



Members of the Chilterns Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are hereby summoned to an ordinary meeting of The Chilterns Conservation Board on

Tuesday 6th December 2022 at 10.00am

Chesham Town Hall, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 1EP

Online session open/coffee available from 9.45am.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Declaration of interest in any of the agenda items
3. Notice of urgent business
4. Approve the minutes of the Board meeting held 6 September 2022
5. Matters arising
6. Public Questions
7. Chairman's update
8. Task and Finish Group updates
9. CEO's update
10. Finance and Budget
11. Planning Committee
12. Signage
13. Any Urgent Business
14. Date of next Board meeting: Tuesday 14th March 2023. Location tbc
15. Boundary Review (Stephen Rudd, Team Manager, Thames Solent, Natural England)
16. Chilterns Chalk Streams Project update (Allen Beechey, Project Manager)

The meeting will be followed by a light buffet lunch and a guided walk on the River Chess with Allen Beechey, Project Manager, Chilterns Chalkstreams Project.

2023 meeting dates:

Board meetings	Executive Committee	Planning Committee
14 th March 2023	14 th February 2023	11 th January 2023
13 th June 2023 plus AGM	9 th May 2023	12 th April 2023
12 th September 2023	11 th July 2023	19 th July 2023
12 th December 2023	14 th November 2023	11 th October 2023
<i>Location TBC</i>	<i>Location Chinnor</i>	<i>Location Chinnor</i>



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

**Held at Bovington Green Village Hall, Frieth Road, Marlow SL7 2JQ on Tuesday
6th September 2022 at 10.05am.**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr David Bartholomew
Cllr Carl Jackson
Cllr Steve Jarvis
Cllr Lynn Lloyd
Cllr Richard Newcombe
Cllr Sally Symington
Cllr Gareth Williams

Appointing Body

Oxfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire Council
North Hertfordshire District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Dacorum Borough Council
Buckinghamshire Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Colin Courtney
Paul Mains
John Nicholls
Joe Stewart
Ian Waller
Elizabeth Wilson

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

Elected by Parish Councils

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

Oxfordshire
Bedfordshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Hertfordshire

CCB Staff

Lynne Cordice
Deirdre Hansen
Graham Hurst
Neil Jackson
Elaine King
Wendy Morrison- for part
Vicki Pearce- for part
Matt Thomson
Annette Venters

Senior Administration Officer
Clerk to the Board
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Conservation & Landscape Officer
Chief Executive Officer
Beacons of the Past Project Manager
Communications Officer
Planner
People and Society Officer

Other

Stephen Rudd

Natural England, Team Manager,
Thames Solent.

22/23.16 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr Andrea Baughan, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Robert Carington, Buckinghamshire Council, *Cllr Paul Duckett, Central Bedfordshire Council, *Cllr Charles Hussey, Buckinghamshire Parish Councils, Geeta Ludhra, Secretary of State appointee, *Cllr Reena Ranger, Hertfordshire County Council, *Cllr Sue Rowland, Oxfordshire Parish Councils, John Shaw, Secretary of State appointee, Cllr Jon Tankard, Three Rivers District Council. *(Those * listened in on the meeting online)*
Simon Kearey and Tom Beeston, Chiltern Society.

22/23.17 Declarations of Interest

No declaration of interest in any agenda item was made.

22/23.18 Notice of Urgent Business

None

22/23.19 Minutes of the AGM and Board Meeting 14th June 2022.

The minutes of the AGM and Board meeting 14th June 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair.

22/23.20 Matters Arising

None

22/23.21 Public Question Time.

No public present

22/23.22 Chair's Update

The Chair, Paul Mains, reported on his activities since his last update 14th June 2022 and highlighted the following:

1. He had attended the annual gathering of the City of London in Burnham Beeches, the southern end is owned by the City of London, with the Lord Mayor of London. The City of London is committed to public access to the countryside. A compliment was made about the Beacons of the Past Project Manager, Dr Wendy Morrison, about her archaeological work in Burnham Beeches. The City of London expressed an interest to be involved in the Boundary Review. Burnham Beeches lies just outside the current boundary of the AONB.
2. Mend the Gap. He has been assisting the director of the consultancy working on mitigation tree planting schemes. In the CEO's, Elaine King, absence on leave he has met with the steering group and progress is being made on working towards a satisfactory solution.
3. Work on board engagement is progressing.
 - Cllr Sue Rowland has taken over from John Nicholls as Chair of the Planning Committee. He thanked John for chairing the Committee for the last three years.
 - He proposed that Cllr Sue Rowland be appointed to one of the vacancies on the Executive Committee. The meeting approved the appointment. It was noted that

the balance of committee membership is currently not aligned with our Code of Governance and Statutory Instrument, but the current membership is suited to our circumstances and will be reviewed by the Board at the AGM in 2023.

- The Governance Task and Finish Group (TFG) will expand their ideas once we have more knowledge of Defra's direction of travel on AONB governance. The exception being the Planning Committee's Real Time System being introduced later in the meeting.
- The HR Advisory Group (HRAG) has not met for a long time. The Chair proposed that Geeta Ludhra and Cllr Carl Jackson join this advisory group subject to Board approval, which was granted.
- The Chair has asked Cllr Carl Jackson to chair a new TFG for HR matters, subject to Board approval, which was granted. The terms of reference being
 - ❖ To review the ToR in the Code of Governance of both the HRAG and the Appeals Sub-Committee for incorporation into the wider Governance Review.
 - ❖ To review the current situation and make recommendations in respect of our practices, policies and procedures relating to performance appraisals, staff surveys and other HR issues including, but not limited to recruitment processes, induction, training, mentoring and staff development.
 - ❖ To report back to the Board meeting in December, but where there are obvious and non-contentious improvements that can be made, and which are agreed with the CEO and Chair these are progressed.
 - ❖ To review the Staff Handbook presently being updated by the HR advisor and the CEO.
- 25 Year Vision. The CCB will be developing this with its stakeholders and use it as a key point of reference. Cllr Sir Hector Sants has agreed to chair a TFG on this matter subject to Board approval, which was granted. The TFG will identify the broad scope, timescale and resources required to produce that vision. Board members interested in joining this TFG were asked to let Cllr Sir Hector Sants know.

22/23.23 Chief Executive's Update

The CEO, Elaine King, had issued a comprehensive report to provide the Board with the activities of the staff team, the powerhouse of the CCB, since the last board meeting 14 June 2022.

She highlighted the following:

1. The 15% Defra grant uplift this year was highlighted, with possible more good news later in the year. She noted that Defra wants to improve accessibility to the AONB for all.
2. We have had several staff changes. The project nature of our work with short term contracts makes it difficult to keep staff to the end of a project. The structure and resourcing of the team must be managed to meet expectation. Changes include three project employees being brought permanently onto the staff team: Wendy Morrison (Beacons of the Past) and Adrian Porter and Laura Silverstone (Chalkstreams and Wetland Meadows project, funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund project) who transfer to the CCB from the Chiltern Society.
3. The Levelling up and Regeneration Bill 2022 provides opportunity for more to be done to safeguard the historic environment in protected landscapes, though more could be done to embed the recommendations of the Landscapes Review.

Discussing with Historic England, what more can be done and scope for the Chilterns to be an exemplar for best practice.

4. Defra continues to talk with AONBs about implementing the Landscapes Review, and we are supporting Natural England on the Chilterns AONB boundary review, as part of its designations programme.
5. The latest Outstanding Chilterns magazine is even better than the last one, compliments to the Communications Officer, Vicki Pearce, her team and the wider team for providing such interesting content.

The Chair added his thanks to Ian Waller for the work he has done on the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) project. There is still some money left in this year's allocation. The CEO encouraged all those eligible to apply.

Ian Waller commented that it is an increasing challenge to bring FiPL into farming. He quoted a farmer "how can you expect farmers to invest in green, when farmers are in the red".

Members asked what arrangements have been made to make the legacy of the "Hillfort" project available to the public? Discussions are ongoing with Historic England, and it was noted that Dr Wendy Morrison is staying on as a permanent member of staff.

The GreenSpacesDarkSkies events on Dunstable Downs and the video of the evening was brought to members' attention. The CEO and Colin Courtney attended the event, and the CEO was asked to share the video.

The Chair thanked the CEO and her team.

1. The Board NOTED the report.

22/23.24 Finance and Budget

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, had provided a comprehensive finance report on activities up to 31st July 2022.

Finance:

1. Core income received was £279,448 which was slightly higher than budgeted.
2. Core expenditure £212,392 is higher than budgeted, largely due to an increase in payroll costs. Pay rises were greater than budgeted. An additional employee has been financed by additional Defra funding. The new senior team member will be paid for from the additional Defra grant.
3. Project income was £231,360 of which £219,518 was from the Chess Smarter Water Project.
4. Project expenditure was £404,794 resulting in a shortfall which has been met from CCB reserves.
5. The project claims are behind, but we are catching up with claiming.
6. We are fortunate that we have substantial reserves.

Audit Report:

1. The draft Internal Audit report shows a "substantial assurance" received with two low priority recommendations. Once the full report has been received, a copy will be circulated.
2. The AGAR and audit papers were submitted on time to the External Auditors, they are in the process of completing their work.

3. The External Auditors are appointed on behalf of the CCB by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd for a five-year term. The current five-year term is at an end. We can appoint our own external auditors for 2022/23 and the following four years. The S151 Officer advised to follow the PSAA, auditing local government accounts is a specialised business. The meeting agreed not to change the system.

Reserves:

It was noted that the CCB has substantial reserves. The Finance Officer proposed that the Reserves Policy be reviewed by the CEO and the Executive Committee, and a paper presented to the next Executive Committee. Cllr Sir Hector Sants volunteered to meet with the Finance Officer to help progress this.

The Chair thanked the Finance Officer for his report.

1. The Board NOTED the CCB financial, audit and reserves position.

22/23.25 Planning

The previous Chair of the Planning Committee, John Nicholls, had submitted a paper on the proposed 'Real Time System' for planning applications and invited the members to discuss and contribute to the paper.

A Real Time System will be an on-line system to inform members of live planning consultations and related matters being considered by the officers under delegated authority. Currently submissions are made by officers and reported retrospectively to the Planning Committee. A real time system would allow members to contribute local knowledge and alert officers.

Members discussed the proposal to help the Planning Committee frame its parameters for a Real Time System. The concept was supported, and the need stressed for an 'alert' system for issues in specific Wards. The members agreed that the aim was to provide such alerts and to enable members to contribute local knowledge through a comment facility. This would not involve members making decisions, that has been delegated to officers.

Clarity would be vital, as the number of planning applications in the AONB is numerous. It is also important to ensure there is no implication that LA members could inadvertently predetermine an application.

Call-in facilities on matters of raising policy issues should apply to all members. This will need careful consideration.

1. The Board DISCUSSED its preferences on the Real Time System as an input to the Planning Committee's development of the on-line system.

It was agreed to move agenda item 11 Governance-Policies down the agenda.

22/23.26 Boundary Review

Stephen Rudd, Natural England Team Manager, Thames Solent, gave a presentation on the Boundary Review including the history and the process. Natural England has

guidance and a process to follow. At the end of the process, we should have a larger AONB.

The presentation will be sent to the members.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions. It was noted that the guidance used by Natural England has not been updated since the Landscape Review published its recommendations. The current guidance will be used to get the best outcome.

The Chair thanked Stephen Rudd for presenting to the CCB.

22/23.27 EDI update

The People and Society Officer, Annette Venters, updated the Board on the CCB's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work. She gave a presentation about key aspirations, reaching more diverse audiences, the activities the CCB is engaged in and the pilot activities that have started.

The staff workshop on 27th September involves project leads compiling information that the various projects already have obtained, which will contribute to formulating an engagement plan with the intention of presenting it to the Board next year.

There is already a lot of activity e.g., an arts festival, schools' art competitions, Dadimas Walk, celebrating Southeast Asian heritage, walking festival, facilitating others to organise events, providing advice and support at the Dark Skies event, supporting businesses work with schools, and research by Bedfordshire University as part of the Chalkscapes project, ensuring that we effectively engage diverse communities. The Communications Team have also worked hard on messaging and language to ensure we are inclusive.

The Chair thanked the People and Society Officer.

22/23.28 Website update

The Communications Officer, Vicki Pearce, gave an update on the new website developments. She outlined the reasons for developing a new website. The current website is very dated in terms of design and functionality. A responsive design is now extremely important. We want to incorporate more activities and reflect our ambitions and vision.

The vision for the new website is to raise the profile of the CCB and the Chilterns AONB and to help achieve our statutory purpose. Due to Wi-Fi problems the website in development could not be displayed, though Members and staff will be sent a link to the new website with a week to submit comments: the internal deadline is 14th September with a launch date of 5th October.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions. It was noted that a Social Media Strategy is also being developed.

The Chair thanked the Communications Officer.

22/23.29 Beacons of the Past

The Project Manager, Dr Wendy Morrison, gave a presentation on the conclusion of Beacons of the Past Project. (Clerk to circulate presentation after the meeting).

Dr Wendy Morrison showed how the 13 deliverables for the project, as agreed with the funders, NLHF, had been achieved. The themes are summarised as Beacons of Diversity, Beacons of Learning and Beacons of Protection.

The 13 deliverables are:

1. Complete a LIDAR survey for an area of approximately 1000km² to produce digital, hill shaped, 3-D files of data.
2. Initial archaeological assessment of the identified features and production of GIS maps
3. Train community groups and volunteers in identification of archaeology in wooded areas, geophysics, field walking and measured surveys, archive and archive research, GIS and data management.
4. A landscape heritage officer and volunteers to undertake walk-over ground truthing.
5. 6-8 sites will have further archaeological investigation.
6. Perform a study of Ivinghoe Beacon to better understand the impact of visitors and management of access.
7. Improve interpretation on the hillforts, to include apps and online materials, physical interpretations on sites.
8. Deliver a formal education programme including new downloadable resources and hands-on activities for primary schools.
9. Provide informal learning opportunities including talks and guided walks, family discovery days, virtual tours, travelling exhibitions.
10. Deliver seminars, workshops and conferences.
11. Deliver a workshop to bring teachers and education professionals together to explore ideas for working with schools and pilot resources.
12. Carry out conservation and enhancement works on sites identified in a 3-tier approach in the application.
13. Work with local authorities, constabularies and Historic England to address heritage crime and establish Heritage Watch Schemes in at least two communities.

On 30th September a new heritage display panel will be launched at Gallowstree Common. The Project Manager will present some of the results of the UK largest bespoke LIDAR survey as well as other outcomes of the project.

The legacy of this project will hopefully be two new initiatives – a new project and developing a new Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership.

The Chair thanked her for her presentation.

22/23.30 Meeting dates 2023.

The following dates for 2023 meetings were confirmed.

Board Meetings	Executive Committee	Planning Committee
14 th March 2023	14 th February 2023	11 th January 2023
13 th June 2023 plus AGM	9 th May 2023	12 th April 2023

12 th September 2023	11 th July 2023	19 th July 2023
12 th December 2023	14 th November 2023	11 th October 2023
Location TBC	Location Chinnor	Location Chinnor

22/23.31 Governance- Policies

All members had seen the paper and it was noted that work is being done to improve visibility of policies and ensure they are updated as appropriate.

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

Future meetings

<u>Full Board</u>	6 December 2022
<u>Executive Committee</u>	1 November 2022
<u>Planning Committee</u>	13 October 2022

The Chairman.....

Date.....

Following lunch Dr Wendy Morrison, Project Manager of Beacons of the Past, led a visit to a hillfort.

Item 8. Task and Finish Group updates

Summary of Governance decisions

Author: John Nicholls

Summary: An Aide Memoire for Board members and officers to summarise the decisions taken to date following the work of the Governance Task & Finish Group

Purpose of Report

The June Board accepted a series of recommendations on governance. One of these was that a short report should summarise the key decisions to date, as these are recorded in a series of Board and Committee minutes. It would be helpful to have them in a single, accessible document.

This is circulated with these Board papers as a separate document for retention, and paper copies will be available at the meeting for colleagues who normally read their papers electronically.

Recommendation: that members note the report and retain it for reference

Governance Review: summary at November 2022

The purpose of this note

Following work by the previous Deputy Chair, the Governance Task & Finish Group got to grips with its task in the winter of 2021. The Board accepted its recommendations that December and in March and June 2022. There have also been discussions and decisions at the Task & Finish Group and at the Executive and Planning Committees.

We have resolved the basic architecture of CCB's future governance but have paused further work pending the current Defra and NE reviews of the purposes and governance of Protected Landscapes. Form needs to follow function, so it would be a mistake to do further detailed design, and to engage with external partners on the new basis, while there is any prospect of our basic functions changing. Defra and NE have been kept informed of our evolving thinking and indications are that it aligns with theirs.

The sole exception to this pause is the Planning Committee, where both the urgency of necessary decisions and their stand-alone nature mean that interim changes can be made.

We have settled our overall direction of travel, but it is recorded in a variety of Board, Committee and Group reports and minutes. As suggested to the 14th of June 2022 Board meeting, this note draws together an overall summary for staff and Board members.

Background issues: the Board

- The current Board is too large, and meets too infrequently, for effective engagement in day-to-day decisions on CCB's operations and running.
- Yet it is too small to represent all the partners and stakeholders whose involvement is vital in defining and carrying out an agreed vision for the Chilterns, through the shared Management Plan which CROW requires us to prepare and revise.
- Nevertheless, it is CCB's key strategic decision-maker, with a statutory role which enables the close strategic and financial engagement of all tiers of Local Authorities. It may get larger following the boundary review. Non-Local Authority appointees bring further expertise.
- The governance review therefore proposes to keep the Board's present constitution, but poses two key questions: how can it better engage upwards, with the many partners whose involvement in setting and delivering overall strategy is crucial - and hold them to account? And how should it delegate downwards, to a more focussed body, Board involvement in running CCB's operations to deliver that strategy.

New arrangements for the Board

- The Board, as currently constituted, remains the legally-accountable governance body, taking the lead and making all key decisions on CCB Strategy: in particular, but not exclusively, the Management Plan. It will meet four times a year and elect its own chairman.
- It will be supported in this task by a larger 'Advisory Group', comprising representatives of key stakeholders and mobilising a wide range of expertise. Member stakeholders will be encouraged to consult and speak for other groups in their subject area. This Advisory Group will:
 - meet, with the Board, annually or bi-annually in the form of a day-long conference chaired by the CCB Chairman.
 - consider and advise the Board on draft CCB strategic policies before they are determined, including long-term vision and the Management Plan.
 - confirm stakeholder commitment to such shared strategic policies once they are determined
 - report on progress made by each stakeholder on their contribution to delivering the shared vision of the Management Plan.
 - establish Topic Groups, possibly chaired by CCB Board members, to create a working relationship and provide direct support to CCB in subject areas where stakeholder expertise will be valuable.
 - Possibly act as governance 'host' of a Community Interest Company or Charity to assist project fund-raising
- This will place a substantial administrative burden on the CCB team, which needs to be resourced
- The Board's involvement in the operational delivery of its strategic policies, and in the day to day running of CCB, will be delegated to the Executive Committee (see below), which will report on its work to each meeting of the Board.

The Executive Committee

- This committee of 10-12 will be nominated by the Board from among its members, seeking to meet a pre-agreed range of skills. It will be chaired by the CCB chairman and meet with greater frequency than at present.
- Its delegated task will be to provide such Board input as is appropriate into the operational running of CCB to deliver the strategic direction set by the Board. This will include, but not be confined to, budget setting and monitoring, staffing matters, risk analysis, and the monitoring of progress on CCB operations, policies and projects. It will be a key reporting line for the CEO and staff.
- A nominated member of the committee will lead on particular topics (e.g. biodiversity or transport) and will support and act as a sounding board for members of staff dealing with those topics, in the style of Cabinet responsibilities in Local Authorities.

The Planning Committee

This Committee poses three main governance issues, covered below. These are not affected by the Defra and NE reviews and need implementing as soon as possible. To varying degrees, they need amendments to the current Code of Governance, but it is preferable to formalise such changes en bloc, once our governance work is finished, rather than in increments. The following are therefore temporary changes pending formalisation at that time.

Definition of the Committee's functions

The current C of G definition is far narrower than what the Committee actually does, hitherto without authority. The working re-definition covers:

- (a) national and local planning policy; planning applications and enforcement; policies of statutory bodies; transport planning and projects; infrastructure proposals; and any other proposals or policies relevant to physical development, all within the AONB and/or its setting
- (b) CCB's own planning policies, including the planning input to the Management Plan.

Delegation to the staff team

The Committee's operation relies heavily on delegation to officers, but the current C of G is unclear and contradictory on lines of delegation. The new definition is:

- All decisions within both (a) and (b) above are delegated by the Board to the Committee
- All decisions on (a) above are delegated from the Committee to officers and reported to the Committee
- Officers or any member of the Committee or Board can refer contentious items for a Committee or Board decision, if time allows, with arrangements to be defined for decisions outside meeting cycles.
- Decisions within (b) above are retained by the Committee, with a similar upward referral of contentious items to the Board.

Adapting to a new real-time system

Currently most decisions are taken by officers and reported retrospectively to the Committee, limiting its ability to contribute. The Committee aims to move to a real-time system, offering the Committee and all Board members a more effective scrutiny role in the making of decisions, including alerting officers to issues and referring decisions

upwards per the third bullet point above. Necessary adjustments to the Committee's terms of reference are work in progress.

Project decisions

- Proposed new CCB projects will wherever possible be incorporated in the Management Plan and be approved by the Board as part of that Plan.
- The CEO will draw up criteria for determining project opportunities outside the Management Plan cycle and recommend those criteria to the Board for approval.
- When such opportunities arise, the CEO will determine them in the light of those criteria and submit a report to the Executive Committee showing the rationale for that decision

Advocacy issues

In discussions with Defra and NE over their governance reviews, we want our officers to campaign for:

- CCB to be a Statutory Consultee for planning purposes
- Our statutory Management Plan to be given greater formal weight in influencing the decisions and activities of relevant organisations
- Revisions to our Statutory Instrument to give more flexibility in appointments to our Committees

Item 8 a. Briefing Note for Chilterns Conservation Board on “long term vision” working group.

Author: Hector Sants

Working Group Participants

Sir Hector Sants (working group chair)
John Nicholls
Robert Carington
Joseph Stewart
Matt Thomson

The working group has met twice 4th and 14th October.

The purpose of the working group is to bring forward a proposal to the CCB March board meeting.

The proposal would lay out a process to create a long-term vision for the Chilterns AONB.

The key elements in the document for the March board would be

1. A section describing the overall framework for the proposed “vision” to be articulated.

Our preliminary thinking on this is set out below:

1. It would be based on the existing high level vision statement of “conserving and enhancing.”
 2. It is envisaged that underneath the overarching vision statement we establish some key themes or drivers which would be focused on to drive the overall vision forward.
 3. Each theme ideally would have measurable impacts and clear supporting timelines.
 4. Each of these themes or goals would have their own supporting visions.
 5. The vision will create a wide consensus about the direction of travel on each main theme over the longer-term. The Management Plan will then become an implementation strategy for that vision, rolled forward periodically, shared by all the partner bodies with a role in its delivery, and integrated into their respective programs.
2. A section setting out a flow chart and commentary on how the stakeholder outreach would interact with the other strands of the CCB work. Specifically, the paper would address the interactions with: the governance/advisory group work, the Natural England Work, the Management/Business plan and the Defra review.
 3. A section explaining both; how the vision would be delivered and its relationship with our key stakeholders and how to support the actual preparation of the plan. The initial thinking is each delivery partner would build the vision and goals into their own strategic and operating plans. The document would thus have to be co-created with these delivery partners.
 4. A section setting out the governance to oversee the plans production and the resources required. The current thinking is the governance to produce this document would be through the current working group; reporting into the board. It is intended the CEO will join the group. If any other board member wishes to join this should be possible, subject to the group not getting too large.

It is also agreed by the CEO that the 22/23 budget would include £30,000 to fund some consultancy/business analyst resource to produce the document. This resource would be functionally accountable to the working group.

Finally, the Board should note following this meeting, a brief communication of our intentions will be issued to key stakeholders.

Recommendation:

1. for the Board to note the briefing note

Item 9 **CEO's update (6 December 2022)****Author:** Dr Elaine King, CEO**Purpose:** To inform and update Board members on delivery of the CCB's priorities as set out in the 2022/23 Business Plan. Outputs and impact are reported broadly under the three Strategic Priorities: Organising for the Future; Deliver existing workstreams; and Leadership and Influence.**Strategic Priority 1: Organising for the Future**

(Four key pillars: People, Policies & Strategies, Governance and Financial resilience)

People (6.1.1)**Provide more opportunities for training and development**

- The CCB team is regularly reminded that they are encouraged to explore training and development opportunities. As a result, this year we will use the full training budget with the **staff benefitting from training on a range of areas** including regenerative farming, developing and writing strategies, project management and understanding local government, along with coaching sessions.
- **Staff inductions** have been conducted with several new members of staff, including the successful use of a PowerPoint presentation which was updated in November by the Administration Officer, along with an updated staff organogram to reflect recent changes.

Evaluate administrative support

- New Administration Officer, Eloise Small, joined the CCB on 7th November. Eloise is full-time, which **increases capacity in the administration team**. This is already making a big difference
- Eloise's work has included reviewing availability of desks and IT equipment, reviewing first aid training requirements, inputting financial transactions into ApprovalMax/Xero etc and is assisting the team with ad-hoc admin support.

Explore and keep under review ICT systems

- We have continued to explore **Filesharing** for the Board. Microsoft Teams now has a number of folders set up. This is currently being tested by two Board members and three staff members (Lynne, Matt, Elaine, and board members Lynn Lloyd, Charles Hussey)
- Helen Valvona (Comms Assistant) is undertaking Google Analytics and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) training and continues to **update and manage the new website**, train staff and ensure it is regularly updated
- Helen will also be focusing on reviewing the **internal photo library** with a view to updating the structure and usage, updating the online **volunteering hub** with new opportunities and reviewing our data platforms (mailchimp and hubspot) to ensure optimum use.

Better integrate the work of Board members and the staff team

- Connections between the board and staff continue to be developed. For example, the four Task and Finish Groups, each led by a board member, involves both staff and board members. The T&F groups are: **Governance Review; 25 Year Vision; HR and EDI** and are reporting to the board separately
- Board members are also involved with a group exploring **filesharing** (see above), two board members are also directly supporting and advising the Mend the Gap programme (John

Nicholls and John Griffin) and the Board's Chairman, Paul Mainds, supports and advises on a range of matters including opportunities to secure funding from **Arts Council England**.

Policies & Strategies (6.1.2)

Review and update internal processes, procedures and strategies

- A list of **policies and procedures** has been established, to include review dates and ownership, along with key legislation and regulations governing the CCB's operations (Deidre Hansen)
- An **HR strategy** has been drafted, the **staff handbook** has been reviewed and updated, along with most **HR policies** (Elaine, Carl Jackson (Chair of the new HR Task and Finish Group))
- Work to ensure that **recruitment processes** are implemented effectively will be completed in the New Year
- Providing **guidance and training to staff regarding policies and procedures** is planned for spring 2023.

Develop an external and internal communications strategy

- Vicki Pearce (Communications Officer) will be working alongside the CEO and an external marketing consultant to create a **external communication strategy**, in addition to an **internal communication strategy**, also working with Kim-lin, one of the CCB's Comms Assistants
- Vicki and Kim-lin will also be working with the team to support the flagship projects and update the communications plan with themed campaigns that will take place throughout the

Develop an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy

- Progress has been made in developing an **EDI Engagement strategy** to represent the CCB's public facing work. A CCB staff workshop was held on 27 September involving project leads, to gather information on the EDI engagement currently taking place across the CCB projects. This will provide a baseline, elicit views on what has worked well and less well, lessons learned and to identify priority audiences and opportunity areas
- This work is supported by Board member Geeta Ludhra and the **EDI Task & Finish group** and will form part of a wider **EDI strategy**, including an **EDI vision statement** and work to ensure we embed EDI in all our operations, including recruitment and training of staff, Board members and volunteers
- A **three-year EDI action plan** has also been developed and will be shared shortly. As an agreed priority area of work for the CCB, we are also exploring options for effective resourcing in terms of staff time and budgets. One likely outcome is to create a new Engagement & Partnership role on the staff team (Annette, Geeta, Kim-lin, Elaine)
- The CCB is also a member of the National Association for AONBs' "**Arts in the Landscape**" steering group (Kim-lin)

Governance (6.1.3)

- Work is ongoing to review and update the CCB's **governance policies**, including **contract standing orders** and to review the **constitution**. The CCB's Clerk, Deidre Hansen, is leading this work, liaising with Elaine and the CCB's Monitoring Officer, Nick Graham.
- The **Governance Review Task & Finish Group** continues to progress its work, led by board member John Nicholls. Matt Thompson has continued to contribute his insight, especially on the codification of the activities and operation of the **Planning Committee** and, along with Lynne, is working towards implementation of the Committee's 'Real-Time System' as part of the wider Board online collaborative workspace
- The CCB continues to assist **Natural England** with developing a project plan for its Designations Programme project to explore **Enhanced Management and Governance Arrangements**

(EMAGA) for the Chilterns AONB. This has included Matt reviewing the tender brief for appointing consultants (appointed in November 2022) who will be undertaking stakeholder mapping (Matt Thompson, Elaine King)

- In **preparing for review of the AONB Management Plan in 2024**, the approach to reviewing the Management Plan was assessed in the context of Lord Benyon's letter, the Glover Review and NE's Designations Programme, leading to a paper taken to Executive Committee in November. The Committee endorsed the proposal to roll the policy content of the existing Management Plan forward with the intention of a full review once the AONB Extension project is complete and other Glover outcomes are more certain (Matt Thompson)
- Our Clerk, Deidre, continues to provide ongoing **support and advice to the Board**, its Committees and Task and Finish Groups

Financial resilience (6.1.4)

- The Senior Administration Officer, Lynne Cordice, continues to liaise with the Finance Officer on a range of areas including invoices and payroll. Also working with project managers and others to ensure **effective financial management** of budgets and to submit grant claims
- Reports have been produced for **Chalk, Cherries and Chairs** to enable completion of a CEF claim to March 22 and in preparation for next NLHF claim (this can't be submitted until the payment request to Sept 21 has been processed by NLHF which depends on the narrative report being submitted by the project manager)
- Up to date claims have also been submitted to NLHF for the **Chalkscapes** project (Lynne)
- **Explore new sources of funding:** in November the CCB commissioned consultants to conduct a project Unlocking Green Finance for the Chilterns, scoping and then taking forward opportunities in the Chilterns to secure **Green** Finance (Elaine)
- This work is in part responding to the Government's clear directive that AONBs and National Parks are expected to **leverage corporate and private finance**. It is expected that the project will also add value to work in this area being carried out by the NAAONB and a small number of other AONBs, which included a workshop for Lead Officers and Chairs of AONBs on 17 November, which Elaine and Paul Mains attended
- **The River Chess Smarter Water Catchment pilot**, hosted by the CCB and funded by Thames Water, is an example of green finance and this project will help us to explore and develop other such opportunities
- The part 1 scoping work will be complete by the end of January 2023, with part 2 kicking off soon after. These timescales also mean that the results can inform the CCB's thinking on budgets, and be included in our development stage report to the NLHF on opportunities for funding the Chalkscapes project (Elaine)
- Elaine continues to work closely with the CCB's **Finance Officer** over financial management, including setting budgets and controlling spending.

Strategic Priority 2: Deliver Existing Commitments

Natural England's Designations Programme

- Contributed to ongoing work on the **AONB Extension project**. Elaine, Neil and Matt attend monthly Management Advisory Group meetings and Matt represents the CCB on the Technical Advisory Group
- Natural England's Designations Programme includes a project to explore **Enhanced Management and Governance Arrangements** (EMAGA) for the Chilterns AONB. This work is progressing well with consultants appointed in November and a stakeholder workshop planned for January. See also Governance at 6.1.3. (Matt and Elaine)

Supporting partners and partnerships

- Continuing to support **the Ridgeway National Trail** through chairing the Development Group (Annette) and attending Partnership meetings (John Griffin). 2023 is the 50th anniversary of the National Trail and an important opportunity to attract new and more diverse Trail users which the CCB is helping to support
- Supporting the Feasibility and Options appraisal for **YHA Streatley** through membership of a working group looking at its wider potential as a gateway amenity to the AONBs (Annette)

Bucks Rural Forum (13th October)

- The CCB continues to **support the Rural Forum** (previously the Wycombe Rural Forum, now extended across the whole of the county) with membership of the steering group and attendance at the twice-yearly evening meetings (now on-line) and summer farm visits
- The forum provides an excellent opportunity for the rural community to interact with councillors and MPs and for the CCB to highlight aspects of our work (Neil Jackson)

Develop a Nature Recovery Plan and a Climate Mitigation Plan

- Plans are in place for developing a **Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan**, which will inform and provide the evidence base for CCB's contribution to the forthcoming **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** (LNRS's). LNRS development will be the responsibility of local authorities. CCB has carried out initial work to map out and identify opportunities for influence.
- A brief and invitation to tender has been created to **evaluate our farmer and land management support and engagement work**, with the aim of taking the learning from the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster work and identifying opportunities to scale up and roll out a successful **farmer engagement and support** model across the AONB. This work is planned to run in parallel with the Nature Recovery Plan development.
- A survey of stakeholders involved in **land management advice and support** was conducted to explore the need and opportunity for collaborative approaches to provision of integrated land management support. Findings and next steps are under consideration.
- Progress still to be made regarding a Climate Mitigation Plan.

Supporting local businesses, the local economy and sustainable tourism

- The **Open for Business** project has continued to focus on promoting the Chilterns countryside experiences through blogs with Muddy Stiletto, a promotional day at Marylebone Station, local advertorial and a three-month digital media campaign which is starting end of November.
- The **media campaign** is being managed by a specialist media agency that has done similar work for other AONBs and helped them to reach London audiences. It is a first for us in the Chilterns and will be a valuable pilot
- We also held a **tourism networking event** in October which attracted 30 businesses and shared useful learning from businesses that have established new visitor experiences (Annette Weiss)

Access and visitor management

- The CCB has received an **increase to its core grant** from Defra, of £227,389 to be spent by 31 March 2023 and a further £261,480 in 2024/25. The funds are for capital spend to make our protected landscapes more **accessible to people of all ages and abilities and from all backgrounds**
- Proposals for **capital Access projects** to be delivered by 31 March were invited from CCB projects and partners, with a good variety of high-quality proposals received. Applications were assessed at a panel meeting on 25 November, with valuable input from Bucks Disability Service and Team Beds & Luton (Annette, Elaine)

- Defra is holding a series of workshops to explore **targets and indicators** for protected landscapes in delivering national commitments on the themes of nature, climate, people and place. National targets will be apportioned individually to each protected landscape and expected to be incorporated into the next round of **Management Plans**
- Elaine attended the first ‘deep dive’ workshop on 29 November, focussing on **Access and Diversity**.
- The initial work is expected to be complete by the end of 2022 and to publish the targets by Spring 2023.

Chilterns Walking Festival

- The **Chilterns Walking Festival** took place 15-30 October, featuring 65 walks. The festival was well received and involved many businesses, community groups and volunteer walk leaders
- The participant and walk leader **survey data** are being collated and the report will be circulated to the Board.

Equality, Inclusion and Diversity (EDI)

- See Policies & Strategies above (6.1.2)

Internal and external communications

Communications campaigns

- Some of the comms and content campaigns we’ve worked on this quarter include:
 - [Blogs](#) to promote upcoming festivals and events
 - Press release, [news articles](#) and social posts to celebrate Tracking the Impact winning the prestigious Marsh Award for Local Ornithology
 - [Campaign](#) including emails, social posts and news articles to promote the new website
 - A [blog post](#), e-newsletter and social posts to celebrate the achievements of the Beacons of the Past project
 - Chilterns Chalk Streams project’s 25-year report [news item](#) and associated posts
 - [News article](#) and associated social posts to support Chalk, Cherries and Chairs “Chilterns Stories” campaign
 - [CCB response](#) to Buckinghamshire Council’s report on pollution on its rivers and Chalk Streams

Read more of our latest news updates [here](#)

New website

- The **redesigned [Chilternsaonb.org](#) website** was launched on 4th October 2022. This huge project took up a lot of time and resource for the entire comms team and included site structure, writing/editing content, paginating and publishing pages, researching/identifying images, liaising with staff, copywriters, the design agency and IT providers
- The whole staff team **developed and uploaded content** for the new website and all staff and board members (approximately 50 people) were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft site ahead of launch
- **Feedback** on the website has been positive with comments such as: *“Website looks great!”* *“Excellent”* *“Congratulations on getting the site live and looking fantastic, massive achievement!!”* *“There’s a lovely feel to the website and I think the drop-down menus work really well. Well done!”*
- In terms of **website traffic**, we have seen a drop off of approximately 30% in users, but we were prepared for this as it takes time for search engines to crawl the new pages, establish themselves and grow organically. We have had search engine optimisation (SEO) in mind

throughout the process of populating the pages, but it will take time, as is the case with all new websites.

Newsletter

- Since August, we have circulated two e-newsletters (September and November) with a specific new website launch email in October
- The website launch email achieved a huge 50% open rate with an 11.9% click through rate (a 32% increase on our usual campaign response). Unfortunately, we have seen a drop off in opens and click throughs on our latest e-newsletter, with 39% opens and just 7.4% click throughs (17.7% decrease). This could have been due to the time of day it was sent (2pm). We will continue to test different send times and days, along with different subject lines to see if we can identify the optimum time for engagement.

Social Media

Highlights and learning from our social platforms over the last three months include:

- *Twitter*: In November we lost 25 followers having gained 22 in Oct and 44 in Sept. This is the first time we have ever seen a decrease in followers. We have also seen a drop in impressions, profile visits and mentions. We believe this is due to people leaving the platform due to Elon Musk taking over
- We have been approached by several colleagues and peers about whether we will also be leaving the platform. No decision has been made yet. We have gained over 8,000 followers over many years so any decisions will not be taken lightly. We will continue to monitor engagement closely and review again in the upcoming months. In the meantime, we have set up a Chilterns AONB Mastodon account to monitor its popularity:
<https://mastodonapp.uk/@chilternsaonb>
- *Facebook*: We have a good, steady following, with a variety of content, posting every 2-3 days. Overwhelmingly the best content for engagement have been posts about chalk streams/water quality. Two posts from the #WWweek awareness did well along with two posts on political initiatives to address water quality and sewage pollution
- A post about an article in our Outstanding Chilterns magazine on our board member, Geeta Ludhra, and her Dadima's walks encouraging diversity outdoors, also performed well
- *Instagram*: Surprisingly, the most popular post in the last three months was the announcement by **Historic England and the National Association for AONBs** that they would be working more closely together in line with a new MoU. However, this could be more to do with the amazing photo of Ivinghoe Beacon that supported the post
- Having posted frequently over the past year now, we have established that the most popular content on Instagram is:
 - beautiful photos, inspiration around scenery and places to visit
 - diversity outdoors - people enjoying the landscape
 - Nature fact and quotes laid on top of an image

Mitigating the harmful impacts of HS2 and Associated projects

- Ongoing engagement with **HS2 Ltd and Bucks Council groups**, and maintaining awareness of the CCB's concerns about the impacts of HS2 on the Chilterns AONB (Neil Jackson, Matt Thompson)
- Submitted responses on formal and informal consultations on **HS2 Schedule 17 applications** (MT)
- Continued to argue for **improved designs** eg Small Dean viaduct, and mitigating the impact of HS2 on chalk streams at Wendover
- **Provided technical support** for local groups arguing for protection of the Leather Lane Oaks

- Pushed for **Chilterns HS2 Review Group** to reconvene after a period of inactivity (met 20th October)
- Review Group approved shift in focus of Landscape and Biodiversity Connectivity Additional Project (overseen by CCB) to fund more **whole farm plans and hedgerow plans** which in turn secure funds through other sources including FiPL and Countryside Stewardship
- **Other Additional Projects** (APs) supported by the Review Group include an upgrade of the Wendover Canal towpath and the Ridgeway National Trail bridleway project
- Created content for a new **CCB web page** to provide public AP updates (Neil Jackson)

Electricity Infrastructure Undergrounding

- The **UK Power Networks (UKPN) undergrounding scheme**, under the OFGEM allowance to improve protected landscapes, has begun. This involves removing 8.72km of overhead cable and 100 wooden poles within the Chess Valley near Latimer and Chenies. New underground cables (11km) will be installed before switch-over and final removal of wires and poles, with most of the work completed by April 2023
- The project will **improve the natural beauty of the AONB**, benefit those enjoying the popular Chess Valley Walk, prevent bird strikes and provide a far more reliable power supply to the local community (villagers were without electricity for five days this year when a tree crashed through the wires) (Neil Jackson)

Developing Farmer Clusters

Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster (part of the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project)

- Cluster farm hedgerow project phase 1 drought losses fully quantified (c. 60% loss of whips across all phase 1 sites)
- Phase 1 **hedgerow whip replacement plan** agreed and funded, contractors appointed and plans in place to replace fully all whips lost in summer 2022 drought
- Phase 2 **hedgerow project** funding secured; tenders issued for planting, coppicing & fencing; contractors appointed across all sites and ready to start delivery in November 2022. Initial hedgerow works will take place across 15 farms in Autumn/Winter 2022/23
- Phase 2 of the farmer cluster **Carbon project** is at an advanced stage and being developed in conjunction with the Rothschild Foundation (outline project framework in place, hope to submit new funding application by end December 2022)
- Farmer cluster **wildflower margin cut/remove** machinery trial planned for Autumn 2022 using National Trust machinery on three cluster sites to test feasibility of wider project across whole cluster in 2023/24
- Two new FiPL applications submitted to December panel meeting, aimed at supporting **chalk grassland grazing projects** on farmer cluster sites
- **community plant nursery project** is being developed in partnership with Chiltern Rangers on a farmer cluster site. A FiPL bid is being developed and will be submitted in December 2023
- **Fencing, stock handling and water installation** completed at Butlers Hangings and Sands Bank Nature Reserves with advanced stages of negotiations with grazier to graze both these chalk grassland sites with Hereford Cattle this winter once Natural England SSSI permissions are secured
- 200 Cowslip plug plants secured and to be planted at chalk grassland sites in proximity to existing populations of rare **Duke of Burgundy butterfly** to support wider project to increase their country-wide distribution
- Initial meetings with **two new farms/landowners** about possible projects for delivery in 2023/24
- Thames Water funded Chess Valley Smarter Water **Catchment Farming Officer**, Josh Biddle, appointed. Working with him to support the development of a new Farmer Cluster in the NE corner of CCC project area where projects overlap

- **Legacy planning and delivery** is accelerating, with involvement in many Natural Environment Partnerships and Natural England groups looking at how learning from the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project can help shape the CCB's Nature Recovery Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and roll out of farmer cluster model across Buckinghamshire
- The winter **supplementary farmland bird feeding** project is up and running, with seed ordered, mixed and on site ready for feeding. The cluster bird ringing group is briefed and ready to deliver on five farms again this winter (Neil Jackson)

North Chilterns Farmer Cluster (part of the Chalkscapes project)

- The CCB is supporting the establishment of a **new Farmer Cluster in the North Chilterns** area in support of the **Chalkscapes** project
- FiPL funding secured to deliver a year-long package of **engagement activities** to support the early establishment of the North Chilterns Farmer cluster
- 14 farmers are engaged in a **supplementary winter bird feeding project** (15 feeders and 15 x 0.5 tonne bags of bird food have been delivered)
- A **programme of workshops** is being delivered, with one completed on the management of small woodland and regenerative farming, with one on ponds and hedgerows planned for 2023. Winter bird surveys are also planned across 15 farms for February 2023 (Neil Jackson, Nick Marriner)

Christmas Common Farmer Cluster

- Now extended to **28 members** but will come to the end of the three years of Stewardship Facilitation Funding in December 2022. Neil and Gareth attended the most recent cluster meeting to support the facilitator, Alison Cross, to discuss funding options and a way forward
- Attendees were unanimous in saying **the cluster had supported their businesses** and their farm management, and want the group to continue and expand and apply for the new round of Facilitation Funding (Neil Jackson)

Chalk Cherries and Chairs (Lachlan Stuart, Nick Marriner, Harriet Bennett, Lizzie Buckley)

- Following **mid-term external evaluation reports**, the project Steering Group has approved the post-Covid reorganisation and forward strategy. This includes bringing in additional administrative support and communications mentoring
- Eliza Alqassar (Buckinghamshire Council) is nominated as the **new Steering Group Chair** (to be decided in December), with Roz Currie (Wycombe Museum) and Briony Hudson (Amersham Museum) joining the group
- Outstanding **claims for HS2 CEF grant funding** are now up to date for the full grant award period. A further six months of staff costs are also secured to September 2022, with further discussions in December for the small residual programme spend, not involving staff costs.
- **Activity reporting for NLHF** is now up to date (to September 2022) with next report due January 2023 for period October – December. Claims are fully prepared.
- Staff team is better supported with **new tools** in place on: financial reporting; activity reporting; event booking; broadcast, printed and social media monitoring systems; event and project plans; site development logs and quarterly reflective learning/skills training; new tools for online evaluation in development (Lachlan Stuart)
- **Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit** is finalised, ready for uploading to the new CCB website (material being uploaded currently – anticipated completion by end of November) (Matt Thompson, Mike Stubbs)
- Project outputs in this period include:
 - **Book Festival** – Chilterns Stories Collection – underway with 200 online and in person participants for '[A Return to Metroland: Julian Barnes in conversation](#)' and 90 for the launch of Rachel Rooney's '[The Ballad of Bodgers Wood](#)' – both with a physical legacy

- Next two books: 'In Their Own Words' linked to oral history digitalisation with Wycombe Museum and women's craft conference; 'Sour Cherry Soup' linked to Theatre Communities, Schools and Community Workshops
- **30 community organisations** now engaged in management and improvement of small green spaces across central Chilterns
- Successful **Lacemaking Day** and establishment of Chilterns Lacemakers Guild
- Successful **Straw Plaiting workshop** with 30 participants
- **Music video** 'Ivinghoe Beacon' by John Cameron with Ivinghoe Community Choir in post-production
- **Small Grants scheme** operational – awards for project partners to pursue pole lathing, pyrography workshops, mental health respite, youth forum, disability access, interpretations
- Second group of 16 young conservationists are in award winning **New Shoots training** and two project **Conservation Trainees** are in placements with Chiltern Rangers
- Future work in preparation includes a Chilterns Women's Conference and Exhibition at Missenden Abbey, a volunteer designed Woodland Heritage Craft and Skills Exhibition at Wycombe Museum, Touring Theatre performances of community created 'Sour Cherry Soup' and a Wycombe Chair Design exhibition at the Chairmakers Museum
- **Chilterns Champions** awards at Sands Bank NR engaged school and commercial leaders
- CCC's 'Tracking the Impact' was recipient of a **Marsh Award** for community engagement – presented at the Mall Galleries in London by the BTO
- Chilterns Landscapes **Art Exhibition** involved 10 schools engaged in Chilterns Champion Awards and 10 more in Chilterns Homes essay writing competition
- **Opportunities to influence** were provided by participation in Buckinghamshire History Festival and the London University led Festival of the Humanities
- Buckinghamshire Council in attendance at project events including Council Leader, Councillors and local MP
- **Provided platforms** for promoting local producers, makers, commercial artists, plus local statutory authorities, educational establishments, community organisations and NGOs
- New **community engagement** pathway through Wycombe Wanderers FC, plus developing and facilitating partnership work between Wycombe Arts Centre, Wycombe and Amersham Museums, Buckinghamshire New University and Chiltern Rangers
- Enquiry from 10 Downing Street on attending an event, though didn't take place due to Prime Minister Truss resigning.

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (Project Manager: Allen Beechey)

The CCSP celebrated its [25th anniversary](#) in October with a series of events and a report reflecting on success and the challenges ahead. The project also launched its own [website](#) as part of the CCB's new website, which includes three new and beautifully made short films on chalk streams.

Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project (funded by Defra's Green Recovery Challenge Fund) (Allen Beechey, Laura Silverstone, Adrian Porter, Annette Weiss, Fran Crowther)

- A six-month extension to the project (to end of March 2023) was secured in August, enabling additional time to deliver the **practical river restoration schemes** that form part of the project
- The R. Chess **water vole habitat enhancement** scheme at Latimer Park was completed in November. 900m of chalk stream habitat was enhanced using a combination of tree management works and woody habitat features to increase habitat diversity. Over 100 **volunteers from business and the local community** were engaged in delivering the scheme
- **The Chesham Moor Recreation Ground Project** (R. Chess) has reached the detailed design phase with the public consultation completed in September. £50,000 of additional funding has been secured from the Defra access fund to enable the life-expired footbridge to be replaced

(bridge is on the route of the Chess Valley Walk). The Flood Risk Activity Permit (FRAP) application for the work is due to be submitted by the end of November. Works are scheduled to take place in March 2023.

- The **River Hamble restoration project** has also progressed to the detail design phase. The scope of the project has been expanded to include restoration of 1.1km of river. **£50,000 of additional funding from the Environment Agency's WFD Chalk Rivers Fund** has been secured to support the project. The FRAP application is due to be submitted in early December once landowner agreement for the work has been secured.
- **Ewelme Brook Community Project** – Ceri (Education and Engagement Officer) has secure consent from the EA for **habitat enhancement works** at two sites on the Brook, which will be delivered in February. She has also produced a **chalk streams management advice guide** for distribution to riparian landowners along the Brook
- **Revitalisation of the Chess Valley Walk** - The new Chess Valley walk signage for the whole 10-mile route was installed in September and looks great. The interpretation boards are due to be installed in December (Laura)
- The updated Chess Valley Walk leaflet and Chess Valley **visitor guides** are in production and a large promotional launch is planned for April 2023, including a series of **guided walks and family events** (Annette)
- Footpath improvement at Weirhouse Mill in Chesham, and Scotsbridge Mill in Rickmansworth were completed by Bucks Council and Hertfordshire Council respectively.

River Chess Smarter Water Catchment pilot (SWC, funded by Thames Water) (Kate Heppell, Steph Horn, Josh Biddle, Hannah Parry-Wilson)

- **Josh Biddle** joined the CCB team in September as **Chess Valley Farming Advisor**. His post is being funded by the SWC and will run to April 2025 initially. Josh's role is to support delivery of milestones within the plan that enhance land management to improve water quality, quantity and nature recovery. Josh is line managed by Neil Jackson and is working closely with the CCSP team
- **Hannah Parry-Wilson** also joined the CCSP team in October in the newly created role of **Citizen Science Coordinator**
- **Prof Kate Heppell**, seconded to the CCB from Queen Mary University London, continues to lead the delivery of milestones under the **Water Quality theme**. She has installed water quality monitoring sondes in the river at two new locations and continued to develop the **citizen science monitoring programme** on the river including SMART rivers training course, sediment apportionment work and the deployment of passive sediment samplers in the river
- At a strategic level, Kate Heppell has been supporting Charles Rangeley-Wilson in his work to support implementation of the **National Chalk Streams Strategy**, to simplify Defra guidance for farmers on chalk stream management
- Kate attended a **workshop with farmers in Wessex** in October and has been working to set up a similar workshop with Chilterns farmers. The aim is for these guidelines to feed into the government's **environmental land management schemes** (formerly ELMS).
- Allen and Kate have continued to work with **Affinity Water** on the delivery of its Catchment Assets for Water pilot on the R Chess, which aims to develop a methodology to identify priority areas in catchments to target **land management improvement initiatives**. The aim is to benefit water quality and recharge to the aquifer. Affinity Water plans to apply the methodology to the rest of its catchment area and use the output as a basis to target investment in land management in AMP 8 (Asset Management Plan).

Mend the Gap (joint venture with North Wessex Downs AONB, funded by Network Rail)

- Following a recent recruitment process, a new **Programme Manager** will be joining the project on 20 February 2023. Fran Crowther, Project Support Officer, continues to assist one day a

week on liaising with internal and external communications and providing administrative support (Fran also provides support to the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project (two days/week), the Chilterns Chalk Streams project (one day/week) and the Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows project (1 day/week).

- Progress has been slow in taking forward South Stoke **Mitigation tree and hedgerow planting**, in part due to difficulties in contacting landowners and land agents. However, agreements are now in place and tenders gone out to contractors, with a view to awarding contracts in early December for planting this winter.
- Some **Enhancement Projects** have progressed, though most are paused until a Programme Manager is in place:
 - Otter Holt, Lower Basildon – completion delayed due to wet weather, though completion expected before the end of 2022
 - Otters are still active in the area, and there is confidence that the holt will be use
 - Hardwick Estate – awarded funds for a feasibility study of an artisan workshop, community kitchen/butchery and deer larder
 - Earth trust – awarded a development grant for a kick starter project, directly engaging with a new beneficiary audience. Work involves testing and understanding people’s needs and how to design, offer and provide an activity that delivers the benefits of a protected landscape
- **Grant schemes** – Fran is starting to review existing plans and to formulate a grant scheme for the project, looking at grant schemes in other CCB projects and workstreams to ensure consistency of approach, learning from other schemes and advise on the CCB’s approach to grant funding going forward.

Beacons of the Past (Dr Wendy Morrison)

- Secured legacy for BotP by ensuring LiDAR portal is maintained until 2027
- Demonstrated need for a core member of staff dedicated to archaeology and heritage, which led to the CCB confirming Wendy as part of the permanent, core staff team in October 2022
- Completed the BotP project (see external evaluation [report](#) and final [newsletter](#))
- Commissioned an Augmented Reality App that will bring the Seven Ways Plain hillfort at Burnham Beeches to life, across all three of the time periods that were influential in its development and use.
- Oversaw erection of the first of many Beacons of the Past Interpretation panel, installed at Kidmore End Cricket Ground at Gallowstree Commons ([unsatisfying news article here](#))
- Instrumental in the creation and provision of long-term management plans for landowners and land managers of some of the hillforts in the project
- BotP was honoured to be nominated for Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society’s Joan Elding Prize, and to be awarded ‘Highly Commended’ on 01 Oct
- Wendy also secured funding from the **Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme** for work on the **Bledlow Cross** - an enigmatic monument which has become shrouded not only in mystery but also in vegetation. This project will physically reveal the monument and its landscape setting and also uncover the facts about its creation and role in the history of Bledlow Ridge. **Community volunteering** will be a key thread running through the project, on areas including research and the practical works necessary to improve and maintain access and condition.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (Gareth Clay)

- The project has spent or approved **£357,877** (including multi-year projects approved from year 1) of the CCB’s Year 2 project allocation of £474,545
- Applications in progress/likely to be submitted amount to approximately £113,909 which leaves £2,759 effectively unallocated. These figures are subject to panel approval so may change.

- Applications approved since the last board report include grants to:
 - South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers for upgrading stiles to kissing gates
 - Darvills Hill Farm for orchard planting (1.5ha)
 - Colstrove Farm: hedge laying (and educational signage)
- CCB staff promoted FiPL at **four farmer events** in September/October (ploughing matches and grant information evening), leading to additional expressions of interest and applications
- The **National Hedgelaying Championships** (which FiPL indirectly supported) took place at Crowmarsh Battle Farms on 29 Oct. The FiPL application included the making of a video of the event which will be shared on the CCB website and the NHLS website
- **BBC's Countryfile** were at the event and may use some of our drone footage for a programme to be aired on New Year's Day
- Applications for consideration at the meeting on 1 December include: fencing for conservation grazing; community plant nursery; further upgrades to PRoWs (stiles to kissing gates); signage and interpretation
- Year 3 project ideas being discussed include stream restoration and enhancement, orchard educational activities and access improvements
- A key challenge is that the central Chilterns farm hedgerow project suffered drought losses (c. 60% loss of whips across all phase 1 sites). A **whip replacement plan** has been agreed and is being implemented. The Phase 2 hedgerow project will implement all planting well before the end of winter to maximise establishment.

Chalkscapes (funded by NLHF)

- The CCB has agreed with the **National Lottery Heritage Fund** to produce a report on the outcomes of the development phase at the end of January, with a view to using the outcomes to inform future funding applications to the NLHF
- Future work will include building on the findings of some very exciting research on engaging diverse audiences in Luton, conducted by Bedfordshire University and commissioned by the CCB. The findings will be published in the New Year and will contribute a powerful body of evidence to inform both the CCB's work and that at a national level. CCB and Beds Uni are also exploring next steps for future collaboration (Elaine King)
- A new **Farmer Cluster** in the Chalkscapes project area has been established with CCB support in the North Chilterns
- Sources of funding are being explored to ensure full support and development of this work (Elaine)

Develop, plan for and resource workstreams for 2023/24 and beyond

- Plans are being developed to ensure the CCB staff team is effectively resourced and has the skills and expertise needed to deliver its strategic priorities, as set out in the CCB Business Plan and Management Plan. This will include creating a number of new posts, especially in the areas of engagement, inclusion and diversity, and project/programme management
- We will also be recruiting to replace the CCB's Countryside Officer, Kath Daly, who leaves the CCB on 2 December, having made a significant contribution to the organisation's work over a 17-year period (Elaine)

Review existing & publish new planning and development guidance

- Work on factual updates to existing guidance is beginning in December and a draft Lighting Position Statement is now with an expert lighting consultant for technical and peer review (Mike Stubbs, CCB's planning consultant).

Strategic Priority 3: Leadership and Influence

- Many of the priorities and key activities identified under this Strategic Priority 3 are being delivered and have been addressed elsewhere in this report. For example:
- **Starting the process of reviewing the AONB Management Plan** - this is addressed at 6.1.3 and will also include the specific priority to ensure that EDI is central to the next Management Plan, as it is largely absent in the current 2019-24 Plan
- **Lead the development of a longer-term vision for the AONB** - a 25-Year Vision Task & Finish Group has been established, led by board members Sir Hector Sants and involving a number of board members and staff. Matt has contributed to the group's early thinking.
- **Engage and secure support from local stakeholders** – this priority will be delivered through the numerous strategic projects involving stakeholder engagement, such as the Natural England Enhanced Management and Governance Arrangements project, the AONB Boundary Review, reviewing the AONB Management Plan and developing a 25 year vision for the Chilterns. Key to success will be to ensure this work connects and is developed iteratively
- **Influence development and infrastructure planning decisions and policies** at local, regional and national levels:
 - Ongoing engagement with HS2 and Bucks Council groups, working with Neil Jackson, maintaining awareness of AONB issues and impacts
 - Submitted responses on formal and informal consultations on **HS2 Schedule 17 applications**
 - Responses to consultations on **planning policies and planning applications** as reported to Planning Committee on 13 October. Quarterly report for Q3 2022/23 will be prepared for Planning Committee in January 2023 (Matt, Mike).
- **Help strengthen the national AONB network** – the CCB continues to liaise with other AONB Lead Officers and the National Association for AONBs on a range of areas including Nature Recovery Plans, exploring how the recommendations in the Landscape Review can be enshrined in legislation eg through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill; and exploring the benefits of Green Finance (Elaine, Matt)

Item 11. Planning Committee update**Author:** Matt Thomson, planner**Purpose of Report:** To summarise for the Board the discussions at the October meeting of Planning Committee, with updates where appropriate.**Background**

1. Planning Committee met on 13th October at the Chinnor Centre. The next meeting is on Wednesday 11th January 2023.
2. There are currently two vacancies on the Planning Committee. A separate Board item is addressing Committee memberships.
3. This paper summarises key issues discussed at the last meeting and provides some updates.
4. **PC 'Real-Time System'**: There was a full discussion, which followed and developed discussions at the previous Board meeting. Conclusions of the discussion were that:
 - a. The proposed design of the System should be simplified from a technically complex database system with automated notifications etc to something more akin to a blog or bulletin, at least initially.
 - b. Work on the PC system should be integrated with work on developing a platform for document sharing and collaboration for the Board as a whole.
 - c. A steering group or TFG should be set up to assist with this. Lynn Lloyd and Charles Hussey volunteered their services. With the addition of the planner, the CEO and Lynne Cordice, senior administration officer, the group met on 17th November.
 - d. The joint system is being developed in Teams and will be rolled out, with the PC content first, during December.
5. **Lighting Position Statement**: The draft position paper is currently being peer-reviewed by an expert consultant. The paper will be brought to the January PC meeting for discussion, before being referred to the Board for approval.
6. **Governance Review**: A full discussion of the implications of the Governance Review for PC and the work of the planning function resulted in agreement on recommendations for an appropriate way forward for the Committee's activities and operations. Those recommendations are part of a separate item on the Board's agenda.
7. **Planning consultation responses**: The Board discussed, noted and approved a number of matters relating to planning consultation responses. Key among these were:
 - a. **The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill** – noting that the Bill so far fails to address the outcomes of the Glover Landscapes Review – we are not 'consulted' on the Bill. **Update**: there have been Government amendments proposed to the Bill, and a number of high-profile issues

reported in the press, including a 'back-bench rebellion' (relating to the imposition of housing targets). It is not yet clear what impacts all of this will have for the Bill, but there remains no evidence of any consideration of improving matters for protected landscapes through this Bill.

- b. **Growth Plan (update):** The Growth Plan (launched as part of the mini-budget under the previous Prime Minister's short-lived regime) has now been superseded by the new regime's Autumn Statement. Proposals for "investment zones" in which planning controls would be reduced, and which were rejected by Oxfordshire County Council, have now been reduced in scope and scale. None were going to directly affect the Chilterns AONB anyway.
- c. **South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan (update):** the consultation was live at the time of the meeting, and a response was submitted, focusing on the odd situation that, while the background to the Plan recognised the existence and importance of the Chilterns AONB, its draft vision and objectives failed to provide any strategic direction for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. In particular, the proposed options for a spatial strategy did not include a strategy to direct development away from the AONB and its setting, despite a clear policy imperative to do so in the NPPF. Similarly, the strategy did not identify how the plan might look to adjust growth aspirations and/or development needs in the light of the extent of either the existing designated AONB or its potential expanded area.
- d. **Neighbourhood Plans:** Response submitted to the Cholsey (South Oxfordshire) NP. Our responses to the Woodcote NP had been specifically mentioned and taken account of in the examiner's recommendations. **Update:** Further to our appearance at the Joint Henley and Harpsden NP hearing, the examiner has regrettably determined to accept the proposal for a major greenfield development in the AONB at Highlands Farm to which we had strongly objected.
- e. **Planning applications:**
 - i. Shortly before the meeting an application for a shooting lodge at Holywicks, Rotten Row was raised with officers. An objection has been submitted.
 - ii. The application for 1,400 homes on greenfield land east of Tring ("Marshcroft") adjacent to the AONB boundary was refused, and the applicant has appealed that decision. We are considering our options for making representations to the appeal hearing.

Recommendation

1. To note the report and make any observations to the Planning Committee chair.

Item 12. Chilterns AONB road gateway signs

Author: Annette Weiss, People & Society Officer

Purpose of Report: To brief the Board on the Chilterns AONB gateway signs, which are now out of date, and to propose the CCB commences initial work looking at options and opportunities for a new gateway signage scheme to coincide with a boundary extension to the Chilterns AONB, expected in 2025.

Background

1. In 1995 the Chilterns AONB authority (known as the Chilterns Conference) installed 32 Chilterns AONB brown gateway signs (see photo below) at 20 **AONB boundary Highway locations** across the Chilterns. This was funded by the Countryside Commission. The purpose of the signs was to make residents and visitors more aware that they were entering a special area, to emphasise that this was a nationally important landscape and to strengthen the Chilterns sense of place. The press release at the time stated:

“Special areas need special care and respect. By raising the consciousness of both local people and visitors we hope that everyone will make sure that the key qualities of the Chilterns are conserved and enhanced”.

With ongoing housing growth and new people moving into the towns surrounding the Chilterns the number of Chilterns countryside users is increasing. This makes it more important than ever to provide gateway signs which raise awareness of the Chilterns and its sense of place.

2. The existing signs are now dated and feature our old Chilterns logo/branding. More importantly, it is hoped that by 2025 we will have an expanded Chilterns AONB boundary (the provisional timescale is for Natural England to submit the designation order to the Defra Secretary of State in October 2024). It is also likely that the AONB will be renamed a National Landscape, in line with other AONBs in England and Wales. We would like to celebrate and mark these exciting changes with a new Chilterns gateway scheme.
3. The new gateway signs project will be part of a wider aspiration to improve the visitor welcome across the AONB, which will be looked at in tandem with the CCB’s new Communications Strategy (currently being developed). This will include information and interpretation provision at other key gateways in the Chilterns such as railway stations and transport hubs. There is a longstanding issue around the lack of identity and low awareness of the Chilterns, and this initiative is a major and timely opportunity to change this.
4. The current brown gateway signs were sited at the AONB Highway boundaries, but there was criticism at the time that these did not include some of the towns near the boundary which considered themselves to be part of the Chilterns (eg Amersham, Princes Risborough, Chesham). In the event, a flexible approach was taken, and some signs were located outside the AONB boundary to include the

nearby town. The principles for the siting of the signs will therefore need careful thought.

5. This type of scheme will require a long lead in time to agree the design principles and a hierarchy of locations (although the precise schedule of locations for installations and permissions can't be agreed until the boundary has been approved), to secure the necessary approvals from the Highways Authorities and to secure funding.
6. Many factors will need to be considered for a new gateway signage scheme involving some key work areas as below:
 - Look at gateway signage at other AONBs and protected landscapes for comparison, plus information gathering to develop a Chilterns vision.
 - Draw up the principles, criteria and priorities for the gateway sign locations. In due course a signage consultant will be required to advise and draw up the signage schedules. Approval will be needed from each of the highways authorities for the design and proposed installations and this can be a protracted process.
 - Sign design: whether to stay with the standard brown tourism signs or look at bespoke alternatives.
 - Identify potential sources of funding.

Next Steps

We propose setting up an internal CCB working group to start looking into the gateway signage scheme. This will be a big project likely to take up a considerable amount of time and planning, which in time will require consultant input to design and develop. At this stage we would be looking to do the preparatory thinking to kick things off. It is proposed the working group comprises Annette Weiss, Vicki Pearce and Matt Thomson and would welcome Board member involvement, too.

Recommendation

1. **To note the report and ask if any Board members would like to be involved with the working group, or to offer support or advice.**

