



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON Tuesday 2nd November 2021 at Chinnor Village Centre, High Street Chinnor OX39 4DH commencing at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Lynn Lloyd	Board Member
John Nicholls	Board Member, Deputy Chairman
Paul Mainds	Board Member, Chairman
John Shaw	Board Member
Ian Waller	Board Member

In attendance:

Gareth Clay	CCB Farming in Protective Landscapes Officer.
Kath Daly	CCB Countryside Officer
Graham Hurst	CCB Finance Officer
Dr Elaine King	CCB Chief Executive Officer

Deirdre Hansen	Clerk to the Board
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21/22.16 Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Alison Doggett, Secretary of State appointee.

21/22.17 Declarations of interest

None.

21/22.18 Notice of Urgent Business

The meeting was notified of a Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy. This policy has been created to consolidate existing policies and documents.

21/22.19 Public Question Time

No public present.

21/22.20 Review notes of previous briefing (10/08/21) and minutes of the previous meeting (28/04/21)

The minutes of the meeting of 28th April 2021 had been reviewed at the briefing 10/08/21 and were approved as a true record.

The notes of the briefing 10/08/21 were reviewed.

21/22.21 Matters arising

All covered in the agenda.

21/22.22 Chairman's update

In the last three months the Chairman had dealt with the following matters:

1. The Secretary of State appraisal system for the Secretary of State appointed members. This was new to the Chairman and had taken a lot of time. If the eight Secretary of State members have to be appraised, what about all the other Board members?
He will inform Defra of his views on this system and report back to the Committee.
2. We now have 26 of the 27 Board members in place. The latest parish council elected Board member is Sir Hector Sants, elected by Buckinghamshire parish councils. The Chairman, Deputy Chairman and the CEO are meeting with Sir Hector next week.
The clerk is working to fill the final vacancy, a Bedfordshire parish council member.
3. The Chair attended the Chilterns Building Design Awards presentation. The Awards are organised by the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chiltern Society to encourage the highest possible quality of building design and thus conserve and enhance the character and outstanding natural beauty of the Chiltern Hills.
4. At the invitation of the Cotswolds AONB, he had attended their October Board meeting. It had been interesting and positive meeting to attend. The Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, and the CEO will be meeting with the CEO of the Cotswolds AONB.
5. Work on a 5- year finance strategy for the CCB is progressing with the Finance Officer and the CEO.
6. The Deputy-Chairman is leading a Task and Finish Group on Governance, which consists of Board members and staff.
7. The Inclusion and Diversity work needs to be progressed and he is meeting with board members Geeta Ludhra and Reena Ranger.
8. He regrets that a Staff and Board away day failed to be achieved this year due to the fuel crisis.
9. The shared space for Board Members to access documents is still work in progress.
10. He thanked the Staff team for all their hard work.
11. The process for developing a business plan and 25 year vision for the Chilterns is in progress.
12. He intends in future for the Executive Committee to sign off the agenda for the Board meeting that follow the Executive Committee meeting.
13. The next Board meeting 7th December agenda items:
 - i. HS2. It is the intention to discuss HS2. The day will include a site visit and presentations from the staff team.
 - ii. Budget and progress on the Business Plan.
 - iii. Income Generation and Funding.
 - iv. Governance
 - v. Future Committee membership
14. Venues and timing of the next Board meeting were discussed. CEO to talk to Cllr Peter Martin.

It was agreed to move agenda item 12 Farming in Protected Landscapes up the agenda.

21/22.23 Farming in Protected Landscapes

The Chairman thanked the Countryside Officer for her work on this paper.

The Countryside Officer gave a summary of and a presentation on the Defra funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme in the Chilterns AONB. This programme is part of the Government Agricultural Transition Plan.

The additional investment will allow farmers and land managers to work with AONBs and National Parks to provide benefits for Climate, Nature, People and Places.

The programme outcomes have been set by Defra and this is the framework the CCB is working to. To be eligible the projects must benefit the protected landscape, or the protected landscape body's objectives (our Management Plan) or partnership initiatives.

Gareth Clay has been employed as the Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer to lead the delivery of the programme. It is a 3- year programme ending in 2024. The original allocation for the Chilterns AONB year 1- 2021/22 was £626,048.

We have recently heard from Defra that the year 1 budget can be reprofiled across the three financial years, if necessary.

Projects are approved by a Local Assessment Panel, chaired by Ian Waller, farmer, and Board member. Terms of Reference have been drawn up based on Defra guidance. The current panel has been appointed on an interim bases until March 2022. The composition of this dynamic and robust panel will be reviewed during the winter.

Funding must be spent in-year. This has resulted in significant pressure on existing staff, who have worked over and above their normal roles. Several "quick" wins have been made using existing farmer networks and wider promotion across the AONB. Defra officials are providing a lot of guidance and advice. There is a direct line to the Defra staff dealing with the programme and there is a National Steering Committee.

Ian Waller continued with the presentation.

He emphasised that the programme is intended to deliver some of the money to small family farms who have been disconnected from previous funding schemes. It is difficult to engage with those who are not already part of a farmer cluster, and it is an aim to set up more farmer clusters in the Chilterns.

Gareth Clay gave a summary of spending and committed spending to date and showed a list of work going on in the programme, for example hedgerow planting and gapping up by the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster. He noted that the farmer has to make a contribution. There is an emphasis on people and biodiversity and a service to enable more people/schools to come out into the Chilterns.

He showed patterns of enquiries and applications. Most applications are from Buckinghamshire, followed by Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Hertfordshire. The majority of applications are made by farmers, but also some by NGOs, small landowners, education bodies and even some from golf courses.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions.

All Committee members expressed their admiration for the impressive work already achieved by the whole team. The CEO commented that this programme is a game changer for the Chilterns and nationally. She thanked the whole team.

The Countryside Officer thanked Ian Waller and the rest of the team for their contributions.

The Chairman and the Committee thanked the Countryside Officer and the team. He intends to remind Defra how hard it is to deliver at short notice.

1. The Committee NOTED the progress update.

21/22.24 Chief Executive's Update

The Chief Executive Officer described some elements of her recent work.

She is starting to work on the new Business Plan with the senior team, bringing in a consultant to help guide and support the work. They will meet this afternoon.

She has also brought in a new HR advisor, following retirement of the previous advisor. Both will work with the team to ensure the right staff are in the right place to deliver the Business Plan and the Management Plan.

Glover Review: the CEO has been working with a group of other AONB CEOs to advise and support Defra on its response to the Glover Review.

The work with Natural England on the extension of the AONB has not started, though Elaine and Matt are having planning sessions with NE on the management and governance element of the work.

The CEO continues to liaise with Dr Geeta Ludhra on Equality Diversity and Inclusion, which includes advising the Defra Public Appointments team, who have asked Elaine and Geeta to assist in the next round of appointments.

Elaine and Allen attended the launch of the Smarter Catchment Plan for the River Chess. This paves the way for £3 million investment into the catchment over 4 years by Thames Water to deliver the first part of a 10-year action plan, with more investment during the second phase of the plan. The plan aims to improve the health of the Chess, working with many local partners. Areas of focus include managing flows, tackling invasive species and improving wildlife corridors.

They also attended launch of the National Chalk Streams Restoration strategy, a catalyst for which was work done by Allen and others in the Chilterns. Rebecca Pow, Under Secretary of State at Defra, launched the strategy, along with the CEO at Thames Water and chairs at Environment Agency and Natural England.

The CEO is arranging a meeting with all the MPs in the Chilterns and has met separately with several of them in recent months.

She is hoping that staff can start using the office this month, after redecoration is complete. The CEO was asked about the new website – this is due for launch in the spring.

The Chairman thanked her for all the work that she does.

21/22.25 Finance and Budget Planning

The Finance Officer reported on the Core and Project activities for the six months to 30 September 2021.

Core expenditure for the six months is £271,851 as expected. All monies from Defra for 2021/22 have been received £448,203. Local Authority contributions are slower coming in.

The CCB has received a legacy payment from a former volunteer £64,504. This money is unrestricted, and it needs to be discussed how to use this legacy.

Fee income is expected to be more than budgeted due to the ability to recover a share of administration costs from a few projects. Some small cost savings have been made due to the late return to the office.

Some projects have been extended due to delays incurred with the Covid restrictions. It is expected that several expense lines will become live in the second half of the year e.g., research and data.

Project income received in the first six months £548,955 as expected. Project expenditure was £391,158. The shortfall relates to expenditure made, but not yet claimed back.

The Finance Officer reminded the Committee of the projects that require match funding, including a contribution from the CCB:

Beacons of the Past - CCB contribution £25,000

Chalk Cherries Chairs - CCB contribution £10,000

Chalkscapes - CCB contribution £20,000

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project - CCB contribution £10,000 per annum

The Finance Officer gave a progress report on the development of a five-year budget.

The Committee reviewed the financial report and the 5-year budget.

1. The Committee NOTED the current financial results for the year to 30 September 2021.

21/22.26 Audit Report

The Finance Officer reported that both the internal and external auditors had concluded their audits for the year ending 31 March 2021.

The internal auditors have made two recommendations in their report issued July 2021:

- i. The CCB reviews its Financial Regulations and Standing Orders. It has agreed to review these in this financial year.
- ii. The CCB updates its accounting records for interest rolled over. This has been done.

The external auditors issued their report September 2021. They report that no matters have come to their attention giving cause for concern that the relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met. The auditors also report that there are no matters which they wish to draw to the attention of the Board.

1. The Committee NOTED both auditors' reports.

21/22.27 Governance Update.

The Deputy Chairman thanked members of the Task and Finish Group for their time and contributions. He reported that the Task and Finish Group had held two meetings.

The first meeting had agreed a list of key questions to be answered. The second meeting provided some answers, and the third meeting will consider a draft report for the December Board meeting. It was noted that Defra's consultation has a longer timescale to work to.

We need to look at a two-stage response:

1. Changes we can make internally, recommending those to the Board in December
2. Fundamental changes that require legislative changes. The Board to recommend these measures and for the CEO to feed them into developing national thinking e.g., how the Government responds to the Landscapes Review.

1. The Committee Noted the update.

21/22.28 Mend the Gap

The Committee had been provided with the papers.

It was asked that there appears to be no end point on the projects. The CEO will ask the programme manager and report back.

21/22.29 Any Urgent Business

The CEO brought to the Committee a Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy. The policy has been created to consolidate existing policies and documents.

Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Board is required to maintain a sound system of internal control and to maintain an adequate and effective internal audit of its financial records and control systems.

The Responsible Financial Officer has a statutory responsibility, under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, to ensure the proper administration of the Board's financial affairs. Mandatory guidance, issued in 2019 by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance, requires the Board to have measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption.

The Board has the following principal measures in place, which this new policy supports and consolidates:

- The Board's Code of Governance
- Financial and Contract Regulations
- Code of Conduct
- Declaration of Interest Procedures
- Annual Governance and Accountability Reports
- Employee Handbook
- Operational Policies and Procedures
(e.g., Health & Safety, IT Security, Disciplinary/Capability).

1. The Committee APPROVED the Counter-Fraud and Corruption Policy.

Next meeting: 1st February 2022

location TBC.

The Chairman.....

Date.....