key areas of work during the last period.

Background

This report comprises highlights from another very busy period since the last Executive Committee meeting in November 2024.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

The SLT continues to take oversight of and deliver across the organisation's activities. Meeting weekly to plan, monitor, and deliver across a range of areas, the SLT also held two full day strategy and planning sessions on the 2nd October and the 10th December.

As part of plans to more effectively involve senior managers in strategic planning, the SLT held a very productive strategic session with managers on 27th November as we embark on another business planning cycle. Another is planned in February.

An increasing focus of discussion, planning and concern is the lack of information on our Defra grant from April 2025. A key focus for the SLT therefore comprises business planning and developing budgets under a range of scenarios, while we wait to hear from Defra.

Other key work being led and managed by the SLT include consulting on a refresh of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan, developing a Scheme of Delegation, assisting Natural England with its Boundary Review, developing a Nature Recovery Plan, exploring new funding opportunities, finalising our new HR policies, managing risk, and collaborating with the National Landscapes Association (NLA) and other National Landscapes.

We are also maintaining momentum in implementing actions arising from the staff engagement survey, some of which were already being addressed, such as improving IT systems and information management, improving the office environment and exploring and introducing an HR system.

Refreshing the Chilterns AONB Management Plan

The consultation on the proposed changes to the Management Plan ended on 3rd February, and the team is currently reviewing the responses received. On our initial assessment:

- We received valid responses from 30 individuals or organisations and have also added the recommendations made by Planning Committee.
- 12 responses were from individuals, and the other 18 from organisations, including Natural England, the Chiltern Society, the Forestry Commission, local authorities, parish councils, environmental charities and businesses.
- Most respondents submitted a number of comments across a range of subject areas in the Plan, and comments seem to be mostly positive, seeking improved clarity of wording, rather than major changes of emphasis (but further analysis is required).

Next steps:

- We will acknowledge receipt of comments from those respondents who have given contact details.

- We will publish news items on our website and in our eNewsletter confirming closure of the consultation, and giving a broad outline (similar to the above) of comments received.
- Officers (including, where appropriate topic leads) will complete analysis of the responses received, corresponding with respondents where it is considered constructive to do so, or where intentions are unclear, and draft recommendations as to what amendments should be made to the Plan in response. Criteria guiding this activity will be developed in discussion with the Management Plan Review Task & Finish Group (TFG).
- A paper summarising the responses received, officers' consideration of those responses, and the final amendments to be made to the Management Plan will be discussed with the TFG and tabled for final approval at the Board meeting on 27th March.

Natural England's Boundary Review

The team - largely Neil Jackson and Matt Thomson - continues to support Natural England with its project to explore an extension to the Chilterns AONB boundary. We are now expecting the formal and public consultation to take place in June 2025. More information, including an FAQ updated in November 2024, is on our website [here](#).

Nature Recovery Plan

The Nature Recovery Plan continues to be developed by Kate Heppell and Neil Jackson, and a communications strategy is under development with Vicki Pearce. A third meeting of the working group was held in November, and a fourth meeting is planned for April 2025. The current plan is to bring the plan to the Board for review in March, run a public consultation via the website in March and April, address comments from the consultation in May and publish in June 2025.

Risk management

The SLT keeps a close eye on, and mitigates where possible, issues that present potential risk to the organisation, as outlined in the Risk Register. These largely focus on finance and personnel. We continue to monitor the status of Thames Water, which makes a significant contribution towards the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) and is the primary funder of the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment pilot (SWC).

Collaborating with the National Landscape Association and other Protected Landscapes

Work with the NLA includes continuing to advocate the value of National Landscapes to the government in order to secure the level of funding required for us to deliver our statutory purposes effectively and meet the government's ambitions and targets. This included responding to the government announcement, on 16th December, that it planned to introduce new legislation to empower and strengthen National Landscapes and National Parks. We published a [response](#), welcoming the move, but warning that National Landscapes need to be properly resourced in order to contribute fully to meeting the government's environmental targets.

Other key areas in which we are engaging with the NLA and the wider family of Protected Landscapes include:

- advocating for National Landscapes to be properly funded – and to be advised of our grant settlement for 2025/26
- implementing Defra's Protected Landscapes [Targets and Outcomes Framework \(PLTOF\)](#)

- exploring how best to respond to the government's groundbreaking consultation on a [Land Use Framework for England](#) and
- implementation by Relevant Authorities of the s85 Duty in the CROW Act (and similar duties for National Parks and the Broads).

On the latter, the first [Judicial Review](#) regarding s85 took place recently. The Secretary of State for MHCLG, Angela Rayner, declared a station car park decision in the Dedham Vale National Landscape as unlawful because, while the railway operator had operated within planning law and policy, it had not taken account of the s.85 duty. This is a welcome outcome as it signals that the government is committed to upholding the strengthened s.85 duty.

I also joined National Landscape Lead Officers at a two-day conference in Birmingham, where areas of discussion and planning included leadership and training, responding to the government's nature recovery commitments, establishing if or how National Landscapes align with the government's growth agenda and responding to the Land Use Framework consultation.

Protected Landscapes Partnership (PLP): Created in September 2023, the PLP is based on collaboration across the full range of Protected Landscapes in England and is led by National Landscapes Association, National Parks England, National Trails UK and Natural England. The PLP originates from the Landscapes Review recommendation to establish a "National Landscapes Service" giving National Parks and AONBs "a bigger voice, bigger ambition and a new way of working to meet new challenges". The PLP is currently focussing on advancing the shared goals of Nature Recovery and Climate Leadership, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and Green Finance.

Staff engagement survey

As reported previously, an annual staff engagement survey was conducted in October 2024. We are now taking forward plans to address areas where staff felt improvements can be made – largely centred on improved collaboration, internal communication, training and development, and addressing workloads, with a clear link between the pressures of workload and the impact this has on the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively.

Current activities include establishing three focus groups, the first of which will address IT and Information Management and includes exploring development of a new HR System and a new Health & Safety System and making the most effective use of HubSpot and Mail Chimp. This group held its first meeting on 10th February.

The other focus groups will address improving the office (this group is meeting at the end of February) and improving internal communications and collaboration.

We will also be providing quarterly updates to the team - 'you said, we did' - and conducting quarterly pulse surveys (the first in March), with the full annual survey being repeated in October 2025.

Improving IT systems and information management

In October last year we launched the **Information Management Transformation Programme** which started with a review of our options for IT systems and information management (Phase 1) and addresses some of the CCB's key operational and compliance risks. The review included exploring continued use of the F Drive as our primary filing system, full movement to Teams and Sharepoint, as well as testing a cloud IT solution, 'Egnyte'. In December, following discussion with key staff in the CCB as well as with our current IT provider, the results were presented to the SLT and a decision in

principle made that the CCB will move to adopting Teams and Sharepoint as our primary information management system.

In January we kicked off a planning phase (Phase 2) and contracted Anna Foster (who has led similar work for other organisations) to lead this work. The planning phase is expected to be completed at the end of March and is designed test the decision in principle through collating and addressing staff and organisational issues and requirements, and to ensure that we establish an effective transition plan for the whole organisation.

Improving the office environment

A number of improvements to the office environment have been made during recent months including:

- Replacing the path around the office, leading to the car park
- Improving external lighting
- Purchasing two stand up desks
- Replacing a fridge and kettle
- Fitting more blinds in the office
- Establishing more work space in the out-house adjacent to the main office

We are currently working on other areas such as providing staff with locker space. One of the first focus groups to be established as a result of the staff engagement survey is also focussing on this area, to ensure we can make changes that staff want and need.

New HR system

In December, a working group comprising the CEO, Head of Operations, Senior Administration Officer and an external consultant (contracted for six months to help lead our HR work) reviewed a number of HR systems. A preferred candidate has been identified and this will be progressed once other transformation work has been completed.

Staff changes and recruitment

During this period, we have welcomed two new members of staff.

- Janet Tuppen joined us on the 20th January as **Project Support Officer** for the Mend the Gap programme.
- On the same day, we also welcomed David Willis as our new **Citizen Science Coordinator**, supporting the 'Tracking the Impact' Citizen Science monitoring programme, first established as part of the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project, and now funded through a grant from Rebel Restoration.
- Anna Foster was contracted in January for three months to support the Head of Operations to plan the CCB's Information Management transformation programme.
- Neil Jackson, our long-serving and much valued **Conservation and Landscape Officer**, will be taking flexible retirement from March, and will reduce his full-time hours to working two days a week.
- More information on our new colleagues will be included in the February edition of our [enewsletter](#).

External Engagement

This period has involved a range of meetings with partners and other stakeholders including the following:

- Meeting with Estelle Bailey, CEO at BBOWT (11 November)

- National Landscape Association Lead Officers and Chairs conference (28 November)
- Meeting with Rebecca Waite, new CEO at the Cotswolds Conservation Board (19 December)
- Not Bourne Yesterday steering group meetings (9 December and 9 January)
- Meeting with Hazel Simmons, Leader at Luton Council, Cllr Rob Roche, our Luton Council-appointed Board member and Cllr Javed Hussain, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Highways (10 January)
- Meeting with Martin Tett, Leader at Bucks Council (10 January)
- Chilterns Chalk Streams steering group meeting (23 January)
- Mend the Gap steering group meeting (23 January)
- Health and Safety training day for SME Directors (30 January)
- Meeting with Geoff Sinclair, Assistant Director for Burnham Beeches, at the City of London Corporation (5 February)
- National Landscape Association Lead Officers conference (12/13 February)
- Natural England Boundary Review Management Advisory Group meetings (monthly)
- Farming in Protected Landscapes independent panel meeting (monthly)

Recommendation:

- 1. To NOTE and provide feedback on the update**