



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

**Held at Frieth Village Hall, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 6PR on Tuesday  
1<sup>st</sup> March 2022 at 10.00am.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Appointed by Local Authorities**

Cllr David Bartholomew  
Cllr Lynn Lloyd  
Cllr Richard Newcombe

**Appointing Body**

Oxfordshire County Council  
South Oxfordshire District Council  
Buckinghamshire Council

**Appointed by the Secretary of State**

Colin Courtney  
Alison Doggett  
Geeta Ludhra  
Paul Mainds  
John Nicholls  
John Shaw  
Elizabeth Wilson

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

**Elected by Parish Councils**

Cllr John Griffin  
Cllr John Harfield  
Cllr Charles Hussey  
Cllr Sue Rowland  
Cllr Sir Hector Sants  
Cllr Adrian Watney

Oxfordshire  
Bedfordshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Oxfordshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Hertfordshire

**CCB Officers**

Lynne Cordice  
Graham Hurst  
Elaine King

Senior Administration Officer  
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)  
Chief Executive Officer

**Other**

Deirdre Hansen  
John Watkins

Clerk to the Board  
Chief Executive, National Association of  
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty  
(NAAONB)

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting in particular John Watkins, Chief Executive NAAONB.

All attendees introduced themselves.

### **21/22.33 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, \*Cllr Carl Jackson, Buckinghamshire Council, \*Cllr Steve Jarvis, North Hertfordshire District Council, \*Cllr Peter Martin, Buckinghamshire Council, \*Cllr Reena Ranger, Hertfordshire County Council, \*Cllr Robert Roche, Luton Borough Council, \*Ian Waller, Secretary of State appointee, Cllr Phil Williams, Three Rivers District Council.  
*(Those members \* listened in on the meeting incl Claire Readey, CCB Development and Funding Manager, Simon Kearey, Chairman Chiltern Society and Bob Empson, consultant, in part).*

Absent: Cllr Phil McDowell, Dacorum Borough Council.

### **21/22.34 Declarations of Interest**

No declaration of interest in any agenda item was made.

### **21/22.35 Notice of Urgent Business**

The Chair was notified of any items.

### **21/22.36 Minutes of the Board Meeting 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and the notes of the briefing 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021.**

The minutes of the Board meeting 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman following the amendments made 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

The briefing notes 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman after the following amendments were made:

- 1) 21/22.25-16 "item" was added after "an important"
- 2) 21/22.26- item 3 "Defra has been impressed with the diversity of candidates who have applied" was deleted.

### **21/22.37 Matters Arising**

The appointment of Cllr Richard Newcombe and Cllr Sir Hector Sants to the Executive Committee was confirmed.

### **21/22.38 Chair's Update**

The Chair reported on his activities since his last update December 2021 and highlighted the following:

1. Defra has confirmed the Secretary of State appointment to replace Alison Doggett.
2. The Government responded to the Landscapes Review in January 2022. The CCB will respond by the April deadline. The CEO will expand on this item later.
3. Natural England AONB Boundary Extension. The Chair had joined a briefing by NE for CCB staff and board members on 28/02/22 looking at the detail of how the boundary extension process works.

4. Internally the Deputy Chair is dealing with the Governance Review which he will report on later in the meeting.
5. He attended an EDI meeting chaired by Board member Geeta Ludhra last week.
6. He attended the lighting ceremony for the Para Olympic flame at Stoke Mandeville on 28/02/22.
7. He had spent time with the Funding and Development Manager looking at income generation.
8. Updating and reviewing Policies and Procedures are high on the priority list. These are being updated by the staff and he is liaising with the CEO and Senior Administration Officer. Regular reviews of policies and procedures is to be a standard agenda item in the future to ensure clear visibility for Board members.
9. The next Board meeting will be held 14<sup>th</sup> June. It is planned to be held in the north of the Chilterns to include lunch and a tour of CCB activity in the area.
10. Technology for hybrid meetings: The Senior Administration Officer was commended and thanked for setting up the 'Owl'. The Chair was pleased to see it working.
11. The Senior Administration Officer is also exploring on electronic shared space.
12. The Chair is connected with Museum of English Rural Life (MERL). John Shaw has been working with them on projects to include those who are disengaged with the countryside. There are obvious synergies with the CCB's work and is an avenue to explore.
13. A 25-year vision. Over the next six months a process is being developed how to work up a 25-year vision with our partners and stakeholders.
14. He met with Gareth Clay, the Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer.
15. Income generation will be on the next Board meeting agenda.
16. We will also hold our AGM on 14/06/22. The AGM includes the election of Chair and Deputy Chair as well as Committee membership. Any members wishing to sit on any of the standing committees please let the Chair know. The Chair and Deputy Chair are willing to fulfil these roles for another year, but succession planning needs to be considered.

#### **21/22.39 Public Question Time.**

No public present.

#### **21/22.40 Chief Executives Update**

The Chief Executive Officer had provided a comprehensive overview of the team's activities and achievement since the last Board briefing in December. Highlighting the following items:

1. Natural England work: Boundary extension and exploring improved management and governance arrangements, this is linked to the Landscapes ('Glover') Review. The CCB is working in partnership with the other 33 AONBs in England. The Glover Review was published in 2019, the Government's response published in January 2022 with responses to that due by 9<sup>th</sup> April 2022. With the Planner, and with contributions from other members of the team, she has been working on a CCB response. They have also been working with the NAAONBs on their response. A lot of time and energy is going into this work. Once the framework for the response has been put together, she will share it with the Board via email. The main points we will be making is ensuring proposal 24 is implemented – enhanced Purposes, Powers and Resources for AONBs.

The Deputy Chair has been proactive and has contributed with his work on Governance.

2. The whole team continues to work hard, and she expressed a huge thanks to them all.
3. She expressed thanks to Lynne Cordice, Senior Administration Officer, and her team for the work they do behind the scenes
4. The Comms team have been working extremely hard with media, blogs and joint messaging with partners.
5. The new website worked on by the Comms team is expected to be launched in the coming months. The whole CCB team have been contributing to the new website. The Board asked to have a preview of the new website before it goes live. Assurance that EDI and social inclusion are covered on the website were sought. The Development and Funding Manager will pursue this.
6. Defra has recognised that AONBs are chronically underfunded.
7. She had attended a number of external events and meetings with partners including a Chalk Streams conference arranged by the Chiltern Society.

The Members used the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the CEO's update.

*10.35 Cllr John Harfield joined the meeting*

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

#### **21/22.41 Update on delivery of the Management Plan policies GP1 and GP2**

The Planner had provided a paper updating the Board on the delivery of the Management Plan policies GP1 (enhanced status) and GP2 (boundary extension) both which will be met by commitments in Natural England's (NE) new Designations Programme announced in June 2021.

Natural England has ruled out re-designation of any AONB as a National Park. However, the work the CCB is doing with NE on their Designations Programme could lead to a more suitable 21<sup>st</sup> century outcome for the CCB with enhanced status and more fit for purpose management and governance arrangements, designed and co-owned with our partners and stakeholders.

The key conclusions in the paper are:

1. The most appropriate fit-for-purpose solution almost certainly lies in enhanced management and governance arrangements, co-created with, and co-owned by our partners and stakeholders.
2. Our work as part of Natural England's Designations Programme could lead to outcomes that are more effective than National Park Status.
3. It is still appropriate to refer to National Park status by way of comparison.
4. If our current endeavours are not successful, we can fall back on National Park status as a second-best option.

The Members discussed the update and questioned the communication process with Local Authorities. The process being followed is a NE process, the CEO will feed back to NE the communication worries from Local Authority members.

The CEO emphasised that the Designation Programme is NE's work, the CCB is assisting NE, but the process is driven by NE, who follow an established process.

- 1. The Board AGREED to continue to advocate for enhanced status, additional resources, strengthened powers and more coherent management of protected landscapes.**
- 2. The Board AGREED to continue to work constructively with Natural England, Defra, and our stakeholders to achieve the outcomes (1-4) in the paper.**

*11.15 Bob Empson, Management Consultant joined the meeting.*

It was agreed to move agenda item 14 EDI Group up the agenda.

#### **21/22.42 EDI Group report**

Geeta Ludhra, Secretary of State appointed Board member, thanked the Chair and the CEO for their progressive and open-minded views on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

She expressed the view that her appointment has been influenced by her educational work on EDI.

She is driving the CCB's working group on EDI. The group has met and started evaluating what the CCB does well in EDI and how it can do better. They will look at how the information is held, where the EDI policy is held, the HR lens for staff and for Board members, EDI visibility and how EDI is addressed.

The working group has looked at Defra's EDI policy and has realised it is not a dynamic policy, but is a starting point for the CCB, and our policy must be consistent with Defra's. The CCB's visibility of its EDI policy is not clear. She asked for EDI to be a regular Board meeting agenda item. A clear and cohesive policy will be developed.

She has looked at other organisations and how they deal with EDI.

The next question is what is the CCB doing to strengthen its position with disengaged and underrepresented communities? Some great work is being done, but it is not all connected. What is the Board's perspective on EDI? What are the high priority areas? What kind of projects are we delivering? And what is our collective consciousness?

Members took the opportunity to ask questions.

The Chair stated that we are starting with a strong ambition, which will be followed by a clear strategy and delivery. We will not be able to do it all at once.

#### **1. The Board NOTED the update.**

#### **21/22.43 Business Plan Update**

Bob Empson, Management Consultant, introduced the Business Plan.

The Business Plan sets out the CCB's own organisational key priorities and activities for 2022/23 in supporting the key elements of the Management Plan.

The process to develop the Business Plan had started three months ago. Our internal and external environments were examined, a staff survey was carried out, CCB Board members and staff took part in workshops and discussion took place with the Executive Committee.

The draft Business Plan has been written by the CEO and the senior team through the process above.

The CEO had provided an extensive report on achieving the required outcomes of the Business Plan giving history, achievements, and an overview of the CCB. As well as detailing the analysis that had taken place.

There are three key strategic priorities:

1. Organising for the future
2. Deliver existing commitments
3. Leadership and influence

Strategic priority 1. Organising for the future comprises:

- a. People
- b. Policies and Strategies
- c. Governance
- d. Financial resilience

This work has already started and is being actively pursued by the CEO, senior team, and Board members.

Strategic priority 2. Deliver existing commitments:

Many externally funded key programmes are committed with clearly defined programmes, objectives and timetables leaving the CCB little flexibility.

The uncertain external environment and our ambitions mean that we need the flexibility to anticipate, respond to and build on opportunities that may arise that allow the CCB to maximise its impact and deliver transformational change.

Strategic priority 3. Leadership and influence:

Defra monitors our performance with their KPI's. We now intend to develop internal KPIs as tools by which the Board and Defra can monitor the CCB's performance. They will not catch all the work the CCB performs but will form a step change to give greater visibility and accountability for our work. We will improve how we work, be more specific, report to the Board and create more opportunities.

The Implementation Plan flows from the Business Plan and details the actions to be taken over the next year (April 22- March 23) and refers to the CCB's longer term plans. The Implementation Plan is in development and is due to be presented to the Executive Committee at its May meeting.

The Implementation Plan and the setting of priorities will connect to the 2022/23 budget ensuring the CCB has the financial resources and capacity required to deliver the work.

## **1. The Board APPROVED the Business Plan 2022/23.**

### **21/22.44 Finance and Budget**

The Finance Officer had provided a comprehensive finance report on activities up to the end of December 2021.

1. Core income received (including a legacy from a former volunteer) was £516,785.
2. It was decided by the Chair, Deputy Chair, CEO and Finance Officer that the £64,504 legacy received from David John Younghusband will be used to fund several small projects which have a lasting outcome.
3. Fee income is higher than budgeted due to being able to recover administration costs from the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the Green Recovery Challenge Fund project.
4. Core expenditure for the period was £421,736 in line with expectations.
5. Project income received for the period was £1,028,334 in line with expectations.
6. Project expenditure was £600,143. There are shortfalls relating to expenditure not yet claimed back and surpluses relating to expenditure yet to be incurred but grants received in advance.

### **Budget 2022/23**

The draft budget has been discussed at the Executive Committee in February for recommendation to the Board. This ambitious budget has been approached in such a way that staff can facilitate what the Board wants it to achieve with a small deficit of under £1,000 to be met from reserves.

The Board was reminded that £55,000 has been set aside in reserves to underwrite any shortfall in match funding for existing projects.

The CEO commended the Finance Officer on the prudent ways of managing the finances while also enabling funds to be made available to support and expand the work of the staff team. Within the limits of the budgets, we are doing well.

**1. The Board NOTED the financial position at 31 December 2021.**

**2. The Board APPROVED budget 2022/23.**

### **21/22.45 Income Generation**

The Development and Funding Manager had provided a comprehensive report giving the Board an overview of the CCB's income generation activities and plans, giving an update since the December briefing.

The Green Recovery Challenge project is an excellent model for how we can work collectively. Two part time members of staff are now in post employed by the Chiltern Society, but line managed by the CCB. This is an ambitious programme with short timelines, stretching the team, but they are managing well.

The Development and Funding Manager is working on a CCB Income Generation Strategy. An outline Income Generating Strategy will be available summer 2022. We are looking for financial stability for the future, while also being ambitious. We must deliver impactful and financially sustainable projects, ensuring they contribute as much as possible to core income and link clearly to the Business Plan.

The CEO thanked her for her report. The CEO reported that Defra had provided some unexpected additional funding: approx. £37,000 which must be spent this financial year. It is being used for a number of items including nature recovery work, supporting some of the People & Society Officer's existing projects e.g., the Chilterns Cycleway, purchasing IT equipment, new laptops with associated software, and six full tickets for

the annual NAAONB conference, to enable more of the team to benefit from this three-day event in September.

Members made suggestions and discussed various funding opportunities, which will be taken up outside this meeting.

The Funding and Development Manager thanked all for their comments and will explore the options.

### **1. The Board NOTED the report and PROVIDED feedback.**

#### **21/22.46 Governance Review**

The Deputy Chairman as Chairman of the Governance Review Task and Finish Group and the Planning Committee presented a detailed report on the recommendations for the future of the Planning Committee, Planning Status and Local Plan role and the work programme for the Task & Finish group.

#### **1. The Planning Committee**

The Planning Committee had considered the T&F Group recommendations for an on-line live system for all planning consultations instead of the current retrospective endorsement of staff decisions. Decision making will continue to be delegated to staff, with Board members able to contribute their comments on a live system, such as SharePoint, already in use.

The system will need to be set up internally, some training will need to be given and ongoing support will be required. All views would be formally recorded.

#### **2. CCB's Statutory Planning role**

The Planning Committee has considered the Board's request to look at the two Glover report recommendations for the CCB to seek Statutory Consultee status and whether there should be a single Local Plan for the whole of the Chilterns AONB. Both would require primary or secondary legislation.

- a. The Planning Committee considered the recommendation for Statutory Consultee Status and concluded that the CCB should seek Statutory Consultee status with elevation of the Management Plan's status – a statutory obligation for the Management Plan to be taken account of.
- b. A Chilterns Local Plan. Although there would be advantages to such a plan, the CCB has neither a democratic mandate, which Local Authorities do have, nor has it the resources for such a plan. A preferred option is Specific Consultation Body status, which would require Local Authorities to include the CCB in a 'Statements of Common Ground', to be developed by the CCB and partners, which would underpin their respective Local Plans.

#### **3. CCB Governance Review- next Steps**

The direction of travel has been agreed. Short term internal changes have been agreed with a view to be implemented.

The pace of implementing longer-term changes needs to recognise the external environment, in particular Defra's and NE's review of the overall purposes of Protected Landscapes.



Therefore, the implementation of a wide Stakeholder Advisory Group should wait until we have the outcome of the Glover Review and NE work.

The Board reaffirmed the intention that the above is their preferred operating model, but that it will hold off on implementation.

*12.43 Geeta Ludhra left the meeting.*

- 1. The Board AGREED the set up of an on-line system for planning consultations as set out in the paper and to bring it into operation as soon as possible.**
- 2. The Board AGREED that the scheme of delegation to the CCB's planning staff be formalised and recommended to the Planning Committee's next meeting.**
- 3. The Board AGREED to advocate not only Statutory Consultee status, but a statutory recognition of the Management Plan as described in the paper.**
- 4. The Board AGREED that a single Chilterns Local Plan should not be pursued, but that the CCB should discuss with its constituent Local Authorities for the CCB to become a Specific Consultation Body, to achieve a Statement of Common Ground for Local Plan purposes, and if agreement is reached this should be put to Defra as a jointly preferred outcome.**
- 5. The Board ENDORSED the work programme for the Governance Task and Finish Group as presented.**

#### **21/22.47 Review of the Risk Register.**

The Risk Register had been reviewed and updated by the Executive Committee and was recommended for Board approval.

Key risks to be considered in the upcoming year:

- The ongoing impacts of Covid-19
- Cashflow management given increased project requirements and uncertainty over Defra and Local Authority funding.
- The impacts of Government policy and legislative decisions.

- 1. The Board APPROVED the Risk Register.**

#### **21/22.48 Urgent business**

- a. The Chair invited John Watkins, Chief Executive National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB), to speak. He put in simple terms that the NAAONB is the trade body for AONBs. They operate to amplify the impacts and outcomes of the 34 AONBs in England and the total of 46 in the UK. They boost the ambitions and opportunities of the AONBs, support officers and operate collectively. The NAAONB appreciates input from AONB lead officers. AONBs are a valuable vehicle for Defra to deliver their ambitions.

The Chair thanked him and affirmed the CCB is keen to be a leading AONB and agreed that a shared voice is always louder.

- b. Alison Doggett informed the Board that she is going to republish the book, The Chilterns, she wrote some time ago with Leslie Hepple, who has since died. Alison and her husband have obtained all the rights to the book and will be revising all the illustrations. The Chair thanked her and wished her well.

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

Future meetings

<u>Full Board</u>	14 June 2022 plus AGM 6 September 2022 6 December 2022
<u>Executive Committee</u>	3 May 2022 2 August 2022 1 November 2022
<u>Planning Committee</u>	13 April 2022 12 July 2022 11 October 2022

The Chairman.....

Date.....