



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

24th February 2021 at 10.00 am

By *remote video conferencing

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of Previous Meeting 4 November 2021
4. Matters Arising
5. Conclusion of Audit
6. Governance Review - (Commercial in Confidence)
7. HR Handbook
8. Business Plan and Budget 2021-22 - (Commercial in Confidence)
9. Risk Register - (Commercial in Confidence)
10. Board Review including Reports from Executive and Planning Committees
11. Mend the Gap – update and video
12. Landscapes Review (verbal update)
13. Any other business

** In accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*

Future Meetings:

Full Board	21 st April 2021 (AGM only)
	23 rd June 2021
	20 th October 2021
Executive Committee	28 th April 2021
	15 th September 2021
Planning Committee	3 rd March 2021
	14 th July 2021
	17 th November 2021



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CONSERVATION BOARD FOR THE CHILTERN'S AREA
OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

Held by remote video conferencing on Wednesday 4th November 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Andrea Baughan
Cllr Paul Duckett
Cllr Steve Jarvis
Cllr Lynn Lloyd
Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr Charles Mathew
Cllr Hugh McCarthy
Cllr Philip McDowell
Cllr Richard Newcombe
Cllr Ian Reay
Cllr Philip Williams

Appointing Body

Buckinghamshire Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
North Hertfordshire District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Dacorum Borough Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Three Rivers District Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Colin Courtney
Alison Doggett
John Nicholls
Ray Payne
Ian Waller
Elizabeth Wilson

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

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr Susan Biggs
Cllr John Griffin
Cllr Charles Hussey

Oxfordshire
Oxfordshire
Buckinghamshire

CCB Officers

Kath Daly
Graham Hurst
Elaine King
Donna Webb

Countryside Officer
Finance Officer
Chief Executive Officer
Administrative Officer

Other:

This meeting is being held remotely in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 no. 392

The Chairman welcomed all present.

19/20.33 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr Alison Balfour-Lynn, Hertfordshire Parish Councils, Paul Mainds, Secretary of State appointee, Cllr Nick Rose, Buckinghamshire Council and John Shaw, Secretary of State appointee (he did attend part of the meeting).

The Chairman welcomed the new members to the board and invited them to introduce themselves.

The Chairman briefly went through the protocol for remote video conferencing meetings.

19/20.34 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

19/20.35 Minutes of the Board Meeting 26th February 2020.

The minutes of the Board Meeting of 26th February 2020 were approved as a true record after the date of the previous Board meeting in item 19/20/.23 was changed to 2019 and the word ordinary was removed.

19/20.36 Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.

19/20.37 Statement of Accounts 2019-20

The Finance Officer presented the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for the year ending 31st March 2020. The overall surplus for the year was £2,495 which has added to reserves.

The AGAR is required by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and once approved by the Board is subject to external audit. The AGAR contains the internal audit report, which shows as good, there were no recommendations and no management actions had been issued.

1. The Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 was approved and will be signed in the appropriate places by the Chairman and the Clerk.
2. The Accounting Statement 2019/20 was approved and will be signed in the appropriate places by the Chairman and the S151 Officer.

The Finance Officer gave a brief summary of the finances and made the following observations:

- a. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the notice of Public Rights and Publication of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return will be submitted late in breach of the public inspection time limits.
- b. A small surplus was made. The CCB ensures that income matches expenditure.
- c. Cash reserves are large and earmarked to be spend over the life time of the various projects/programs.
- d. The Pensions reserve is a statistical figure, provided by actuaries, not an actual one.
Cllr Richard Newcombe and Peter Martin, Buckinghamshire Councillors declared an interest as respective Chairman and member of the Buckinghamshire Audit and Governance Committee overseeing the Buckinghamshire Pension Fund of which the CCB is a member
- e. Defra funding is no longer set in a 4- year funding arrangement, but applied annually, creating financial uncertainty. The cash reserves are earmarked and do not cover core expenditure.

Members discussed finances. It was suggested that earmarked reserves should be clearly noted and identified in the accounts to clarify understanding of the financial position of the CCB.

The Finance Officer explained that he always supplies explanatory notes to the external auditors as the CCB's accounting model relevant to "not for profit" organisations is not compliant with the format used for the AGAR.

The Finance Officer was thanked for his hard work on the accounts.

- 1. The Board APPROVED the Annual Governance Statement included in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20**
- 2. The Board APPROVED the Accounting Statement included in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20**
- 3. The Board APPROVED the Statement of Accounts 2019/20**

19/20.38 Board Review including reports from the Executive and Planning Committees.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) had provided a comprehensive review of the team's ongoing activities and achievements in recent months.

The Coronavirus outbreak began to impact day to day work in early March. In line with Government guidance staff have been working remotely since then. Project work, events and meetings were paused or moved online, with work continuing on most areas including developing partnerships to best deliver the AONB Management Plan and, when restrictions were eased in the summer, providing guidance for visitors and showcasing local businesses.

The team have worked very hard in this challenging time and achieved a great deal. A few highlights:

- A bid was made to the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) was made with non-governmental organisation partners, focussing on practical restoration work, education and community engagement connected to a number of the Chilterns' chalk streams work.
It was noted that the GRCF deadlines were very challenging and preparing and bidding for projects in these circumstances is not the most effective way of working and puts pressure on already stretched staff teams.
- The team has contributed to a number of national consultations, including the Planning White Paper, England Woodland strategy and the new Environmental Land Management Scheme, along with providing support and advice to other AONBs.
- Meetings have also been held with Chilterns MPs and local authorities.
- Recruitment is continuing, with vacancies for a Chalkscapes Development Officer and a Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Project Manager advertised.
- It was noted that the Planner has been extremely busy and will continue to be so with the Government's new planning proposals and Planning White Paper.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and comment.

The Chairman congratulated the team on the big list of achievements in the last six months. He was impressed with how rapidly they had embraced new working arrangements and had managed to increase the CCB's profile in such challenging times.

1. The Board NOTED the review

19/20.39 Mend the Gap

The CEO presented an update on the developments with the Mend the Gap project.

The Board was presented with and asked to approve the Terms of Reference and the Memorandum of Agreement.

The documents have been revised and updated with feedback from the project partners.

The documents were approved at the Executive Committee meeting 23rd September 2020.

Members commented on the papers.

1. The Board NOTED the update

2. The Board APPROVED the Terms of Reference and the Memorandum of Agreement.

19/20.40 Future Establishment of the Board

The Deputy Chairman introduced Agenda Item 9 by referring to the draft Phase 1 document of the Board’s Long-term Establishment and Government Policy. He outlined the reasons for undertaking this task, which included that it had become clear that the Board’s governance arrangements and financial model is unsustainable. The Deputy Chairman also set out the work’s connection to the Landscapes Review. He acknowledged that much more work had yet to be done but was confident that the evidence bases upon which the Phase 1 Report had been prepared were sound. He also highlighted that it is commercial in confidence at this point in time.

He drew attention to the fact that the Phase 1 report concluded that the Board had difficulty in satisfying its obligations under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. In addition, it was unable to discharge many of its obligations under Statutory Instrument 2004 No 1778. In any case the Statutory Instrument was out of date and no longer reflected the Local Government administrative arrangements of the AONB area or the Board’s current or likely future manner of operation.

The board thanked the Deputy Chairman for his work on this matter.

1. The Board NOTED the progress made and the programme for delivering the review.

11.37 John Shaw joined the meeting

11.40 Cllr Paul Duckett left the meeting

19/20.41 Any Other Business

1. The Deputy Chairman reported that the first two sections of the HR Policy Review have been completed.
2. The CEO highlighted the amount of time the team is spending on HS2 work, especially now work has started. It is the intention to make strategic interventions and hold HS2 to account.
3. The Chairman mentioned that he had been invited to a meeting with Defra concerning its stand on Diversity.

Future Meeting Dates

Full Board:

Wednesday 24th February 2021

Wednesday 21st April 2021 AGM only

Wednesday 23rd June 2021

Wednesday 20th October 2021

Executive Committee

Wednesday 27th January 2021

Wednesday 28th April 2021

Wednesday 15th September 2021

Planning Committee:

Wednesday 18th November 2020

Wednesday 3rd March 2021

Wednesday 14th July 2021

Wednesday 17th November 2021.

The Chairman.....date.....

The smaller authority failed to approve the AGAR in time to publish it before 1 September 2020, the date required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as amended by SI 2020/404 the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, and did not disclose this by answering 'No' to Section 1, Box 1.

The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission for review.:

- *Section 2, Box 7 for the prior year does not agree to Boxes 1+2+3-(4+5+6). This is due to a transcription error in Box 1. The figure in Box 1 for the prior year should read £569,809.*
 - *The smaller authority has not fully addressed the 'except for' matter raised by the external auditor when qualifying the prior year AGAR. In the prior year, grants received that had not yet been used were treated as deferred income and not included in Section 2, Box 3. In the current year the smaller authority has accounted for grants correctly in Box 3 when they were received, and any grant not used has been correctly carried forward as an earmarked reserve rather than being treated as deferred income. However, the prior year figures have not been restated to be on the same basis, instead the deferred income of £336,198 as at 31 March 2019 has been released to Box 3 income in the year ended 31 March 2020. Section 2, Box 7 for the prior year should have been restated to include this deferred income and should read £897,040. Section 2, Boxes 1 and/or 3 for the prior year should have been restated by the same amount in total depending on when the grants were originally received. Therefore, for the current year Section 2, Boxes 1 and 3 should read £897,040 and £4,920,493 respectively.*
6. The Board will recall that the previous year's accounts were qualified to the treatment of Deferred Income and that the Finance Officer was to investigate how such a qualification may be avoided. As the AGAR does not include a Balance Sheet it was decided to include Deferred Income within Earmarked Reserves which would be acceptable to the auditors. The CCB will continue to publish its own Revenue account and Balance Sheet which classifies Deferred income in accordance with the Financial Account Standards as a Liability rather than a Reserve.
7. The change in disclosure was made in the 2019/20 figures and therefore the auditors have recalculated what the 2018/19 figures would have been on the same basis, including the brought forward reserves.

Action required

8. The notice of conclusion of the audit together with the auditor's report are required to be published on the CCB website.
9. To note the External Auditors report.

Recommendation

- 1. To approve and accept the auditor's report and approve the actions noted.**

Chilterns Conservation Board

Notice of conclusion of audit Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2020

Sections 20(2) and 25 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014

Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)

Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/404)

	Notes
<p>1. The audit of accounts for Chilterns Conservation Board for the year ended 31 March 2020 has been completed and the accounts have been published.</p>	<p>This notice and Sections 1, 2 & 3 of the AGAR must be published by 30 November. This must include publication on the smaller authority's website. The smaller authority must decide how long to publish the Notice for; the AGAR and external auditor report must be publicly available for 5 years.</p>
<p>2. The Annual Governance & Accountability Return is available for inspection by any local government elector of the area of Chilterns Conservation Board on application to:</p> <p>(a) <u>THE FINANCE OFFICER</u> <u>CHILTERN'S CONSERVATION BOARD</u> <u>THE LODGE 90 STATION ROAD</u> <u>CHILTERN OXON OX39 4H4</u></p> <p>(b) _____ _____ _____</p>	<p>(a) Insert the name, position and address of the person to whom local government electors should apply to inspect the AGAR</p> <p>(b) Insert the hours during which inspection rights may be exercised</p>
<p>3. Copies will be provided to any person on payment of £ <u>1</u> (c) for each copy of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return.</p>	<p>(c) Insert a reasonable sum for copying costs</p>
<p>Announcement made by: (d) <u>GRAHAM HURST - FINANCE OFFICER</u></p>	<p>(d) Insert the name and position of person placing the notice</p>
<p>Date of announcement: (e) <u>5 FEBRUARY 2021</u></p>	<p>(e) Insert the date of placing of the notice</p>

Section 3 – External Auditor Report and Certificate 2019/20

In respect of **Chilterns Conservation Board OT0011**

1 Respective responsibilities of the body and the auditor

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2020; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

Our responsibility is to review Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with guidance issued by the National Audit Office (NAO) on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (see note below). Our work **does not** constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would do.

2 External auditor report 2019/20

Except for the matters reported below, on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

The smaller authority is required by law to publish its AGAR, including the signed external auditor report, by 30 November this year; however, we are unable to certify completion of our review work on the AGAR and supporting documentation prior to 30 November to allow the smaller authority to fulfil this requirement, as the period set by the smaller authority for the exercise of public rights does not expire until on or after 30 November 2020.

An invoice for the standard annual review fee (and chaser letter charges where they apply) has been issued with this interim certificate; however, this interim invoice does not fall due for payment until we certify completion and issue our final report and certificate. Should we receive challenge correspondence before we have certified completion, any additional fees arising from additional work required as a result of that correspondence will be invoiced with the certificate of completion; where no additional fees apply a zero invoice will be issued on completion. Both the interim and final invoices do not fall due for payment until we issue our final invoice with the certificate of completion.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

Please see above.

3 External auditor certificate 2019/20

We do not certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2020

We do not certify completion because:

The period set by the smaller authority for the exercise of public rights does not expire until on or after 30 November 2020.

External Auditor Name

PKF LITTLEJOHN LLP

External Auditor Signature

PKF Littlejohn LLP

Date

26/11/20

* Note: the NAO issued guidance applicable to external auditors' work on limited assurance reviews for 2019/20 in Auditor Guidance Note AGN/02. The AGN is available from the NAO website (www.nao.org.uk)

Final External Auditor Report and Certificate 2019/20 in respect of Chilterns Conservation Board OT0011

Respective responsibilities of the body and the auditor

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with Proper Practices which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2020; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

Our responsibility is to review Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with guidance issued by the National Audit Office (NAO) on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (see note below). Our work **does not** constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would do.

External auditor report 2019/20

On 26 November 2020, we issued a report detailing the results of our limited assurance review of Sections 1 and 2 of this authority's Annual Governance & Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2020. We explained that we were unable to certify completion of the review at that time. We are now in a position to certify completion of the review.

The external auditor report given in Section 3 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return requires amendments as follows:

Except for the matters reported below, on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

The smaller authority failed to approve the AGAR in time to publish it before 1 September 2020, the date required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as amended by SI 2020/404 the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, and did not disclose this by answering 'No' to Section 1, Box 1.

The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission for review.:

- Section 2, Box 7 for the prior year does not agree to Boxes 1+2+3-(4+5+6). This is due to a transcription error in Box 1. The figure in Box 1 for the prior year should read £569,809.
- The smaller authority has not fully addressed the 'except for' matter raised by the external auditor when qualifying the prior year AGAR. In the prior year, grants received that had not yet been used were treated as deferred income and not included in Section 2, Box 3. In the current year the smaller authority has accounted for grants correctly in Box 3 when they were received, and any grant not used has been correctly carried forward as an earmarked reserve rather than being treated as deferred income. However, the prior year figures have not been restated to be on the same basis, instead the deferred income of £336,198 as at 31 March 2019 has been released to Box 3 income in the year ended 31 March 2020. Section 2, Box 7 for the prior year should have been restated to include this deferred income and should read £897,040. Section 2, Boxes 1 and/or 3 for the prior year should have been restated by the same amount in total depending on when the grants were originally received. Therefore, for the current year Section 2, Boxes 1 and 3 should read £897,040 and £4,920,493 respectively.

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Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

We note that the smaller authority did not comply with Regulation 15 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as amended by SI 2020/404 the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 as it failed to make proper provision during the year 2020/21 for the exercise of public rights, since the period for the exercise of public rights did not start on or before 1 September 2020. As a result, the smaller authority must answer 'No' to Assertion 4 of the Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21 and ensure that it makes proper provision for the exercise of public rights during 2021/22.

External auditor certificate 2019/20

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2020.



PKF Littlejohn LLP

05/01/2021

Item 7**HR Handbook**

Author: Ray Payne, Deputy Chairman

Summary: This paper provides a summary of the current position.

Purpose of Report: To note.

Background

1. The programme of work to develop a revised and contemporary HR handbook for the Board has now reached the stage for the Advisory Group to begin looking at it and providing input. It has been recast to incorporate the latest HR policy guidance and legal compliance. It is also being transcribed into a contemporary format and style. It is designed in individual stand-alone sections in such a way as to allow periodic changes to be made without having to publish again the whole volume.
2. It is anticipated that the transcription process will be complete in the first week in February. When this is done the first sections will be sent to the Advisory Group for comment.

Recommendation

1. **To note this interim report.**

Item 10

Board Review (February 2021)

Author: Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer

Summary: This paper provides an overview of the team's activities and achievements since the last meeting in November 2020.

Purpose of Report: To update the Board of the organisation's ongoing work and to invite feedback.

Background

The Coronavirus outbreak began to impact our day-to-day work in early March 2020. In the early stages, our work largely centred on making key decisions in line with emerging Government guidance. This included arranging for the staff team to work and be connected remotely, liaising with colleagues and partners to pause project work and suspend meetings and other events, and responding to requests for information, eg from Defra, the National Association of AONBs and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The second phase involved still reacting but also planning ahead, with a key focus being to explore how we can best deliver the AONB Management Plan and the Business Plan.

The third phase began in the Summer, when lockdown restrictions started to be eased and we moved to activities which included providing guidance for visitors to the Chilterns, sign-posting local businesses that were starting to open, developing a suite of socially distanced walks and liaising with partners and others in tackling the more negative consequences of more people using the countryside. We also started to explore starting up site visits and survey work, which included putting all the necessary measures in place to ensure staff safety.

Despite the continued disruption to day-to-day life, the staff team has achieved a great deal in recent months. This paper highlights some of these achievements and provides a strategic overview of the impact, risks and opportunities of the current situation, while also looking ahead to the post-coronavirus recovery phase.

Recommendation

- 1. To note the paper and provide feedback.**

1.0 Summary

The CCB team has continued to work at home since mid-March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Various measures are in place to ensure the team can keep in contact, including regular team meetings, informal groups in MS Teams, project teams meeting regularly and, as restrictions have allowed, meetings in small groups or 1 to 1. The team continues to be kept informed regarding the latest government advice and the decisions we are making as a result.

During this period of reporting, we dealt with the impacts of tighter restrictions during November, followed by national restrictions the following month to the present time. The whole team has been very pragmatic in its approach to an uncertain and fast-moving situation and have planned and adjusted their work accordingly, particularly that most affected by the restrictions, such as outdoor and group activities including surveys and monitoring, practical habitat restoration, festivals and community engagement.

As a team, we have also continued to work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including NGOs, businesses, MPs and government agencies, and have engaged at a regional and national level with the government - especially Defra - and colleagues across the network of protected landscapes.

As part of new measures being introduced to more effectively monitor, evaluate and report on impact, we intend to develop a more effective means of reporting to the Board. We therefore expect a new format for the Board Review to be in place for the next Board meeting.

2.0 Report from Executive Committee, 27 January 2021

2.1 The Finance Officer reported a net surplus of £16,528, largely explained by a £10,000 Covid business support grant from South Oxfordshire District Council, £5,200 additional funding from Defra received via the National Association of AONBs and £6,000 from HS2 for staff time on the AONB Review Group. Core expenditure is underspent due to Covid restrictions and staff working at home.

2.2 The Finance Officer presented a draft budget for 2021/22. Core income is budgeted at a similar level to 2020/21 at £564,800. Core expenditure is budgeted at £582,160. All possible savings will be made, though pension contributions are set to increase – a payment outside the CCB’s control – and any salary increases will result in increased pension contributions. Projects in general breakeven subject to CCB contributions and the budget deficit will be met from the 2020/21 surplus and reserves, should no additional funding be received.

2.3 The Deputy Chair summarised the current position with the review of the governance of the Board and explained that the Phase 1 report had been shared with Defra.

2.4 The Deputy Chair reported on progress on a revised HR handbook. A final draft will be circulated soon to the HR Advisory Committee.

2.5 The CEO introduced the Business Plan for 2021/22. She set out how the whole team contributed to its development and explained how the Business Plan is instrumental in delivering and reporting on our DEFRA KPIs and will be submitted to DEFRA as part of the CCB’s core grant claim.

2.6 The Committee reviewed the Risk Register and made recommendations for updates and additions, including the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.7 The CEO introduced the Board Review, summarising the huge range of work delivered by the team during the last period, despite Covid-19, giving a strategic overview of the opportunities and risks of the current conditions, whilst looking ahead to the post-pandemic recovery period.

2.8 The CEO updated the Committee on the Mend the Gap programme and gave a verbal update on the Landscapes Review and progress being made by the CCB with implementing its recommendations. The government's formal response is expected later this year.

3.0 Report from Planning Committee, 18 November 2020

3.1 The Committee met virtually for a second time, receiving and approving updates on work undertaken by the Planner and Planning Advisor on both strategic planning and development management issues, as well as related corporate activity, with a verbal update from the CEO. The Planner gave a brief overview of anticipated future caseload and an outline of a possible work programme for 2021, with a commitment to provide more detail at the next meeting (3 March 2021 – most likely also to be held virtually).

3.2. Substantive discussions related to the responses submitted on the Board's behalf to two major government consultations relating to short- and long-term reforms to the planning system, in particular on how housing needs could be calculated (see below for latest news on this) and ideas for simplifying and speeding up the planning system by classifying land for "protection", "renewal" or "growth". Most proposals comprised a mixture of positive, negative or unclear outcomes for the Chilterns (and protected landscapes in general). For details, see the news and updates section at the bottom of the CCB [planning and development web page](#).

3.3 The Committee also considered the need for a CCB position statement on the proposals for strategic development in the "Oxford-Cambridge Arc" (OxCam). Several CCB publications and statements have noted the potential for this growth corridor to impact upon the Chilterns AONB, but this has not so far been quantified or a formal position developed. Following an excellent and informative discussion, the Committee recognised the need for a position statement on OxCam. In particular, it advised that the position statement should promote the Chilterns AONB as an important and powerful part of the sub-region's infrastructure that contributes to its prosperity and the well-being of its residents. As a result, plans for the development of the sub-region must not only protect the Chilterns environment, but also contribute resources to the enhancement of the AONB.

4.0 Over-arching and core work

4.1 Administration, finance and IT (Donna and Lynne)

- All administration, finance and IT has continued to be carried out effectively from home since the office was closed on 17 March. We have now moved from using Sage software for recording financial transactions to Xero, which is hosted in the Cloud. Using Xero means we have been able to start using ApprovalMax to automate creation of purchase orders and approvals of invoices. This has been a major innovation and time saver for senior staff and should also give us even greater financial controls.
- Training in best use of Hubspot contact management system for the team is due to take place in the coming weeks, along with procedures to help ensure the CCB team uses and manages personal contact data to ensure GDPR compliance.
- Telecommunications - members of staff who did not have a telephone in the office previously, now have telephone numbers hosted in Microsoft Teams and are able to make external calls directly from Teams. The existing physical numbers/lines from the office are due to be ported to a hosted service on 3rd March by our current supplier, they

will provide the information for each user to download in advance along with the necessary passwords.

4.2 Chilterns Partnership and Partnership Delivery Plan (Kath) Kath and Claire are now working with Kate Measures (consultant) and partners on creation of the draft Partnership Delivery Plan and impact monitoring framework. Deadline June.

4.3 HS2 (Neil, Matt, Kath, Elaine)

The CCB continues its efforts to reduce the negative impact that HS2 is having on the Chilterns landscape, its wildlife, historic features and communities. Key recurrent themes include HS2 and its contractors' lack of transparency, their failure to uphold claims to work to the highest environmental standards, poor community engagement and failure to be a 'good neighbour'.

In all our activities, we are liaising with a range of stakeholders including Buckinghamshire Council, Natural England, the Police, national and local NGOs (including the Chiltern Society, Woodland Trust and the RSPB), councillors and representatives of local community groups.

- **River Misbourne** - Since our last update, both Allen Beechey and Neil Jackson visited Bottom House Farm Lane and saw first-hand the damage to the bank of the River Misbourne and subsequent flooding of adjacent land. In response to expressing our further concerns, HS2 called a workshop to present their position. Neil, Allen and Elaine attended for the CCB. The contractors, Fusion, acknowledged bank vegetation had been removed (soil has too) and agreed to work with CCB to identify solutions to repair the bank and mitigate flooding. Further meetings are scheduled with the Environment Agency, local MP Dame Cheryl Gillan and others.
- **Bucks HS2 Environment Group** – Elaine and Neil were pleased to attend an inaugural meeting of a new HS2 Environment Group, set up by Bucks Council to coordinate work on the growing number of concerns related to early HS2 works throughout Bucks.
- **Additional Projects** – we continue to work with partners and farmers to identify projects that will provide landscape, wildlife and recreational improvements in the HS2 corridor.
- **Recreational Links** – Neil and Jonathan Clark (Bucks Council Rights of Way) met with representatives from EKFB (the HS2 designers for the above ground section through the Chilterns) to discuss new rights of way running parallel to the route and linking all the public rights of way that will be dissected by the line. The 'Wendover' and 'North Links' were first proposed by the Detailed Design Principles prepared by LUC for the Chilterns Review Group. It is hoped that these links will provide additional safe walking and cycling extending from South Heath to the new Stoke Mandeville by-pass.
- **AONB Review Group** - we continue to provide technical comment on emerging HS2 designs, landscape and ecological mitigation, largely through the [AONB Review Group](#).
- We are very grateful to all the local people, parish councils, the Chiltern Society and other groups who provide invaluable information concerning what is happening on the ground – particularly during lockdown, when HS2 and their contractors' activities are more difficult to monitor. We remain committed to working with and supporting local people to do the best we can to protect communities, wildlife and the Chilterns landscape. Further information can be found on our [HS2](#) webpage.

4.4 Nature and Landscape (Kath, Nick, Neil)

- **Farm Clusters** – the Central Chilterns Farm Cluster, led by Nick and Ian Waller (Chair of the central Chilterns Farm Cluster and CCB Board member), goes from strength to strength with an expanded programme of projects and activities. These are set out in more detail in the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs section including news of a successful grant application to the Rothschild Foundation (£9,500) to deliver phase 1 of a cluster-wide carbon project.

The Christmas Common farm cluster also continues to develop despite lockdown

restrictions. Ed and Wendy ('Beacons of the Past') have identified historic pond locations from the project's LiDAR survey and historic maps to help farmers find suitable sites on their farms for new or restored ponds.

More information on our work with farm clusters can be found [here](#) and a case study of the landowner engagement & support model is in development. The work is underpinned by end-to-end landowner engagement and support, along with monitoring through citizen science.

- **Landowner engagement and support** – We are continuing to develop, roll out and embed this model across the whole of the Chilterns (and beyond). One of our highest conservation and landscape priorities, we are pursuing all opportunities to deliver positive environmental outcomes with farmers and landowners. For example, we are seeking to embed these approaches in other initiatives including our new Chalkscapes landscape partnership, the Big Chalk project with other protected landscapes in the south east (see below), Defra's Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilot in Buckinghamshire and Defra's Farming in Protected Landscape programme. Our ambition is that in the Chilterns
 - all farmers have access to the benefits of a farmer cluster and
 - all land managers have access to a basic package of support and advice
- **Agricultural Transition Plan** - We continue to assess the implications of the government's evolving Environmental Land Management Schemes proposals including possible three-year funding to implement the new measures in protected landscapes. The team attended a series of National Association of AONBs workshops before Christmas which aimed to ensure a greater understanding of ELMs.
- Neil and Nick have set up a series of six online webinars for farmers looking at different topics linked to the proposals in ELM, running from 3 February to 10 March. As we write the first two have been successfully delivered, attracting 300 and 250 attendees respectively. The full programme is [here](#) and all webinars will be recorded and available to watch on YouTube [here](#).
- **Farming in Protected Landscapes** – We await the details of this Defra-led scheme and associated funding which we will oversee for the Chilterns. We have advised on the design of the scheme and are developing scenarios looking at how to integrate this programme with our existing landowner engagement work and landscape scale projects.
- **RPA data** – the Rural Payment Agency has recently shared with us farmer and landowner data within the AONB and extending 10km around the boundary. This will be of great help to our work in delivering our statutory duties, and will include using the data to collaborate with our neighbouring AONB, the North Wessex Downs.
- **Big Chalk** - Kath is working closely with eight other AONBs, and the South Downs National Park, in the development of the 'Big Chalk' initiative, which aims to work with landowners, farmers and local communities to build resilience in calcareous landscapes (chalk and limestone) on an unprecedented scale. The initiative will run from the south coast to the midlands. Kath and Nick are working with Simon Smith from the Cotswolds Conservation Board to strengthen the project concept and ensure a strong focus on landowner engagement and support. We are talking with colleagues from North Wessex Downs AONB and South Downs National Park to set up a forum for those working at a landscape scale with farmers and other land managers.
- **Rural Forum** – the CCB team continues to support the evolving Buckinghamshire Rural Forum through membership of the steering group and by delivering presentations at the public meetings. The Forum is involved with developing Food and Rural Strategies both of which we will be contributing to in support of our farmers, communities and other rural businesses.
- **Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan** – part of the NAAONB Colchester Declaration commitment every AONB is to create a Nature Recovery Plan. Kath is leading this work for CCB and has begun to scope out an approach which can integrate with our land management engagement work, as well as the local authority led Local Nature Recovery

Strategies (as set out in the Environment Bill). This work will be a high priority over the next quarter.

- **5.0 People and Society (Annette)**

- ***Chilterns Walking Festival***

- The Chilterns Walking Festival took place 17 October - 1 November. Featuring 65 walks and outdoor events over 16 days, and attracting 624 participants, the Festival was smaller than usual due to Covid restrictions. It was nevertheless a great success, providing inspiration and exploration with expert guides. Some key findings below and a festival summary [here](#).
- Some key achievements include: collaborated with over 50 organisations and volunteer walk leaders across the Chilterns; 57% of participants used a local business before/after their walk and visited an average of 1.7 businesses; 39% of participants were from outside the Chilterns; 47% discovered new parts of the Chilterns during the Festival; and 35% joined several walks
- We supported and promoted several new Chilterns businesses and initiatives through the Festival including the Midsomer on the Misbourne walking trail, the 'River Meadow at the Pile of Stones' arts trail in Chesham and some newly established walking guides
- The Festival generated press and social media coverage. We gained 351 new Facebook followers (bringing total to 1,268) and 21,000 page views on the Chilterns Walking Festival web pages
- Two Chilterns Walking Festivals will take place in 2021: 22 May - 6 June 2021 and 16 - 31 October 2021. We are looking at opportunities to expand the Festival and reach a greater diversity of audiences, identifying new partners and communities to work with, and exploring new funding opportunities.

- ***Countryside Access***

- We continued to play an important role in reviewing and disseminating government guidance and communications regarding Covid-19 and countryside access. This included raising awareness of the Countryside Code and on-going promotion of our series of 23 [social-distance friendly walks](#) which we are looking to expand.
- Promoted a 'respect the countryside' media campaign in February 2021 focusing on keeping to the path and keeping dogs on leads. This was done in partnership with the NFU, CLA, TVP and local farmers, and achieved extensive media coverage.
- We prepared a response to Natural England's consultation on the Countryside Code which NE are in the process of revising.
- Provided advice and support to a number of new initiatives, including the Wendover Arm Trust for the resurfacing of the Wendover Arm Canal towpath, an important recreational resource.
- We have been working closely with the Chilterns Tourism Network, Visit Buckinghamshire and others to update and distribute information about visiting the Chilterns with the changing Covid-19 situation. This included messages about 'Know before you Go' and encouraging people to continue to shop local, promoting local food and drink, farm shops, farmers markets and community shops [see here](#).
- We marked **World Mental Health Day** (10 October) with [a blog](#) and social media highlighting 'How to look after your health and wellbeing', from walks and rides to volunteering and nature spotting.
- Other **blogs, articles and social media** focused on 'Halloween Happenings'; 'What to do with the kids this winter'; 'Keeping active outdoors right through the winter' and 'Four seasons Chilterns'. All these blogs helped to promote sustainable visiting and outdoor activities.

- ***Open for Business project***

- On hold from the start of lockdown in March. Although there was a partial re-opening of the leisure and hospitality sector over the summer and autumn, we decided not to

resume activity on the Chilterns Pass or the Festivals until circumstances allow, hopefully by Easter 2021. Groundwork has approved our revised plans and the grant funding for the project will be maintained.

Fostering the economic and social wellbeing of local communities

- Working closely with our tourism partners, we have maintained regular communications with businesses, signposting them to information on business grants, sharing and updating them on sector news.

6.0 Communications (Claire and Vicki)

6.1 Strategic Communications Planning

- Vicki has been working on a new set of brand guidelines, social media guidelines and social media usage policies to share with the team.
- A number of additional assets have also been created in order to streamline the communications processes and encourage staff members to contribute to sharing the great work they have done. We have introduced a Communications channel in MS Teams for sharing news and information. The team is also able to update the media log, add media contacts, and tell us about upcoming work.
- We have also been working on a communications plan which will be populated and developed once the new website is complete. Claire is also working on a Communications strategy in conjunction with Vicki.
- We have completed a large piece of data management and contact work, updating mailing lists for Outstanding Magazine distribution and, as a result, have formed a new task group for data management. The group has set out a contact management matrix and will be implementing the new way of managing contacts and training the entire staff team on this and HubSpot (CRM system) in the coming weeks.

6.2 Operational communications (Vicki)

The CCB's communications work continues to develop and grow in line with our ambition to raise the profile of the Chilterns AONB.

- ***Outstanding Chilterns*** magazine hit the shelves in November 2020, having generated the highest revenue since production began. On our behalf, 18,000 copies are distributed throughout the Chilterns and we have widened our reach to include parts of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Berkshire which have previously not been included. A further 2,000 copies have been distributed to partner organisations, MPs, Local Authorities and stakeholders including Affinity Water, Thames Water, Defra and Natural England. Remaining editions will be sent to libraries across the Chilterns once the lockdown has lifted.
- *Outstanding Chilterns* is proving to be an excellent advocacy tool and reach has been further extended through sharing electronically through our [website](#).
- We expect the additional investment in distribution, redesign and quality print will result in an even higher revenue generation next year, leading to it being a profitable asset.
- **BOARD MEMBER REQUEST:** *We are now seeking ideas and article contributions for the next edition of Outstanding Chilterns. If you have an idea for an article or would like to contribute, please email vpearce@chilternsaonb.org. We would also be grateful if you could advise the best distribution methods for the organisations you represent, to ensure as wide a coverage of the magazine as possible.*
- ***New website*** - the website project continues to progress with the main website "build" now complete. Significant progress on the interactive map has been made with development almost complete and all interactive map points reviewed, researched and updated. We are now working on the content and imagery and anticipate a "go live" date in April.

- **Volunteer hub** - we have also spent significant time on the compilation of a “volunteer hub”. Content writing and flowing into the site will commence in the next few weeks and following that we will be asking for volunteers to help “test” the new site in various internet browsers and devices. Please email Vicki vpearce@chilternsaonb.org if you would like to be part of the website test volunteer group.
- **Annual Review** - The Board’s Annual Review 2019/20 is complete and will be shared on our website and included in the next e-newsletter.
- The CCB website, e-newsletters and associated social media channels continue to be updated regularly with news on the team’s work and relevant government advice. We mostly use Twitter and Facebook: @Chilternsaonb
- **Blogs, statements and views** have been written and shared [here](#), including:
 - Chilterns Conservation Board highlights the increase in concerns over HS2 activities
 - ‘Respect the Chilterns Countryside’ plea from leading conservation groups and farmers
 - The future of planning - and what it might mean for the Chilterns
 - Keeping the Chilterns’ skies dark: CCB responds to “Dark Skies” consultation
 - Concerns raised over HS2 Work in Jones’ Hill Wood
 - Chilterns Conservation Board welcomes the Prime Minister’s 10 Point Plan
 - Green light for new £2.8 million landscape partnership project "Chalkscapes"
 - The best Chilterns places to visit with kids this winter
 - Covid-19 latest guidance on access to the Chilterns countryside
- **Support to team** - we have been supporting the new farmer webinar series, creating webpages, writing content and scheduling social media posts to assist with promotion. The first webinar titled “Why we need to farm with the environment in mind” was hosted by James Rebanks and was extremely well received. The video is [here](#)
- **Volunteers and contributors** – Vicki has been working with a number of new photographer volunteers who will be assisting with the compilation of a new set of stunning images to use on the new website. She has also been reaching out to more experts, influencers and bloggers to ask for contributions to a blog schedule, an element of the new comms plan.

6.3 Media coverage

The Chilterns has received some good media exposure over the last three months including:

Chilterns celebration & Chilterns Champions conference included articles in [Visit Buckinghamshire](#), [Slow Chilterns](#), [Oxford Mail](#), [InYourArea Community News](#).

Best of the Chilterns

- Cheryl Gillan MP’s [article](#) on a Chilterns National Park in Politics Home
- The Spectator [article](#) on the Chilterns and Cotswolds
- Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project – Woodlanders Lives and Lace industry – [article](#) in Wendover News
- [Feature](#) on Beacons of the Past in British Archaeology magazine
- [The Guardian](#): Chalk streams and waterfalls: the natural wonders under threat from HS2
- Article from Elaine in Affinity Water’s Customer Challenge Group newsletter (December 2021)

Enjoying the Chilterns and visitor management issues

- Elaine [interviewed](#) by BBC Radio Oxford (1:31)
- Annette [interviewed](#) by BBC Radio Oxford in response to our press release with the CLA, NFU and Thames Valley Police for walkers to keep to the footpaths and keep dogs under control

- [Article](#) about walkers damaging one of our farmer's crops, quoting our guidance and one of our tweets
- Articles in [The Countryman](#), the [Bucks Herald](#), [Hiya Bucks](#) and [TheBeyonder](#) about #keoptothefootpath
- [Article](#) in the Bucks Free Press on concerns over littering at Desborough Castle hillfort, in High Wycombe
- The Chilterns to be featured on [Countryfile](#) on Sunday 24 January, including an interview with our own Dr Wendy Morrison

HS2

- [Article](#) in the Guardian: Inside the 'moving factory' that will cut HS2 through the Chilterns
- Concerns in [Bucks Free Press](#) over bright lighting at Jones Hill Wood

Woodland/planning

- [Article](#) in the Henley Standard on selling small parcels of woodland for development when no permission exists
- [Letter](#) in Planning Resources from Matt Thomson, CCB Planner, on method used by the government to assess housing need

7.0 Development & Funding

7.1 New project development

Green Recovery Challenge Fund (Claire, Kath & Allen)

- After a successful Expression of Interest (EOI) to the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund, we submitted a full application to the GRCF in October, in partnership with non-governmental organisations including the Chiltern Society and Chiltern Rangers.
- Unfortunately, the application, which comprised a suite of projects to contribute to the delivery of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project's Business Plan, was unsuccessful. We have been advised that the application was strong and that we should resubmit a proposal when the second tranche of funding (another £40m) opens in early 2021. The fund was hugely oversubscribed - £40m was available and applications totalled over £270m. We are currently revising our project proposals with the intention to resubmit to this fund.

8.0 Planning (Matt Thomson and Mike Stubbs)

8.1 Planning Applications (Mike)

Planning Applications

- At the Nov 2020 Planning Committee, 28 CCB formal representations were reported, of which six involved objections. In updating the committee on applications reported to the July Committee it was interesting to note that seven applications were subsequently refused (to which CCB had objected) and two withdrawn (to which CCB had objected). CCB needs to carefully select when it does raise an objection to a planning application but it is useful to know of cases where Local Planning Authorities share the same opinion on the merits of an application.
- Also of note, a number of sites are now coming forward in which Local Plans have been adopted/approved and allocations made within the AONB area. Two such sites in the Buckinghamshire Wycombe Area have resulted in detailed applications. The recent adoption of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan should also result in similar detailed applications coming forward. This is to be expected, with scrutiny at the application stage focusing on matters of detail as opposed to the planning principle of development. CCB may have opposed the principle at the Local Plan/Neighbourhood Plan stage.
- Consideration as to the setting of the AONB remains a matter that requires careful evaluation. Two such applications, of late, about the AONB boundary at Little Kimble and at Hazelmere. The former is awaiting the deferred Neighbourhood Plan referendum in

May 2021 and the latter generated objection due to the partial and piecemeal selection of the allocation, avoiding the wider benefits of green infrastructure and cherry orchards in the wider allocated site.

8.2 Local and neighbourhood plans (Matt and Mike)

- The **South Oxfordshire Local Plan** was adopted on 10 December. The Inspector's [final report](#) included further details of his reasoning which were sufficient to demonstrate that he had taken his CRoW Act section 85 duty seriously. While the outcome is not perfect, the plan contains sufficient safeguards for the protection and enhancement of the AONB, so long as the relevant policies are applied correctly (i.e. as the Inspector's reasoning suggests) - we will need to be vigilant to ensure that they are.
- The **Dacorum Local Plan** was published for [consultation](#) in December, and the deadline has just been extended to 28 February to help account for Covid-19 restrictions. The plan is challenging as a result of housing targets imposed on the borough, and most of the major development proposals (at Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring) adjoin, or will have a significant impact on the setting of, the AONB. Council officers have been working proactively with us, particularly on reducing impacts on the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge and Tring Park, but our initial reaction to the plan is that more needs to be done to (a) reduce the overall ambition for growth in light of the AONB in line with para 11 of the NPPF, (b) focus on regeneration within existing built up areas, and (c) where greenfield development is necessary, provide landscaped recreation space as a buffer to the AONB and make designs more compatible with the designation. We also have concerns about the impact of policies and proposals on chalk streams, water abstraction and dark skies, etc. The Chiltern Society, Chilterns Countryside Group and several residents' associations have formed a "one voice alliance" to put pressure on Dacorum BC to reduce the scale of greenfield development in the Plan. Along with the local Wildlife Trust and CPRE group, we have been advising this alliance on technical matters.
- Hertfordshire County Council published its **draft Waste Local Plan** for consultation on 11 January, running to 19 March. We have not had the chance yet to assess the potential impacts of this new plan's proposals.
- CCB submitted comments to the **Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan** (closed 16 Jan 2021). The pre-submission consultation is supported by a robust and detailed evidence base and one that supports the creation of a landscape to the south of the AONB boundary, itself of sufficient quality to be protected as a valued landscape and one that contributes positively to the setting of the AONB. The policy and indeed the Neighbourhood Plan is exemplary and evidence based.
- Buckinghamshire recently adopted (November 2020) the **Burnham Beeches Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Strategic Access Management Supplementary Planning Document**. New homes within 500 metres of the SAC are to be resisted and between 500 metres and 5.6 km must contribute financially to education, monitoring and survey work so that effective management and recreational alternatives are put in place. CCB supported this policy, when developed. It is also a useful model for similar recreational management and planning strategies within the AONB area.

8.3 Strategic transport planning (Matt)

- We have few specific updates for this report, but we have contributed to work on **HS2** (see above). We have recently begun engaging with the next phase of the **Misbourne Greenway**, where proposals are being drafted for the section through Great Missenden and to the south. Care will need to be taken with the meadows in that area and the integrity of the Misbourne itself, for this otherwise very worthwhile project.
- **Heathrow Airport** - the Supreme Court overturned previous rulings on the potential expansion and determined that it was, after all, lawful for the government to confirm its support for the expansion proposals through the publication of the Airports National

Policy Statement. We expressed disappointment in the decision through social media channels, and [this statement](#), but it's worth noting that the ruling does not mean that Heathrow expansion should go ahead, just that it was lawful for government to support it.

8.4 National issues (Matt)

- In December, MHCLG published its [response](#) to comments received on the part of its “Changes to the current planning system” consultation relating to their proposals to amend the “standard method” for assessing housing need. This was swiftly followed by revisions to the online planning practice guidance. The revised approach, now implemented, retains the existing (deeply flawed) housing needs method, adding an additional uplift in the housing need for the 20 largest urban areas in England, regardless of local aspirations, opportunities or constraints. Matt Thomson expressed his view on the new proposals in an [opinion piece](#) on CCB’s website.
- We responded to MHCLG’s consultation on “[Supporting housing delivery and public service infrastructure](#)” which proposed more planning freedoms under permitted development rights for converting commercial premises to homes (not applicable inside AONBs) and for extending social infrastructure (including schools, hospitals and prisons inside AONBs). Our response (in MHCLG’s awkward pro forma) is [here](#). There is now [another](#) live MHCLG [consultation](#) on a national model “design code” and changes to the NPPF relating to the design of new development, which runs until 27 March.

8.5 Policy issue: Lighting and Tranquillity

- We were invited to participate in a discussion on 9th Feb on lighting proposals for the redesign of a school parking and vehicular access at the Misbourne School, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire (application to discharge lighting details, reference AOC / 0051/20). The discussion involved much technical detail and Chilterns Management Plan policy DP8 was an important component.
- The impact of lighting on tranquillity and biodiversity is a matter of increasing concern in recent planning applications, and HS2 is also a cause for concern with construction and security lighting. New roads planned at Princes Risborough and around Aylesbury will also impact upon the setting of the AONB.
- Last September CCB submitted its [views](#) to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Dark Skies when calling for evidence on tranquillity issues, noting the importance of dark skies tourism and the point that national planning guidance lacks any real detail or depth when dealing with lighting issues in AONBs/National Parks and the countryside more generally. We are now considering the need for CCB technical advice on lighting, and an initial paper may be ready for Planning Committee in March.

9.0 Projects

Chalk, Cherries & Chairs (Lachlan , Harriet, Lizzie, Nick, Sam and Kath)

- We are delighted to confirm the appointment of [Lachlan Stuart as](#) new Project Manager for Chalk, Cherries and Chairs landscapepartnership. Lachlan joined us on 1 February and is currently part way through his induction, whilst also planning a project review with the project steering group. Lachlan’s appointment means that the interim line management arrangement involving Wendy, Claire and Kath can come to an end, although handover and induction will take some time as this is a complex project.
- A spring festival will be going ahead from 8-15 April, albeit online. Partners are busy creating new videos, volunteer interviews, and projects working closely with local students as part of this showcase. We hope to be able to organise a larger festival for summer 2021, including town centre events and volunteering recruitment events
- New leaflets and booklets are being created to showcase project work once we are able to get back out, recruiting new volunteers and working with new groups

Wildlife Theme (Nick and Harriet; Chiltern Rangers, BBOWT)

The Farmer Cluster continues to develop its offer to its 18 members. In this period:

- Four contractors appointed to carry out 18 Whole Farm Plans. Work now underway and will be completed by end of March 2021. Plan to work with individual framers to agree specific plans for their farms and to offer support for them to enter Countryside Stewardship or develop specific Lottery funded projects directly. Novel approach asking all contractors to work collaboratively to ensure connections between farms
- Year two roll out of the supplementary feeding project is underway with 13 tonnes of seed being mixed by Ian Waller (thanks Ian) and distributed across the 18 farmers. Bird count completed on all 50 feeders in early January with impressive counts on farms
- Wildflower margin challenge completed with seed supplied to 13 farmers (equiv. 3km new margins)
- Bucks Owl and Raptor Group (BORG) has been hampered with Covid and wet weather in putting up Owl boxes but have now installed 50 boxes with four farms remaining
- Agreement signed with Bucks Mammal Group to set up and deliver new small mammal survey project across three member farms. Kit supplied to the group includes Longworth traps
- New Amphibian/Reptile survey project being developed. Donations of over 350 refugia secured from farmers and many from Atkins Global recycled from their use on East-West Rail project. Volunteers from BMERC to check monthly over spring/summer
- 11 volunteers in place to deliver third year of winter farm bird survey across all 18 farms in February
- Farmland bird ringing programme now expanded from three to five farms last year. November and December ringing sessions completed but January postponed due to Covid. Hoping February and March can be delivered
- Successful application to the Rothschild Foundation for phase 1 of three year farm carbon project. £9,500 secured and will provide training workshop, 1:1 advice per farm to help complete farm carbon self-assessment and also carry out soil analysis on two fields per farm as first stage of wider project
- Consultant commissioned to draw up case study document of the work and impact of the Farmer Cluster to date. This will be used in public arena but also as a key advocacy tool to help in discussions with Defra on roll out of ELM and other strategic programmes
- First of 18 [LiDAR](#) maps for each of the farms complete, with aim to complete all 18 by Spring to help farmers understand heritage features on their farms
- Designed and set up six new farmer webinars for February/March aimed at introducing key underlying principles of ELM. First webinar is a keynote session from James Rebanks (Author of English Pastoral, fantastic book!). Full programme of webinars and booking details [here](#)
- Two Whole Farm Plans completed, one in process of completing new mid-tier Countryside Stewardship Agreement
- Site based work has really accelerated this winter: Lodge Hill scrub clearance 85% complete and due for completion by end of January with fencing, water and stock pen work by end February and hopefully cattle grazing on site by spring. Two 17 year old media student commissioned to do before, during & after videos. Second update [here](#).
- Significant hedgerow planting and coppicing projects well under way at six sites, two orchard expansion projects completed
- Partnership funding package of support agreed and being delivered with the Woodland Trust
- Local Wildlife Site survey and application to BMERC being developed. Quote from BMERC surveyor - *'fantastic chalk grassland, some of the biggest and best I have ever seen. Would be worthy of SSSI status'*
- Growing number of farmers and private landowners developing projects for delivery in Autumn/Winter 2021/22

- Tracking the Impact undergone full volunteer evaluation and year two delivery being planned ahead of April start, assuming Covid restrictions are lifted
- Tracking the Impact project has plans in place to support 109 volunteers with 11 online and 24 infield training days. Survey coverage stands at 72%
- Advocacy work continues to grow with involvement in Farmer Cluster best practice sharing across NAAONB, South East & East Protected Landscapes group (SEEPL) and across Buckinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilot, and sharing information with Defra landscape and farming teams
- Work nationally with JNCC using project example of best practice to help shape wider work to roll out more local landscape scale surveying projects.

Heritage Theme (Sam, Bucks New University, Amersham Museum)

October festival activities delivered:

- 21 people attended two guided walks focussing on historic routeways based in Chinnor and Coombe Hill
- Online talk on historic routeways delivered to 32 and viewed by further 147 on YouTube
- Online talk on Grim's Ditch delivered to 25 and now viewed by further 403 on YouTube
- Heritage Working Group met in November to begin considering festival plans for 2021 and activities/events we can run either separately or together as a heritage theme
- The Woodlanders' Lives Project continues to engage with volunteers and work on research and developing the bodgers pub tours, also planning how the deposition of material at the end of the project will be carried out.
- Understanding the Chilterns has had some great uptake with schools as a result of Covid, with more appetite for teacher training and loan boxes leading to further plans being developed for the project as school museum visits are currently not possible

Comms and Engagement Theme (Lizzie)

- The second comms partnership meeting took place in late January 2021, bringing together our partners to discuss the 'digital flythrough' as part of C5 (Coming Alive) and other issues, including the spring festival. Once again, lots of creative ideas for content were shared and partners are now working on these
- Work continues on a partner comms resource pack, to make requesting comms help and new content easier, as well as reviewing the communications and engagement outputs as part of each project under the LCAP and how these might be addresses to reach key audiences
- A new partnership with Aylesbury Youth Action is forming, starting with the delivery of a series of history research workshops lead by Helena Chance. We hope this will be just the beginning of our work with this group!
- Echoed Locations is under review, and Lizzie is busy getting quotes from local artists, musicians and sound technicians to deliver workshops and sonic postcards to help promote the project and inspire more people to get involved
- Illustration students from Bucks New University will be working on sonic postcards as part of Echoed Locations, combining sounds and images to create inspiring files to add to the sonic map and inspire young people to get involved in the project
- The website remains regularly updated, showcasing the latest videos, workshops and online resources to inspire our audience

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (Allen & Ceri)

- The Project held a riverfly monitoring course in early December. The course was run with reduced numbers to ensure social distancing to be maintained during the practical session. The four trained monitors will be monitoring the R. Ver.
- With the introduction of the third lockdown, the majority of riverfly monitoring groups have ceased monitoring again. Only the Ver and Chess groups remain operational.

- Data from the first phase of Water in a Dry Landscape volunteer water quality surveys has been made publicly available. Shortlisting of sites for the more detailed phase 2 surveys is underway. Tendering for the surveys will begin in February.
- The CCSP has continued to work with Chiltern Rangers to deliver the second phase of restoration work on the R. Wye at Wye Dene in High Wycombe. Work includes tree work and the installation of woody habitat features along 200m of the R. Wye Back Stream.
- A project plan for the creation of a fish pass around Dodd's Mill on the R. Chess near Latimer was developed in January. The scheme is being funded by the Environment Agency and the work is expected to be carried out in the Autumn of 2021.
- Determination of the £250K bid to the UK Research Institute grant fund by Queen Mary University London and a partnership including the CCSP, has been delayed until the end of January. The application is for citizen science project focussing on developing monitoring techniques for assessing the health of winterbournes in the Chilterns.
- The CCSP has secured an offer of funding (£235,000) over five years from Thames Water to support delivery of the new CCSP Business Plan and the Chess Smarter Water Catchment Pilot scheme. The Project has joined the advisory panel of a project to define health metrics for chalk streams in the Chilterns. The project, commissioned by Affinity Water, aims to develop a framework and a bespoke series of metrics that can be used to determine what constitutes 'good' condition for chalk streams in the Chilterns and assess the health of the Chilterns rivers against that standard.
- The CCSP has continued to work with Thames Water and the River Chess Association in the development of the R. Chess Smarter Water Catchment pilot scheme. Although progress has been delayed by Covid, Thames Water has recruited two new officers to help support the development process of the three pilot schemes and the creation of the catchment plans. They have also issued a draft contract to the CCSP for its involvement in delivering aspects of the Chess catchment plan over the next five years.
- In December, the Project Officer and River Chess Association Chairman, Paul Jennings, led a field visit to the upper Chess with representatives of Affinity Water including CEO Pauline Walsh, Natural England Chairman Tony Juniper, Charles Walker MP and Charles Rangely-Wilson. The purpose of the visit was to brief Tony Juniper on issues impacting Chilterns chalk streams and on the work that stakeholders are doing to improve the condition of the Chess.
- The CCSP completed three advisory visits over the winter with landowners on the Misbourne, Hamble Brook and Horsenden Brook, providing advice on the management of chalk streams and river restoration options.
- The CCSP continued to work closely with partners on the Chilterns Chalk Rivers Action Group, which included an online [summit](#) in October, with a keynote speech from Defra Minister, Rebecca Pow.

Beacons of the Past (Wendy and Ed)

- The project has met one of its key deliverables, against all expectation, by [identifying a new hillfort](#)
- Project delivery timetables are being brought in line with the significant delays to capital works and volunteer engagement brought about by Covid-19 restrictions and impacts.
- The [LiDAR portal](#) continues to be available online, with over 4200 registered users and an average of around 20 different people logging in every day to help find and map archaeological sites.
- Over 10,000 archaeological features have been recorded by our 'Citizen Scientists' and nearly 5000 already worked on through the Reviewers Portal (higher level trained volunteers who validate entries for inclusion in the official Historic Environment Records)
- A four page article on the project appears in the Jan/Feb 2021 issue of *British Archaeology* (national readership 50,000)

- A series of [video lectures](#) have also been prepared for those who missed Ed's workshops. Ed's YouTube videos – recordings of talks about the project – have now clocked up over 1700 views. Links can be found in Ed's excellent Year in Review roundup [blog](#)
- Wendy appeared on BBC's [Countryfile](#) on 24 January in a short feature on the LiDAR aspect of the project
- Ed and Wendy were invited to write an article on the project for *Geoconnexion*, the leading publication for geospatial and GIS technologies professionals with a digital readership of 1 million globally.
- Wendy has worked with Historic England to secure £28,380 in additional funds to increase the scale of capital works delivered on four hillforts in the southern and central Chilterns, to include comprehensive erosion mitigation at Ivinghoe Beacon. She will be working next to secure a similar amount for three sites in the Northern Chilterns.
- Several landowners have been engaged to discuss improved management of archaeological features on their land.
- Ed has been supporting Neil with responding to felling licence applications, using the LiDAR data to demonstrate extant archaeological earthworks in woodland.
- Wendy spoke at the Ver Valley Society AGM to over 100 people and the recording made available on [Vimeo](#)
- In the month of November alone Ed and Wendy gave talks to local societies and groups reaching an audience of over 170. In addition, Ed recorded a short talk for Edinburgh University students about LiDAR and Citizen Science, which was watched by just under 50 undergrad, Masters, and PhD students.
- Over Christmas, Ed and one of the BotP volunteers, Nigel Rothwell, submitted an article for the Roman Roads Research Association newsletter, concerning the evidence for Roman roads seen in the Chilterns LiDAR. This will be circulated to the board when available. (They will also give a 'Zoom' talk on the subject in late February or early March – date to be confirmed.)
- The LiDAR Review Portal "Upper Database", to be provided to the county HERs at the end of the project, now stands at over 4700 records, and continues to grow.
- Quotations are now being received for the creation of a Woodland Management Plan for Cholesbury Camp.

Mend the Gap – joint venture between the CCB and North Wessex Downs AONB (Jo)

- The Programme Manager continues to work to raise the profile of Mend the Gap with organisations and individuals with interests that overlap with those of the programme. Visits (pre lockdown) and online meetings have been held with a number of organisations including the Anne Carpmael Charitable Trust (Withymead Nature Reserve), Earth Trust, South Stoke Parish Council, Goring Gap Boat Club, South Oxfordshire District Council, local landowners, Action for the River Kennet and the Pang Valley Flood Forum
- Development of emergent projects continues, including: access-related projects linked with the Thames Path and Ridgeway Path; a possible foot passenger ferry link between Moulsoford and South Stoke; a land manager engagement project across the two AONBs within the programme area; and a possible new foot ferry across the Thames.
- We are intending to recruit a Mitigation Projects Officer to focus on developing and implementing mitigation planting schemes within the programme area which will directly reduce or soften the visual impact of the rail electrification. The job advert for the Mend the Gap Mitigation Projects Officer went live on 18 January.
- Jo has given a presentation about Mend the Gap to the North Wessex Downs Council of Partners in November. Feedback was positive and a number of useful contacts were made.
- Filming for a short film about Mend the Gap took place over two days during December. The film is intended as a tool for promoting the programme and for providing background

about its origins and ambitions. It was shown at the North Wessex Downs AONB Annual Forum meeting on 29 January and will be made available on both AONBs' websites.

- Jo was a panellist at the North Wessex Downs AONB's January 2021 forum meeting.

Chalkscapes (Claire & Jenny)

- Permission to Start was secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for our Chalkscapes Project in December 2020. We successfully recruited a Development Manager in November 2020, and are delighted to welcome Jenny Ponsford, who joins us from the National Trust Ashridge. Jenny will work part time. We now have one more post to fill on this team: that of Development Officer. We have readvertised after an unsuccessful advertising campaign in October. The vacancy is currently live on both the [Guardian website](#) and Environment jobs.
- The Chalkscapes Development period will run for 24 months, and will culminate in a Delivery Stage bid to the NLHF in late 2022. If successful, we will secure funding for a five year delivery project on a similar scale to Chalk, Cherries and Chairs. This provides us an excellent opportunity to focus on community engagement and volunteering with more diverse audiences, particularly young people in the urban conurbations of Luton and Dunstable.
- A key challenge will be the impact of Covid-19 restrictions – on actual outreach and engagement – as well as the commitments of key partners – such as the National Trust and Local Authorities, who have undergone considerable reorganisations and restructures.
- Board members are invited to make suggestions as to how we can work closely with Local Authorities, Parish Councils - and especially community groups - in the North Chilterns project area. Any Board members wishing to get involved in the project, or find out more, are invited to contact Jenny Ponsford directly: jponsford@chilternsaonb.org.

10.0 National focus (Elaine and Team)

Liaising with a range of organisations and individuals, including our partners - both nationally and locally - has been important during this period. This has included conversations with our local authorities over responding to the Covid-19 emergency and working with the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), AONB Lead Officers, National Parks and others on a range of operational and strategic matters. Strong links have also been maintained and developed with Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Defra

- The CCB staff team continues to communicate and share information on our work with Defra, particularly since the CCB team hosted a visit by five officials from the Landscapes team in March 2020.
- A number of staff changes at Defra, and a rapidly developing work programme, has led to some very positive conversations with Defra officials and opportunities for us to share insight and showcase our work. This has included liaising with Defra, Natural England and others on implementing the Landscapes Review, commenting on design of the government's Agricultural Transition Plan, developing Nature Recovery Networks and measures to improve the protection of chalk streams.
- The CCB is also a key partner on Defra's Buckinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Pilot. Kath sits on the Pilot Area Team and is providing direct support for that work to end of March (0.75 days funded per week). This work includes input on stakeholder engagement, workshop facilitation and assisting with analysis of workshop findings.

- Elaine has also collated information for Defra from AONBs relating to the Landscapes Review and is a member of Defra's Contact Group for AONBs and National Parks exploring implementation of the Review's recommendations.

NAAONB

- Members of the team continue to work closely with Lead Officers and their teams in other AONBs and the National Association of AONBs on a range of strategic and operational matters, including comms, nature recovery, visitor management and farming,
- Elaine continues in her role as a member of the Colchester Declaration Steering Group, along with Kath and Claire. The Declaration was agreed by all AONBs in July 2019 and aims to increase the scale and pace of conservation activity in AONBs, along with increasing our engagement with people and local communities.
- Work has included developing an ambitious plan for nature recovery across all AONBs in England and has resulted in securing Natural England funding for a national Nature Recovery Officer to work across all AONBs in England. The Officer started work in October.
- Claire is leading the development of a proposal as part of the Colchester Declaration, work. The Urban Hinterland Cluster (Kent, High Weald and Surrey Hills AONBs) seeks to engage with young, black people aged 16 - 24 in central London.
- Elaine worked with the NAAONB and group of Lead Officers to develop a major funding bid for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF). The bid comprised a Nature Recovery Officer for each of the 34 AONBs in England, plus a designated fund to distribute to partner projects within each AONB. The application was unsuccessful and we are exploring next steps to secure alternative funding for the project.
- Elaine also meets with other AONB Lead Officers and National Parks to discuss collaborative working on Nature Recovery Networks and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilots (of which Buckinghamshire is one) and is working with a small group of Lead Officers to collate and share AONBs' insight on the new Farming in Protected Landscapes element of the government's new Agricultural Transition Plan
- Continued work on joint initiatives and engagement with South East and East protected Landscapes (SEEPL) with most recent meeting in December.

Other

- HS2 continues to be a huge cause for concern. As reported above, the examples are mounting of damage and disruption to the Chilterns AONB landscape, its wildlife and local communities, alongside a lack of transparency by HS2 Ltd and its contractors. Conversations are ongoing with Buckinghamshire Council, Natural England, MPs, the police and others, including formal correspondence with HS2 and government ministers.
- We continue to liaise over funding opportunities with Defra and external bodies, such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This has included providing insight on the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF).
- Significant progress has been made on chalk streams, leading to increased collaboration with and commitment from all key players, including increased funding from water companies. Elaine is also contributing to Affinity Water's long-term strategic planning and has provided an article for the company's Customer Challenge Group newsletter.
- Discussions on the Landscape Review proposals are ongoing, especially the proposal for the Chilterns to be designated a National Park. In November, the Prime Minister announced the designation of new National Parks and AONBs and we are waiting for further detail. In the meantime, Cheryl Gillan MP wrote an [article](#) for The House magazine advocating for a Chilterns National Park.
- A number of (online) meetings were held with local MPs in this period, providing a good opportunity to share information and views.

- Claire and Elaine have also held virtual meetings with local councils, including Herts CC and Bucks Council to discuss Covid-19 emergency planning and recovery, and are both on partnership boards for Bucks Councils' 3 Rs for Recovery strategy.
- Buckinghamshire is one of five pilots for a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy, announced by the Secretary of State in July. Kath leads for the CCB, sitting on the LNRS Pilot Area Team and inputting to the stakeholder engagement group with Elaine.
- The pilots were launched in one of our farmer clusters in August. Defra published a [tweet](#) and [blog](#) on the LNRSs and the visit to the Chilterns.
- Elaine is a member of the [Buckinghamshire Culture](#) Development Board, which met in January 2021. Buckinghamshire Culture is a partnership that aims to build the quality of cultural opportunities in the county, strengthening the cultural sector, growing the creative industries and promoting a sustainable, inclusive approach to culture-led development.
- [The Landscapes for Everyone](#) (#LfE and #L4E) national conference was held online on 13 October. The proceedings are now available online ([morning](#) and [afternoon](#) sessions). Focussing on proposals 7 and 17 of the Landscape Review (7: connecting everyone with landscapes and 17: creating vibrant communities), Elaine chaired the morning session, which included a keynote speech from Julian Glover and a series of expert presentations. The Chilterns had a strong presence with one of our young volunteers, Emily, contributing as a Youth Ambassador, and our Beacons of the Past selected to submit an online [poster](#).

Item 11

Mend the Gap Update

Author: Jo Watson, Mend the Gap Programme Manager

Summary: To update members on progress with the Mend the Gap programme

Background

Introduction

The Mend the Gap Programme has funds of £3.75million secured from Network Rail and to be used for projects and schemes that will mitigate and compensate for the harm done to the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs by the electrification of the Great Western Railway. The funding is split across two primary strands: £0.75million for mitigation projects; £3million for enhancement projects.

Recruitment

Recruitment is currently underway for a Mitigation Projects Officer. The post-holder will be responsible for building relationships with local landowners, farmers and community organisations to develop the mitigation schemes and work with and oversee contractors and volunteers to realise those schemes. The closing date for applications is 17 February.

Network Rail

Disappointingly, despite expressing keenness to build a closer relationship with protected landscapes, there has still been no further contact from Network Rail following the discussion between Network Rail, the National Association of AONBs, North Wessex Downs AONB and Chilterns Conservation Board in October. The Programme Manager and NAAONB will continue to chase.

Filming

The Mend the Gap introductory film is complete and was shown as part of the North Wessex Downs AONB Annual Forum on 29 January. The film and subsequent Q&A session gave rise to some interesting discussion and subsequent contacts. The film is now available on the [Mend the Gap](#) pages of the CCB website.

Enhancement Projects

Further discussions/meetings have been held with a number of organisations to explore potential opportunities for development of projects within the programme area that fit with the Mend the Gap criteria. Several potential projects also continue to be developed through to a point where they can be presented to the Programme Steering Group for consideration.

Mitigation Projects

As noted above, recruitment for the Mitigation Projects Officer is underway.

Following negotiation of a new data sharing licence with the Rural Payments Agency, CCB now has access to contact details for landowners across the Mend the Gap area who are in receipt of payments from the RPA. The data have only recently been received but look to be far more comprehensive within the Chilterns AONB's parts of the MtG area and for the first time, includes the North Wessex Downs part of the area. Time is needed to match landowners to priority locations for mitigation planting but this should provide an excellent platform for identifying and establishing contact with landowners.

The Programme Manger has met with the tenant farmer of some areas of land identified as priority locations for mitigation planting and also with his agent. Both are open to the possibility of tree planting and hedgerow restoration in the identified locations. However, this would be subject to the agreement of landlords. Jo Watson will be making contact with the landlords' agents to open next stage of discussions.

Recommendation

- 1. To note the update and provide feedback.**