



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Chilterns Conservation Board HELD ON Tuesday 14th February 2023 at the CCB offices, The Lodge, 90 Station Road, Chinnor OX39 4HA commencing at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Lynn Lloyd	Board Member
Paul Mains	Board Member-Chair
Cllr Richard Newcombe	Board Member
John Nicholls	Board Member- Deputy Chair

In attendance:

Deirdre Hansen	Clerk to the Board
Carol Hatcliff	HR Advisor – for part of the meeting
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer
Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Matt Thomson	Head of Strategy and Planning

22/23 15. Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from the following Board members: Cllr John Griffin, Cllr Sue Rowland and *Cllr Sir Hector Sants.

*(Those * observed the meeting online)*

22/23.16. Declarations of interest

None.

22/23.17 Notice of Urgent Business

None

22/23.18 Minutes of the previous meeting 01/11/22

The minutes of the meeting 01/11/22 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

22/23.19 Matters Arising

No items not included in the agenda.

22/23.20 Chair's update

1. The Chair reported that responses have been received from most Local Authorities (LAs) on the letters sent out by the CEO in January. An annual letter to the LAs who are legally members of our Board would be useful reminder.
2. He proposed a follow up with an annual forum with all LA's Chairs, Chief Executives and Leaders of Councils plus some board members to brief LAs on the CCB's plans. It was suggested end June/early July, after May elections, might be a suitable time. CEO to investigate suitable date and location.
3. Planning Committee: Cllr Sue Rowland, Chair Planning Committee has recruited Board Member, Cllr Jon Tankard on to the Planning Committee. She will ask Cllr Sally Symington to join the Planning Committee too. These two will fill the vacancies on the Planning Committee.
4. Defra has advertised the two Secretary of State vacancies on the Board. The dates for sifting of applications and interviews have been agreed.
5. He has spent time with the CEO on Budgets, HR Strategy and Business Planning. The CCB needs to improve its timetable for Business Plan preparation. He also had discussions with the Head of Strategy and Planning. All items are on the agenda for discussion.
6. Boundary review: He is still a member of Natural England's Management Advisory Group. He has also spoken with a group from Burnham Beeches who are keen to get involved with the Boundary Review.
7. There is work to be completed on Policies and procedure with the Clerk, and with the Senior Administration Officer on Teams and access to files for Board Members.

1. The Committee NOTED the Chair's update.

22/23.21 Chief Executive's update

The CEO, Elaine King, had issued a comprehensive report to members. She highlighted the following:

1. Restructuring of the team. The CCB has gone out to recruit for three positions: Head of Landscape, Head of Operations and Executive Assistant, recruitment closed 13/02/23. Shortlists are being prepared for interviews.
2. Recruitment for the two Secretary of State upcoming vacancies closes 20/02/23. The CEO has had conversations with a few interested parties. The Clerk has also been contacted by several people interested in the vacancies. The CCB is particularly interested in applications from farmers and academics, alongside ensuring greater diversity on the Board.
3. Mend the Gap: Hedges are going in the ground this week. The Project Support Officer, Fran Crowther, has done a very good job in overseeing the programme. The new Programme Manager, Ruth Staples-Rolfe, joins the team 27/02/23. It was noted that the Board should continue to have visibility of the project.
4. Defra has confirmed that the Farming in Protected Landscape programme (FiPL) will receive a guaranteed 4th year funding and the FiPL Officer, Gareth Clay, has issued his report to Defra.
5. Green Finance: Consultants have carried out research to explore potential projects suitable to attract corporate and private investment.
6. EDI: good progress is being made. A draft Strategy and Vision Statement have been drafted.

Members had some questions:

- a. Will the legacy of "Beacons of the Past" be outward facing, especially enabling volunteers to see the outcomes? A website is being build that will be a long-term legacy of the project.
- b. Chalkscapes update: The CEO reported that consultants have finalised their report for the Development phase. The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and its advisors are pleased with the report. The Project Support Officer, Fran Crowther, will assist on the next stages. The

CEO has agreed with the NLHF that we apply for a number of smaller projects rather than one large one.

1. The Committee NOTED the CEO's update.

22/23.22 Finance Report

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, reported on the Core and Project activities for the year ending 31st December 2022.

Finance:

1. Core income for the period was £849,156, including the full annual Defra grant. This is higher than anticipated due to receipt of the Defra Access grant £226,959. This grant does not contribute to Core costs and must be spent by 31st March 2023 on approved Access projects, with any unspent balance being returned to Defra.
2. Core expenditure for the period was £567,845 which is higher than budgeted. This is due to payroll costs being higher than budgeted and Defra Access grant expenditure to date of £68,077.
3. Core activities generated a £281,297 surplus, which includes the Defra annual payment and the Access payments in advance of £333,263. Overall, for the nine months there is a deficit of approximately £25,000. The outturn for the year 2022/23 is expected to be breakeven.
4. Project income received for the period was £677,571 of which £368,130 was from the Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project, funded by Thames Water, and £67,354 from Chalk, Cherries and Chairs.
5. Project expenditure was £1,195,693 resulting in a cash shortfall of £518,121 which has been met from CCB reserves. The Chalk, Cherries & Chairs project is still not up to date with its claims and is temporarily being funded by the Board by £373,780.
6. The Finance Officer (S151 Officer) Graham Hurst explained the complexities of CCB funding. Although the first nine months show a deficit, expenditure has been upfront. For the full year to 31st March, we expect to breakeven. Defra and most Local Authority funding is received in advance, which then can show a surplus of income over expenditure earlier in the year. Project funding generally is claimed after the expenditure has been made. This can then show as an overspend, but once the claims have been made there is a breakeven or maybe an underspend.
7. Although for the nine months of this year we are showing a loss, once the claims have been made and received, we will be again at a breakeven point.
8. There are concerns with projects, in particular with Chalk Cherries and Chairs. Financial claims cannot be submitted until the Project Manager has submitted his report. The CEO has given previous instruction in this regard. Members discussed the problem which presented unacceptable risk to finances and reputation. The CEO will continue to chase for the report to be submitted and ensure all files are accessible on the CCB main server.
9. It was noted that the NLHF funded Beacons of the Past project has been completed successfully and will soon be in surplus once final claims have been received.

Audit Report:

The external audit report was issued 12 December 2022. It states that there are no matters that give them cause for concern. The report has been published on the CCB website.

The Chair thanked the Finance Officer.

1. The Committee NOTED the CCB Financial Position on 31st December 2022.**22/23.23 Budget Report 2023/24**

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, presented a draft deficit budget 2023/24 for discussion.

He noted that it had been a difficult budget to generate, with 80% of expenditure is on salaries and not enough income is visible yet.

- a. 80% of Core funding comes from Defra. Local Authorities should contribute the further 20%. Not all LAs contribute the full amount they should contribute. As mentioned before, there is a fixed formula for LA contributions.
- b. Defra Access Funding can only be used for capital projects and does not contribute to core expenditure.
- c. NHLF projects do not contribute to Core costs either. Other funders do.
- d. A consultancy specialising in Green Finance has been commissioned to advise of potential funders and the type of projects in the Chilterns AONB that they may fund.
- e. Since the agenda papers were published, several potential new funders have come in sight. As well as further recharging project costs for Core costs.
- f. There is new income expected, but until it has been agreed it can't be spent. This has made the Finance Officer and CEO more confident of the budget including postponing several planned expenses for 2023/24. He expects to be able to provide a more complete budget for the March Board meeting.

There was discussion on the recruitment of new permanent staff and the three project staff now appointed as permanent staff.

11.00 The HR Advisor joined the meeting, and this discussion was adjourned.

22/23.24 HR Strategy

The HR Advisor, Carol Hatcliff, had put before the Committee a draft HR Strategy and a proposed Implementation Plan for discussion and approval.

The HR Advisory Group (HRAG), the Chair Paul Mainds, the Vice-Chair John Nicholls, the CEO Elaine King and the HR Advisor Carol Hatcliff had met in December 2022 and discussed and developed the draft HR Strategy.

There had been complex HR issues to manage in the last 12 months and now is a good opportunity to move forward.

The proposed HR Strategy intends to support compliance and effective management of employees, which in turn support a positive working environment, develops skills and delivers the desired outcome.

The HR Strategy was in principle agreed. A timetable for implementing the HR Strategy was presented and discussed. Some amendments were suggested.

The Chairman notified the meeting that he with assistance of the HR Advisor intends to put forward abbreviated Terms of Reference for the HRAG. He will circulate them to the Committee before taking them to the Board.

Carol Hatcliff was thanked for her work and left the meeting.

1. The Committee APPROVED the HR Strategy.

- 2. The Committee APPROVED the Implementation Plan for the HR Strategy once some amendments had been made.**

*The Committee returned to **22/23.23 Budget Report 2023/24***

It was noted that the CCB must produce a budget, but this is not required to be a balanced budget.

Although the CEO and Finance Officer are looking to the years ahead, this might not be clear. It would be beneficial to make that clear and explicit to the Board. They were asked to look at the draft budget and present a more balanced budget to the next Board meeting.

The Committee were not comfortable with the Development Reserve being earmarked to fund staff costs in 2023/24. The reserves policy had been agreed to be recommended to the Board at the Committee's meeting of the 1st November. It had been agreed that the Development Reserve to be earmarked for the continued development of activities not financed from core funding. This wording is open to interpretation. The CEO explained that the intention was to use a small amount of funds for one post as an interim measure for the coming financial year, with the role being self-funded in future.

It was suggested that the Board should look at the reserves policy for all reserves at the next Board meeting.

- 1. The Committee DID NOT AGREE to put the proposed budget to the Board in March.**
- 2. The Committee ASKED the CEO and the Finance Officer to review and rework the proposed budget for presentation to the Board in March as a more balanced budget.**

2022/23.25 CCB Business Plan- a new approach to preparation, reporting and review.

The Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson, presented a report proposing a new approach for the preparation, reporting and review of the CCB's annual Business Plan.

The Business Plan needs more visibility about how it fits in with the Management Plan, the CCB's Statutory Duties and purposes, projects and ultimately staffs' objectives. Allowing all parties to position what they are doing along this golden thread.

The Business Plan is a key aspect of the evidence the CCB submits to Defra as part of our claim for the core grant.

The Business Plan should be used to monitor progress against objectives, reporting to the Board and reviewing any adjustments to the Plan. It should be linked to the budget setting process timetable for preparation and reporting to the Executive Committee for ultimate approval by the Board.

It is proposed that the Executive Committee is delegated the authority by the Board to oversee the development of the Business Plan alongside the Budget. Reviewing and monitoring of the Business Plan will be a regular key priority for the Executive Committee.

A proposed timetable, starting in September the preceding year, was discussed, and approved. It was noted that the process for 2023/24 would be a hybrid process as we are now in February.

The Committee discussed the proposals and recommended them for approval to the Board.

The CEO, Elaine King, and the Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson, were thanked for their work.

- 1. The Committee DISCUSSED the proposals and RECOMMENDED them for approval to the Board.**

22/23.26 Business Plan 2023-24

The Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson, presented a paper setting out the key priorities for the 2023-24 Business plan.

The Business Plan guides the work of the CCB and its staff for that year. It also is the main document submitted to Defra as part of the claim for our Core grant.

The main strategy for the Business Plan 2023-24 is to roll forward the priorities and objectives of the 2022-23 Business Plan. The strategic priorities, objectives and activities remain relevant for 2023-24. Those Strategic Priorities are:

- Organising for the Future,
- Deliver Existing Commitments,
- Leadership and Influence.

- 1. The Committee CONSIDERED the approach to rolling forward the Business Plan, the Strategic Priorities outlined in the paper, and the draft outline Business Plan (circulated separately) and OFFERED observations for action by officers in advance of the Plan being submitted to the Board for approval.**

22/23.27 Constitution Review.

The Clerk, Deirdre Hansen, updated the Committee on the ongoing work on updating our constitution.

The question was raised if we should include our arrangement with our sponsors in the constitution. Clerk to speak to Cllr Sir Hector Sants about this.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the ongoing work to update the CCB's Constitution.**

22/23.28 Risk Register

The CEO, Elaine King, presented the Risk Register for review. The Committee was asked to review the updated Risk Register and send any comments to the CEO by the end of February.

Clerk to remind members.

- 1. The Committee to REVIEW the Risk Register and SEND any comments to the CEO.**

22/23.29 Mend the Gap

The CEO, Elaine King, informed the Committee that the new Programme Manager will start 27th February 2023. The Project Support Officer, Fran Crowther, has done a very good job at kept the project moving. Once the new Programme Manager has started the work will pick up a pace.

Board Member John Nicholls, Vice-Chair and Cllr John Griffin have been supporting the project. Cllr Lynn Lloyd has volunteered to assist the project as well.

1. The Committee NOTED the update.

22/23.30 Update on Chilterns Access Projects

The Head of Engagement and Partnerships had presented a report on the Defra Access funding, how year 1 (2022/23) funds have been allocated, promotional opportunities and the next steps.

1. The Committee NOTED the update.

22/23.31 Urgent Business

1. The question was asked how Board Members can get together and be updated on the staff's activities? Committee Members were asked to consider this request.
2. Cllr Lynn Lloyd notified the meeting that she will not be standing for re-election of her council seat on South Oxfordshire District Council in May.

22/23.32 Next meeting: 9th May 2023- at the CCB offices in Chinnor.

Future meetings: 11th July 2023, and 14th November 2023.

The Chairman.....

Date.....