



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

1 March 2022 at 10.00 am

Frieth Village Hall, Frieth, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 6PR and by remote video conferencing
Online session open/coffee available from 9.30am

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Notice of Urgent Business
4. Briefing Notes of Previous Meeting (7 December 2021)
5. Matters Arising
6. Chairman's update
7. Public Question Time
8. Chief Executive's update
9. Update on delivery of Management Plan policies GP1 and GP2
10. Business Plan
11. Finance and Budget
12. Income Generation
13. Governance Review
14. EDI Group
15. Policies for Review: Risk Register
16. Any Urgent Business

Future Meetings:

<u>Full Board</u>	14 June 2022 (plus AGM) 6 September 2022 6 December 2022
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<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



NOTES OF THE BRIEFING FOR THE CONSERVATION BOARD FOR THE CHILTERN'S AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Held by remote video conferencing on Tuesday 7th December 2021 at 10.00am.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr David Bartholomew
Cllr Robert Carington
Cllr Paul Duckett
Cllr Carl Jackson
Cllr Steve Jarvis
Cllr Lynn Lloyd
Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr Richard Newcombe
Cllr Reena Ranger
Cllr Robert Roche
Cllr Philip Williams

Appointing Body

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

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Colin Courtney
Alison Doggett
Geeta Ludhra
Paul Mains
John Nicholls
John Shaw
Ian Waller
Elizabeth Wilson

Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State- Chairman
Secretary of State- Deputy-Chairman
Secretary of State
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

Allen Beechey
Kath Daly

Chalk Streams Project Officer
Countryside Officer

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Elaine King
Graham Hurst
Claire Readey
Matt Thomson
Donna Webb

Chief Executive Officer
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Development and Funding Manager
Planner
Administration Officer

Other

Deirdre Hansen
Amber Inman

Clerk to the Board
Coordination and Engagement Lead,
Natural Environment, Trees and
Landscape Directorate, Defra
Chairman Chiltern Society
The Lee Parish Councillor

Simon Kearney
Cllr Colin Sully- in part

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and made note of the two latest members to join the Board, Sir Hector Sants, elected by Buckinghamshire Parish Councils and John Harfield elected by Bedfordshire Parish Councils.

He asked all attendees to introduce themselves.

21/22.20 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr Andrea Baughan, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Carl Jackson, Buckinghamshire Council and Cllr Phil McDowell, Dacorum Borough Council.

21/22.21 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Robert Carington made a personal declaration of interest as a partner of Carington Estates, who have made a bid under the Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme administered by the CCB.

21/22.23 Notice of Urgent Business

The Chairman will comment on committee membership

21/22.24 Minutes of the previous Board Meeting 7th September 2021.

The minutes were reviewed, and in item 21/22.12 fourth paragraph 'includes' was amended to read 'include' and 'protective' was amended to read 'protected'.

21/22.25 Chairman's Update

The Chairman reported on his activities since the September meeting and highlighted the following:

1. The Government's response to the Glover Review is expected soon.
2. Board Engagement: all Board vacancies have been filled. Today's briefing should have been face to face, but current Covid conditions have made a virtual briefing the most sensible option for Board members to meet.
3. He would like to take hybrid meetings forward and the technology is being reviewed. Legislation at present does not allow for hybrid formal meetings, but he is progressing this with Defra.
4. SharePoint for board members is being worked on.

5. In September he had to deal with the request from Defra of the appraisal system for the Secretary of State appointees to the CCB. None of the other Board members fall under this system. It turned out to be an onerous task. We are awaiting confirmation of Secretary of State re-appointments and one new appointment in June 2022.
6. With more than a third of the membership leaving the Board at the May elections Committee membership has had to be reviewed for the two standing committees appointed at the AGM. Cllr Sir Hector Sants and Cllr Richard Newcombe have agreed to join the Executive Committee. It is noted that committee membership is concentrated in the south and centre of the Chilterns. He asked members to consider joining committees in the future.
7. He acknowledged the Deputy Chairman's work on the Governance Review and thanked all engaged in the review to date.
8. He had met with Professor Simon Mortimer, Head of the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development at Reading University. A previous CCB Board member, who would like to re-engage.
9. Co-option to the Board is to be considered to expand expertise and to increase the links with our stakeholders.
10. He attended the Chilterns Building Design Awards ceremony.
11. He had attended a Cotswolds AONB Board meeting and together with the CEO will be meeting their CEO and Chairman in the new year.
12. He had attended one of the Chiltern Rangers workdays.
13. He had attended the National AONBs conference, it had been a useful day and he had made many useful contacts. An emphasis from Lord Deben on the day had been on health and wellbeing, including doing more to celebrate the aesthetics of the landscapes.
14. He had a meeting with the Museum of Rural Life in Reading, who are interested in closer working with the Board.
15. He had attended a Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) 'online 'meeting, thanks to Ian Waller, the FiPL Officer and the Countryside Officer for their work and involvement in this important work.
16. He introduced an important on "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion". He expressed thanks to Geeta Ludhra, who agreed to chair this and to both John Shaw and Reena Ranger. This is an important step forward and members were invited to join a working party being set up. Cllr Robert Roche offered to join the working party.

All in all, it had been a busy time.

21/22.26 Board Review

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

1. Glover Review: The Government will be publishing a consultation early in the new year. The CEO and other AONBs are meeting to consider the AONBs responses. The CCB will respond, and the CEO will work with the NAAONBs on their response. We have a lot of expertise to offer.
2. Natural England: Boundary extension and exploring improved management and governance arrangements - our governance review will be helpful to increase efficiency.
3. Defra has been impressed with the diversity of candidates who have applied A working group being set up including Geeta Ludhra and Cllr Robert Roche on

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inclusion and diversity will be a great help in this work. They were both thanked.

4. Defra has been impressed with the diversity of candidates who have applied for the Secretary of State vacancy. The CEO and Geeta Ludhra are working with Defra, who are keen to learn from the CCB on this success.
5. The CEO thank the staff team for their hard work, she noted that everyone is continuing to work hard and achieve a great deal in unusual circumstances.

The Board thanked the team.

1. The Committee NOTED the report.

21/22.26 Business Plan Update

The CEO updated the Board on the progress and the timetable for developing the CCB 2022-23 Business Plan.

This year the CCB is taking a longer-term approach rather than focussing on a one-year period as in previous years. A workshop will be held online 11/01/22 for Board members and staff.

1. The Committee NOTED the Business Plan process and timetable.

21/22.27 Finance and Budget Planning

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

1. Core income received (including a legacy from a former volunteer) was £380,962.
2. The twice half yearly grant from Defra has been received in full £ 448,203. Local authorities have been slow at paying with only half their contributions received to date.
3. Core expenditure for the period was £321,361 in line with expectations.
4. Project income received for the period was £911,349 in line with expectations.
5. Project expenditure was £441,231. 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 and 5-year plan:

A draft budget and 5-year plan was presented, which had already been discussed at the Executive Committee meeting in November. The draft budget has been approached in such a way that staff can facilitate what the Board wants it to achieve. It was noted that current core funding does not allow the CCB to deliver all the work it wants and needs to do.

The Board discussed the draft budget and the 5-year plan.

The Chairman complimented the Finance Officer on presenting the figures in a comprehensive, but simple way.

Audit Report:

The external audit report was issued 23 September 2021. No matters had come to their attention giving cause for concern that the relevant legislation and regulatory

requirements had not been met. There are no matters which they wish to draw to the attention of the Board.

- 1. The Board NOTED the financial position 31 October 2021.**
- 2. The Board NOTED the CCB budget discussion paper.**
- 3. The Board considered the Audit report 2020-21.**

21/22.28 Income Generation

The Funding and Development Manager had provided a comprehensive report. She explained a new funding opportunity through the Buckinghamshire Council's Community Boards, and work on a collaborative funding application with Buckinghamshire Council.

The Board discussed continued funding with a multistranded approach.

The Chairman thanked the Funding and Development Manager for all her work and the report produced.

- 1. The Board NOTED the report.**

11.10 Geeta Ludhra left the briefing.

21/22.29 Governance Review

The Deputy Chairman as Chairman of the Governance Review Task and Finish Group presented a report on Part 3 of the Governance Review.

The Task and Finish Group (T&FG) had looked at the structure and workings of the Board and Committees.

It considered short term changes that can be made without changes to statute and longer-term changes to advocate to Defra and Natural England (NE). It recommends that amendments to our Code of Governance (standing orders) need to be considered. It is acknowledged that further work will include researching relevant experiences elsewhere.

The report recommends a 'direction of travel' towards a two-tier structure for the Board, as well as a name change for the Executive Committee to avoid confusion with the executive staff team, as well as some structural changes to the way the Planning Committee operates.

There is an opportunity to influence and take account of the national picture for AONBs, through Defra considering its response to the Glover Review and the CCB working with NE on its designations programme, which includes exploring management and governance arrangements.

The Board discussed the recommendations at length and supported the recommendations.

Amber Inman, Defra, commented that Defra encourages the kind of thinking that the CCB is engaged in at present. She explained that legislative and governance circumstances for different protected landscapes varies. Defra is encouraging flexibility and will be keen to hear the CCB's views.

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman will get together to highlight the next actions and the Deputy Chairman will set out a scoping paper for the T&FG.

- 1. The Board ENDORSED areas where immediate change can be made, instructing the T&F group to draft changes to the Code of Governance.**
- 2. The Board ENDORSED areas where more work is needed and the basic principles to be pursued. Instructing the T&F group to report in more detail to a future Board meeting.**
- 3. The Board ENDORSED the principles to be pursued by the staff team in their discussions with Defra and NE in the longer term.**

12.00 Cllr Colin Scully joined the meeting

21/22.30 HS2 Engagement and update.

CCB staff had presented a full report on engagement of the CCB with the HS2 project and the current focus of staff involvement.

The Board is asked to consider the CCB's ongoing opposition in principle to the scheme and to set out the mitigation process.

The Countryside Officer gave a short slide presentation introducing the current position on HS2. She gave a brief insight into the history and background of the CCB's work and involvement with HS2. The CCB has sought to influence Parliament and the HS2 Select Committee through opposing the scheme and advocating a hierarchy of mitigation for the scheme routed in its statutory duty. Suggestions for alternative tunnels had also been made.

From 2010 there has been a lot of direct involvement by CCB staff and Board members.

The Chalk Streams Project Officer showed the damage caused by the HS2 project to the River Misbourne and highlighted concerns over the aquifer. The tunnelling is having a far-reaching impact both in physical damage and pollution incidents.

The Conservation and Landscape Officer showed examples from the Chiltern Society's picture diary, highlighting concerns over designs. With the help from local parish councils and Cllr Peter Martin the CCB can hold HS2 to their own design standards.

The CCB along with others have questioned HS2 about design that required extensive tree felling and the parties have been successful in having design changed in some circumstances thereby saving trees (e.g., Leather Lane). Tree felling not only impacts

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the landscape features but wildlife too. Permanent structures can be sympathetically designed to minimise their impact on the environment.

Ian Waller gave a slide presentation showing farmland affected, woodland being taken out and fields lost. He noted that the CCB had done very well saving trees along Leather Lane. Mitigation has been good, but more land has been taken from farmers and more fields lost than envisaged, with no compensation having been paid to those farmers affected.

The Chairman thanked all contributors. He commented that the paper and the presentations made clear the huge impact of the HS2 work in the Chilterns and confirmed the CCB's opposition to HS2.

Board members asked how they could help and engage with this work.

It was noted that the cancellation of the northern route weakens the business case for HS2.

The Lee Parish Councillor Colin Scully showed photographs of the impact of construction activities, both visually and environmentally. He informed the Board that local parish councils are holding HS2 to account. Working together is key. Some designs are not yet complete, and it is important to try to mitigate the impacts of designs on the landscape.

Parish Councils, the CCB and Buckinghamshire Council are working together to hold the contractors to account.

It was noted that the CCB has great strength in pointing out environmental disasters that are on the way.

The paper and the presentations were discussed at length. It was noted that the CCB is not campaigning but driving conversations to ask questions. The CCB has a responsibility to protect and enhance.

12.47 the Planner left the meeting.

1. **The Board NOTED the paper and CONFIRMED the CCB's ongoing opposition in principle to the scheme and the current focus of the CCB's activities.**

21/22.31 Urgent business

The Chairman informed members that Cllr Richard Newcombe and Sir Hector Sants had come forward to join the Executive Committee. A future Board meeting will endorse these appointments.

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

Future meetings

<u>Full Board</u>	1 March 2022
	14 June 2022

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	6 September 2022 6 December 2022
<u>Executive Committee</u>	1 February 2022 3 May 2022 2 August 2022 1 November 2022
<u>Planning Committee</u>	12 January 2022 13 April 2022 12 July 2022 11 October 2022

The Chairman.....

Date.....

Item 8 **CEO update (March 2022)**

Author: Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer

Summary: This paper provides an overview of the team's activities and achievements since the last Board meeting in December 2021.

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

Background

The CCB team worked effectively at home from mid-March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and, with lockdown measures easing, we are now trialling a phased return to the office involving hybrid working.

A key part of the team's focus is to work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including NGOs, businesses, MPs and government agencies – both locally and nationally. We are collaborating with other AONBs and National Parks on a range of subjects - including sustainable tourism, land management and planning reform - in large part through the National Association of AONBs. This period has also involved significant focus on the Glover Review following publication of the Government's response to the Review in January.

We are also contributing our time and expertise to a number of government-led initiatives and consultations – not least contributing to Natural England's new designations programme, delivering and providing insight on Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and contributing to Defra's thinking on Local Nature Recovery Strategies. All these activities will, hopefully, lead to benefits for both the Chilterns and protected landscapes overall.

As ever, the team consistently achieves a great deal in uncertain and changing circumstances. Many in the team are enjoying delivering and planning outdoor activities, including surveys and monitoring, practical habitat restoration work, festivals and community engagement, while also starting to meet partners, colleagues and others in person.

Recommendation

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

Item 8 CEO update (March 2022)

1.0 Summary

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2.0 Over-arching and core work

2.1 Administration and IT

- The admin team continues to be extremely busy in providing a diverse range of services to support the staff team – both core staff and those working on projects.
- Recognising the vital need for effective administration services, we are pleased to have promoted Lynne to Senior Administration Officer, and increased Lynne's hours to a full-time role. At the same time, our Clerk, Deidre Hansen will work increased hours, focussing especially on providing support and strategic advice to the CEO, Chair and the Board. Linked to this, is a further increase in capacity following the recruitment in February of our first Project Support Officer.
- Lynne and Donna are planning for the return to the office – for example, making sure that all Health and Safety requirements are met and necessary equipment is available along with a means of reserving desks in the office.
- IT equipment for hybrid meetings has been researched and purchased, to be tested prior to the Board meeting.
- Work is continuing to improve the way that all types of leave are tracked, including annual leave, sick leave, compassionate leave etc to maintain confidentiality. Ways to achieve this in BrightPay are currently being explored. HR documents are stored in BrightPay where possible.

- Lynne is working on putting together some basic tips for using Hubspot before rolling out training to team members.

2.2 Planning

- The CCB's Planner continues to be occupied with work outside of the core planning sphere, including contributing to the CCB's Governance Review, contributing to thinking on the response to the Glover Landscapes Review, and developing our work with Natural England on the Designation Programme projects to extend the AONB and enhance its external management and governance arrangements. This work will involve more direct engagement with the Board in the coming weeks and months.
- There has been little by way of strategic planning activity since the last Board review, though Buckinghamshire Council issued a residents' [survey](#) on the 'discovery and exploration' phase of the first local plan for the new authority. We submitted a [high-level response](#).
- You can keep up to date with responses on strategic planning matters on our [website](#).
- South Oxfordshire District Council's application to the High Court for a review of the appeal decision that granted permission for an extra-care housing village in the AONB at Little Sparrows, Sonning Common was unsuccessful. SODC has determined that there is no further action they can reasonably take. We will be using the case as an example of how badly the interpretation of current planning policy for AONBs can go wrong as we make the case for improvements through the Government's consultation on its response to the Glover Review and planning reform activities.
- We have raised objections to a proposed housing allocation in the AONB north of Highlands Farm in the draft Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan. This matter has now progressed to the submitted plan, so CCB will consider an objection to be raised at the plan's independent examination. Our earlier response to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan sought to avoid such additional pressures around Henley and this proposal confirms the fears that we had expressed at the local plan examination, but which were dismissed by the Inspector.
- We hope to work constructively with the Neighbourhood Plan body but have had to raise objections as this allocation for 110 dwellings would unacceptably erode the character of the AONB.
- We have responded to the draft Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan, in effect supporting the Parish Council's proposal that fewer houses be accommodated than in the adopted SODC Local Plan. The Local Plan allows for this scenario in the AONB, where evidence exists. The Parish has produced a comprehensive landscape and visual impact assessment to support their stance, which we support.
- Learning from recent experiences with planning applications involving excessive outdoor lighting, our Planning Advisor is currently drafting a position statement on lighting in the AONB, and we anticipate developing this through a working group of the Policy Committee during 2022.
- Further observations on development management issues include:

- Between our planning audit 'bookends' of November 2021 and February 2022: 11 applications were granted to which CCB made supportive comments, 4 refused to which we commented, two refused to which we had objected and 3 granted to which we had objected. In the final category this included the Luton airport noise and passenger capacity variations as agreed by the LBC planning committee in November 2021. This increased annual passenger numbers from 18 million to 19 million. At the January 2022 planning committee meeting we reported a further 24 formal representations on planning applications, including 6 objections, 15 comments and one part objection/part comment, together with two consultations on the scoping contents for environmental impact assessments ahead of major development (land east of Tring for housing and the new road at Princes Risborough).
- For this reporting period a number of major schemes have been considered, including a second consultation on the land east of Green Street Chorleywood (300 and 800 home scheme, within the AONB) and at the Little Chalfont Golf Club (380 homes within the setting of the AONB).
- In February, London Luton Airport Ltd (now known as 'Luton Rising') launched a statutory consultation on the expansion of the airport. The consultation is in advance of a Development Consent Order (DCO) under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime, anticipated in the Autumn.

2.3 Nature and Landscape

Farmer/ land manager engagement and support

- Kath is working with colleagues on proposals to increase CCB's core capacity for land manager engagement, advice and support work. This builds on the achievements of several of our projects including our Chilterns Chalk Streams Project and the NLHF funded project Chalk, Cherries and Chairs.
- Work this quarter has included preparation of a brief to commission work exploring collaborative models of land manager engagement/ advice/ support; working with Claire on exploring the potential for green finance to support this work; and promoting coordination and knowledge sharing between farmer clusters and projects at different stages of development, with input from Nick, Neil, Gareth and Luke.
- Neil continues to support the Christmas Common Farmer Cluster which has already met twice since Christmas. Forestry Commission colleagues led an informative meeting on deer management in January and Farmers Weekly Arable Advisor of the year, Kieran Walsh, shared his soil management expertise at a further meeting in February.

Nature Recovery Networks/ Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)

- Kath has attended meetings of the Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Network and also contributed to a meeting with Defra on the learning from the National LNRS pilots (of which Buckinghamshire was one). Defra is currently working on the development of guidance for development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, expected to be issued later this year.

Nature Based Solutions

- Kath and Neil continue to contribute to the National Association's Nature Based Solutions (NBS) Climate Change working group. The group is currently gathering case studies and best practise for a NBS toolkit for use across the AONB network.

Farming in Protected Landscapes

- The total number of enquiries (including applications) is approximately 90. Many of these enquiries are still active and will lead to year 2 and 3 projects. A list of approved applications will be publicised on the CCB website shortly and we will also be presenting particular case studies on the website of projects which we consider to be good examples in terms of meeting the programme objectives and fitting with the particular priorities of the Chilterns. We will also consider whether we need to promote FiPL to particular areas and/or particular groups of land managers. The guidance for applicants on the website will also be updated to make it more accessible and useful.
- Six panel meetings have been convened and 24 applications received. Nine applications were for less than £5,000 each and were therefore assessed internally. Of the remaining 15 applications considered by the panel, 12 were approved. Those not approved were for reasons such as: application not sufficiently addressing the FiPL themes, questions over deliverability due to insufficient communication between owner and tenant, insufficient detail on ecological conditions for habitat creation plans.
- The average grant approved is £15,677.
- The programme can now accept applications for NoFence GPS collars for cattle grazing. Such applications have to be approved by DEFRA as well as CCB due to sensitivities around animal welfare. It is expected that these would be applications on common land rather than locations where fences are sufficient. We are likely to receive such an application for common land at Berkhamsted golf course.
- More applications themed around education and enhanced public access and interpretation are expected. Other projects in the pipeline include those with an archaeological/historical focus, maintaining and enhancing chalk grassland and additional regenerative farming projects.
- An important focus for the financial year end is to make sure all applicants can complete all their year 1 works, otherwise DEFRA will recoup the money and we will not be able to pay out. We are hopeful that everything can be completed but there is a risk that some smaller projects will not be completed.

HS2

Tunnel boring machines, chalk streams and the aquifer

- The tunnel boring machines have been stopped as they were going too quickly and the first vent shaft at Chalfont St Peter wasn't ready for them! When arguing for a fully bored tunnel during the Select Committee stage, our experts put the case that tunnelling would be far quicker than HS2 predicted and extended tunnelling would not create the stated delays to the programme. It appears our experts were right.

HS2 Cutting

- The internal construction road will soon be complete, allowing transport of excavated material northwards. Original plans required early construction of the Small Dean viaduct to transport material over the A413 and Chiltern Railway line. Delays to construction (as a result of design changes requested by Buckinghamshire Council) have led to alternative proposals to construct an enclosed 750m long conveyor belt across the A413 and railway line. Construction is expected in April with the conveyor being in operation for two years.

Schedule 17 planning approvals

- We continue to engage with Natural England, the Independent Design Panel and Buckinghamshire Council over emerging plans including vent shafts, road designs and landscape mitigation. We are expecting a number of Schedule 17 planning applications to be submitted in the coming months. Along with Buckinghamshire Council, we are pushing for improvements to noise barrier locations and green verge improvements for overbridges.

Regular update meetings

- We are pleased to confirm that the main works contractors, Align and EKFB, have agreed to regular monthly update meetings. Elaine and Neil attended the first of these meetings at the beginning of February.

The CCB's webpages on HS2 are [here](#).

Big Chalk Initiative

- We are supporting the development of the **Big Chalk Initiative** alongside eight other AONBs, and the South Downs National Park. The aims are to work with landowners, farmers, and local communities to build resilience in calcareous landscapes (chalk and limestone) on an unprecedented scale. The current focus is on preparatory work for a funding bid to the National Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Natural England funding has been secured to support this preparatory work and consultants appointed. The CCB has made specific contributions around landowner / farmer engagement and support, environmental monitoring and liaison with NHLF.

2.4 People and Society

- The next Chilterns Walking Festival will take place 21 May to 5 June. Walk leaders and event organisers have been invited to submit events and the entries are coming in. We are encouraging several new groups and walk leaders to participate as part of a wider effort to make the festival more inclusive and broaden the profile of participants.
- A summary report from the last festival is [available here](#).
- We have been encouraging people to get active outdoors through our blogs and comms work – eg our [Get Active](#) blog includes a wide range of activities aimed at

improving wellbeing and mental health, highlighting the range of clubs and organised events in the Chilterns.

- Plans to revitalise the Chess Valley Walk are progressing well as part of the Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows project, funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. This includes progress on rebranding the Chess Valley Walk, appointing a signage consultant to oversee the waymarking of the route, progressing the interpretation boards and negotiating access improvements along the route.
- We hope to launch the revitalised Chess Valley Route early summer 2022.
- We are also seeking professional consultancy advice to help us review our promoted routes and online walks information, to make them more accessible and appealing to wider and more diverse audiences.
- We will be appointing a signage consultant to audit the signage along the Chilterns Cycleway, including the link routes (over 700 signs) and to produce a schedule of works. This is the first step towards revitalising the Chilterns Cycleway. We are seeking further funding from the Buckinghamshire Community Board and others for signage production and installation.

2.5 Sustainable Tourism and promoting the rural economy

- The Open for Business project has been helping businesses to develop and market new bookable Chilterns countryside experiences.
- We held two workshops in January 2022 (jointly with Mend the Gap project), a webinar and an in-person workshop, attracting 34 participants. There was lots of interest and we are now following up with 1:1 business support.
- A dedicated page is being prepared on the new Chilterns AONB website which will give businesses a route to market and we are developing and promoting new experience-based visitor Itineraries which will be promoted on the site. [SEE HERE](#) for further information on our Experiential Tourism work and support for businesses.
- The CCB will have a stand at the Buckinghamshire Tourism Summit on 2 March, which will see the launch of [Visit Buckinghamshire: Boost](#), a new six-month programme designed to accelerate the recovery of tourism, hospitality and leisure businesses and the wider visitor economy in Buckinghamshire. Around 200 people from within the tourism, hospitality and leisure sector are expected to attend.

2.6 Development & Funding

- The Development & Funding Manager has continued to oversee and develop a range of work, including:
- The Green Recovery Challenge Fund project Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows: scheduled to end in October 2022, key activities during this period included liaising with NLHF, establishing effective monitoring and evaluation processes, preparing and submitting reports and grant claims, and liaising with partners, especially the Chiltern Society and Chiltern Rangers, to ensure effective project delivery, with input from colleagues at both the CCB and Chiltern Society.
- Chalkscapes: the CCB is progressing the Development Phase of this NLHF supported project. Work has included supporting the Development team (see later Chalkscapes update for details) and liaising with NLHF.

- Increasing staff capacity: Claire led the creation, funding and recruitment of a Project Support Officer – a new post which will provide additional capacity to support core and project work. Creating the role has included a review and update of tasks and responsibilities across the administrative team.
- Developing an Income Generation Strategy in discussion with the CEO, Chair and Finance Officer. As part of this work, Claire is exploring the opportunity presented by Green Finance and has held initial meetings with Accelar, a consultancy who may support us with financial expertise to shape proposals and project concepts which can be positioned to attract Green Finance.
- Other work during this period includes contributing to the 2022/23 Business Planning process, representing the CCB is at a national level in developing collaborative projects with other AONBs and National Parks, through the National Association of AONBs, and providing strategic support and advice to other members of the team on internally generated initiatives to secure funding for projects and other activities.

2.7 Communications

- **Elevator Pitch:** A General PowerPoint presentation of the Chilterns has been produced for staff and Board members to use in talks and as they see fit. Staff can download a copy of the presentation for use in their work, [here](#). (If you have problems accessing the link, please contact Vicki – vpearce@chilternsaonb.org)
- **Strategy & Planning:** The comms team have been drawing up a content and social plan for the year ahead and Vicki is working on a Tone of Voice document to accompany the draft brand guidelines she has been working on. We are also reviewing our monitoring and evaluation processes to better understand our audiences and what they engage with.
- **Annual Review:** The draft Annual review for 2020-21 is complete - in a new PowerPoint format - and is expected to be published in March. As the review has been delayed, we will be discussing a publication plan and how best to connect it with the next Annual Review, which we will be working on from 1 April.
- **Outstanding Chilterns Magazine:** We have received some excellent feedback from our readers and our distributor has asked for more copies as they have run out - we will need to increase the print run for the next edition!
- We have provided the distributor with several extra boxes – and are now extremely low on supplies. Please contact Vicki as soon as possible if you need further copies.
- We are currently brainstorming article ideas for the next edition. Some of the article ideas include:
 - A big volunteering push including interviews with members of Chalk, Cherries and Chairs led “Tracking the Impact” project and young explorers - “Chilterns New Shoots”
 - An interview with Dr Geeta Ludhra about her walking programme and our shared ambition to improve inclusion and diversity in the countryside
 - The Green Spaces, Dark Skies festival
 - A focus on Experiential tourism – promoting some of the wonderful producers, tour guides and other businesses creating unforgettable experiences for visitors to the Chilterns

- Chilterns Tree Identification Guide including highlighting threats such as Ash Dieback and Grey squirrels
- Accessible walks – enlisting volunteers with hidden and visible disabilities to test and feedback on accessible routes
- Implementing the Glover Review and what it means for AONBs
- A Wander around Wallingford
- Project promotions – festivals and events

If you have any ideas for an article or would like to help contribute to any listed above, please email Vicki at vpearce@chilternsaonb.org.uk .

- **New website:** The project continues – the “Visit Chilterns” is 95% complete, historical news items are being transferred across to the new site by a dedicated volunteer, Robert. The About Us section is 75% complete and we have dived into Our Landscape and What We Do sections with the help of an experienced copywriter and input from Kath and the Countryside team.
- The interactive map development is complete, and we have imported all data – we are now working on a few user issues and testing rigorously! We previously hoped to release the site for user testing in February however .due to intense time and resource issues and needing time from other team members who are already stretched, we haven’t been able to meet this. We are now working on a month-by-month update and hope to have finished all areas of the site, with the exception of our landscape and what we do, by the end of March.
- **Newsletters:** we continue to send our monthly e-newsletter with the subscribers continuing to increase steadily (4,000+). We have also helped the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project develop its own quarterly newsletter, sharing updates and news from the ever-expanding team. The first newsletter was issued on 17 February.
- **Latest News:** The communications team continue to share the latest news and blogs from the CCB, plus local and national environmental news and statements. Highlights since the last update include:
 - [Get Active Outdoors this Spring](#)
 - [Hundreds of local people are invited to come together and create an artwork in The Chilterns AONB as part of UK-wide celebration of creativity.](#)
 - [Dadima’s Countryside Walks & Talks: 2022 Programme](#)
 - [A Year with the Chiltern New Shoots - our young conservationists](#)
 - [25th Anniversary of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project](#)
 - [Chilterns Conservation Board welcomes publication of the Government’s response to the Landscapes Review](#)
 - [Tracking the Impact: In Celebration of Volunteers](#)
 - [Forging ahead with Farming in Protected Landscapes in the Chilterns](#)

You can read more of our latest news updates [here](#)

All our news items are supported by social media posts, including on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and will be highlighted in our monthly newsletters.

3.0 Projects

3.1 Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

- In January, Allen was promoted to Project Manager for the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project.

Chess Smarter Water Catchment Plan

- The CCSP is a co-host of the R. Chess Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) initiative, working alongside the River Chess Association and Thames Water. Thames Water's [Smarter Water Catchment initiative](#) aims to deliver improvements at a catchment scale, aimed at restoring the Chess over the next ten years. As part of the initiative, Thames Water is investing £3m into the delivery of a Smarter Water Catchment plan for the Chess catchment over the next five years.
- The CCSP is leading on the Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) theme of the Chess SWC year 1 plan and has completed an assessment of its INNS survey of the R. Chess, which was carried out in 2021.
- The SWC is holding a stakeholder workshop on 22 February to showcase the findings of the baseline assessment work that has now been completed. Contact abeechey@chilternsaonb.org if you would like to attend.
- As part of its co-hosting role, the CCSP has agreed to lead on the coordination of the Chess SWC. A Partnership Coordinator role was advertised in January, interviews completed on 14 February, and an excellent candidate appointed. The four-year post will be funded by the Chess SWC.
- CCB has provided additional support through Kath leading on the Wildlife Corridor theme (one of 6 themes within the SWC programme). A new role of Chess Nature Recovery Officer has been proposed, subject to agreement by the SWC steering group.
- A new Chess Valley Farming Officer role is currently being advertised. The purpose of this role will be to lead delivery of some of the water quality and wildlife corridor related actions within the catchment plan. The role will be hosted by CCB. Closing date is 7th March.
- The CCSP has worked with partners of the SWC to develop and finalise the year 2 action plan and budget. Year 2 budget is £850,000.

Prof. Kate Heppell Secondment

Kate began her secondment with the CCSP in September. She is leading on the delivery of the year 1 water quality milestones within the Chess catchment plan. Kate has produced a draft of the baseline assessment for the Chess which is currently with the EA and water companies for their comments.

- As part of the development of the year 2 action plan, Kate has drawn up and issued a tender for the equipment required to upgrade and expand the water quality monitoring network on the river.
- In January, Kate held a volunteer workshop to share the results of her analysis of riverfly monitoring data and to introduce the citizen science programme that she has developed for the Chess. A number of volunteers have been recruited to help deliver the programme.
- In January, Kate took part in a two-[part podcast](#) by Affinity Water talking about the importance of citizen science and the work she has been doing with volunteers on the Chess over the last year.

Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project

- In July, the Chiltern Society and Chilterns Conservation Board were successful in an application to the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund for a grant of £294,000 to enable delivery of the Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project (CWMP).
- The CWMP Project runs for 12 months from October 2021 and involves the delivery of a suite of nine education, engagement and practical restoration projects.
- In August Adrian Porter and Laura Silverstone were recruited to the project team, Adrian joining as Rivers Officer and Laura as Education and Engagement Officer. Both started in post on 27 September.
- Adrian has drafted restoration plans for both the Wye and Latimer Park Schemes. These are currently with the CCSP Project Manager for comments. Adrian has also created a tree management plan for the Latimer Park Project and submitted an application to Buckinghamshire Council to carry out the work this coming Autumn.
- Adrian and Kate have begun developing a restoration plan for the Hamble Brook at Colstrope farm and has met four three landowners to discuss options.
- Laura has commissioned designers Studio Beam to develop the designs and branding for the Chess Valley Walk.
- Laura has also completed a number of site meetings with landowners to discuss options to improve access along the walk, where problems have been identified. Laura has met with Thames Water and Buckinghamshire Council to discuss whether a footpath can be installed along the Latimer Road between Holloway Lane and Broadwater Bridge to improve safety for walkers along this section of the route.

Working with members of Benson Parish Council, the Chiltern Society and the Wild Trout Trust, Ceri has developed a plan for a series of small-scale habitat enhancement projects along the Ewelme Brook. The work will be carried out by local volunteers, over the coming summer, under the leadership of The Wild Trout Trust and CCSP.

Education and Engagement

- Ceri and Laura set up Trout in the Classroom units in 11 schools on the Chess, Wye and Ewelme Brook, in January. Each school is also taking part in the CCSP's river schools programme, which involves a series of lessons plus field trips out to their local river.
- Laura has begun working with the Box Moor Trust to develop a series of guided school visits to the Bulbourne. The visits will take place over the summer period and will involve 5 schools in the Hemel area.
- Ceri has continued to develop and upload new content for the CCSP's microsite which will go live with the launch of the CCB's main site in March.

Advice and support to Water Companies

- In February the CCSP provided support and guidance to Affinity Water with the roll out of their Catchment Assets for Water project, which they are piloting in the Colne catchment this year. The project aims to deliver an evidence-led, catchment-scale approach to planning Nature-based Solutions for resilient water resources, through taking a Natural Capital Approach to opportunity mapping & impact assessment.

- The project is part of Affinity Water's work to develop catchment options for their Water Resource Management Plan for 2025-2030. As a result of the CCSP's input the Chess and Ver catchments have been shortlisted as potential trial catchments.

3.2 Chalk, Cherries & Chairs

- Chalk, Cherries and Chairs is delivering some considerable successes, some of which, especially in relation to our work on farms, are of national learning significance. An adapted scheme has been agreed in principle by the steering group. This covers adaptation agreements with project funders and revised delivery arrangements with project partners, including new arrangements agreed in principle with Buckinghamshire County Council and Wycombe Museum.
- We are awaiting the outcome of the independent mid-year review and will consider proposals for a further and final scheme adaptation once the report has been received and considered.
- The Board should note that one options under consideration is to extend the scheme by a cost-neutral six months, utilising the underspend arising from the first two years to fund costs of an extended period, as adapted. An extension period carries contractual implications for project staffing, details of which will be shared if the details are approved in the iterative process between delivery partners, steering group and scheme funders.
- The key elements of the proposed project adaptation are to utilise the underspend arising from reduced activities during lockdown, principally to additionally fund three types of projects, with adaptations in each ranging from minor adjustment to wholesale reimagination:
 - Some projects are on track in delivering their aims but will need additional time to meet all their final output targets. Projects of this type include Landscape Connections, Rough Around the Edges, Tracking the Impact, People and Mills of the River Wye and the Chilterns Festivals.
 - Projects which were late to start or have taken longer to establish but which, with the proposed adaptations and some additional time, will meet their aims and most of their final targets include Rock Around the Chilterns, Cherry Talk, Celebrating Chilterns Crafts and Skills, Echoed Locations and Coming Alive.
 - Other projects have adapted well or reasonably well to increased online delivery and will meet their aims and adjusted targets, but for which the unit costs for the necessarily adapted forms have been different from those originally envisaged. These projects need to be additionally resourced to be sustained for the duration. Projects of this type include Woodlanders Lives, Understanding the Central Chilterns, Routes to the Past and The Mystery of Grim's Ditch.
- Other projects will either continue as originally planned and conclude on time or will be merged with corresponding resources and targets into one of the three types of adapted project noted above.
- The Communication and Community Engagement Officer is currently on maternity leave (congratulations to Lizzie on the birth of her daughter!). Maternity

cover is being provided through a mix of fixed term commissions and direct support from the Project Manager. Targeted interventions to increase social media reach and engagement have delivered month-on-month improvements over the past quarter.

- Recruitment for replacing the Heritage Officer will commence shortly.
- Our adapted plans for celebratory festivals continue to be successful, with our food themed events combining with the Chilterns Food Festival in this autumn and plans for three themed festivals in 2022: the first being the Chilterns Landscapes Spring Arts Festival, 24th April – 1st May 2022 at Wycombe Museum.
- The exhibition will showcase our wonderful Chilterns landscapes, featuring fine art, local contemporary art submissions and the winners from our local schools competition (over 200 schools entries received!)
- Other festivals scheduled are Chilterns Wildlife in the Summer, and Chilterns Storytelling in the Autumn. We will also launch our first vLog of traditional Cherry Recipes currently being identified by volunteers researching the archives around Flackwell Heath and Seer Green Orchards.

Landscape Connections

Advice and guidance:

- 3 new Whole Farm Plans completed (total 24)
- 3 farms started delivery of new Countryside Stewardship agreements in Jan 2022
- 11 farms planning possible Countryside Stewardship agreements for January 2023
- Specific pond advice given and work completed at Cadmore End Common
- 2 traditional Orchard management plans completed
- Farm woodland management plan commissioned
- Full farm soil sampling completed
- Mob grazing consultancy reports completed for 2 farms
- Biodiversity Net Gain initial feasibility study completed

Specific project delivery:

- Farm Carbon Project near completion:
 - 17 Whole Farm carbon self-assessment complete
 - 36 field soil samples complete
 - Debrief workshop for farmers complete
- Horsenden Brook project being developed looking to reintroduce Brown Trout:
 - In partnership with 3 cluster farms and with the Chilterns Chalk Stream project & River Thames Conservation Trust

Project delivery:

- £53,000 FiPL funding secured for 2 new direct drill projects on cluster farms
- £9,500 FiPL funding to support SSSI chalk grassland restoration on 3 sites
- £18,500 FiPL funding secured for care farming project on cluster farm
- £134,000 FiPL funding secured to deliver (90% completed) 5,644m hedge planting, 1,293m hedge coppicing, 250m hedge laying, 192 new hedgerow trees, 9,597m stock fencing, 27 new farm gates (and a new set of hedge shears)
- Over 600m new hedge planting agreed and scheduled for late February
- Plans being developed for c.2km new hedgerow planting on new non cluster farm

- Year 3 of cluster supplementary feeding project in progress (10tonnes seed distributed)
- BORG Owl box project installed 70th box in February, 5 more to go to completion

Monitoring:

- Year 4 of winter cluster farm bird surveys in progress (18 farms)
- Year 3 winter farmland bird ringing project (5 farms)
- Year 1 cluster wide reptile survey project completed (17 farms)
- Year 1 small mammal survey project completed (3 farms)

Publicity:

- 7 talks on the farmer cluster given to local interest groups & other AONBs

Tracking the Impact

2021 survey season highlights:

- 82/150 surveys completed (183 visits, 337 species, 2,228 records):
 - Breeding Bird Survey 38/50
 - Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (27/50)
 - National Plant Monitoring Scheme (17/50)
- 54 surveyors (457 hours of surveying)
- 132 volunteers involved in whole project incl.:
- 3 survey methodology courses
- 23 sessions of species ID training (infield)
- 8 session species ID training (online)
- 81 volunteers on active WhatsApp group
- Volunteer celebration event:
 - Chaired by Andy Clements Natural England Board member & ex BTO CEO
 - 65 volunteers attended online
 - Recorded and available here -
 - [Tracking the Impact 2021 Programme Review - December 2021 - YouTube](#)

Chilterns New Shoots:

- Year 1 programme near completion (16 young people aged 15-18):
 - 4 species ID & survey sessions
 - 4 habitat management sessions
 - Additional sessions:
 - Behind scenes tour of RSPB Otmoor Reserve
 - Reptile surveys
 - Bird Ringing
 - Farm wildflower meadow ID
- Featured in New Year episode of BBC Countryfile
- 2 group members spoke at end of year Tracking the Impact conference
- 3 group members undertaking work experience placements with Chiltern Rangers
- Plans in place for recruitment of year 2 group and programme
- Plans in place for follow on bursary project to support Year 1 group with training and kit

- Won Best Community Group award at recent Pride of Bucks awards for North West Chilterns!

3.3 Beacons of the Past

- Registered Portal users are now over 15000, with steady daily work carried out both in initial recording and reviewer portal quality checking. 8000+ verified records, 16000+ features identified.
- Meetings have been taking place with stakeholders and volunteers regarding the legacy of the project as we enter the final six months. The project continues to support the endeavours of community groups such as the South Oxfordshire Archaeology Group, the Thames Valley Orienteering Club and of individual project volunteers who have taken on independent research inspired by the features they have discovered.
- The project is retaining freelance Landscape Heritage Officer Ed Peveler to conduct some field checking exercises and mapathons from March to June.
- Wendy continues to add value to the CCB's core work by responding to requests to offer advice to farmers, forestry, and local authorities on the archaeological resources and implications of activities in the AONB, as well as consulting on potential FiPL applications and meeting with landowners to advise on the care of non-designated heritage features discovered through the BotP project.
- Wendy has given three online talks to over 190 people in the last two months and is booked to deliver eight more in the next 12 weeks.
- Capital works planned at the Tier One hillfort sites are now in line with projected Covid restriction changes. Cholesbury Camp has a new woodland management plan, and tree work to carry out the recommendations of that plan are ready to commence upon receipt of TPO consents. Geophysical survey of the interior will be conducted in March by Dr Kris Lockyear of UCL and his volunteer team.
- Desborough Castle's management plan is being briefed and a draft will be ready for review by the stakeholders in early April
- A community excavation at Burnham Beeches is planned for 15-29 April, with an Open Day 24 April. This should also see the launch of a bespoke Augmented Reality experience at Seven Ways Plain.
- Work continues on the Development Phase application for a new chalk streams/archaeology collaborative project scheme (*Not Bourne Yesterday*). This project, if successful, will provide an important legacy for the BotP dataset and the connections made during the project.

3.4 Mend the Gap – joint venture between the CCB and North Wessex Downs AONB

Enhancement Projects

- Two experiential tourism workshops were held in January in collaboration with Annette's Sustainable Tourism project. The workshops had a good mix of attendees, with a total of 34 participants. Roughly half of those attending came from within or close to the Mend the Gap programme area.
- MtG has allocated further funding to enable further 1:1 support to those businesses wishing to push forward with turning ideas for experiential tourism activities into reality.

- The Steering Group has allocated programme funds to a local small-scale biodiversity project, which although small will be a positive boost for the programme in terms of profile in the local area.
- We have been working collaboratively with CCB's FiPL Officer, Gareth Clay, which is proving a useful and positive approach, through which we have identified several projects which may, ultimately, be jointly funded by the two schemes. We also continue to liaise with the North Wessex Downs AONB's FiPL Officer.
- We are providing active support to a small charitable trust to develop a larger-scale proposal for work at a nature reserve within the programme area. The trust's capacity and project-development experience are limited and so a more collaborative approach, with direct input from the MtG Programme Manager is needed in order to move the project forward.
- Discussions with BBOWT in relation to development of potential projects continue with discussions coalescing around two themes – one relating to working strategically with community-level organisations and another focussed more on BBOWT's sites within the programme area.
- It is taking much longer than had been anticipated to bring FWAG SE on board to support delivery of the MtG Mitigation project. Complications with FWAG SE's organisational structure have been the main reason for the delay. Positive discussions have continued, however, and we believe we have an interim solution should be in place in the next couple of weeks.
- As soon as FWAG SE is on board we will be progressing detailed discussions with landowners and development of the detailed mitigation proposals across the area. In the meantime, we are continuing to discuss mitigation with local landowners and have a number of meetings with owners of priority locations for planting planned for the coming weeks.

3.5 Chalkscapes

- Species Dossier research has concluded, and a final report has been produced by Plantlife
- Site Dossier research is close to conclusion, with the 'Desirables' element beginning work with a deadline of May 2022. Both elements will culminate in a report produced by the Wildlife Trust BCN for May 2022.
- Initial workplans are being produced for Delivery stage, guided by the findings the Species and Site Dossiers have produced.
- Sundew Ecology has been awarded the tender (worth £10,000) of the Routes and Waysides research, following a review of the brief by Working Groups who concluded the scope was too broad. The research findings for the R&W brief will produce the outline of the workplans for Delivery stage
- The University of Bedford has been approved by their ethics board to undertake the consultation with local faith groups and South Asian community groups. Online consultations have concluded and face to face consultation sessions will commence in March – April, with findings presented in May for feedback at the midpoint review.
- A new project partner, Action for Conservation, has committed to delivering a pilot for hands on conservation learning and activities to engage BAME families with the countryside. School based, with conversation in action across Luton BC land. (March 2nd – Putteridge High School , March 4th - Cardinal Newman High School).

- There are four elements of collaboration in Chalkscape champions, from volunteering efforts to training and best practice groups. Throughout the development stage so far, the concepts have grown and evolved, and partners have taken ownership of each element. Some are developed to a more defined stage than others. The strands are:
Chalkscape Champions: Working collaboratively with councils and landowners to create a nomadic group of volunteers for active conservation, trained and led by Chiltern Society, National Trust and Plantlife.
Species Guardians: A monitoring programme for volunteers to act as species guardians for rare flora in the chalk grassland with a view to conserve and protect it.
- Farmer Cluster: A community of invested landowners and farmers to act as a knowledge sharing platform for best practise in sustainable farming. The first meeting of the farmer cluster included 22 land owners and is set to focus their efforts over the coming months on recruiting more farmers and outline their first years aims and overall ambition as a collective.

4.0 National Focus

- Liaising with a range of organisations and individuals, including our partners - both nationally and locally – continues to be a key feature of much of our work. This has included conversations with our local authorities over responding to the Covid-19 emergency, implementing the new Environment Act and, more recently, considering the implications and opportunities for the area as part of the Government's Levelling up White Paper - for example the CEO is a member of Buckinghamshire Council's Strategic Partners Board.
- We are also working with the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), AONB Lead Officers, National Parks and others on a range of operational and strategic matters, most recently contributing insight to Defra on its response to the Landscapes Review, plus developing climate adaptation and mitigation measures, Nature Recovery Plans, securing funding and inclusion and diversity.
- Strong links have been maintained and developed with Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency on a range of matters.
- We have worked especially closely with Natural England regarding its designations programme announced on 25 June 2021, helping to kickstart two joint projects involving the Chilterns AONB. On the AONB Boundary Extension project, we have provided Natural England with our thoughts on the extent of an Area of Search, and NE anticipate launching the process publicly in April.
- We are also working on initial stakeholder mapping for the Enhanced Management and Governance Arrangements project and will be seeking some volunteers from the Board to assist with that shortly.

4.1 Defra and Natural England

- The CCB staff team continues to communicate and share information on our work with Defra. We are liaising with Defra, Natural England and others on the Landscapes Review, the Government's Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme, Nature Recovery Networks, sustainable tourism, the rural economy, HS2 and developing measures to improve the protection of chalk streams.
- Elaine continued to represent the AONB network with several other AONB colleagues with Defra in the lead up to publication of its response to the Landscape Review. Focus has now shifted to supporting the NAAONB and other

AONBs to develop a collaborative response to the consultation. This will form a prospectus for how AONBs can be best equipped to be fit for the 21st Century.

- Elaine and Matt have met with Defra to advise on specific items, such as planning and governance. Elaine is now leading the NAAONB's Governance Group, Matt is supporting the Planning Group and Annette is contributing her expertise to Defra's 'deep dive' sessions on sustainable tourism.

4.2 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. This includes regular meetings with the South East and East Protected Landscapes group (SEEPL), including one on 3 December, at which Elaine led discussions on the Landscapes Review.
- Elaine continues in her role as a member of the NAAONB's Colchester Declaration Steering Group - with Claire. The Declaration was agreed by all AONBs in July 2019 and aims to increase the scale and pace of conservation activity in AONBs, along with increasing our engagement with people and local communities.
- Work includes 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.

5.0 Other

- The staff team is involved with either chairing or acting as members of external Boards and steering groups. For example, Elaine continues in her role as member of the Buckinghamshire Culture Development Board and the Bucks and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership.
- The [announcement](#) of the Chilterns AONB boundary extension continues to generate positive interest from residents, community groups, NGOs and local councils, leading to valuable new connections being made and meetings held or planned. This includes Elaine, often with Matt and Kath, too, meeting with senior teams at our local authorities.
- Elaine continues to liaise closely with other colleagues in local councils, for example monthly meetings with the Head of Planning, Growth and Sustainability at Bucks Council. A walk is also planned with the Leader of Bucks Council on 25 March.
- Meetings have also been held with Government agencies this year, including the Regional Director at the Forestry Commission and the Regional Director for the Environment Agency's Thames region.
- Collaboration and discussion also continues with a range of NGO partners including the CEOs at the Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust and BBOWT, and the YHA.
- CCB's Chair and CEO meet regularly to discuss and plan ongoing work. Meetings, sometimes with other board members, too, have included focussed discussions on a range of areas including governance, finance and business planning.
- The Senior Leadership team worked hard during this period to develop a Business Plan for 2022/23. This involved a series of consultations with the staff

team and Board members through a survey, focussed workshop and discussion at Board meetings. The Business Plan provides a solid platform on which to deliver our statutory objectives over the next 12 months, and enable us to plan for the longer term - not only with respect to the CCB's priorities, but also recognising that we will start reviewing the AONB Management Plan in 2023.

recharging projects fees for facilitation and hosting. We are budgeting these fees to be £90,636 in the forthcoming year. Note we are unable to charge hosting fees to the National Lottery Heritage funded projects.

4. We are budgeting for an increase in Core expenditure of £100,000. This is largely due to employment costs £60,000 and a new Nature Recovery budget amounting to £25,000.
5. Employment costs will rise by the additional 1.25% National Insurance increase and 1.3% in Employer's pension contribution. There has been an additional post of Projects support officer created and some existing staff have had their hours extended.
6. Project activities coming to and end in 2022/23 includes the very successful Beacons of the Past Project and matters are well progressed to bid for new projects. Timing of Income and expenditure are difficult to predict but there is potential for our Project income to exceed £2.5m in the forthcoming year. The CCB have financial commitments of £55,000 for existing projects to underwrite any shortfall in matched funding. This has been specifically provided for in the CCB reserves

Recommendation

- 1. To note the CCB's financial position at 30 December 2021**
- 2. To Approve the Budget 2022/23**

Summary: Feedback from 12th January Planning Committee's consideration of issues stemming from 7th December Board relating to the operations of the Committee

Purpose of the report

The December Board accepted the Task and Finish Group's recommendations on the 'direction of travel' for future governance. These included potential changes to the operations of the Planning Committee, which are within CCB's discretion and require no change to statute. The Board asked the Planning Committee to consider the detail, which it did on January 12th, and to report back. This report provides that feedback.

Extract from the executive summary of the December Board report

***The Planning Committee:** Its current retrospective endorsement of staff decisions should be replaced by an on-line resource to enable member input in real time. It should become a Working Group for this purpose with access for all Board members. Decisions on CCB's own planning policies remain with the formal Committee, meeting when needed.*

Conclusions of January 12th Planning Committee

The Committee reaffirmed its support for the recommendations above, which will be entirely within CCB's control and so could be implemented as soon as practicable.

a) An on-line system for planning consultations

The proposal is that an on-line system should be established, providing information in real time on all current planning applications, local plan consultations and all other proposals, such as transport or infrastructure, which will impact physically on the AONB and its setting. The aim is twofold:

- To give all Board members access to such information, and an opportunity to seek clarification, make comment and contribute to the decision process before decisions are made. Decision-making will continue to be delegated to our staff, but this will create an ability for members to be engaged in the process.
- To supersede the present system, under which delegated decisions are reported retrospectively to the Planning Committee in lengthy schedules: while useful discussion usually follows, it happens long after the event and the substantial staff time in drawing up these schedules, and member time in reading them, is of limited practical benefit.

The Committee considered the practicalities of creating such a system using Sharepoint, which CCB already operates. This would record all planning applications in such categories as CCB would pre-determine as relevant, local plan consultations, and other significant proposals, such as infrastructure or transport, which are likely to impact on the AONB or its setting.

This would be available for all Board members (not just the Planning Committee), preferably in an accessible format, such as being map-based, to enable members to spot applications of interest. Members could also elect to be alerted by the system to types and/or locations of application which would be of particular interest to them. They would then have the opportunity to input their views and discuss them with the Planner before the deadline for CCB's response, though the response itself will remain delegated to the Planner. The Committee believes that this is a considerable advance on the current system, where all decisions are taken by the Planner and reported retrospectively.

Having endorsed the principle, the Committee considered issues of implementation

1. How will all Board members be alerted to applications of interest?

The system will display all applications and proposals which are currently under consideration by CCB. is always available. All Board members will be able to inspect the detail of any application on the list, and will also be offered the chance to pre-nominate types or areas of application for individual alerts to them.

2. How will Board members interact with the system?

As well as being able to post comments direct on the system, the new set-up will enable all members to discuss applications of interest with the planning staff. Their comments will be recorded by the system and will be visible to other Board members, but the system will be internal to CCB and not accessible to the public.

Once taken and submitted, CCB's eventual comments on applications will be accessible on the websites of recipient authorities, as at present, but these will continue to be a collective CCB response and will not identify the views of individuals within CCB.

To ensure transparency and avoid any suggestion of conflicts of interest, the Planner will be record all discussions with Board members on the Sharepoint system. Members representing the authorities with a role in determining particular proposals do not at present recuse themselves from discussion and the Committee did not feel this would be necessary under the new system, provided all views were formally recorded.

As all Board members will have access on a continuing basis, the 'Working Group' (a misnomer) in the December Board report, summarised above, will not be needed as a separate group.

3. How will the system be set up and populated with data?

Sharepoint is already in use at CCB and the system can be set up internally, but some refresher training and on-going support will be needed, which will need a budget. The problem is less one of money than of staff time in this substantial initial set-up.

Data will be entered incrementally from the inception of the system and no attempt will be made to back-fill with historic decisions.

Once the system is established, the on-line record will be relied on and the current lengthy and time-consuming retrospective reports to the Committee will cease.

b) The continued Planning Committee

The current Planning Committee will continue to meet but with a reduced agenda, consisting of:

- Considering, and either determining or recommending to the Board, CCB's own relevant policies. Examples might include revisions to the Chilterns Design Guide and the planning and development elements of the Management Plan
- Making, or recommending, CCB's responses to government consultations on changes to planning legislation etc
- Such decisions on planning applications or other major proposals where CCB's case would be reinforced by a formal Committee decision. Examples might include particularly problematic planning appeals: when/if a CCB witness is challenged or cross examined at a planning inquiry, it is useful to have the committee's input/peer review/local knowledge and formal backing to reinforce professional evidence.

The Committee debated whether it should meet on an entirely ad hoc basis, as and when such issues arise, but decided that both diary planning and the qualifying requirement for CCB members to attend a specified minimum number of meetings each year meant that two scheduled meetings per annum were needed. When substantial and urgent issues arose, there would be two alternatives. Either an additional ad hoc meeting could be called (including a facility for 'emergency' meetings to be called by members); or the Chair and Vice-chair of the Planning Committee could be given delegated authority to determine such issues, in consultation with the Chief Executive and after consulting Committee members and with the advice of the Planner. Both should be incorporated in revised Terms of Reference.

c) Governance aspects

- The present system relies heavily on delegation of decisions to the planning staff. This will continue, as the Committee feels it is the best use of resources and the only practical way for CCB to respond to a very wide range of issues to tight deadlines. However, current delegations appear to be a matter of custom and practice and need formalising at the inception of the new system. This needs further work.
- The Committee's Terms of Reference need re-drafting to accommodate the new arrangements.
- Consequential changes to CCB's Code of Governance may be needed. These will be considered by the Task and Finish Group and reported to the June 2022 Board.

Recommendations

- 1. The on-line system for planning consultations be set up as described above and brought into operation as soon as possible**
- 2. The scheme of delegation to CCB's planning staff be formalised and recommended to the Planning Committee's next meeting**

3. The Planning Committee and Governance Task and Finish Group consider any consequential changes to the Terms of Reference for the Planning Committee and to the Code of Governance and report to the June 2022 Board.

Item 13.2 Governance Review : CCB's statutory planning role

Summary: Feedback from 12th January Planning Committee's consideration of issues stemming from 7th December Board

The December Board's governance discussions included proposals for longer-term change, which would need amendment of primary or secondary legislation. The purpose was to inform our staff's discussions with Defra and Natural England as part of current consultations by each.

These potential changes included two affecting CCB's planning role. Both of them were recommendations in the Glover report, but both have been discussed within CCB over a much longer period. Defra/NE's post-Glover consultations give us the opportunity to bring them to a head. They are whether CCB should seek Statutory Consultee status, and whether there should be a single Local Plan for the whole AONB.

The December Board asked the Planning Committee to consider both issues and report back.

Extracts from the executive summary of the December Board report

***A statutory planning role:** We should seek enhanced Statutory Consultee status and comparable status in relation to local plans, infrastructure schemes etc. Planning decisions should be required to comply with the AONB Management Plan. While not convinced by a single Chilterns Local Plan, we suggest further exploration of other routes to improve strategic planning across the AONB.*

1. Statutory Consultee status?

A key recommendation of the Glover Report was that AONBs should become 'Statutory Consultees' on planning applications. This would require Local Authorities to consult CCB formally on planning applications and to take our responses into account, putting us on the same footing as, for example, Parish Councils, Historic England and the Environment Agency.

The Committee welcomed the suggestion and endorsed it as one which the CCB team should advocate in consultations with Defra and Natural England (and through them with DLUHC, whose decision it would be). However, caveats attach to this support:

- It would undoubtedly be 'nice to have' but is not a panacea. It would oblige Councils to consult us (which does not always happen at present), would recognise the importance of AONB issues and increase the heft of our comments, not least in appeals, but it does not actually increase the duty on

Councils to take our views into account and applies only to planning applications.

- It also places a duty on CCB to respond to consultations, adding to the staff burden, but this could be minimised through use of standard responses like many established Statutory Consultees already do.
- We could define the categories of applications we wished to be consulted on, reducing though such triage an otherwise unmanageable volume, but we would need to retain the right to comment on any particularly significant applications outside those categories.

The Committee concluded that we should seek Statutory Consultee status, but that we needed more than that if the conservation of the AONB is to be adequately reflected in planning decisions. The key would be to create a **statutory obligation to take the Management Plan into account** in all relevant planning decisions, increasing its weight in the decision-making balance and enabling CCB to advise what decision would be compliant, with reserve powers of legal challenge.

(As a parallel, developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be an obligation on all local authorities when the Environment Act come into force, which may provide a means to require LAs to have regard to AONB Management Plans on relevant issues. While this does not extend directly to planning applications, it encouragingly sets the scene for a wider statutory role for Management Plans. This will be part of the government's response to the Glover Review and CCB will be commenting on that.)

In descending order of potency, statutory backing for the Management Plan could be achieved by:

- Making it a formal part of each Development Plan (maybe ideal, but probably unattainable); or
- Giving it the status of a Supplementary Planning Document; or
- Recognising it as a Material Planning Consideration of weight

Our team should therefore advocate this hierarchy in Defra consultations. This is outside Defra's normal areas of operation, so it will be difficult but gives CCB a chance to provide leadership and to seek support from the AONB community. Limiting it to the two Conservation Boards, or to only those AONBs who actually want this status, would assuage Defra concerns about resource implications. The Chilterns' location, and the consequent planning and population pressures, provide particular justification in our case.

Recommendation

1. The CCB advocates not only Statutory Consultee status but a statutory recognition of the Management Plan in the terms described above

2. A Chilterns Local Plan?

Glover recommended a single Local Plan for the Chilterns. While the Committee could see the advantages, it quickly came to the view that we have neither the resources nor the democratic mandate. Instead, it suggests we should seek 'Specific Consultation Body' status, which would require local authorities to include CCB in a

“Statement of Common Ground’, about issues such as housing numbers, which would underpin their respective Local Plans.

Such a Statement would define how Local Authorities would encompass the conservation of the AONB in their Local Plans, making it integral to their thinking in contrast to CCB’s current ‘arm’s length’ position, and putting us in a position similar to bodies such as Historic England. It would build a relationship with Councils on many policy matters, in agreeing text and justification, and would raise the AONB profile both when the plan is examined, when Planning inspectors review policy text/land allocations, and in the sometimes quixotic decisions on subsequent planning appeals.

The Committee felt it important that this structure should be co-created with our Local Authorities, and that their views should be sought and the proposal put to Defra as a joint initiative.

Recommendation

- 2. A single Chilterns Local Plan should not be pursued, but that CCB should discuss with its constituent Local Authorities its becoming a Specific Consultation Body to achieve a Statement of Common Ground for Local Plan purposes, and that if agreement is reached this should be put to Defra as the jointly-preferred outcome.**

Item 13.3

CCB Governance Review: Next Steps

Summary: work programme for the Governance Task & Finish Group

Purpose of report

The December Board briefing recommended the overall ‘Direction of Travel’ for the Governance Review. It accepted the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations, first for potential short-term changes which do not require and amendments to statute, and this are within CCB’s jurisdiction; and secondly longer-term aims which will inform the staff team’s negotiations with Defra and Natural England during their current consultations on governance in the wake of the Glover Report.

The aim of this report is to agree a work programme for the Task and Finish Group, to build on the recommendations from the December 2021 Board, to enable a further report to be presented to the June 2022 meeting, to develop further the detail of the agreed ‘direction of travel’ and to make recommendations for implementation. The proposed work programme is attached.

Progress on short-term changes

As requested by the Board, the Planning Committee has fleshed out much of the detail on the recommendations for its future operation, and this is reported elsewhere on the agenda with a view to early implementation. Other short-term changes are developed further in the attached work programme, for reporting to the 7th June Board.

Longer-term changes

The principal proposal agreed in December was for the Board to be supported and advised in its strategic thinking by an Advisory Group of key stakeholders, with the Board taking the relevant decisions and with an 'Operational Group' of the Board, akin to the present Executive Committee, overseeing the implementation of strategy.

This is illustrated in the diagram and remains CCB's committed 'Direction of Travel'. The pace of implementation, however, needs to recognise the external environment and particularly the current Defra and EN review of the overall purposes of Protected Landscapes. While the agreed concept can be further refined, actually setting up the Advisory Group should await the outcome: form should follow function, so defining its Terms of Reference and membership would be premature until this external picture is clearer – which will maybe take a year.

In the meantime, the revival of the Chilterns Partnership, presaged in the Business Plan, should take account of this eventual re-structuring and avoid compromising or duplicating it.

The attached work programme for the Task and Finish Group therefore sees further refinement of the overall concept but stops short at implementation. It continues work on other longer-term issues for reporting to the 7th June Board.

Recommendation

- 3. The Board endorses the attached work programme for the Governance Task & Finish group.**

13.2 Governance Review: Scoping Stage 4

What was agreed 7.12.21	What needs to be done in Stage 4	Who responsible	Target date
1. The Board			
<p>Principle of two-tier Board :</p> <p>1)existing Board continues, working alongside an 'Advisory Group' of key stakeholders on setting and monitoring strategy but with Board taking the decisions.</p> <p>2) smaller 'Operational Group' takes Board-level decisions on delivering strategy (see below)</p> <p>See attached illustrative diagram</p>	<p>Explore experience of similar systems elsewhere, inc NAAONB</p> <p>Consider impact of Defra/NT reviews on purpose, T of R and composition of groups before initiating new structure</p> <p>Consider any further changes to long-term structure (i.e. any requiring change to Statute) both to influence Defra/NE discussion and to avoid compromising long-term through short-term action</p> <p>Devise transition plan and implement</p>	<p>JN</p> <p>T&F Group/Board</p>	<p>7.6.22 Board</p> <p>Situation report 7.6.22</p> <p>Post-7.6.22</p> <p>TBC</p>
'Advisory Group' alongside Board (Note: working title only: name remains to be settled)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form follows function, influenced by Defra/NT reviews, but prelim consideration of: • Name? • Remit: what aspects of strategy? (25 year vision; Management Plan; Business Plan; Budget...?) • Who should be on it? How selected? • Chair? • Legal basis of decisions and who within Group takes them? • Role/engagement of LAs within it: maintaining commitment • Logistics of managing larger group and capacity of staff team to service: resources impact 	T&F Group	Initial report to 7.6.22, final once Defra/NT intentions clear

13.2 Governance Review: Scoping Stage 4

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When to commence • Changes needed to C of G 		Post-7.6.22
'Operational Group': assumed to be an evolution from current Executive Committee, with suggested re-naming to 'Policy and Resources'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further thought to name • Who will be on it and how decided? Need this be different from current Executive Committee selection? • Selection of LA members and its implications • Issues within its brief, decisions and powers to be delegated from Board • Changes to C of G 	T&F Group	Initial report to 7.6.22, final once Defra/NT intentions clear Post-7.6.22
2. Major project decisions			
Most upcoming projects approved by Board as part of Management Plan	Build into B/P process	Staff	From Jan 2022
Criteria to be set for ad hoc projects. Staff to take decisions, consulting chair as necessary, and reporting post-hoc on how criteria met	Criteria to be defined: suggest by staff team for consideration by T&F group Suggest protocol for consulting chair	Staff/T&F Group PM/EK/JN, T&F group to consider	7.6.22
	Consequent clarification of C of G	T&F Group	Post 7.6.22
3. Executive Committee			
See 'Operational Group' above	Amend C of G to reflect revised 'Operational Group' role	T&F Group	Post-7.6.22
4. Planning Committee			
On-line system to consider planning apps etc in real time, accessible to all Board members	Planner to establish on-line resource Planning Committee to consider detail Define T of R for new group	Planner Done 12.1.22: report to this Board See Board report	ASAP 1.3.22

13.2 Governance Review: Scoping Stage 4

Committee still to meet formally to deal with CCB planning policy, inc Management Plan input, & government & similar consultations	Ditto	Ditto	1.3.22
Amend C of G inc better-defining Conflict of Interest issues and delegation to staff	Planning Committee to undertake, inc means of recording of all inputs from members to avoid CofI issues	Ditto	Post-1.3.22
5. Task & Finish and Working Groups			
Accepted principal of wider use	Scope areas these might cover, for discussion at Board	T&F Group	7.6.22
6. Longer-term changes for Defra/NE discussion			
6.1 Statutory Planning Role			
Seek statutory consultee status, and comparable status in other subject areas	Planner to draft report to enable Planning Committee to determine negotiating stance. Staff then negotiate with Defra/DLUHC	Planner/JN Staff once decided	Done 12.1.22: see Board report On-going
No single Local Plan, but develop 'statement of common ground' to incorporate in LA Local Plans	ditto	ditto	ditto
Giving Management Plan statutory teeth: explore Joint Dev Plan document, 'Prescribed Body' and 'Specific Consultation Body' status for CCB (see 6.3 below)	ditto	ditto	ditto
6.2 Funding formula			

13.2 Governance Review: Scoping Stage 4

Strongly endorse Glover call to rationalise	Include in Defra negotiations	Staff	On-going
Advocate three-year rolling funding programme	ditto	ditto	ditto
Advocate removal of AGAR requirement and replace with meaningful Statement of Accounts	ditto	ditto	ditto
6.3 Statutory Role for Management Plan			
Require all public capital spend to comply with MP	Staff team to consider/take advice and discuss with T&F Group Staff negotiate with Defra	Staff/T&F Group Staff	1.3.22 On-going
LA's to be required to 'have regard' to Mgt Plan or at least 'take into account'	ditto	ditto	ditto
Statutory Planning 'teeth' as in 6.1 above	6.1 above	Planning Committee	Done 12.1.22: see Board report
6.4 Wording of CROW Act			
Take up strongly with Defra need for wording of ss 85(1) and 87(1) to be strengthened beyond 'have regard to'	ditto	ditto	ditto
6.5 Other points			
Committee quorum requirements of SI to allow more flexibility	T&F group suggests new requirements Staff then negotiate	ditto	ditto

13.2 Governance Review: Scoping Stage 4

Include Working and T&F Groups in eligibility for minimum of six-month attendance for Board members	ditto	ditto	ditto
SI Changes suggested in Stages 1 & 2 of review confirmed	Include in Defra/NE Negotiations	Staff	On-going

Report 13.3: Illustrative structure for revised CCB Governance



