



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

**Held at Edlesborough Memorial Hall, High Street, Edlesborough, Dunstable LU6
2HX on Tuesday 14th June 2022 at 10.25am.**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr David Bartholomew
Cllr Lynn Lloyd
Cllr Richard Newcombe
Cllr Reena Ranger
Cllr Gareth Williams

Appointing Body

Oxfordshire County Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Colin Courtney
Alison Doggett
Paul Mainds
John Nicholls
Elizabeth Wilson

Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State- Chair
Secretary of State- Deputy-Chair
Secretary of State

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr John Harfield
Cllr Charles Hussey
Cllr Sue Rowland
Cllr Adrian Watney

Bedfordshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Hertfordshire

CCB Staff

Lynne Cordice
Deirdre Hansen
Graham Hurst

Senior Administration Officer
Clerk to the Board
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)

Other

Tom Beeston
Joseph Stewart

Chief Officer Chiltern Society

22/23.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from *Cllr Andrea Baughan, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Robert Carington, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Paul Duckett, Central Bedfordshire Council, *Nick Graham, Monitoring Officer, *Cllr John Griffin, Oxfordshire Parish Councils, Cllr Carl Jackson, Buckinghamshire Council, *Cllr

Steve Jarvis, North Hertfordshire District Council, Elaine King, CCB CEO, Geeta Ludhra, Secretary of State appointee, *John Shaw, Secretary of State appointee, *Cllr Sir Hector Sants, Buckinghamshire Parish Councils, *Cllr Jon Tankard, Three Rivers District Council and Ian Waller, Secretary of State appointee. (*Those * listened in on the meeting online*)

22/23.2 Declarations of Interest

No declaration of interest in any agenda item was made

22/23.3 Notice of Urgent Business

None

22/23.4 Minutes of the Board Meeting 1st March 2022.

The minutes of the Board meeting 1st March 2022 were approved and signed by the Chairman

22/23.5 Matters Arising

The Chairman has asked the CEO for a delivery plan for the Business Plan, she will report to the next Executive Committee meeting.

22/23.6 Chair's Update

The Chair reported on his activities since his last update March 2022 and highlighted the following:

1. He is pleased that we are back to face-to-face meetings with improved Board engagement and a planned visit to a FiPL project after the meeting
2. We need to explore better ways for the Board to engage with staff.
3. The CEO is working on improvements to the staff structure
4. Joe Stewart, our new Secretary of State Board Member, replacing Alison Doggett from 01/07/22, was welcomed to his first meeting.
5. There are no co-options to propose at this meeting.
6. The Natural England team looking at the Boundary Review spent three days in the Chilterns. The Conservation and Landscape Manager had organised a comprehensive tour of the Chilterns, which had given a broad view of the Chilterns and was well received. The Chairman had met them in Henley. Natural England is seeking to write a brief for a consultancy to do the next step in the work. The Boundary Review will take a considerable amount of staff time.
7. The Chairman attends advisory group meetings with Natural England, along with CCB's CEO, Planner and Conservation and Landscape Manager (At the subsequent MAG meeting, 20.6, Natural England were invited to attend the September board meeting to brief members.)
8. Mend the Gap. A resident's group has been working with our staff and the North Wessex Downs AONB. After a complaint that progress is too slow the Chair joined a meeting with two representatives of the local community and the CEO. It was an 'uncomfortable' meeting, but positive actions were proposed and agreed. The Chairman has asked the CEO to lead and take the Chair of the group to give a clearer focus on delivery. A grant scheme will be introduced. The Chairman will meet with the group again, it is important to maintain contact between the residents' group and the Board. The Chairman reported that the programme manager has resigned. It is acknowledged that short term employment contracts can cause disruption. The Chairman has made suggestions for future employee engagement.

9. He reported a certain amount of frustration with the updating and making visible internal policies and procedures.
10. Equally there is still no progress on a 'shared space' to enable easy access to documents for board members.
11. The grant application to Arts Council England, referred to at the last meeting, by the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading has not been successful.
12. It is hoped that work on the 25-year Long Term Strategy document can begin during the next year and a plan is to be produced.
13. A brief review of our Communications strategy would be helpful, given recent discussions with the Comms team.
14. He is supporting the CEO in what are continuing to be challenging times.

Members commented on items in the Chairman's update and asked questions.

Questions were asked about timelines, completion dates, project management experience, financial risks, and risk assessments. There was some concern that the problems with "Mend the Gap" had not been highlighted sooner. The Chairman reported that the next Executive Committee meeting will review these matters and set out how to handle and report on such problems in future.

The Chief Officer of the Chilterns Society requested to comment, he pointed out that recruitment in the sector both of our organisations operate in is virtually impossible. He commended the CCB 'fantastic' staff team and stressed the teams experience should not be underestimated. The Chairman thanked him for these comments which are clearly well informed by experience.

22/23.7 Public Question Time.

No public present.

Agenda item 9. Finance and Budget was agreed to be moved up the agenda.

22/23.8 Finance and Budget

The Finance Officer had provided a comprehensive finance report on activities up to the end of the financial year 31st March 2022 and the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2021-22

He presented a combined Profit and Loss Account together with a Balance Sheet for the financial year.

1. Overall, there was a combined surplus of income of £12,339.
2. Core income was higher than budgeted due to a £65,054 legacy, a Defra £35,992 "top-up" and £49,012 recharge to project.
3. Project income includes new projects: River Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project (NLHF), Farming in protected Landscapes (Defra), Chalkscapes (NHLF) and Green Recovery Challenge Fund (Defra/NHLF) totalling £619,412.
4. Core and Project expenditure are largely as budgeted, noting that at present the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project income is behind schedule, due to grant claims not yet submitted. The project will break even once the outstanding sum of £189,725 has been reimbursed.
5. The AGAR is required by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. It is prepared under local government accounting principles which do not recognise deferred

income and therefore income is recognised when funds are received rather than earned.

6. The external auditors report can only be completed once the sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR have been approved by the Board.
7. The internal auditors have only recently commenced their audit.
8. The completed AGAR will be published on the CCB website.

Members asked questions on publication of salary banding, we are not obliged to publish senior staff salaries. Do we have an investment strategy? It was confirmed that we do, and the Finance Officer explained the strategy. He was asked if the CCB had considered lending to Local Authorities, he will investigate this.

1. The Board APPROVED the CCB's Annual Accounts for 31 March 2022.

2. The Board APPROVED and SIGNED the Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 and the Accounting Statements 2021/22, both part of the AGAR 2021/22.

22/23.9 Chief Executive's Update

In the CEO's absence the Chairman went through her written report.

The Members used the opportunity to ask questions. The CEO was asked to look at a Deer Policy for the Chilterns. Members discussed.

A comment was made that not enough farmers are involved with the FiPL programme. The CEO will be asked to confirm at the September Board meeting the measures currently underway to increase engagement.

Concern was expressed of the continuing pressure on Chalk Streams. While the team have expanded in recent months, they lack the capacity to look out for all the Chilterns Chalk Streams.

The question was asked "What had started the Red Kites Campaign"? This will be put to the CEO/Team.

It was noted that planning application at Tralee Farm, Buckinghamshire for 101 houses, which has a non-determination appeal pending should be refused as it is not compliant with the Local Plan.

1. The Board NOTED the report.

22/23.10 Income Generation

Covered by the CEO's update.

22/23.11 Governance Review

The Board had been presented with the report from the Task and Finish Group on the role and operations of the proposed new governance structure, on the Task and Finish Group's future work and on the operations of the Planning Committee.

At the March Board meeting a change in Board structure had been approved, comprising the existing Board supported and supplemented by an Advisory Group drawn from stakeholders.

What the Advisory Group is intended to achieve still needs to be defined, as does how it will operate, its size and form. The T&F group recommends that full consideration must await the Natural England Boundary Review and Defra's exploring governance arrangements leading from the Landscapes Review. Our work on governance is welcomed by Defra and is influencing their thinking and the outcome of their work. The Deputy Chairman was encouraged to develop the Defra contacts.

Suggested new structure:

1. Board Advisory Group- BAG:
To advise the Board on strategic policy and to provide a forum to enable stakeholders with a role in implementing those strategic policies to report and monitor progress. Size and membership to be considered once the outcome of the Defra and Natural England reviews is known Meeting once a year suggested, supplemented by topic groups. And the required additional resources will need to be found.
2. Board:
To continue much as it operates now, setting the strategic direction of the CCB taking advice of the BAG into consideration, but not be bound by it. It is to be considered whether any of its roles in implementing such strategy can be delegated to the Executive Committee.
3. Executive Committee:
To provide such input as is appropriate into the operations of the CCB to deliver the strategic direction set by the Board.
We are currently bound by our Statutory Instrument, but Defra has indicated that it is open to discussing a more relaxed approach and the CCB will engage with Defra to achieve this.
4. Types of decisions handled by each tier were illustrated.
5. It was noted that the Management Plan process may change due to a review by Natural England.
6. Major decisions: those known about at the time of the preparation of the Business Plan should be included and agreed in the Business Plan. Ad hoc opportunities arising would remain delegated to the CEO, with decisions being guided by predetermined criteria as set in the Business Plan.
7. Planning Committee:
The current Code of Governance (agreed Sept 2021) contains some inconsistencies, and the delegations need to be clarified.
A Real Time system allowing members to contribute to planning applications being considered for comment by the CCB has been agreed. The system to be developed in-house, which will take considerable amounts of officer time. The scope and functions to evolve incrementally with experience.

Now a basic structure has been agreed it is proposed to temporary pause the work of the T&F group until Defra/Natural England reviews have concluded. It is anticipated once these reviews have concluded that a great deal of work will have to be done.

Two exceptions to the pause of work of the T&F group are proposed:

1. The T&F group to prepare a summary paper for information for the Board, setting out the conclusions and decisions of all the stages of the governance review so far.

2. The changes to the Planning Committee's governance can proceed by the Planning Committee and the T&F group, but to be held as draft pending the Defra/Natural England reviews.

The T&F group were thanked for their contributions.

1. **The Board AGREED that the work of the T&F group to date be deployed in discussions with Defra and Natural England on their wider function and governance reviews, but that further work be paused pending the outcome of those reviews, when the work will be resumed.**
2. **The Board AGREED that a brief information report be circulated setting out the conclusions and decisions on future governance reached thus far.**
3. **The Board AGREED that the T&F group and the Planning Committee continue detailed work on evolving that Committee's role, up to and including draft revised governance arrangements.**

22/23.12 Landscape Review

It was decided to move this item to the next meeting.

22/23.13 EDI Group report

The Chairman reported that the group is chaired by Board member Geeta Ludhra. The People and Society Officer (Annette Venters) has joined the group as staff member. The group have met. The Chairman read a brief report from Geeta Ludhra who was unable to attend the meeting. The need for a broad approach to the issues was emphasised. A further paper will be prepared by the 'People and Society Officer' and circulated to the Board before the next meeting.

Members discussed.

It was agreed to keep this item on each agenda.

1. **The Board NOTED the report.**

22/23.14 Meeting dates 2022-23

2022-23 meeting dates to be finalised at the September meeting.

22/23.15 Urgent business

- a. This meeting is Alison Doggett's last meeting as Board member appointed by the Secretary of State. The Chairman thanked her for her nine years of valuable service and contributions to the CCB.
Alison gave a brief history on the establishment of the CCB's first big Lottery funded project "Beacons of the Past Hillforts". Alison had worked tirelessly with Shirley Judges, another previous Board member, writing and putting this bid together with help from the Countryside Officer. The bid was successful in 2016, and the project is coming to its end this year.
She has seen enormous developments in the CCB during her nine years.

She has enjoyed her time at the CCB and shall miss it. She is publishing an updated version of her Chilterns Book.

The Chairman thanked all for attending and thanked the staff for all their work.

Future meetings

<u>Full Board</u>	6 September 2022 6 December 2022
<u>Executive Committee</u>	19 July 2022 1 November 2022
<u>Planning Committee</u>	12 July 2022 11 October 2022

The Chairman.....

Date.....

The Chairman introduced Gareth Clay, Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer, who gave a short introduction to the restoration and expansion programme supported by FiPL of an orchard at Ivinghoe Aston Farm. He will be leading the members on a visit to the farm.