



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

**27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 10.00am**

**By \*remote video conferencing**

**Agenda**

1. Apologies
2. Declaration of Interest
3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (23.09.20)
4. Matters Arising
5. ~~\* Public Question Time~~
6. Finance Report
7. Draft Budget 2021-22
8. Governance Review
9. HR Handbook
10. Business Plan 2021-22
11. Risk Register
12. Board Review
13. Mend the Gap
14. Landscapes Review (verbal update)
15. A.O.B

*\* 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	24 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
	21 <sup>st</sup> April 2021 (AGM only)
	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2021
	20 <sup>th</sup> October 2021
Executive Committee	28 <sup>th</sup> April 2021
	15 <sup>th</sup> September 2021

<u>Planning Committee</u>	3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2021
	14 <sup>th</sup> July 2021
	17 <sup>th</sup> November 2021



**MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON Wednesday 23<sup>th</sup> September 2020 by remote video conferencing commencing at 9.30 am**

Present:

Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Lynn Lloyd	Board Member
John Nicholls	Board Member
Paul Mains	Board Member
Prof. Ray Payne	Board Member
Cllr Ian Reay	Board Member, Chairman

In attendance:

Graham Hurst	CCB Finance Officer
Dr Elaine King	CCB Chief Executive Officer

Deirdre Hansen	Clerk to the Board
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*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*

**19/20.35 Apologies for absence.**

Apologies were received from Paul Mains who had advised in advance of the meeting that he would be late.

Apologies for absence were received from Alison Doggett.

**19/20.36 Declarations of interest**

None.

**19/20.37 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020 were approved as a true record.

**19/20.38 Matters arising**

None

**19/20.39 Finance Report**

The Finance Officer had circulated the financial report to the Committee on the financial position to the end of July 2020

There is a core surplus of £17,027 due to increased external income. This surplus will be used during the year due to commitments to projects. When the budgets were set, income from local authorities had not yet been agreed and the Finance Officer had set the budgets cautiously.

An unexpected £10,000 Covid grant had been received from South Oxfordshire District Council. The Finance Officer is investigating the CCB's entitlement to this grant.

There is a significant amount of money due from HS2 for the salary costs of the HS2 AONB Review Group Programme Manager. Advertising monies are also due for the "Outstanding Chilterns" magazine.

Planning consultancy costs were higher than usual as the Planning Advisor had carried out more work in the months between the Planning Officer leaving and the new Planner starting.

The Committee discussed the financial report.

**1. The Committee NOTED the financial results for the four months to July 2020.**

**19/20.40 Treasury Management Review**

The Finance Officer reported that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy deem it good practice to annually review Treasury Management Strategy. This is done in September.

The Finance Officer gave details on the CCB's holding of funds, ensuring the best rates of return with the lowest risk. The Executive Committee agreed to maintain its strategy of using UK deposit accounts, maximising return with a low risk approach.

The Finance Officer will maintain his approach to search for higher returns without risking capital.

It was noted that interest rates are exceptionally low at present.

Treasury Management was discussed.

**1. The Committee AGREED to continue to maximise interest received from deposit accounts where the risk of losing capital is reduced.**

**19/20.41 Annual Accounts**

The Finance Officer advised members of the CCB's financial position to the end of 2019-20 as presented in the Annual Accounts prior to Full Board approval at the next Board meeting.

1. The increased total income of £1,186,214 is almost entirely due to the project income increase of £300,000.
2. The increase in expenditure to £1,183,719 is also almost entirely due to increased project expenditure just over £300,000.
3. The surplus for the years was £2,495

4. The increase in current assets is entirely due to the advanced payment by Great Western Railway for funding to the Mind the Gap joint venture with the North Wessex Downs AONB of £3,750,000. This is treated as deferred income and the corresponding liability is shown in current liabilities reflecting that these funds will be spend in future years as the Mind the Gap programme advances. This is in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice rules for income recognition.
5. It was noted that the CCB's pension scheme is 105.9% funded. The Triannual valuation and the FRS 102 valuation for the annual accounts are performed using different assumptions as advised in the Pension Scheme report discussed by the Committee at its January 2020 meeting (ref 19/20.20)
6. Reserves were noted. Most are restricted. The free reserve is £100,000.
7. The internal audit report required in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) has been completed and has confirmed that there are no matters of concern to be brought to the attention of the Board.
8. The final internal audit report is awaited and will be brought to the Board. The external audit is delayed until the AGAR has been approved by the Full Board. The restrictions due to Covid-19 have meant the AGAR approval will be at the next Board meeting instead of at the time of the AGM normally held in June.

The Finance Officer was thanked for his work.

### **1. The Committee NOTED the CCB's financial results for the year ending 2019-20**

*10.07 Paul Mains joined the meeting.*

#### **19/20.42 Board Review**

The Chief Executive Officer had provided a comprehensive overview of the team's activities and achievement over recent months.

She thanked the Finance Officer for advising her and managing the CCB's accounts effectively.

The Finance Officer complimented her detailed understanding of the finances.

The CEO commented that the Board report had been a team effort with every member of the team contributing to the report. She highlighted a few points.

1. The team is managing working from home exceedingly well. More work has been generated due to Covid-19 and the team has responded to the opportunities that have arisen. The team is exploring how to manage delivery of the additional work in the long term.
2. One of her key priorities has been looking after the team while working remotely. Staff have been able to collect items of equipment and furniture to enable working from home and are meeting in small groups, but are primarily based t home for the time being.
3. The CCB's core work is in the Chilterns, but the CEO and the team are also working to have more of a voice nationally, for example through working with other AONBS and the National Association of AONB (NAAONB).

4. The team is drafting an Expression of Interest for a bid for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, recently launched by the Government. The focus is on practical work as well also looking at bidding for a greater sum with the NAAONB's for this fund. The focus is on practical work to restore chalk streams and education, connecting people with nature. This bid includes working in partnership with NGO's. The CEO is developing a bid with the NAAONB. The deadline for expressions of interest for smaller bids (>£250k) is 24 September 2020 and for bids £250,000 to £5m the deadline is 2 October 2020.
5. It is still expected that the Government will respond to the Glover Review by the end of the year. The CEO continues to contribute to the Defra contact group for AONBs and National Parks.
6. The Chilterns Chalk Streams project continues to be busy, with chalk streams currently a very topical issue.
7. The Countryside Officer is working with the team and partners on identifying priorities for a delivery plan for the AONB Management Plan.
8. The CCB submitted Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for 2019/20 to the NAAONB, which compiles the data and sends them to Defra. The CCB's KPI is impressive with increases in metric including the number of volunteers (612 to 3,281) and the value of volunteer time (£75,680 to £240,476). Attendance at events that we have convened also increased (3,597 to 4,464) and the number of young people engaged (436 to 1,486). The CCB is also part of the steering group or lead partner on a great number of partnerships (17 to 29).

Members thanked the CEO for her report. They were impressed with all the activity and very encouraged by the progress she highlighted.

The CEO expressed her concern regarding the design of the HS2 Amersham vent shaft. The impression is being given that the AONB approves the current design, though this is not the case. A briefing document was provided to Buckinghamshire Council and the local MP, Cheryl Gillan. She expressed her concern that the CCB's view had not been taken into account, even though they are members of the HS2 Chilterns AONB Review Group and highlights the challenges of not being a statutory consultee.

The Chairman stated that he was very impressed with all the work the CEO and the team have been doing including the projects, engagement and increasing the profile of the CCB. He was grateful to the CEO and the team for all the work that is going on in very difficult circumstances.

### **1. The Committee NOTED the Board Review and provided feedback.**

#### **19/20.43 Mend the Gap**

The CEO updated members on the development with the Mend the Gap programme and provided the Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Agreement for approval.

1. The project was initiated following the installation of steel gantries and wires for the Great Western Electrification project between Reading and Didcot, affecting the North Wessex Downs AONB and the Chilterns AONB. Network Rail provided a £3.75m grant to restore the natural beauty in these two nationally protected landscapes.

2. Jo Watson was been appointed as Programme Manager in February 2020. A month later the Covid -19 restrictions came into play, curtailing a lot of the work, but with the easing of restrictions momentum is starting to build.
3. The key governance documents have been updated and discussed by the Committee. It was noted that the CEO Chairs the Mend the Gap Steering Group and the CCB Finance Officer oversees the finances for the programme, regularly reporting to the Executive Committee. The members asked for a bi-monthly summary report in advance of the steering group meetings. The Advisory Group will stay in place and it was agreed that the programme will be a standing item on the agendas of the Executive Committee and Board Meetings.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the update, provided feedback and APPROVED the Terms of Reference and the Memorandum of Agreement.**
- 2. The Committee AGREED that the Mend the Gap programme will be a standing item on future agendas for the Executive Committee and Board Meetings.**

#### **19/20.43 Future establishment of the Board**

The Deputy Chairman had tabled a draft of Phase 1 of the Board's report on the future establishment of the Board.

He acknowledged the assistance of the Board members, Paul Mains, John Nicholls, John Griffin, the Finance Officer and the Clerk in their advice and assistance in preparing the draft report.

The future establishment of the Board is divided into three basic phases. Phase 1 establishes the facts and subsequent reports will make recommendations.

The Members discussed and agreed the report and the programme for delivery. The document is very helpful.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the progress and the programme for delivery of the review.**

#### **19/20.44 Any Other Business**

1. The Vice-Chairman reported that the first review of the HR policy will be released shortly.

#### *11.38 The Vice-Chairman left the meeting*

2. The Clerk had asked if the CCB's website complied with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (no2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

*Post meeting the Communications Officer confirmed that the new website will comply, but the launch had been delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions. The existing website requires two hours work to make it compliant, which she has actioned straight away.*

- 3. The Chairman advised the Committee that the Vice-Chairman’s appointment to the Board will end after ten years in March 2021. Defra will be recruiting a replacement.

**Next meeting: TBC**

The Chairman.....

Date.....



**Item 6** **Finance Report****Author:** Graham Hurst, Finance Officer**Summary:** At November 2020 the CCB is showing a net surplus of £16,528 in respect of Core and Project activities**Purpose of Report:** To update members of the Board with the CCB financial position to the end of November.**Background**

1. The eight months to November show a net position of £16,528 surplus and it is envisaged that the CCB will make an overall surplus for the financial year 2020/21. In these difficult times caused by Covid, the CCB has taken a cautious approach to its finances and the surplus can be analysed as follows.
2. Core income is higher than budgeted mainly as a result of a £10,000 Covid grant received from South Oxfordshire DC, £5,200 additional funding via National Association of AONBs received from DEFRA, £6,000 fees received from HS2 for staff time engaged with the AONB Review Group. Without this unbudgeted income the CCB would have made a core surplus but had an overall deficit for the period.
3. Core expenditure is underspent. The main savings were in respect of staff salaries where no increase was awarded in this financial year. Office, travel and meeting costs are also lower due to Covid restrictions and staff working from home.
4. Consequently, the CCB has a Core surplus of £37,383 at November. This surplus is utilised against the CCB agreed contributions to projects leaving a net surplus of £16,528 at the end of November.
5. The Board will note that the draft Budget, which will be presented at this meeting, shows a net deficit of £38,380 for 2021/22 and therefore the surplus in the current financial year will be fully utilised in the forthcoming year.

**Recommendations**

1. **To note the current financial for the financial year.**

Chilterns Conservation Board	2020/21	Nov-20	
Finance Report Year to 31 March 2021	Annual Budget 2020/21	8 Months Budget	8 Months to Nov 2020
	£	£	£
<b>Income</b>			
<b>Public Sector</b>			
Defra	448000	298667	304072
Local Authorities	104000	69333	74273
	552000	368000	378345
<b>External income</b>	14800	9867	19506
<b>Core income</b>	<b>566800</b>	<b>377867</b>	<b>397851</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Employment	406128	270752	267348
Members' Allowances	9500	6333	5465
Premises	35000	23333	18206
Office Costs	15000	10000	4934
IT	14150	9433	8825
Finance	13000	8667	7847
Engagement	5000	3333	3000
Special Projects	5000	3333	0
Planning Consultancy	12000	8000	14475
Monitoring and Evidence	10000	4667	4667
Outstanding Chilterns mag.	7250	4833	7882
Website	5000	3333	438
Insurance	4000	3267	3161
Travel	4000	2667	1136
Personnel	3500	2067	2512
National AONB	3000	2000	3209
Other costs centres < £3000 budget	17300	13200	7362
<b>Core Expenditure</b>	<b>568828</b>	<b>379219</b>	<b>360467</b>
<b>Core Net income / (expenditure)</b>	<b>-2028</b>	<b>-1352</b>	<b>37383</b>
<b>Major Projects</b>			
<b>Chalk Streams</b>			
Income	63400	42267	25625
Expenditure	60000	40000	53567
Net	3400	2267	-27942
<b>Chilterns Woodlands contribution</b>	<b>-5000</b>	<b>-3333</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Hillforts Beacons of the Past</b>			
Income	276500	184333	60138
Expenditure	283025	188683	60138
Net	-6525	-4350	0
<b>Chalk Cherries Chairs</b>			
Income	423450	282300	144616
Expenditure	425950	283967	153537
Net	-2500	-1667	-8922
<b>HS2 Additional Projects</b>			
Income	0	0	14028
Expenditure	0	0	6815
Net	0	0	7213
<b>Chilterns Walking / Food Festival/ BLEF</b>			
Income	11665	7777	12971
Expenditure	11665	7777	3806
Net	0	0	9165
<b>Chalkscapes</b>			
Income	15000	10000	5750
Expenditure	20000	13333	6121
Net	-5000	-3333	-371
<b>Mend the Gap</b>			
Income	250000	166667	8180
Expenditure	250000	166667	8180
Net	0	0	0
<b>Project Net income / (expenditure)</b>	<b>-15625</b>	<b>-10417</b>	<b>-20856</b>
<b>Total Net Income (Expenditure)</b>	<b>-17653</b>	<b>-11769</b>	<b>16528</b>
<b>Grand total income</b>	<b>1606815</b>	<b>1071210</b>	<b>669159</b>
<b>Grand total expenditure</b>	<b>1624468</b>	<b>1082979</b>	<b>652631</b>
<b>Grand total net</b>	<b>-17653</b>	<b>-11769</b>	<b>16528</b>



Chiltern Conservation Board		
Annual Budget	2020/21	Draft 2021/22
Income	£	£
<b>Public Sector</b>		
Defra	448000	450000
Local Authorities	104000	100000
	552000	550000
<b>External income</b>		
Investment income	1000	1000
Fee Income	800	800
Events, sales etc net	13000	13000
	14800	14800
<b>Core Income</b>	<b>566800</b>	<b>564800</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Employment	406128	417000
Planning Consultancy	12000	15000
Travel	4000	3500
Web site	5000	5000
Communications, Printing / Distribution	4500	4500
Annual Report	1050	1050
Monitoring and Evidence	7000	7000
Subscriptions	1200	3000
Meetings and Partnerships	3000	2000
Planning Committee	900	750
Training	3000	3000
Premises	35000	35000
Office Costs	15000	15000
IT	14150	14000
Finance	13000	13000
Personnel	3100	3100
Monitoring / Clerk	1150	1150
Insurance	4900	4900
Engagement budget	5000	5000
Members' Allowances	9500	8500
National AONB	3000	3210
Outstanding Chilterns mag.	7250	7500
Other costs	5000	5000
Farm projects (landowners)	5000	5000
<b>Core Expenditure</b>	<b>568828</b>	<b>582160</b>
<b>Core Net income / (expenditure)</b>	<b>-2028</b>	<b>-17360</b>
<b>Major Projects</b>		
<b>Chalk Streams</b>		
Income	63400	65000
Expenditure	60000	70000
<b>Net</b>	<b>3400</b>	<b>-5000</b>
<b>Hillforts Beacons of the Past</b>		
Income	276500	200000
Expenditure	283025	205000
<b>Net</b>	<b>-6525</b>	<b>-5000</b>
<b>Chalk Cherries Chairs</b>		
Income	423450	200000
Expenditure	425950	205000
<b>Net</b>	<b>-2500</b>	<b>-5000</b>
<b>HS2 Additional Projects</b>		
Income	0	15000
Expenditure	0	16000
<b>Net</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-1000</b>
<b>Chilterns Walking / Food Festival / BLEF</b>		
Income	11665	10000
Expenditure	11665	10000
<b>Net</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Chalkscapes</b>		
Income	15000	10000
Expenditure	20000	15000
<b>Net</b>	<b>-5000</b>	<b>-5000</b>
<b>Mend the Gap</b>		
Income	250000	100000
Expenditure	250000	100000
<b>Net</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Project Net income / (expenditure)</b>	<b>-15625</b>	<b>-21000</b>
<b>Total Net Income (Expenditure)</b>	<b>-17653</b>	<b>-38360</b>
<b>Grand total income</b>	<b>1606815</b>	1164800
<b>Grand total expenditure</b>	<b>-1624468</b>	-1203160
<b>Grand total net</b>	<b>-17653</b>	-38360

**Item 9****HR Policy**

**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 policy 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.**



## Chilterns Conservation Board Risk Register

<i>Last Updated:</i>	February 2020
<i>Revisions:</i>	
<i>Approved:</i>	February 2020
<i>Next Executive Review:</i>	January 2021

### The Board's Risk Management Process

Risk management comprises two separate activities: risk identification, evaluation and impact; and management of the risk.

The first step is to identify the risks facing the Board. Each risk is then evaluated by assessing both its likelihood and its impact on a scale of 1 to 4. The two scores are then multiplied to give an overall risk score. Highest scores are classified as red risks, with lower scores classified as amber or green as appropriate and as indicated in the table below.

The next step is to manage each risk by identifying a suitable response and the risk score adjusted. There are four possible responses:

- transfer it (e.g. insurance)
- tolerate it (accept the risk)
- remove it (discontinue the activity that gives rise to the risk)
- treat or reduce it (take action to control it)

### Risk Scoring

	<b>4 Very High</b>	<b>3 High</b>	<b>2 Medium</b>	<b>1 Low</b>
<b>4 DISASTER</b> Significant service failure / total loss of public confidence / fatality / major financial crisis.	RED	RED	RED	AMBER
<b>3 MAJOR</b> Significant service disruption / serious public criticism / serious injury / large financial cost.	RED	RED	AMBER	GREEN
<b>2 NOTICEABLE</b> Some service delivery disruption / reduced public confidence / minor injury / unplanned financial cost.	RED	AMBER	AMBER	GREEN
<b>1 MINIMAL</b> Minor service delivery disruption / adverse public comment / no injury / low financial cost	AMBER	GREEN	GREEN	GREEN

No	Area	Description	Assessment – NO controls in place			Control Measures	Responsibility	Assessment – WITH controls in place		
			Likelihood	Impact	Score			Likelihood	Impact	Score
<b>1. REPUTATION: Any action or inaction that could damage the profile and status of the Board</b>										
1a	Reputation	Withdrawal of key partners such as local authorities due to funding and other pressures	3	3	9	Board Members to ensure profile of AONB and CCB within local authorities Involvement of all partners in AONB Management Plan Review	Board Members Chief Executive Officer	2	3	6
1b	Reputation	Loss of reputation due to scandal / impropriety, or bringing the Board into disrepute	1	3	3	Clear financial procedures and controls in place Qualified Comms Officer in post	Chairman Chief Executive Officer Deputy MO	1	2	2
<b>2. PERFORMANCE: Failure to deliver sufficient impact</b>										
2a	Performance	Lack of strategy and plan to create a sustainable future and deliver on duties Failure to implement recommendations in the Government's Landscapes Review	1	4	4	Regular consideration at Board and Executive Committee. Robust process to develop Business Plan Commitment to five-year Management Plan Development of Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to assess and deliver impact Staff team proactively exploring Landscapes Review recommendations Chief Executive is member of Defra working group exploring delivery of the Review's recommendations	Executive Committee Chief Executive Officer Chief Executive Officer	1	3	3
2b	Performance	Poor working relationship with Defra or funding				Regular liaison at Chairman and Chief Executive Officer level.	Chairman			



No	Area	Description	Assessment – NO controls in place			Control Measures	Responsibility	Assessment – WITH controls in place		
			Likelihood	Impact	Score			Likelihood	Impact	Score
		partners	1	3	3	Board Members to ensure profile of AONB and CCB within local authorities	Board Members	1	2	2
2d	Performance	Lack of staff capacity or capability Poor staff morale/ retention Lack of expertise e.g. landscape architecture	3	4	12	Effective recruitment process to replace CEO Effective use of personal and performance development system, annual objectives Positive approach towards staff training and development, including an appropriate budget Clear prioritisation in business plan Professional support from contractors: HR, legal, IT Strong project management in place	Chief Executive Officer	2	2	4
2e	Performance	Insufficient board contributions or attendance	2	4	8	Regular board reviews Board member knowledge sessions (2-3 per year) Improved communications with Board Members Actively connect Board and staff team	Chair Chief Executive Officer	1	2	2
2f	Performance	Failure of IT Systems Breach in data security/hacking	2	3	6	Contract with IT maintenance company. Effective back up system	Admin/office manager Admin/office manager	1	3	3
2g	H & S	Accidents to staff member, volunteer or contractor Lone working of staff	2	4	8	All staff to read H & S policy and ensure volunteers and contractors are aware	Chief Executive Officer	1	3	3

No	Area	Description	Assessment – NO controls in place			Control Measures	Responsibility	Assessment – WITH controls in place		
			Likelihood	Impact	Score			Likelihood	Impact	Score
		members Failure of electrical equipment				Annual review of H&S policy Lone-working system – use of public calendars, emergency contacts Annual check of electrical equipment Annual fire risk assessment	Admin/office manager			
2h	Safeguarding	Harm to members of public especially children and at-risk adults	2	4	8	Ensure staff are aware of safeguarding issues and new Safeguarding Policy	Chief Executive Officer	1	3	3
<b>3. FINANCIAL: Weaknesses of planning, control and monitoring, lack of resources</b>										
3a	Financial	Reduced resources due to Defra and local authority grant allocations reducing, or due to HLF reducing funding to landscape initiatives.	3	4	12	Detailed scrutiny of planned spend and income generation Board Members to ensure profile of AONB and CCB within local authorities Build evidence and 'return', make strong case for support to DEFRA and local authorities Develop and nurture relationships with key funders eg National Lottery Heritage Fund	Executive Committee Board Members Chief Executive Officer	2	3	6
3b	Financial	Insufficient resources to cover cashflow needs, emergencies and to invest in development	2	4	8	Effective management of reserves, including maintenance of minimum operational and contingency reserve Clear business cases for investments	Chief Executive Officer & Finance Officer	1	3	3
3c	Financial	Poor planning, control and monitoring	2	3	6	Preparation of medium-term financial plan & scenarios Scrutiny of annual budget to match costs with resources	Executive Committee Chief Executive Officer	1	2	2

No	Area	Description	Assessment – NO controls in place			Control Measures	Responsibility	Assessment – WITH controls in place		
			Likelihood	Impact	Score			Likelihood	Impact	Score
						Adequate resources for the repair and renewal of assets Review budget monitoring reports on a regular basis	Finance Officer			
3d	Financial	Failure to pay salaries and allowances to staff and members Failure to maintain pension scheme effectively	2	3	6	Sage payroll operated in-house Both Finance Officer and Administration Officer conversant with procedures Finance Officer monitors actuarial valuations and makes recommendations as necessary.	Finance Officer Admin/office manager Chief Executive Officer	1	3	3
3e	Financial	Failure to manage cash flow effectively	3	3	9	Treasury Management Policy in place Production of cash flow forecasts Expenditure controls	Finance Officer	1	3	3
<b>4. GOVERNANCE: Failure to operate as an effective and efficient body; failure to act legally</b>										
4a	Governance	Failure to comply with corporate governance requirements and legal obligations, including employment law, H & S law etc	2	2	4	Updated governance document & Code of Conduct in place Appointment of Monitoring & Deputy Monitoring Officer Appointment of Section 151 Officer Appointment of Monitoring Officer	Executive Committee & Chief Executive Officer	1	2	2
4b	Governance	Insufficient engagement & oversight by board	3	3	9	Effective involvement of Executive Committee & Planning Committee, use of working groups as appropriate Functional reviews by Exec Comm. Effective recruitment processes for new board members	Chairman Chief Executive Officer	2	2	4

No	Area	Description	Assessment – NO controls in place			Control Measures	Responsibility	Assessment – WITH controls in place		
			Likelihood	Impact	Score			Likelihood	Impact	Score
						Regular learning sessions/visits for board members Implement new guidance and policies from Government				
4c	Governance	Insufficient quantity and capability of externally appointed Board members  Lack of diversity amongst Board members	3	3	9	DEFRA/public appointments team selection process reviewed and updated in late 2019  Extensive networking by all  Effective Parish Council process	Chairman  Board Members  Deputy Monitoring Officer	3	2	6
4d	Governance	Failure to combat financial mismanagement, fraud, theft	2	4	8	Appointment of internal audit service  Appointment of Section 151 Officer  Effective internal governance policies and procedures	Finance Officer  Chief Executive Officer	1	3	3
4e	Governance	Failure to ensure public and staff safety at external events	3	4	12	Risk assessment undertaken for all events  Public liability insurance in place  Safeguarding Policy in place	Chief Executive Officer  Project Officers  All staff	1	3	3
4f	Governance	Failure to comply with data protection law	3	2	6	DP Officer appointed  Staff training & new procedures	Chief Executive Officer	2	1	2



**Item 12****Board Review (January 2021)****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 such as 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 Executive Board meeting.

**2.0 Report from Planning Committee, 18 November 2020**

2.1 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).

2.2. 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 relating to 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](#).

2.3 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, and advised the Planner to consider a statement which not only sought to prevent harm to the Chilterns AONB arising from the proposals, but emphasised the benefits that the Chilterns provided to the economy of the region and the

wellbeing of its citizens and sought recognition of those benefits through channels such as development contributions and biodiversity net gain.

### **3.0 Over-arching and core work**

#### **3.1 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 by the end of January, 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. We are working with our current telephone supplier to transfer numbers from the office to their hosted telephone system. This should be completed by end of January.

#### **3.2 Chilterns Partnership (Kath)**

- The first Annual Partnership Forum was held online on 15 October with a panel discussion and Q&A on the theme of Green Recovery in the Chilterns. Panel Members: Marian Spain, CEO Natural England; Pauline Walsh, CEO Affinity Water; Estelle Bailey, CEO BBOWT; Jonathan Smales, Executive Chairman Human Nature, with Howard Davies, CEO at the National Association of AONBs chairing. The forum was recorded and is available to watch [here](#).
- The forum was very well attended with 120 participants on the day and a good number interested in getting more involved. The next step is to bring the task and finish groups together to create the delivery plan and impact monitoring framework.

#### **3.3 HS2 (Neil, Matt, Elaine)**

The CCB continues its efforts to lessen 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.

- **Jones Hill Wood** - pressure from the CCB - including letters to HS2's Chief Executive - and others has secured a temporary halt to felling of ancient woodland at Jones' Hill Wood while bat surveys are carried out. Excessive lighting has now been adjusted to cause less disturbance to local communities and wildlife.
- **River Misbourne** - in 2020, we expressed our concern at HS2 contractors having removed 1km of ancient hedgerow, in the bird nesting season, beside Bottom House Farm Lane in Chalfont St Giles. Since then, HS2 contractors have damaged the banks of the River Misbourne where bridge foundations have been installed for the temporary haul road crossing the river. Concerns over the fragility of the perched River Misbourne have been raised by the CCB and other stakeholders since the Draft Environmental Statement was first issued in 2013 and subsequently discussed by the AONB Review Group. Crossing the Misbourne adjacent to Bottom House Farm Lane was specifically mentioned in the [Detailed Design Principles](#) (section 3.10.12).

- More recently, [photos](#) posted on the Chiltern Society HS2 Photo Diary show damage to the river bank. Having raised our concerns through the AONB Review Group, HS2 responded with a 'factual report' claiming foundations were 5m away from the river and caused no damage, despite one of the photos showing water flowing from the river into the foundation excavation less than 1m from the river bank top. We have raised our concerns with HS2 Ltd and shared information with our local MPs. We are also writing to the Minister responsible at the Department for Transport, and Rebecca Pow, Defra Minister, who has previously highlighted the importance of protecting our chalk streams.
- **Cut and cover tunnel** - the Wendover HS2 group has worked hard to highlight potentially disastrous impacts of HS2's cut and cover tunnel on the aquifer and springs feeding the Wendover arm of the Grand Union Canal and the Weston Turville Reservoir SSSI. We share these concerns and will press for the group's solutions to be fully implemented by HS2.
- **2020 update report** - we have recently contributed information for a [report](#) written by Dr Jim Conboys of the Chilterns Society, cataloguing the numerous failings of HS2 and its contractors in 2020. Dr Conboys is circulating this to numerous groups and MPs. The report follows criticism of HS2 Ltd from the Transport Select Committee.
- **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.

### **3.4 Conservation and Landscape (Kath, Nick, Neil)**

- Early results from Nick and Harriet's landscape scale conservation work in the Buckinghamshire part of the Chilterns AONB are hugely encouraging, (see Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project report below)
- The work is underpinned by end-to-end landowner engagement and support, along with citizen science monitoring. Scaling up this work and embedding the approach across the Chilterns AONB (and beyond) is one of our highest priorities in light of the biodiversity and climate crises. We are pursuing all opportunities to do this – for example seeking to embed these approaches in other initiatives including Chalkscapes, the Big Chalk project (see below), Defra's Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilot in Buckinghamshire and Defra's Farming in Protected Landscape programme. Securing the resources and capacity to support this roll-out is critical.
- 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 is working with Simon Smith from the Cotswolds Conservation Board to strengthen the project concept and ensure a strong focus on landowner engagement and support.

### **(Neil and Nick)**

- **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 within protected landscapes. The team attended a series of National Association of AONBs workshops before Christmas which aimed to provide a greater understanding of ELMs and, utilising a small grant from DEFRA, Nick has developed a series of on-line Farming and the Environment [webinars](#) running from 3 February to 10 March.



- **Farm Clusters** – the Central Chilterns Farm Cluster, led by Nick and Ian Waller, goes from strength to strength with an expanded programme of winter bird supplementary feeding and farmers responding to the friendly challenge of establishing a network of pollinator margins across the area.  
Neil has continued to support the Christmas Common Farm Cluster in Oxfordshire, including a farmland bird initiative and installation of Barn Owl boxes, both of which have been adopted enthusiastically by the group. Through our work with Christmas Common cluster members, we are also promoting [Mend the Gap](#), our joint venture with the North Wessex Downs AONB.  
More information on our work with farm clusters can be found [here](#).
- **RPA data** – we are currently renewing and expanding the range of landowner data available through a confidential agreement with the Rural Payments Agency. The RPA supply these data to support us in fulfilling our statutory duties. The data are of great benefit for a range of project work and, we are hoping, will expand our positive engagement with landowners through the Farming and the Environment workshops mentioned above. The expanded data range should help us work with our colleagues in the North Wessex Downs AONB to reach landowners in the whole of the Mend the Gap project area as it reaches into our neighbouring AONB.
- **Fragmented Woodland** – We have been working with the Forestry Commission and others, including local MPs, to address concerns over the selling and fragmentation of a number of woodlands in the Chilterns. A case in Stoke Row highlighted dubious marketing techniques which implied plots of ancient woodland could be developed for luxury housing. Trading Standards were involved but were unable to do more than instruct the marketing agent to change their advertising. Matt Thomson, our Planner, has offered to help Trading Standards hold such agencies to account for misleading marketing.
- **UK Power Networks Electricity infrastructure undergrounding** – we are very pleased to report that UKPN has now committed to deliver the two Chilterns AONB undergrounding proposals (Dunstable Downs and Latimer/Chenies) within the current OFGEM approved funding round. The Dunstable Downs project is due to be completed this year and will see the removal of 7.5km of dual circuit 33kv power lines, currently supported on 22 steel towers comprising two highly visible rows over the Dunstable Downs SSSI escarpment. This represents an investment of £2.06m in the Chilterns AONB.  
The next OFGEM spending round will commence in 2023 but only last for five years. The undergrounding projects are notoriously difficult to progress, in part linked to securing local support, overcoming technical difficulties and obtaining landowner agreement. We are currently seeking proposals which offer significant benefits for our Chilterns landscape and have widespread support from local people and landowners. The UKPN area runs approximately from the M40 northwards and we are restricted to 11 and 33kv lines (normally these are on wooden poles) as structures with voltages above this level are exorbitantly expensive to underground. Please get in touch with Neil ([njackson@chilternsaonb.org](mailto:njackson@chilternsaonb.org)) with ideas.
- **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.

#### **4.0 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](#).

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

### ***5.0 Communications (Claire and Vicki)***

#### ***5.1 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 next few weeks.

## 5.2 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.
- **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.
- **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](mailto: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:
  - 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.
- **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.

### **5.3 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)
- [Article](#) about walkers damaging one of our farmer's crops, quoting our guidance and one of our tweets
- [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

## **6.0 Development & Funding**

### **6.1 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.

## **7.0 Planning (Matt Thomson and Mike Stubbs)**

### **7.1 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.

### **7.2 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.
- 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.

### **7.3 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 regard to 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.

### **7.4 National issues (Matt)**

- In December, the government 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 original consultation had proposed that housing targets should relate more strongly to house prices or the size of existing settlements. Both options received widespread criticism for exacerbating pressure on the south-east while further deflating economies in the midlands and north. 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.

## **8.0 Projects**

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

- Covid-19 has remained a major challenge. However, the temporary easing of some lockdown restrictions in the summer and autumn allowed most of the 18 projects to continue to make some headway during this reporting period, with some notable successes. The response of the staff team and project leads to current circumstances has been fantastic, finding creative ways to engage people and maintain momentum across many projects.
- The absence of a Project Manager has continued to be a challenge, with the role being covered by Kath, with support from Claire and Wendy. This team approach has brought some real benefits, integrating the work of the CCC project with the wider work of the CCB. However, the absence of an overall Project Manager has left important gaps. There is still some work to do to streamline project management and at present we have limited capacity to complete this work. The interim management arrangements in place were never intended to be a long term solution and a recruitment campaign was conducted at the end of 2020. The new Project Manager, Lachlan Stuart, takes up the post on 1 February.

- Budgets continue to be significantly underspent due to a combination of delays in start-up and Covid-19 impacts. Once the new Project Manager is in post it is proposed to involve the steering group in a project and budget review. This will be an opportunity to reflect on progress and achievements, and to consider what activity we should do more, or less of.
- A particular highlight has been the first annual '[Chilterns Celebration](#)' festival of events – a month long programme of events and activities for our target audiences including socially distanced walks and activities, on-line talks and the Chilterns Champions conference (jointly organised with Wendy Morrison, Beacons of the Past).
- Another highlight has been the scaling up of practical habitat management work - see details below, and the successful completion of the first season of volunteer wildlife survey (Tracking the Impact Project) in spite of Covid-19.
- Sam and Wendy have reviewed the Heritage Theme and refocused activity into one far more integrated programme which is already starting to deliver greater impact. Delivery partners - Bucks New University and Amersham Museum - have continued to make progress across their projects despite lockdown.
- Nicola Thomas, Partnership Manager, Bucks and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership has agreed to chair the CCC steering group.

***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 many farms
- Wildflower margin challenge completed with seed supplied to 13 farmers (equiv. 3km new margins)
- BORG been hampered with Covid and wet weather in putting up Owl boxes but have installed 50 boxes now with four farms left to go before spring
- 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 for the spring. Aim to recycle enough corrugated iron to provide five refugia per farm (90 in total). Volunteers from BMERC to check monthly over spring/summer
- Eight volunteers in place to deliver third year of winter farm bird survey across all 18 farms in February
- Farmland bird ringing programme now expanded to five farms from three last year. November and December ringing sessions completed but January postponed due to Covid. Hoping February and March can be delivered
- Application submitted to Rothschild Foundation for phase 1 of 3 year farm carbon project. Aim to 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. Decision expected late February
- 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
- 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, Jo Potkin)***

- The successful Chilterns Celebration festival of events was organised for October 2020 and included a number of third-party events, and events designed to reach key audiences (young and urban audiences) for the CCC. 900 people were reached as a result of 34 events (10 online), and 180 of those attendees were under the age of 18
- Plans are already underway for a seasonal festival timetable for the CCC, to ensure deeper engagement with our key audiences and to allow for more seasonally appropriate events and volunteering taster sessions. The first festival week of 2021 is due to take place over the Easter half term



- Projects C3 and C5 are being reviewed to increase their impact and potential engagement, focusing on legacy and the use of new technologies to reach key audiences
- Quarterly partnership communications meetings are now taking place. The first was a big success, with lots of new ideas and areas for potential linking up and the level of enthusiasm across the partnership was high following the successes of the Chilterns Celebration in October.

### **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' staff 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 QMUL 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 will appear 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 will be ready to go live in w/c 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 will initially be shown at the North Wessex Downs AONB Annual Forum meeting on 29 January as well as being made available on both AONBs' websites.
- Jo will be 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 Claire Readey, Development and Funding Manager, directly: [creadey@chilternsaonb.org](mailto:creadey@chilternsaonb.org).

### **9.0 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.
- 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. 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, local 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 13****Mend the Gap Update Report**

**Author:** Jo Watson, Mend the Gap Programme Manager

**Summary:** To update members on developments with the Mend the Gap programme

**Purpose of Report:** To update members.

**Background**

1. **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.
2. **Filming** - The Introductory film for Mend the Gap is close to being finalised. The film has been part-funded by the North Wessex Downs AONB and will initially be shown at the North Wessex Downs AONB's Annual Forum at the end of January 2021. Subsequently it will be uploaded to both the CCB and NWD's websites and can be used for events and meetings to provide an overview of the genesis of the programme and its ambitions. The film has been produced by GJMultimedia ([www.gjmultimedia.co.uk](http://www.gjmultimedia.co.uk)) and we are pleased with the quality of the work.
3. **Communications** - Microsite & domain name. The domain name **mendthegap.uk** has been purchased and will be used for the new MtG microsite. Planning for the microsite, which will be created as part of the new CCB website, is underway.
4. In late November 2020, the Programme Manager gave a presentation to the North Wessex Downs' Council of Partners. The response was positive and several useful contacts emerged. In late January Jo Watson and Ian Haslam (Railway Action Group) will be panel members at the North Wessex Downs' Annual Forum. The Forum presents a good opportunity to raise awareness of the programme.
5. **Network Rail** - Despite chasing there has been no further correspondence from Network Rail regarding the potential of entering into a MoA with the NAAONBs or involving protected landscapes in NR's review of its design guidelines for electrification equipment. The Programme Manager will continue to follow-up.
6. **Recruitment** - The role description for the Mend the Gap Mitigation Projects Officer post has been finalised and the job advert has gone live. The closing date for applications is 17 February. The post-holder will lead on working with landowners/land managers within the Mend the Gap programme area to develop and implement projects that will contribute towards directly reducing

the visual impact of the electrification equipment (e.g. tree planting, hedgerow restoration). The post is a 0.5FTE two year fixed-term appointment. The costs of the Mitigation Project Officer post will be met through the Mend the Gap programme funds.

7. **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.
8. Several potential enhancement projects also continue to be developed through to a point where they can be presented to the Programme Steering Group for consideration.
9. **Mitigation Projects** – Jo Watson has met with the tenant farmer of land around South Stoke identified as priority locations for mitigation planting who has indicated that he is open to the possibility of tree planting and hedgerow restoration in the identified locations, however this would be subject to the agreement of his landlords. He has agreed to put JW in touch with his agent to open next stage of discussions.
10. The Programme Manager is in contact with the farmers who manage parcels of land around South Moreton and Cholsey which have been identified as priority locations for mitigation planting and is following up with a view to seeking agreement to mitigation planting projects.

### **Recommendation**

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