



**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-contentions 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.