



Chilterns National Landscape

Executive Committee, 7 May 2025

Update

At the time of publishing papers for the above meeting, the paper for agenda item 2.6 was withheld as confidential under section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as the item related to the cancellation of Natural England's review of the boundaries of the Chilterns National Landscape, which had not then been announced to the public.

As that announcement was made on 9 June 2025, in the interest of open government, we are now in a position to publish the paper alongside the rest of the agenda.



Chilterns National Landscape

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

Executive Committee

On Wednesday 7th May 2025 at 11.00am at

The Meeting Room, Chilterns Conservation Board, 90 Station Road, Chinnor, OX39 4HA and by remote video conferencing.

Voting (Executive Committee) members are encouraged to attend in person to ensure the meeting is quorate; voting is not permitted for remote attendees. Remote access will be available for non-voting members.

The online session will be available from 11.00am

AGENDA

1. Standing Items

- 1.1 Apologies for absence
- 1.2 Declaration of interest in any of the agenda items
- 1.3 Chair's announcements
- 1.4 Notice of urgent business
- 1.5 Approval of minutes of the previous meeting (24.02.25)
- 1.6 Matters arising
- 1.7 Consideration of motions submitted by members
- 1.8 Public questions

2. Items for Decision

- 2.1 Reserves policy
- 2.2 2025/26 Budget
- 2.3 Financial Approvals
- 2.4 Local Authority Engagement Advisory Group
- 2.5 Exclusion of the Public and Press
- 2.6 Natural England's Boundary Review project (confidential paper)

3. Items for Noting / Information

- 3.1 Quarter 4 Finance Report
- 3.2 Quarter 4 Delivery Report
- 3.3 Funding Strategy
- 3.4 Chief Executive Officer's Report

4. Any Urgent Business

5. Next Meeting: 9th September 2025

Future Meeting Dates 2025

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thursday 23 rd October @10am Location Chinnor Offices	Tuesday 9 th September @10am Location tbc Thursday 13 th November @10am Location tbc	Thursday 19 th June @10am Location tbc Thursday 25 th September @10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury Thursday 11 th December @10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

Elaine King, CEO

Summary of Actions Required

Agenda No	Agenda Item	Actions Required
1	Standing Items	
1.1	Apologies for absence	
1.2	Declaration of interest in any of the agenda items	
1.3	Chair's announcements	
1.4	Notice of urgent business	
1.5	Approve minutes of the previous meeting (24.02.25)	APPROVE
1.6	Matters arising	
1.7	Consideration of motions submitted by members	
1.8	Public questions	
2	Items for Decision	
2.1	Reserves policy	APPROVE
2.2	2025/26 Budget	APPROVE
2.3	Financial approvals	APPROVE
2.4	Local Authority Engagement Advisory Group	APPROVE
2.5	Exclusion of the Public and the Press	APPROVE
2.6	Natural England's Boundary Review project (confidential paper)	APPROVE
3	Items for Noting / Information	
3.1	Quarter 4 Finance Report	NOTE

3.2	Quarter 4 Delivery Report	NOTE
3.3	Funding Strategy	NOTE
3.4	Chief Executive Officer’s Report	NOTE
4	Any Urgent Business	
5	Next Meeting: 9 th September 2025	

CCB Executive Committee Meeting

Monday 24th February 2025

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
COMMITTEE of the Conservation
Chilterns Area of Outstanding
HELD ON Monday 24th February
Brunel Suite, Regus, Kingsmead**



**Chilterns
National
Landscape**

**THE EXECUTIVE
Board for the
Natural Beauty
2025 in The
Business Park,**

1 Aston Court, High Wycombe HP11 1JU commencing at 10.00 AM.

Present:

Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member – Chair
John Nicholls	Board Member – Chair of the Board
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Paul Mainds	Board Member – online
Cllr Louise Price	Board Member
Cllr Richard Newcombe	Board Member
Cllr Phillip Spicer	Board Member

In attendance:

Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Andy Brock-Doyle	Head of Operations
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer
Matt Thomson	Head of Strategy & Planning and Deputy Monitoring Officer – online
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager
Eloise Small	Administration Officer
Kate Heppell	Head of Landscape – online

The Chair welcomed all present. It was noted that the meeting planned to be held on May 1st is election day for some Local Authorities and would need to be moved. Alternative dates will be circulated.

24/25.40 Apologies for absence

Cllr Sue Rowland – Parish Councils
Cllr John Griffin – Parish Councils
Geeta Ludhra – Secretary of State

24/25.41. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

24/25.42. Chair's Announcements

None at this meeting.

24/25.43. Notice of Urgent Business

None.

24/25.44. Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 07/11/24

The minutes of the meeting 07/11/24 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

24/25.45. Matters Arising

All items covered on the agenda.

24/25.46. Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members

CCB Executive Committee Meeting

Monday 24th February 2025

None at this meeting.

24/25.47. Public Questions

No members of the public were present.

24/25.48. Items for Decision**48.1 2025/2026 Budget**

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster had supplied a proposed Core Budget envelope for the financial year 2025/2026, with three scenarios based on differing funding from Defra. She is proposing a deficit over a two year period, on the understanding that more work will be carried out when figures are known. The project-based funding shown in the budget is secure and does not reflect any funding that is not yet guaranteed, so this figure is likely to increase but should not decrease.

It was requested that the paper to the Board includes further information about the reserves held and the reserves policy. It can therefore be determined whether the proposal to roll this year's surplus into the following financial year, instead of it topping up reserves, is acceptable.

The Committee supported the budget options being presented for approval at the March Board meeting, with a cumulative deficit of £22,000 over two years in the event the Defra funding package decreases. It was requested that a package of revised priorities be brought to the next Executive Committee meeting for discussion when exact figures will be known. The Senior Leadership Team is also exploring some restructuring to improve efficiencies.

Elaine King, CEO, gave thanks to the Senior Finance Manager and Head of Operations for their work. Cllr Phillip Spicer asked for requests to Local Authorities to be made earlier, preferably in the autumn, so that the funding can be included in their budget-setting processes. This could lead to an increase in contributions, and therefore less of a deficit for the CCB's budget. It was agreed that bespoke letters to Local Authorities will be sent annually from the CEO in the autumn outlining the work carried out by the Chilterns National Landscape team on their behalf, which saves Local Authorities both time and money, with letters copied to the relevant Board member.

1. The Committee APPROVED the draft budget for 2025/2026 and RECOMMENDED APPROVAL to the Board

48.2 Executive Committee Functions

A paper was circulated by the Chair of the Board requesting opinions of Committee members. A lot of discussion held at the Executive Committee is referred to the Board for further consideration, where the Terms of Reference for the committee state that this is not necessary and is currently done as a courtesy, rather than obligation. This duplication can interfere with the Board's ability to consider strategic matters and contributes to long agendas at Board meetings. It is proposed to consider items at the Executive Committee, with just a summary report to the Board with recommendations or concerns. It was also agreed that an email would be sent to all Board members and the staff team when committee papers are published online so they are aware what is discussed.

1. The Committee APPROVED that customary practice be amended as follows:

- a. **The Executive Committee takes decisions prescribed to it in the Constitution, without routinely referring them to the Board for further discussion. In particular, the Executive Committee should continue its detailed consideration of quarterly finance and project delivery reports but report this to the Board on an exception basis.**
- b. **The Executive Committee identifies any further areas to which this principle could be**

applied and proposes them at a future Board meeting.

- c. Officers' recommendations to the Executive Committee, and the Committee's decisions on them, will only recommend referral to the Board where there is either a constitutional requirement or where issues are raised that the Executive Committee believes need Board consideration.**
- d. That future Board agendas focus more clearly on advocacy, scrutiny, policy, and strategy, and briefing on 'on the ground' delivery, including reporting on the latter at local authority level.**

24/25.49. Items for Noting/Information

49.1. Quarter 3 Finance Report

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, reported on the accounts to 31st December 2024.

- 1. Core profit was £62k for the nine-month period versus a budgeted surplus of £30k. It is anticipated this surplus be maintained at £63k, with a full year budget out-turn of £10k.**
- 2. Income (excluding Defra Capital income which nets off costs) is ahead of budget by £72k; this surplus is driven by additional interest income (£10k), unbudgeted project income (£16.5k) and internal fee income (£40k). The internal fee income represents staffing and overhead cross charges from Core to projects.**
- 3. Costs are £39k over budget (excluding the Defra Capital uplift). The overspend relates to staff costs +£35k but this is more than offset by internal fee income from projects relating to staff costs (£50k) which is included within income.**
- 4. The full year forecast includes the costs of the Management Plan (£7.5k), Nature Recovery Plan (£13k), elements of the Operational Effectiveness work (£18k plus IT work £7k) and developing a Communications Strategy (£10.5k) all of which can be absorbed due to the revenue uplift to our Core Defra funding in 24/25.**
- 5. Project income is £2.68m, costs of £1.87m and "profit" on projects of £808k overall. This represents income received in advance of expenditure, particularly for projects including the Chess Smarter Water Catchment, FIPL and Access for All funding.**

The additional Defra capital funds are expected to be spent by the end of the financial year with no risk of having to return them.

The Financial Regulations are currently included within the Constitution which is being reviewed. This is a large piece of work and includes the possibility of moving them to a separate document. In the meantime, interim changes to the Financial Regulations, to reflect increased inflation and costs, is proposed to be taken to the March Board meeting. The changes will reflect more sensible limits and include the Senior Finance Manager following the reduction in hours of the Finance Officer, Graham Hurst.

It was agreed that the Executive Committee is willing to recommend the proposed changes for approval by the Board, on the understanding that wider policies are being reviewed to ensure that appropriate scrutiny is in place and guidance is provided to staff. The Executive Committee will look at a transparent governance process around procurement and invoicing statements before the December Board meeting.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the financial position as of 31st December 2024 and project full year out-turn**
- 2. The Committee NOTED the proposed changes to approvals and ADVISED on suggested amendments to be taken to the Board**
- 3. The Committee NOTED other finance matters**

49.2. Quarter 3 Delivery Report

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle had circulated a paper to update the Executive Committee on the progress of the Chilterns National Landscape team between October and December 2024 against the financial year 2024/2025 Delivery Plan. The overall position remains similar to quarter 2, however some work has been postponed and shown on a new line. These items will be reconsidered for inclusion in the 2025/26 Delivery Plan. In Q3 (October-December 2024):

- 49 (44 in Q2) delivery lines reported as progressing on track (42) or completed (7) (48%)
- 29 (35 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness (28%)
- 12 (16 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness (12%)
- 12 (0 in Q2) delivery lines have been postponed for reconsidering in FY25-26 planning (12%)

1. The Committee NOTED the Q3 Delivery report

49.3. Annual Planning

Staff capacity continues to be an issue, with a need to identify priority issues and identify work that can be deprioritised. The Climate Adaptation Plan is a requirement of the Management Plan, with a requirement from Defra for this to be embedded by 2028. Work will start on this soon and will include liaising with the new Climate Coordinator at the National Landscapes Association.

It was proposed to spend a significant amount of time at the next Executive Committee meeting, when the budget figures are known, to discuss priorities and the consequences of insufficient resources.

1. The Committee NOTED the Annual Planning update

49.4. Funding Strategy Update

The Executive Committee was provided with a paper detailing progress on delivering the Funding Strategy by Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer, which was taken as read. The uncertainty over future government funding remains, with Defra still having not advised the grant settlement for the next financial year. Confirmation of a further three-year settlement from 2026/2027 is expected around the same time. Defra has confirmed that the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme grant funding has been extended for a fifth year. Income generation continues to be challenging, especially ensuring that funding permits recharging for staff costs. Thanks were given to Kate Heppell who has been very successful in securing large amounts of funding in recent months.

1. The Committee NOTED the Funding Strategy update

49.5. Chief Executive Officer's Update

A comprehensive paper was circulated by the CEO, which was taken as read, with highlights including:

- The Senior Leadership Team continue to take oversight of and deliver a huge amount of work across the organisation's activities.
- The consultation on the proposed changes to the Management Plan ended on 3rd February. The responses are being reviewed.
- Formal consultation for the Boundary Review is expected in June 2025.
- The Nature Recovery Plan continues to be developed by Kate Heppell and Neil Jackson.
- Defra needs to recruit five new Secretary of State appointees. This could be potentially challenging, and she is encouraging and supporting an effective Defra recruitment campaign. Local Authority and Parish Council elections may also result in a change of membership to the Board.
- The CEO is seeking to meet with local MPs and members of the House of Lords.

Paul Mains gave an update of the HR Advisory Group; the remaining HR policies should be completed and ready to be approved by the Board at its June meeting. He thanked everyone involved.

CCB Executive Committee Meeting

Monday 24th February 2025

1. The Committee NOTED the CEO’s update

24/25.50. Any Urgent Business

None, all items covered in the agenda.

24/25.51. Next Executive Committee meeting

The date for the next meeting will be reconsidered as the planned date is the date of some Local Authority elections. It was agreed that the meeting would be extended to three hours to enable a full discussion of the Delivery Plan.

Further meeting Dates:

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thursday 17 th April, 10am Chinnor Office	Date TBC, 10am Location TBC	Thursday 27 th March, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 23 rd October, 10am Chinnor Office	Tuesday 9 th September, 10am Location TBC	Thursday 19 th June, 10am Gateway Office, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
	Thursday 13 th November, 10am Location TBC	Thursday 25 th September, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
		Thursday 11 th December, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 12.49.

The Chair.....

Date.....

Item 2.1 Reserves Policy

Author: Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose: To set out proposed amendments to CCB's reserves policy

1. **CCB Financial regulations** which form part of the **Constitution** currently stipulate the following regarding reserves:

- *The general reserve is held as a contingency for unexpected future events. Reserves are also maintained for specific purposes where it is likely that a liability will arise.*

Regulations

- *Any additions or withdrawals from reserves are to be approved by the Executive Committee.*
- *The Finance Officer is responsible for advising on prudent levels of reserves in accordance with the Local Government Act 2003, taking account of the views of external audit.*
- *The Chief Officer and Finance Officer will review the reserves annually to determine the appropriate level required.*

2. CCB's current level of reserves are as follows:

£'000s	31.3.25 (Draft)	31.3.24
Total Restricted Project Reserves	3,761	4,084
General Reserve	100	100
Revenue Reserve	252	225
Development Reserve	294	294
Total Unrestricted Reserves	646	619
Total CCB Reserves	4,518	4,703

The Revenue Reserve above does not include our current year draft core surplus of **£111k** as this is already earmarked to fund the 25/26 budget deficit. It does include some adjustments following historical reconciliation of earmarked reserves totalling £27k (net increase in general reserves).

3. To give better guidance to the SLT and the Executive Committee, we propose a more detailed reserves policy, with specific criteria, to assist in assessing the minimal reserves that need to be held. We also propose that General and Revenue reserves be combined, and the resultant General Reserve comprises the minimum level of reserves CCB needs to continue its operations. The Development Reserve then continues to be earmarked for use for one-off projects, as approved by the Executive Committee.
4. The CCB needs to ensure it has adequate working capital reserves. We assess this to be equivalent to covering three months of salary costs. Based on figures at the end of March 2025, this is £320k but note this includes costs funded by projects so is a prudent assessment.
5. It is important that the CCB maintains adequate funds to finance the projects it facilitates. Short term project cashflows for projects, such as those funded by the National Lottery

Heritage Fund for example, are needed as costs are generally claimed quarterly in arrears. The CCB needs to ensure there is adequate short-term funding to cover this period. This needs to be part of our overall considerations in deciding whether to commit to projects. For example, if the Not Bourne Yesterday project is successful in securing funding for a Delivery phase, this could commence from May 2026 and represent a 5-year project with a grant of £2.8m. Average cashflow exposure on this project would be approximately **£140k**. The CCB therefore needs to ensure it has the reserves available to cover this. Currently, our model is such that much of our funding is received in advance of spend, in part because we have insisted on it or the funds have been provided upfront, ie Network Rail funding for Mend the Gap and Thames Water and Affinity Water funding for the CCSP and the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment project. Nevertheless, we need to continually reassess to monitor our risk.

6. A further measure of the level of reserves required is the costs to the CCB of winding up its operations. This cost is assumed to be the CCB's total redundancy and notice costs (**£364k**) not covered by projects as at 31 March, plus our annual rent (12 month rolling break clause: **£23.5k**); totalling **£388k**.
7. Our recommendation is that minimum General Reserves be the higher of the three criteria and this be re-assessed at least on an annual basis. Therefore, from our above assessment, we should maintain a minimum of **£388k** in **General Reserves**. Reserves over and above this level would then be available for use for Core projects with approval from Exco.
8. Based on our assessments above we propose an overall Unrestricted Reserves be composed of a new consolidated **General Reserve** of **£388k** (combining the current General Reserve and Revenue Reserve) and a separate **Development Reserve** of **£258k**.

Recommendation

1. To **APPROVE** the proposed reserves policy above, to be subsequently incorporated into the updated Financial Regulations as part of the Constitution review
2. To **APPROVE** the consolidation of reserves into General Reserve (to include the revenue/current year reserves) and Development Reserve. The Development Reserve is the balance over and above minimum General Reserve assessed to be required.

Item 2.2**Budget 2025/26****Author:**

Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose:

To set out the proposed final 2025-26 Core Budget

1. 2025-26 Proposed Final Budget – Overview

£'000s	2023/24 (final)	2024/25 (draft)	2025/26 Budget Envelope (Mar 25)	2025/26 Final Budget (May 25)
Income	798	1,151	805	981
Costs	(821)	(1,040)	(902)	(1,078)
Surplus / (Deficit) in year	(23)	111	(97)	(97)
Projected 24 / 25 surplus			75	111
Total 24/25 & 25/26 (Deficit)/Surplus			(22)	14

- Following the budget envelope presented to the Board on 27th March 2025, we have continued work to review and refine the detailed budget for 2025/26. A full detailed budget line by line is included in **Appendix A**.
- Our overall position is unchanged with a budget deficit of **£97k** for the year. As agreed at the Board meeting on 27th March, we propose to fund this from the current (24/25) year surplus. Draft numbers for 2024/25 are now showing a surplus of **£111k** which is much improved on our forecast surplus in March of **£75k** (this reflects some prudent spending decisions by the SLT – further details in the Q4 Finance Report). This moves our overall position for the two years to an anticipated surplus of **£14k** (previously a net deficit of £22k) and relieves pressure on reserves to fund the deficit.
- We are currently assessing the guidance from Defra on the use of Capital (CDEL) funds. There are two elements to the fund – **innovation, invest to save and income generation** and contributing to **30by30 nature recovery targets**. Whilst we have been allocated a substantial pot of CDEL funds (**£348k**), there is still some uncertainty on interpreting the criteria and therefore how we might be permitted to use the funds to support our work, with the key requirement being that activities must be capital spend, and not revenue. Despite the uncertainties, we have concluded that some of the CDEL funds will be available for the planned organisational transformation work and to fund some other Core activities. Details are scoped out below.

2. Income

- The budget assumes **£129k** local authority contributions for 2025/26. This is in line with current contributions and also incorporates increases for those authorities who

we are confident are accommodating uplifts in line with our Defra grant and thus maintaining the required 80:20 ratio of contributions between Defra and local authorities. Note that if we received all contributions we are due from local authorities, we could receive a further **£30k** of income in 2025/26 which would make a significant contribution to our budget shortfalls.

- Project recharge income is **£158k** - this reflects ad hoc recharges of Core staff to projects and other core recharges, for example overheads.
- Interest income is **£25k** – this is a conservative estimate (actual interest for 2024/25 is £48k) but the budget figure reflects declining interest rates and reducing project cash balances held (we have held significant funds in advance in 24/25, not least Thames Water monies).
- Project income is **£46.5k** – this represents HS2 Additional Projects income of £14k (Landscape Connectivity project and advice to the HS2 Review Group) and FDRI income (£22.5k). Our FDRI contract with CEH is described more fully in the Funding update. The work is agreed in principle, but subject to a final contract.
- Defra Capital (CDEL) funding of **£80k** – our assessment of the CDEL criteria is that we will be able to draw on the CDEL funding to deliver some elements of our organisational transformation work, under the 'Innovation & Invest to Save' criterion. We will be seeking confirmation from Defra over the next few weeks and, in the meantime, given the urgency of the work and the need to spend the funds in the next 12 months, we propose to start elements of the project. The total cost of the Transformation work is £80k, so the worst-case scenario is needing to use £80k of the £258k of Development Reserves, though we are confident that at least some will be eligible for CDEL funding.
- **CDEL Core income £40k**– we have also assumed that we will be able to utilise some of the CDEL funds against our Core activities in Strategy & Planning and Landscapes.

3. Expenditure

- The CCB's largest cost is its staff. A 3% inflationary pay rise for all staff who joined CCB before 1 October 2024 has been included in this budget. This adds a cost of approximately **£14k**.
- Staff costs outlined represent Core (non-project) staff only and are net of any costs directly recharged to projects. Where appropriate the project recharges income includes staff recharges.
- The budget includes the increased Employer's National Insurance contribution, effective 1 April 2025. This adds approximately **£15k** to Core staff costs.
- A reduction in FTE is included for our CEO for this financial year (from May) of 0.2 FTE which reduces the role to four days per week. Other FTE changes are being explored but have not yet been incorporated into the budget. These could represent further savings on staff costs.
- New roles included in the budget include:
 - **Additional admin resource 0.4 FTE £16k**. This reflects ongoing capacity challenges in this area, particularly with our Senior Admin Officer being required to spend significant time on several key projects including FIPL.
 - The other new role included in our budget for 25/26 is a **part time Planning Officer**. We have been unsuccessful in recruiting to this role, but it remains a requirement of **£32k equivalent annual cost**. We have now included an

assumption to reflect likely delay in recruitment of two months so the cost in the 25/26 budget is £27k.

- **Senior Programme Manager** – this is an essential new role being considered in light of work being conducted on workload and organisational priorities. It is included in the budget to give it visibility, though recognising that approval will only be possible once we have greater certainty on future funding. For now, we have assumed recruitment halfway through the year at a cost of **£40k**.
- **Transformation work costs of £80k** have now been included in the budget. This includes continuing our Operational transformation works in IT, Information Management and HR.
- Design and printing costs for our Management and Nature Recovery Plans are included - total cost **£14.5k**.
- We have also included **£5k** for work on our Climate Adaptation plan.
- We have budgeted to continue with consulting costs for Health & Safety **£6k**, Planning **£36k** and HR **£13k**.
- We have made the decision not to produce Outstanding Chilterns magazine in 2025/26, and our budget income and costs have been reduced accordingly. We have retained some costs to potentially produce an enhanced annual review and do some much-needed updates to our website - **circa £5k**.
- Our insurance costs have increased significantly year on year following a large increase at renewal in September 2024. This is a combination of increased costs of management liability insurance and extra premium on our commercial insurance to ensure our water-focussed projects are adequately covered, brought about in part due to our existing insurers changing the scope of what they would insure.
- We are in the process of agreeing to continue our lease on the office in Chinnor. The rent for the next five years has increased by **£5k** per annum from September 2025 and this is factored into the budget.

4. **Budgets 2026- 2029**

- We expect to be advised in June/July on a three-year grant settlement from Defra for 2026/27 onwards. Until there is clarity on this, it is not appropriate to commence any cost restructure.
- Once we are advised on the three-year settlement, we will develop a new three-year business plan for 2026/27- 2028/29 including cost restructuring as appropriate.
- Our budget for 2025/26 includes a number of one-off costs which will not recur in 2026/27 – Staff costs of £64k (eg Retirement of Conservation & Landscapes Officer, Heritage & Archaeology Manager self-funding, North Chilterns Engagement & Partnership Officer contract ending) and other costs £22k (one off legal contract review and Nature Recovery and Management plan costs) Offset against this is a proposed new Senior Programme Manager role which will have an ongoing cost of £80k. We are also considering several other staff restructure proposals (including FTE reductions), and this could create savings of circa £30k.

Recommendation

1. To **APPROVE** the 2025/26 budget (£97k deficit in 2025/26 offset by £111k surplus in 2024/25).
2. To **APPROVE** use of reserves towards the organisational transformation work that are not deemed to be eligible for Defra CDEL funding. This would be to a maximum of £80k.
3. To **RECOMMEND** to the Board on 19th June approval of this final budget.

BUDGET FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

Chilterns Conservation Board

Profit and Loss

	Draft 24/25 Full Year Actuals	Full Year 23/24 Actuals	FINAL Proposed Budget 25/26
Income			
Advertising Income	7,792	8,166	-
DEFRA CORE	628,145	513,896	513,896
DEFRA Capital Grant	95,902	-	-
Donations Received	60	-	-
Interest Income	48,481	18,792	25,000
Local Authority Contribution	127,442	124,448	129,666
Project Income	31,611	19,760	34,500
Fee Income from Project recharges	211,371	112,979	158,081
Sale of merchandise	479	235	-
CDEL - Innovation/Invest to Save Income	-	-	80,000
CDEL - Core Income	-	-	40,000
Total Income	1,151,283	798,276	981,143
Costs			
Advertising & Marketing costs	10,022	496	19,070
Bank Fees	184	150	150
Board Meetings	1,130	828	1,850
Cleaning	3,196	3,305	2,852
Computer and IT Equipment	0	3,850	-
Consulting	70,508	42,425	59,895
Defra Capital Spend	95,902	-	-
Employers National Insurance	55,778	41,139	73,730
Event costs	2,164	866	2,955
Finance costs	12,443	5,880	7,082
General Expenses	2,191	7,074	1,604
Insurance	16,035	15,944	23,000
IT Software and Consumables	9,026	7,594	11,733
IT support and maintenance	9,174	7,456	8,695
Legal Expenses	7,755	20,000	7,000
Light, Power, Heating	4,180	7,739	4,054
Magazine costs	16,848	16,506	-
Medical Insurance	3,410	5,146	3,348
Members Allowances	9,656	6,356	9,813
Nature Recovery	0	5,000	-
Office Equipment	0	312	-
Pensions Costs	109,050	77,893	117,374
Postage, Freight & Courier	(264)	475	750
Printing & Stationery	1,527	1,344	3,576
Rates and Water rates	6,854	6,127	7,485
Recruitment	3,245	2,909	500
Rent	18,825	20,500	21,975
Repairs & Maintenance	4,483	3,052	6,776
Research & Survey Expenditure	0	5,000	-
Salaries	528,938	458,943	576,479
Staff expenses	177	640	450
Staff Training	11,668	5,907	12,000
Subscriptions	4,201	5,898	4,724
Transformation Projects	0	-	80,000
Telephone & Internet	3,508	3,182	3,793
Travel Expenses	3,888	2,479	4,298
Website running costs	1,073	2,163	1,488
Project Donations	13,146	27,000	-
Total Administrative Costs	1,039,921	821,576	1,078,499
Operating Profit	111,362	(23,300)	(97,356)
24/25 Surplus			111,362
Net Surplus 24/25 + 25/26			14,006

Item 2.3 Financial Approvals

Author: Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose: To seek approval for changes to Financial Approvals

Financial Approvals – proposed interim amendments to Financial Regulations

The CCB's Financial Regulations currently form part of the Constitution which is being reviewed. The Constitution review is a large piece of work, expected to be completed later in 2025, and was subject to a Board paper in December 2024.

In the interim, we propose that three changes be made to the Financial Regulations, as follows:

1. **Modify financial approval levels** by increasing the budget holder sign off limit from £2k to £5k. The requirement for three quotes remains the same. This change will better reflect inflationary increases in costs and make approvals more time efficient. This approach is consistent with the Cotswolds Conservation Board.
2. **Add Senior Finance Manager as an alternative approver for the Finance Officer** for signing off orders of £15k - £50k. This is required with the Finance Officer reducing their hours and will aid operational efficiency whilst still ensuring good financial controls. Note that the CEO will continue to be one of the approvers but the second approver can either be the Senior Finance Manager or the Finance Officer. It does not mean that there will be three approvals required.
3. **Align Purchase Order (PO) and Payment approval limits.** This will improve consistency across the two areas. Currently, the limits for Payments are lower than for POs, despite the PO being the key risk because, once approved, the CCB is committed to the expenditure. Any new vendor due diligence takes place at the PO stage.

The changes proposed above are summarised in the table below.

Additional points to note:

- All the approvals above are for expenditure within the agreed budget
- The proposals will operate alongside a process of regular budget monitoring and scrutiny across Core cost centres and Projects
- For the new financial year, all budgets are being loaded into the CCB's accounting system and there will be monthly/quarterly reporting versus budget, with all project and cost centre managers being fully accountable for their costs.
- Following approval of these changes, internal guidance will be issued to staff, supported by training as appropriate.

The summary table below shows the proposed PO and Payment Approval sign off limits and authorised personnel and is in the same format as our current financial regulations:

Value of Purchase Order /Payment Sign off limits	Quotation Requirements	Authorised Personnel
Up to £5,000	Best endeavours to seek value for money on orders up to £5,000	Budget Holder
£5,000 - £15,000	Three quotations for orders over £5,000	As for £5,000 plus Line Manager
£15,000 - £50,000	Three written quotations	As for £5-15,000 plus CEO and either the Finance Officer or Senior Finance Manager
Over £50,000	Three written quotations/tenders	As for £5-15,000 plus Chair (or Vice Chair)

Recommendations

1. To **APPROVE** the proposed changes to Financial Approvals, effective for the new financial year (ie from 1 April 2025).
2. **NOTE** that the changes will be incorporated into the CCB's updated Financial Regulations as part of wider improvements to the Constitution.

Item 2.4 Working group on Local Authority engagement

Author: John Nicholls, Board Chair

Purpose of Report: To establish an informal working group to address this issue, agree its purposes and invite participants

Summary

A brisk discussion at the March Board suggested a need to overhaul our working relationship with local authorities. I suggest that a time-limited, informal working group, with the relevant expertise, be established and report back, via this Committee, to the Board.

Richard Newcombe has kindly agreed to lead this work, including beyond his retirement from the Board. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advises that it is not constitutionally required for advisory group members to be members of the Board; the Committee may nevertheless consider the benefits of co-opting Richard onto the Committee, if that would be agreeable to him. Other members are invited to volunteer, and it is suggested that local authority officer input could also be sought, in addition to CCB's own officers. A limited number of meetings is envisaged.

It is proposed that the group's role be to consider and advise on the CCB's relationship with local authorities, focussing in particular on the following:

- How we communicate to achieve engagement at the right strategic level in each local authority, be it Leader, Cabinet members, CEO or other officers
- How do we secure proper senior buy-in for the Management Plan and a commitment to its delivery?
- How do we convey and mobilise the additional responsibilities under s 85 of the CRoW Act, as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act?
- How and when do we most effectively make our request for local authority funding contributions?
- How can we most effectively influence emerging Local Plans, especially in their early stages?
- What is the role of the CCB's local authority Board members and how can we best equip them to be champions and advocates in their authorities?

Recommendation:

- 1. That Executive Committee APPROVES establishing the group, provides FEEDBACK on the role description, and identifies participants.**

Item 2.5 Exclusion of the Public and Press

Author: Matt Thomson, Deputy Monitoring Officer

Purpose and Summary: To close the meeting and exclude members of the public and of the press in order to consider a confidential item relating to Natural England's Boundary Review Project

Background

1. Further to section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended, the Board or its Committees may resolve to exclude members of the public and the press in order to consider matters that are determined to be confidential. Exclusion of the public and press requires the relevant part(s) of the meeting in effect to be held in closed session, and this requires the cessation of any means of recording and/or broadcasting the meeting, including the use of video conferencing. Members attending online will therefore be excluded from the discussion (but will have access to the confidential paper(s)).
2. A paper is being brought to the Executive Committee to consider and advise officers on next steps in relation to Natural England's project to review the boundary of the Chilterns National Landscape with a view to the designation of additional land. The paper is recommended to be treated in confidence since it includes information about the boundary review project that Natural England is keeping confidential for the time being in the public interest, including, but not limited to, in relation to the local government elections period of sensitivity. It is anticipated that Natural England will be making the information publicly available within the next few weeks.
3. The paper itself, and the record of the Committee's consideration, may be made publicly available after Natural England has published its own information about the project.
4. The paper is circulated separately as a confidential appendix and seeks the Committee's views on the information relating to the project in order to give officers a strategic steer with regard to the project going forwards.

Recommendations:

1. **That the Committee RESOLVES to exclude members of the public and of the press, stops the recording/broadcast of the meeting, and holds the discussion of item 2.6 in closed session.**

Item 2.6 CONFIDENTIAL: Natural England's Boundary Review Project

Author: Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy & Planning

Purpose and Summary: To inform the Committee in confidence about the cancellation of the boundary review project and seek the Committee's observations on next steps including on communications.

Background

1. This paper is submitted to the Committee under confidentiality procedures because the content relates to news regarding a Natural England project that has not been announced in public at the time of writing. It is currently understood that an announcement will be made in public during the week commencing 12th May.
2. **Natural England (NE) has decided to stop work on the Chilterns boundary review project.** The reasons given relate to pressures on public finances and the need for all government departments and bodies to make significant cuts to their activities.
3. This also affects the proposed designation of the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge as an AONB/National Landscape, but not the two other projects in the current designations programme, the extension of the Surrey Hills National Landscape and the designation of the Yorkshire Wolds, both of which were significantly further advanced.
4. This paper does not seek the Committee's approval for next steps and/or any media response, which would normally be determined by officers within existing agreed policies and priorities, and referred to the chair of the Board where appropriate. Because of the significance of the news, officers felt it was appropriate to inform members and seek their observations through the conveniently-timed Committee meeting. If the news breaks before the Committee meets, officers will seek observations from the Board Chair, John Nicholls, and Deputy Chair (and Executive Committee Chair), Hector Sants.

The story so far

5. **7th April:** The news was formally announced in confidence to the project's Management Advisory Group (MAG) on 7 April. The MAG includes CCB officers, Board members John Nicholls and Paul Mainds, and Darran Eggleton of Buckinghamshire Council (Chair of the project's Technical Advisory Group (TAG)).
6. In the meeting, NE officers acknowledged that the news will be enormously disappointing, not only to the CCB, but to other stakeholders who have been involved with the project too, given the amount of time and resources that have been committed so far. It is obviously also a blow to NE's own officers engaged in the project, and it is to be emphasised that the dedication and professionalism of NE's local teams (in both the West Anglia and Thames & Solent offices) must be recognised and applauded.
7. **15th April:** CCB's CEO Elaine King sent a letter, co-signed by Board Chair John Nicholls, to Marian Spain, Chief Executive of Natural England (text in Annex 1) expressing dismay at the decision and noting the resources already invested in the project and many of the potential benefits that will now not be realised. If the decision could not be reconsidered, the letter sought:
 - a. confirmation in writing of the decision;
 - b. an explanation of the reasoning behind the decision; and
 - c. assurances as to whether the project could be completed in the future.

8. No formal response has been received at the time of writing.
9. **24th April:** Local authority officers on the TAG were notified of the decision, again in confidence, by email (disappointingly not shared with CCB officers by NE at the time – Annex 2). This email put details of the decision in writing, and included further information suggesting a shift in understanding of the decision, even internally to NE.
10. A number of TAG members immediately contacted CCB officers expressing similar concerns and disappointment, in relation both to the principle of ending the project and the wasted resources. This included a local authority that had been ambivalent about the boundary review in the first place, suggesting that concerns about wasted resources are not restricted to those disappointed by the cancellation.

What we know

11. The emphasis in all the messaging is on the decision being **made for financial reasons** only (a “context of tighter budget settlements across the public sector” and the need to make “difficult decisions about [NE’s] resources in this new financial year”). However, in combination with other recent decisions and rhetoric, it would be reasonable for stakeholders to conclude that the allocation of financial resources reflects a de-prioritisation of a commitment to protected landscapes (and the environment more widely), including a reduced emphasis on the scenic quality of landscape.
12. There may be scope for the **project to be revived in future** (“If in the future, resources do become available and Natural England is able to prioritise this work again, we may be able to return to this project.”). A key question raised has been that of whether it will be possible for NE to pursue any other landscape designations in future *without* reviving the Chilterns boundary review project. The work undertaken so far has confirmed that significant areas outside the existing designation do meet the ‘natural beauty criterion’ for designation, and have been assessed as being ‘desirable’ to designate. We also know from the background to the designations programme, when it was announced in 2021, why the Chilterns was prioritised for review. If, in future, a new designations programme was started that did not include the review of the Chilterns, this could indicate that there are reasons other than immediate costs/resources for stopping the current project.
13. The work and resources put into the project so far **should not be wasted**, and NE are “*hoping* that the evidence base which has been collated as part of this project can be shared in due course to inform other projects” (emphasis added). (See also below.)

Next steps

14. An officer group, comprising the CEO, Head of Strategy & Planning, Communications Manager (Vicki Pearce) and Conservation & Landscape Officer (Neil Jackson), have been considering a **media response**, in addition to discussions by Senior Leadership Team, and between the CEO and Board Chair and Deputy Chair. The plan is for a response to be issued simultaneously with Natural England’s public announcement, and include:
 - a. A statement of dismay/disappointment;
 - b. Comment on the wasted resources by NE, CCB, LA partners, other stakeholders and the public;
 - c. Comment on how hopes have been raised for some stakeholders, while others have been subject to concerns unnecessarily; and
 - d. Benefits of the potentially extended area that is being lost, including contribution to other government priorities, such as 30by30 targets and connecting people with nature.

15. It may be possible to circulate a draft of the proposed media statement for discussion at the meeting, but officers would, in any case, welcome the Committee's views on the content of any media statement, and particularly the strength of feeling to be expressed, as well as any further ideas that the Committee would suggest for action.
16. Officers would also welcome the Committee's thoughts on the following avenues that are currently being pursued or considered for future action.
- a. Seeking support from the wider protected landscapes community, including the National Landscapes Association.
 - b. Engaging with the promoters of the other project that has been stopped: the Sandstone Ridge Trust, Cheshire East Council and Cheshire West & Chester Council.
 - c. Proposing to Natural England that the CCB's capital (CDEL) funding be used to pay for the continuation of the project (which has been suggested not only internally, but by at least one TAG stakeholder). On this point, there are several significant issues:
 - i. The costs of completing the project to designation are unknown, and unknowable, since there may be a need for public inquiries and further consultations.
 - ii. There is (and has always been) a risk that even having undertaken all the proper assessments, consultations and inquiries, the extension isn't formally approved by either NE or the Defra Secretary of State.
 - iii. There are other important delivery projects and investments that would be missed if the funding is used for this purpose.
 - iv. The nature of the project appears not to meet Defra's CDEL funding criteria (officers are checking this).
17. Away from the project itself, officers must now **review a wide range of materials** in relation to references to the project, including our website and strategy/policy documents that refer to the project. In particular, policy GP2 of the Management Plan will need to revert to its previous form seeking a boundary review, rather than supporting NE in the boundary review project.

Are there any positives?

18. The following suggestions are not intended in any way to excuse the decision to stop work on the boundary review project, which is, without doubt, the wrong decision for NE and Defra to have made. Nonetheless, it is important to consider whether there are any positives that may be taken from it.
19. Cancellation (or indefinite deferral) will **free up some resources** at a time when CCB officers are particularly stretched (with the Management Plan Review, Nature Recovery Plan, embedding new legislation, undertaking internal operational and governance improvements, etc.) This is all within the same context of reduced resources that have led NE to stop the project. The amount of potential increased capacity will be limited, however, as a result of the amount of publicity, engagement and editing of materials that officers will have to undertake to account for the project ending.

20. The project has generated a **wealth of data on the landscape surrounding the Chilterns**. If NE is prepared to share the data with us, and with local authorities (and potentially other stakeholders), then all will have access to information that will assist with the better understanding of the character of the region. This may be beneficial to discussions of the setting of the National Landscape, to the designation of local landscape areas, and informing decision-making (e.g. on local plans and planning applications), and to support landscape or habitat connectedness projects. CCB officers and TAG members have already requested that the data be published for these purposes. However, there may be legal, contractual or other reasons why NE (or the consultants LUC) are reluctant to share (all of) the data.
21. The project has created and developed a **community of interest** in the form of the TAG, with a broad range of contacts with a depth of understanding and experience of the whole Chilterns chalk landscape beyond the designated area. NE is in the process of seeking permission from all the TAG members to share their contact details with the CCB, with a view to CCB continuing that engagement as a legacy of the project.
22. Officers would welcome views on the above, and on any other positives that might cheer everyone up a bit.

Recommendations:

1. That the Committee **CONSIDERS** the content of this paper, and **OFFERS OBSERVATIONS** to officers, particularly in terms of paras 14-15 and 21.
2. When discussion of this item is concluded, that the Committee **RESOLVES** to re-open the meeting to the public and to the press, and to re-start recording and broadcast of the meeting.

Annex 1: Text of letter to Marian Spain, 15 April 2025

Marian Spain
Chief Executive
Natural England
By email: chiefexecutivesoffice@naturalengland.org.uk
15 April 2025

Dear Marian,

Natural England's decision to cancel the Chilterns AONB boundary review

We are writing to express our dismay at Natural England's decision to cancel the project to review the boundary of the Chilterns AONB. This decision is extremely disappointing for several reasons, not least that a huge amount of time, energy and resources have already been spent on the project - by Natural England officers, Chilterns National Landscape staff and consultants for the project.

The work already carried out on this project has provided evidence that the natural beauty criteria have been met. The desirability to designate is also clear, along with obvious opportunities to support access to the landscape. Designating these new areas will therefore enhance the Chilterns AONB's ability to contribute to the domestic and global targets set out in Natural England's new Strategy 2025-2030, which include the global 30 x 30 biodiversity targets, the Environment Act targets on reducing declines in nature and the government's commitment to ensure more people can experience nature.

Given that Natural England has a general purpose to conserve and enhance the landscape (NERC Act 2006) and a power to designate an AONB where evidence exists that an area meets the outstanding natural beauty criteria (CROW Act 2000), and has already determined that it will proceed with a boundary review for the Chilterns AONB, we believe it perverse that it is choosing not to exercise its powers in this instance, not least because the work is so far advanced, public expectation has been raised, and Natural England itself has identified a clear and pressing need.

We would appreciate confirmation, in writing, of the decision to cancel the Chilterns AONB boundary review, along with an explanation of the reasoning behind the decision, including any assurances as to whether the project could be completed in the future. We further request that Natural England reconsiders its decision.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Elaine King

Chief Executive

John Nicholls

Chair

Cc: Edel McGurk, Natural England
Edward Barker, Defra
Sally Randall, Defra
John Watkins, National Landscapes Association

Annex 2: Text of NE email to TAG members, 25 April 2025**CONFIDENTIAL: UPDATE ON THE CHILTERN AONB BOUNDARY REVIEW PROJECT**

Dear XX,

I am writing to you with an update regarding the boundary review of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. XX Council has been contributing to and supporting this important work, through their involvement on the Chilterns Boundary Review Technical Advisory Group.

In the context of tighter budget settlements across the public sector, Natural England is having to take some difficult decisions about its resources in this new financial year. Funding to continue our landscape designations work is very limited and as such we have had to make reductions in that area. Unfortunately, we have had to stop work on two of the four landscape designation projects, and this includes stopping the Chilterns boundary extension project.

We are disappointed that it is not possible to complete all four designations as originally planned. We have had to prioritise the projects which are further advanced, having been through public consultations and with refined proposed areas in the public domain. If in the future, resources do become available and Natural England is able to prioritise this work again, we may be able to return to this project. There is no set timeline for this at present.

While this is disappointing news for the Chilterns AONB and all involved, Natural England continues to recognise the huge value of landscape designations more widely, and their role in bringing benefits for nature and people. We remain committed to maximising that value over the long term.

We will be engaging with partners and stakeholders to work through the implications of this decision in the coming weeks and intend to share further information in due course. In the meantime we would be grateful if this news is not made public while we communicate with all partners.

Natural England greatly values the support and partnership which XX Council has contributed to this project. We are hoping the evidence base which has been collated as part of this project can be shared in due course to inform other projects.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you or members of your team have any questions or would like to discuss this further. Please email chilternsaonbboundaryreview@naturalengland.org.uk (cc'd) which will reach our project team directly who are closest to the detail.

We are committed to maintaining transparent communication and are here to provide any additional information you may need.

Thank you once again for your understanding and continued support. As an organisation we are committed to recovering nature for growth, health and security. We are keen to develop strategic partnerships to achieve this ambition, and I hope we can explore other opportunities to work with your team towards this.

Yours sincerely,

etc

Purpose: To provide the Executive Committee with a Finance Report for Quarter 4 2025.

1. Draft Management Accounts to 31 March 2025

1.1 Core Financial Results for Quarter 4 – 31 March 2025

At this early stage in our year end processes our financials to 31 March 2025 are very draft and will be subject to some changes as we complete our year-end review and reconciliation work.

Appendix 1 shows the full detailed Core Performance versus budget for the year to 31 March 2025 along with our full year forecast (9+3) and budget.

The CCB shows a Core profit of **£111k** for the years to 31 March 2025 against a budgeted surplus of **£10k**. This far exceeds our forecasted out-turn estimate of **£75k** surplus. This is mainly due to better than anticipated interest income (+£22k), lower planning consultancy costs (£6k) and legal contract review being deferred into 25/26 (£8k). Our forecast also included costs for the Management Plan and Nature Recovery Plan which were more than the £12k carried into 25/26 (+£9k).

1.2 Defra Capital Funds

The CCB received additional capital funds from Defra of **£114k** for 24/25. We have spent these monies on appropriate Core and Project activities. As at 31 March 2025 we have fully committed on these funds. The main purchases include a large drone (**£26k**), Water monitoring equipment (**£11k**), several bank enhancements on the River Chess (**£13k**), new server (**£11k**) and investments in new laptops and IT (**£29k**) along with various office improvements works (equipment, new paving etc).

1.3 Projects

Appendix 2 shows the overall CCB position as at 31 March 2025. Project income is **£3.277m**, costs are **£3.572m** and there is a deficit on projects of **£295k** overall. The main driver of the overall Project deficit is the Mend the Gap (MtG) project with a deficit of £594k, this is of course funded by our significant MtG reserve of £3.3m as at 31.3.24.

2. Treasury Management

Overall, the CCB has bank interest earned of **£118k** for 24/25 versus **£85k for 23/24**. This reflects higher interest rates for the whole of the 24/25 financial year as opposed to part of 23/24 (from Sept 23). Interest rates are now falling but due to our improved treasury management we now have more funds in 90 day + accounts with Nationwide and HSBC. We are also making use of Money Market accounts to earn additional interest on funds that are tied up by more than one month. For the period from 1 Jan to 31 March 25 this has resulted in additional interest earned of **£10k** year on year, even with interest rates of 0.25% lower. Note our year end cash balances held overall are similar year on year at £5.2m.

Recommendations

1. To NOTE the draft CCB financial reports as at 31 March 2025

CORE Budget Variance

Chilterns Conservation Board

For the year ended 31 March 2025

Core is Communications, Corporate Services, Landscapes, People and Society, Strategy & Planning.

Account	Actuals	Forecast	Budget	Variance v Forecast
Trading Income				
Advertising Income	7,792	7,792	7,020	(0)
Defra Capital Grant	95,902	86,135	-	9,767
Defra Core Grant	628,145	628,144	628,140	1
Donations Received	60	60	-	0
Interest Income	48,481	26,166	12,408	22,315
Internal Fee Income	211,371	223,318	117,432	(11,947)
Local Authority Contribution	127,442	126,054	120,826	1,388
Other Revenue	15,105	32,350	-	(17,245)
Project Income	16,506	-	-	16,506
Sale of merchandise	479	255	269	224
Total Trading Income	1,151,282	1,130,274	886,095	21,008
Gross Profit	1,151,282	1,130,274	886,095	21,008
Operating Expenses				
Advertising & Marketing	10,022	19,899	302	9,877
Bank Fees	184	114	206	(70)
Board Meetings	1,131	1,461	1,200	330
CCB recharges	13,147	10,000	-	(3,147)
Cleaning	3,196	3,113	2,390	(82)
Consulting	70,508	76,935	51,640	6,427
Defra Capital Spend	95,902	86,135	-	(9,767)
Employers National Insurance	55,778	56,205	41,979	427
Event costs	2,164	3,452	3,650	1,288
Finance costs	12,443	5,870	5,665	(6,573)
General Expenses	2,191	4,001	4,451	1,809
Insurance	16,036	15,651	10,794	(385)
IT Software and Consumables	9,026	8,437	11,386	(590)
IT support and maintenance	9,175	8,026	5,064	(1,149)
Legal Expenses	7,755	15,755	10,500	8,000
Light, Power, Heating	4,180	5,459	7,866	1,279
Magazine costs	16,848	13,638	16,750	(3,210)
Medical Insurance	3,410	3,835	2,510	425
Members Allowances	9,657	11,038	12,638	1,381
Nature Recovery	-	-	2,000	0
Office Equipment	-	-	220	0
Pensions Costs	109,050	111,573	80,506	2,523
Postage, Freight & Courier	- 264	987	459	1,251
Printing & Stationery	1,528	2,195	1,545	667
Rates and Water rates	6,854	8,165	8,200	1,311
Recruitment	3,245	3,245	3,500	0
Rent	18,825	18,500	18,500	(325)
Repairs & Maintenance	4,484	4,402	5,437	(82)
Salaries	528,939	530,438	533,617	1,499
Staff expenses	177	993	979	815
Staff Training	11,668	12,946	13,019	1,278
Subscriptions	4,202	5,729	7,015	1,528
Telephone & Internet	3,508	3,425	4,156	(83)
Travel Expenses	3,888	3,405	3,834	(483)
Website running costs	1,073	616	4,116	(457)
Total Operating Expenses	1,039,928	1,055,643	876,094	15,715
Net Profit	111,354	74,631	10,001	36,723

OVERALL- PROFIT AND LOSS - CORE AND PROJECTS

Chilterns Conservation Board

For the year ended 31 March 2025

Account	CORE	PROJECTS	Total
Turnover			
Access Grant	0	257,997	257,997
Advertising Income	7,792	0	7,792
Defra Capital Grant	95,902	18,315	114,217
Defra Core Grant	628,145	1,101,882	1,730,027
Donations Received	60	50	110
Interest Income	48,481	70,511	118,991
Internal Fee Income	211,371	73,081	284,452
Local Authority Contribution	127,442	46,287	173,730
Other Revenue	15,105	19,900	35,005
Project Income	16,506	1,688,407	1,704,913
Sale of merchandise	479	362	841
Total Turnover	1,151,282	3,276,792	4,428,075
Gross Profit	1,151,282	3,276,792	4,428,075
Administrative Costs			
Access grant expenditure	0	254,013	255,927
Advertising & Marketing	10,022	9,528	19,550
Bank Fees	184	1	185
Board Meetings	1,131	0	1,131
CCB Core Contribution	0	32,138	32,138
CCB recharges	13,147	221,355	234,502
Chess SWC Landowner Grant	0	177,418	177,418
Cleaning	3,196	0	3,196
Computer and IT Equipment	0	16	16
Consulting	70,508	72,737	143,245
Defra Capital Spend	95,902	18,315	114,217
Employers National Insurance	55,778	34,056	89,834
Equipment and materials (activity)	0	12,105	12,105
Equipment and materials (capital)	0	12,279	12,279
Evaluation	0	31,638	31,638
Event costs	2,164	43,846	46,009
Finance costs	12,443	0	12,443
FiPL Grant Year 3 23/24	0	77,174	77,174
FiPL Grant Year 4 24/25	0	878,810	878,810
Full Cost Recovery (NLHF Projects)	0	3,335	3,335
General Expenses	2,191	693,578	695,769
HLF New Staff Costs	0	97,456	97,456
HLF Training for staff	0	395	395
HLF Travel for staff	0	1,474	1,474
Insurance	16,036	0	16,036
Irrecoverable VAT	0	22,513	22,513
IT Software and Consumables	9,026	3,604	12,631
IT support and maintenance	9,175	1,600	10,775
Legal Expenses	7,755	0	7,755
Light, Power, Heating	4,180	0	4,180
Magazine costs	16,848	0	16,848
Medical Insurance	3,410	1,701	5,111
Members Allowances	9,657	0	9,657
Nature Recovery	0	84,804	84,804
New building work (NLHF)	0	4,574	4,574
Other costs (activity) NLHF	0	26,389	26,389
Other costs (capital) NLHF	0	3,327	3,327
Other costs NLHF	0	4,662	4,662
Pensions Costs	109,050	73,464	182,514
Postage, Freight & Courier	(264)	418	154
Printing & Stationery	1,528	6,524	8,052
Professional fees (activity)	0	204,635	204,635
Professional fees (capital)	0	5,992	5,992

Publicity and promotion	0	(1,253)	(1,253)
Rates and Water rates	6,854	0	6,854
Recruitment	3,245	2,276	5,522
Rent	18,825	1,750	20,575
Repair and conservation work	0	12,754	12,754
Repairs & Maintenance	4,484	0	4,484
Research and survey expenditure	0	53,907	53,907
Salaries	528,939	353,527	882,466
Staff expenses	177	678	856
Staff Training	11,668	7,131	18,798
Subscriptions	4,202	83	4,285
Telephone & Internet	3,508	2,469	5,976
Training for volunteers	0	9,538	9,538
Travel and expenses for volunteers	0	31	31
Travel Expenses	3,888	8,913	12,801
Website running costs	1,073	3,905	4,978
Total Administrative Costs	1,039,928	3,571,582	4,613,424
Operating Profit	111,354	(294,789)	(185,349)
Profit on Ordinary Activities Before Taxation	111,354	(294,789)	(185,349)
Profit after Taxation	111,354	(294,789)	(185,349)

Item 3.2

Quarter 4 Delivery Report

Author:

Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations

Purpose of Report:

To update the Executive Committee on the progress of the Chilterns National Landscape team between January and March 2025 against the FY24-25 Delivery Plan.

Overall Progress

- The Delivery Plan approved for FY24-25 was split into five workstreams and contains 28 delivery areas and 103 delivery lines (this is an increase from the start of the year as for example the Not Bourne Yesterday Project that started in October 2024 has been added).
- Appendix 1 sets out a summary of delivery on individual delivery lines.
- In Q4 (Jan-Mar 2025) the status of delivery across the CNL Team was as follows:

Completed	Slightly Delayed / Slightly Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed / Significantly Limited in Effectiveness	Postponed for reconsidering in FY25-26
On Track			
51 (50%)	24 (23%)	13 (13%)	15 (15%)
compared to 49 in Q3	compared to 28 in Q3	compared to 15 in Q3	compared to 9 in Q3

Note that a few adjustments were made to the status that was reported in Q3 to better reflect position at the end of Q3

Note that “completed” refers to delivery lines where work has now been fully finished and is not expected to continue in the following year (e.g. projects that have been completed). It does not refer to the completing all outputs identified in a particular quarter or the whole year where that work will continue in the next year (these are reported as “on track”).

Breakdown by Workstream

- **Improve Strategic Alignment** (Workstream 1) reported two (2) delivery lines on track, four (4) slightly delayed, four (4) significantly delayed and three (3) postponed. Those significantly delayed or postponed were:
 - **1.1.1 Management Plan Review:** A consultation on the Management Plan has been undertaken and analysis of submissions started which has identified additional work needed. Board approval has been obtained to defer approval of the Management Plan to June 2025
 - **1.1.2 Long Term Vision:** postponed through needing to wait for the potential new areas to be published by Natural England as part of the Boundary Review, and a focus on other priority strategic and operational work.
 - **1.1.4 Protected Landscape Reform:** no further work undertaken during the quarter as no more information has come out and capacity has meant that the focus has been on the Management Plan
 - **1.2.1 Governance Review:** the Forum is still in development, so engagement has not yet been embedded, with a need to clarify the best way to proceed and the timing. However, the first version of the revised Constitution (a tidied-up version of the existing Constitution with some enhancements) was approved by the Board in December.

- **1.4.2 CNL Team Evaluation Framework:** work in this area has been postponed as clarity is first required on the other monitoring and evaluation metrics (e.g. Protected Landscapes Target Operating Framework, PLTOF) that the organisation is being asked to report against.
- **1.4.4 CNL State of the Environment Indicators:** work in this area has been postponed to reconsider as part of FY25-26 planning because of the need to respond to the PLTOF and there being insufficient time to devote to developing CNL indicators.
- **Increase Operational Effectiveness** (Workstream 2) reported four (4) delivery lines on track, eight (8) slightly delayed, seven (7) significantly delayed and eight (8) postponed. Those significantly delayed or postponed were:
 - **2.1.2 Staff Handbook:** whilst the staff handbook has been drafted, it needs to align to HR policies. The handbook will therefore be reviewed, to check for alignment and a consistent depth of information, once policies are approved by the Board to ensure that there is a seamless link between the two.
 - **2.2.1 - 2.2.4 All Processes and Procedures:** postponed until next year due to capacity constraints and the need to focus on HR policy development, information management transformation and health and safety requirements. A new Risk Assessment procedure has been developed and updated as part of providing training to field staff in the organisation.
 - **2.3.1 HR System:** it was decided to pause work on inputting a new HR system whilst other transformation priorities were put in place and this will be considered again as part of the FY25-26 planning.
 - **2.3.2 Finance Systems:** work has started on improving the way in which we use the finance system as an organisation, including linking the Xero accounting system to the Approval Max approval system and uploading budgets with ongoing work on this due across FY25-26
 - **2.4.1 HR Policies:** whilst this delivery line is reporting as significantly delayed against the plan that was put in place at the beginning of the year, it is delivering in line with a revised plan that was agreed by the Executive Committee. In March a further seven policies were approved by the Board with a target of getting the remaining eight policies signed off in the June Board meeting (these policies are either additional policies that have been identified as being needed or ones where more work is needed as they are tied up in contractual terms and conditions).
 - **2.4.2 Finance Policies:** following the recruitment of the Senior Finance Manager in October 2024 work has started on looking at finance policies. However, a focus on other areas such as budgeting and reserves has meant that this work has not progressed as quickly as intended. A revision to the reserves policy as well as amendments to the approvals policies are due to be presented to the Executive Committee in May.
 - **2.4.3 Governance Policies:** work on this area, which focuses on internal day-to-day governance rather than areas such as delegated authority, has been postponed and will be addressed again in planning for FY25-26 because of a lack of capacity and a need to focus on delivery of other operational effectiveness areas.
 - **2.4.4 Operations Policies:** work in this area has been deprioritised to focus on HR with work in this area now focused on Health & Safety. The overall Health and Safety Statement for the organisation approved by the Board in March 2025. Work is ongoing with Risk Fluent (our designated competent person) especially around standing up of Risk Assessments across the organisation.

- **2.5.2 Image Library:** further work in this area has been postponed to FY25-26 to ensure that it fits in with overall Information Management solutions.
- **2.5.3 Internal Information Management:** whilst this area is reporting as being significantly behind schedule, this is against target outputs identified at the beginning of the year. Following the decision in December in terms of the strategy and platform the organisation is putting in place, significant work has been done in the quarter to plan for the transition (phase 2). This culminated in a report that identifies current issues (based on full consultation with staff), the high level structure of information management going forward and a plan for the transition and the purchase of a new server. Work to start to transition data onto the updated platform will start in Q1 of FY25-26.
- **2.6.1 Managing Successful Programmes:** further work in this area has been postponed to consider again in planning for FY25-26 due to workload in other areas and a lack of capacity in the Operations Team.
- **2.6.2 Programme Finances:** following the recruitment of the Senior Finance Manager in October 2024 work has started on getting programme budgets into the Finance Operating System (Xero) but has been delayed because of other financial priorities (including working on the budget, reserves etc). IT is still the target in the first quarter of FY25-26 to get all programme budgets loaded into Xero so that they can be more effectively tracked.
- **2.6.3 Programme Governance:** whilst delivery of programme governance on the ground is taking place generally as planned, work on improving the overall programme governance framework is delayed due to capacity issues in the Operations Team and a need to focus on delivery in other areas. It was therefore decided to postpone this work and reconsider it as part of the planning for FY25-26.
- **Conserve & Enhance Natural Beauty** (Workstream 3) reported thirty (30) delivery lines on track or delivered, six (6) slightly delayed, two (2) significantly delayed and two (2) postponed:
 - **3.1.1 Nature Recovery Plan:** the Nature Recovery Plan has been aligned to Local Nature Recovery Strategies and a report designed has been secured. The report is close to completion but case studies are still being added with work ongoing to finalise maps, the introduction and executive summary. The plan will go out for consultation in the first week of May.
 - **3.1.2 Climate Adaptation:** the Head of Landscape has not had sufficient capacity to progress this work, due to needing to focus on Local Nature Recovery Strategies across the four counties of the Chilterns National Landscape, developing a Nature Recovery Plan and the considerable amount of time needed to lead and manage the Landscapes team. It was therefore decided to postpone this work and reconsider it as part of the planning for FY25-26.
 - **3.4.1 Woodland Strategy Development:** positive discussions with Forestry Commission colleagues continue, with a Woodland Strategy forming a key part of the emerging Nature Recovery Plan.
 - **3.8.1 Planning Policy:** lack of capacity within the Planning Team (including an inability to recruiting an additional planning officer has meant that pro-active engagement with Local Authorities has not been prioritised this quarter. National policy consultation has either been de-prioritised or responses made through the National Landscape Association.
- **Improve Understanding & Enjoyment** (Workstream 4) reported twelve (12) delivery lines on track or completed with four (4) slightly delayed.
- **Effectively Communicate** (Workstream 5) reported three (3) delivery lines on track, two (2) slightly delayed and two (2) postponed:

- **5.3.1 Brand & Profile:** lack of capacity within the Communications Team meant that a decision was made to postpone any work on Brand and Profile until FY25-26
- **5.4.1 Internal Communications:** whilst work is ongoing on improving internal communications through areas such as transformation and having SLT-Team Leads meetings as well as through engagement on the Delivery Plan and Resourcing Plan a decision was made to postpone work on establishing an internal communications channel until FY25-26 whilst clarity was sort on the overall Information Transformation direction of travel as this would impact the way any internal communications channel was set up.

Recommendation

1. To NOTE and offer feedback on progress made in Quarter 3 against the Delivery Plan

Appendix 1**Status of Individual Delivery Lines**

Key

Delivered (Everything planned in this delivery line has been delivered with no continuation of the delivery line)
On Track (Everything is being delivered to plan but the delivery line is expected to continue into next year)
In Progress (Not started when planned to or slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness)
In Progress (Not started when planned to or significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness)
Not scheduled to have started
Postponed to reconsider in FY25-26 planning

Delivery Area / Delivery Line	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	Q4 (Jan-Mar)
Workstream 1: Improve Strategic Alignment				
1.1 Strategic Development				
1.1.1 Management Plan Review				
1.1.2 Long Term Vision			Postponed	Postponed
1.1.3 Boundary Review				
1.1.4 Protected Landscape Reform				
1.2 Organisational Governance				
1.2.1 Governance Review				
1.3 Strategic Engagement / Influence				
1.3.1 Local, Regional & National Government & Agencies				
1.3.2 Protected Landscapes Network				
1.3.3 Chilterns National Landscape Forum and Strategic Partners				
1.4 Monitoring & Evaluation				
1.4.1 Management Plan Evaluation	Subsumed under 1.1.1 Management Plan Review			
1.4.2 CNL Team Evaluation Framework			Postponed	Postponed
1.4.3 Defra Protected Landscape Target Outcomes Framework				
1.4.4 CNL State of the Environment Indicators			Postponed	Postponed
1.5 Financial Stability				
1.5.1 Funding Strategy				
1.5.2 Fundraising Activity				
Workstream 2: Increase Operational Effectiveness				
2.1 People				
2.1.1 HR Strategy				
2.1.2 Employee Handbook			Postponed	Postponed
2.1.3 Staff Engagement				
2.1.4 Working Environment				
2.1.5 IT Equipment				
2.1.6 Organisation Design and Development				
2.2 Process & Procedures				
2.2.1 HR		Postponed	Postponed	Postponed
2.2.2 Finance			Postponed	Postponed
2.2.3 Governance				Postponed
2.2.4 Operations (inc Health & Safety)				
2.3 Systems				
2.3.1 HR System				Postponed
2.3.2 Finance System				
2.3.3 Governance System				
2.3.4 Health & Safety System				
2.4 Policies and Internal Governance				
2.4.1 HR Policies				
2.4.2 Finance Policies				
2.4.3 Governance Policies			Postponed	Postponed
2.4.4 Operations Policies (inc Health & Safety)				
2.4.5 Annual Planning				
2.4.6 Financial Management				
2.4.7 Internal Monitoring and Reporting				

2.5 Information Management				
2.5.1 Contact Management				
2.5.2 Image Library				Postponed
2.5.3 Internal Information Management				
2.6 Programme & Project Management				
2.6.1 Managing Successful Programmes			Postponed	Postponed
2.6.2 Programme Finances				
2.6.3 Programme Governance				
Workstream 3: Conserve and Enhance Natural Beauty				
3.1 Core Strategy Development				
3.1.1 Nature Recovery Plan				
3.1.2 Climate Adaptation Plan			Postponed	Postponed
3.2 Farming & Landowners				
3.2.1 Strategy Development				
3.2.2 Farming Clusters				
3.2.3 HS2 Landscape and Biodiversity Connectivity				
3.2.4 FiPL				
3.2.5 CCC				
3.2.6 MTG				
3.3 Water				
3.3.1 Strategy Development				
3.3.2 SWC: Involving People				
3.3.3 SWC: Working Together				
3.3.4 SWC: Managing the Flow				
3.3.5 SWC: Water Quality				
3.3.6 SWC: Invasive Non-Native Species				
3.3.7 SWC: Wildlife Corridors				
3.3.8 CCSP				
3.3.9 CCC				
3.3.10 MTG				
3.3.11 NBY				
3.4 Woodland				
3.4.1 Strategy Development				Postponed
3.4.2 Deer Management				
3.4.3 Treescapes				
3.5 Landscape Character				
3.5.1 Strategy Development				
3.5.2 UK Power Network				
3.5.3 HS2 Review Panel				
3.5.4 MTG				
3.6 Heritage				
3.6.1 Strategy Development				
3.6.2 Chilterns Heritage & Archaeology Partnership (CHAP)				
3.6.3 Heritage Advice				
3.6.4 CCC				
3.6.5 SWC				
3.7 Citizen Science				
3.7.1 Strategy Development				
3.7.2 Tracking the Impact				
3.7.3 CCSP				
3.7.4 SWC				
3.8 Planning				
3.8.1 Planning Policy				
3.8.2 Development Management				
3.8.3 Planning Support				
3.8.4 HS2 Review Planning				
3.8.5 CCC				
4. Improve Understanding & Enjoyment / Social & Economic Wellbeing				
4.1 Strategy Development				
4.1.1 Strategy Development				
4.2 Access & EDI				
4.2.1 Defra Access Fund				

4.2.2 Walking Festival				
4.2.3 Information Provision & Promotion				
4.2.4 Partnership Projects				
4.2.5 CCC				
4.2.6 MTG				
4.2.7 SWC / CCSP				
4.3 Engagement				
4.3.1 Partnership Engagement				
4.3.2 Nature Calling				
4.3.3 Local Business & Partnerships Promotion				
4.3.4 CCC				
4.4 Health & Wellbeing				
4.4.1 Health & Wellbeing				
4.5 Volunteering				
4.5.1 New Shoots				
4.5.2 CCC				
4.5.3 Volunteering Network				
5. Effectively Communicate				
5.1 Communications Strategy & Ways of Working				
5.1.1 Strategy Development				
5.1.2 Ways of Working				
5.2 Communications Delivery				
5.2.1 Strategic Communication				
5.2.2 Ongoing Communications Delivery				
5.2.3 Project Communications				
5.3 Brand & Profile				
5.3.1 Brand & Profile				Postponed
5.4 Internal Communications				
5.4.1 Internal Communications				Postponed

Acronyms

Common acronyms used in the table are given below:

CCC = Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership
 CCSP = Chilterns Chalk Stream Project
 CHAP = Chilterns Heritage & Archaeology Partnership
 CNL = Chilterns National Landscape
 CNLF = Chilterns National Landscape Forum
 Defra = Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
 FiPL = Farming in Protected Landscapes
 H&S = Health & Safety
 HS2 = High Speed 2
 LR&N = Local, Regional & National
 MTG = Mend the Gap
 NBY = Not Bourne Yesterday
 NRP = Nature Recovery Plan
 PLTOF = Protected Landscape Targets & Outcomes Framework
 SWC = Smarter Water Catchment

Item 3.3 Funding Strategy Update**Author:** Elaine King, CEO**Purpose of Report:** To update the Executive Committee on progress with delivering the Funding Strategy.**Background**

This paper provides an update on the CCB's Funding Strategy and sets out key observations on the current pipeline of externally funded projects.

Future Funding

A key issue facing all Protected Landscapes remains uncertainty over future government funding. We now have full sight of our Defra grant settlement for this 2025/26 financial year. This comprises: Core Revenue funding (£513,896k) representing the same flat cash settlement as the previous three years; Core Capital funding (347,722k), which is a new, additional fund for all Protected Landscapes; and Access for All Capital funding (£429,229). Defra also confirmed grant funding for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme of £802,824 for this financial year.

The overall grant fund has therefore increased this year, largely due to the additional core capital fund. However, revenue funding has declined in real terms - as a result of inflation, increases to employer National Insurance contributions, new requirements being placed on Protected Landscapes by the government and last year's additional revenue uplift (£114k) not continuing. The challenge is now to use the capital grant most effectively and in line with the Defra criteria, while ensuring that we have the staff capacity to oversee delivery.

Confirmation on a further three-year core settlement, from 2026/27, is expected around June 2025, following the Spending Review in late spring.

The two areas where the capital funding must be focussed are: contributing to the government's 30x30 nature recovery targets, and measures that have income generating or cost saving potential. Considerable time has been spent by CCB officers, along with those across the National Landscape network and the National Landscapes Association (NLA), to agree a formula that best and most fairly allocates the funds across all National Landscapes.

Officers have also worked with others in the network to understand and provide feedback on the detail of the spending criteria to maximise the opportunities for us to utilise the funds in the best possible way. The final criteria were circulated two weeks ago and the SLT is now discussing how to interpret the criteria in terms of the work we have planned for this year. Once these discussions are complete, we will be better able to finalise this year's budget.

We have also continued to flag to the NLA and Defra that the two Conservation Boards (Chilterns and Cotswolds) have significantly higher operating costs, and further consideration needs to be given to how funds are allocated to us.

The reasons were set out in the Funding update to the Board in March. In summary, they comprise the fact that Conservation Boards must pay VAT, in contrast with all National Parks and all other National Landscapes, and we also need to cover many of our costs in areas including HR advice, legal advice, IT, governance, finance and Health and Safety, plus

overheads such as rent, rates, utilities and insurance. Both the NLA and Defra have recognised these challenges, and we expect to progress discussions over the coming months.

As part of discussions on the government's intention to improve governance of Protected Landscapes, with enhanced powers and purposes, we will be advocating for a fair funding settlement for all National Landscapes and one which accounts for some of the specific challenges faced by Conservation Boards.

Diversifying income

We continue to work to secure funds that enable us to recharge to cover core overheads. This includes recharging from projects – where funder rules allow – and from other sources of restricted income.

In this regard, a further challenge for us as a Conservation Board is that we do not meet the National Lottery Heritage Fund's criteria for full cost recovery, despite having raised this with NLHF and it subsequently conducting an internal review of its criteria. This puts us at a disadvantage when seeking to leverage funding from external sources. Funding applications can also take considerable time to develop, especially those developed in collaboration with partners, and we need to carefully balance the imperative to secure additional funding with the pressure this can put on the staff team, along with the implications of taking staff away from their other work.

Considerable time therefore continues to be spent exploring with funders and our partners the best options for securing funding. Most of these are outlined below, with a small number still involving discussion or are commercially sensitive at this stage.

Funding pipeline

The Funding Pipeline is populated and regularly updated and reviewed by the SLT. The bullet points below highlight some key observations that we believe will be of interest to the Executive Committee, focussing especially on risk.

Heritage and nature recovery

- **Affinity Water (Secured):** Affinity Water is funding a Farming and Landowner Adviser – a new full-time role for 12 months - to support the CCB's Nature Recovery Manager, Nick Marriner, in continuing to develop and deliver work with the emerging North Chilterns Farmer Cluster. Melinda Dresser joined the team in this role in October 2024. At Affinity Water's invitation, the team has recently applied to extend the Farming and Landowner Adviser role for 18 months from November 2025 until 31 March 2027.
- **Affinity Water (Secured):** Since securing funding for the Farming and Landowner Adviser role in the North Chilterns above, Affinity Water expressed interest in supporting the Farming and Landowner Adviser role in the Chess and Misbourne area in FY2025/6 and funding to support this role has been secured. Harriet Bennett is carrying out this role, with funding split 50/50 between Affinity Water and Thames Water.
- **Rebel Restoration (Secured):** £104.3k of funding has been secured from the charity Rebel Restoration (which receives its funding from Rebel Energy) to employ a member of staff for 18 months to continue the 'Tracking the Impact' citizen science monitoring programme, initially established through the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project. David Willis joined the team in this role in January 2025. Rebel Restoration is a charity of Rebel Energy, which went bust in early April. We continue to liaise with the charity, which is still

operating, and is keen in principle to support us further if this becomes possible in the future.

- **Not Bourne Yesterday (Secured):** £351,083 was secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund in June 2024 for the 18-month Development Phase of this [project](#). The project team has been recruited and expect to apply for funding for a full Delivery Phase in May 2026. Fran Crowther was appointed Development Manager in November and Martha Glennon joined us as Engagement Coordinator in March 2025.
- **HS2 Additional Projects (Submitted):** An application was submitted recently to the HS2 Review Group for the 'Mending the Misbourne' project and we are awaiting the outcome. The aim is to develop and deliver a strategic river catchment plan for the River Misbourne using a similar delivery template to River Chess Smarter Water Catchments initiative.
- **HS2 Chilterns Review Group** – the group was set up under Select Committee assurance in 2019 to develop detailed design principles and oversee allocation of the £3m Additional Project budget. We are still pursuing back payments for March 2020 to December 2024 of £15k and negotiating a funding formula for the next two years which might secure a further £15k.
- **FDRI initiative - chalk streams in a changing climate (Secured)** The [Floods and Droughts Research Infrastructure](#) team (UKCEH, BGS, Imperial, University of Bristol) are continuing their preparatory work on the River Chess, which will be the location of one of their three national observatories. Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape, has submitted a successful application to work 0.2 FTE with UKCEH as Chess Champion to champion the River Chess, helping to support infrastructure development and installation and encourage scientists to use data from the Chess in their research.
- **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** - in February the government announced that the grant funding element of the [FiPL](#) programme is being extended for a fifth year. This follows National Landscapes and others advocating for Defra to further extend the programme. In 2025/26 the CCB was allocated £802,824k funding for administration, advice and guidance, and project delivery.
- **Landscape Connections:** Launched in July 2024, [Landscape Connections](#) is the NLHF's 10 year, £150m grants programme, focussing on nature recovery, heritage and people in protected landscapes. As a result of conversations with NLHF and a number of partners, we are continuing to explore a role as a key partner on a 'preliminary project planning' bid, led by North Wessex Downs National Landscape, to develop a plan for a Ridgeway Nature Corridor through both National Landscapes. The 'Project Enquiry Form' is under development for submission to NLHF and will be used by NLHF to evaluate the project feasibility and to determine whether we can move forward with a pre-development project application.

Chess Smarter Water Catchments (Secured): We have been successful in securing one-year interim funding of £334k from Thames Water to support the Chess Smarter Water Catchments programme (to include both staff and project costs). We hold £185k of the funding as under-spend from FY2024/25 and Purchase Orders are being raised for two further payments by 31 March and in April 2025 (totalling £149k). A further £50k of funding for CCSP has been ring-fenced by Thames Water for applications to fund projects in 2025/6. As of March 2025, we have also secured an additional £232k for project delivery.

Diversity Equity and Inclusion

- **Defra Access for All funding:** this programme is aimed at improving access to protected landscapes for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. In 2024/25 we received £261,480 with all of it allocated. Defra has confirmed a further £429,229 funding for 2025/26. More information and detail of previous projects funded are on our [website](#).
- **Nature Calling:** This [project](#) brings together the 34 National Landscapes in England, local arts organisations, and community groups to find creative ways to connect and deepen people's engagement with the countryside on their doorstep. The Chilterns National Landscape is one of six hubs nationally, focussing on underserved communities in Luton. Arts Council England is providing £532k over two years and Defra has committed £300k match funding.
- We continue to seek further funding to maximise the potential of the project and will be looking for opportunities linked to health and wellbeing. Raheed Salam, the North Chilterns Engagement & Partnerships Officer, is supporting Nature Calling and contacting potential funders and partners.
- We have supported Luton Council with a multi-partner £1 million bid to the **National Lottery Heritage Fund's Nature Towns and Cities fund**. The full application was submitted on 14 April for a decision by mid-July. The bid is focused on nature recovery and providing better physical and emotional connections and more equal access to public green spaces. A **Collaborative Targeted Outreach Proposal** (CTOP), developed by the University of Bedfordshire following research funded by the CCB's Chalkscapes project, has been incorporated in the bid. In addition, £5k of CCB advisory time is included in the bid, for project advice and support on access and heritage.

Recommendation:

1. **To NOTE and offer feedback on updates on delivering the Funding Strategy.**

Item 3.4**CEO Update****Author:**

Elaine King, CEO

Purpose of Report:

To update the Executive Committee on key areas of work during the last period.

Background

This report comprises highlights from another very busy period since the Board meeting in March 2025.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

The SLT continues to take oversight of the organisation's activities, meeting weekly to plan, monitor, and deliver across a range of areas. A key focus of attention has been to budgets and business planning, in particular securing confirmation of our Defra grant settlement for this financial year. We now have the details, apart from complete clarity on the criteria for Capital (CDEL) funding, though we expect this to be clearer in the next couple of weeks. More detail is set out in the Funding Strategy update.

Other key work being led and managed by the SLT include finalising a refreshed Chilterns AONB Management Plan, preparing for a public consultation on our Nature Recovery Plan (launching on 6th May), liaising with Natural England regarding its Boundary Review, supporting Defra in preparing to recruit new Secretary of State appointed Board members (recruitment is live [here](#)), ensuring succession planning amongst Board members, exploring new funding opportunities, finalising our new HR policies, completing appraisal meetings and associated reports, running a whole-team prioritisation exercise to better identify priorities, time allocations and manage workloads, managing risk, and collaborating with the National Landscapes Association (NLA) and other National Landscapes.

We are also maintaining momentum in implementing actions arising from October's staff engagement survey, some of which were already being addressed through the organisational transformation project, such as improving IT systems and information management, improving the office environment and exploring and introducing an HR system.

Refreshing the Chilterns AONB Management Plan

Following the Board approval in March of a slightly amended timetable for preparing the Management Plan, the team is final making final adjustments to the refreshed plan and will be bringing the revised Plan to the next Board meeting on 19th June.

Work during this period has included finalising screening reports for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the Plan, along with developing an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) to demonstrate compliance with the public sector equality duty (s.149 of the Equality Act 2010).

A further email has also been sent to all local authorities to encourage non-responders to the public consultation to send their feedback. The TFG also met in April and will be meeting again (5th June) before the Board meeting to review and sign off the final plan.

Natural England's Boundary Review

The team - largely Neil Jackson and Matt Thomson – have liaised with Natural England on its project to explore an extension to the Chilterns AONB boundary. We are expecting an announcement from Natural England later this month.

Nature Recovery Plan

The Nature Recovery Plan is almost complete prior to launch of the public consultation on 6th May. Kate Heppell and Neil Jackson have led development of the Plan, with a communications strategy agreed with Vicki Pearce, our Comms Manager. The current intention is to bring the plan to the Board for review in June with publication in July.

Risk management

The SLT keeps a close eye on, and mitigates where possible, issues that present potential risk to the organisation, as outlined in the Risk Register. These largely focus on finance and personnel. We continue to monitor the status of Thames Water, which makes a significant contribution towards the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) and is the primary funder of the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment pilot (SWC). That said, we have secured all committed funding in advance also secured additional funding – see Funding Strategy update for more detail.

Collaborating with the National Landscape Association and other Protected Landscapes

Work with the [NLA](#) includes continuing to advocate the value of National Landscapes to the government in order to secure the level of funding required for us to deliver our statutory purposes effectively and meet the government's ambitions and targets.

Recently we have been liaising with the NLA and other National Landscapes over the extent and criteria for the capital (CDEL) funding for 2025/26, resulting in a set of criteria that we feel we can work with. However, the challenge remains that revenue funding is reduced, making it difficult to ensure we have enough staff capacity to deliver capital projects.

Discussions on the specific financial challenges for Conservation Boards are ongoing with the CEO at the Cotswolds Conservation Board, the NLA and Defra. See Funding Strategy update for further detail.

Other key areas in which we are engaging with the NLA and the wider family of Protected Landscapes include:

- implementing Defra's Protected Landscapes [Targets and Outcomes Framework \(PLTOF\)](#)
- exploring how best to respond to the government's groundbreaking consultation on a [Land Use Framework for England](#) and
- developing Climate Adaptation Plans.
- implementation by Relevant Authorities of the s85 Duty in the CRoW Act (and similar duties for National Parks and the Broads)

I also joined National Landscape and National Parks Lead Officers in the South East and East in early April to discuss current issues and opportunities, with some useful actions being taken forward on areas including green finance, planning and wider fundraising initiatives.

Staff engagement survey

As reported previously, an annual staff engagement survey was conducted in October 2024. We are now taking forward plans to address areas where staff felt improvements can be made – largely centred on improved collaboration, internal communication, training and development, and addressing workloads, with a clear link between the pressures of workload and the impact this has on the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively.

Current activities include establishing three focus groups. The IT and Information Management focus group is progressing work including exploring development of a new HR System and a new Health & Safety System and making the most effective use of HubSpot and Mail Chimp.

The Office Environment focus group has made huge progress in improving the office, while the focus group to improve internal communications and collaboration will be established shortly.

The first quarterly updates to the team - 'you said, we did' - was circulated in mid-March, along with the first quarterly Pulse Survey being circulated at the end of March. The full annual survey will be repeated in October 2025.

Improving IT systems and information management

In October we launched the **Information Management Transformation Programme** which started with a review of our options for IT systems and information management (Phase 1) and addresses some of the CCB's key operational and compliance risks. The review included exploring continued use of the F Drive as our primary filing system, full movement to Teams and Sharepoint, as well as testing a cloud IT solution, 'Egnyte'. In December, following discussion with key staff in the CCB as well as with our current IT provider, the results were presented to the SLT and a decision in principle made that the CCB will move to adopting Teams and Sharepoint as our primary information management system.

In January we kicked off a planning phase (Phase 2) and contracted Anna Foster (who has led similar work for other organisations) to test the decision in principle through collating and addressing staff and organisational issues and requirements, and to ensure that we establish an effective transition plan for the whole organisation. The planning phase is now complete, having been informed by an excellent report from Anna, in part informed by feedback from all members of the staff team.

Improving the office environment

A number of improvements to the office environment have been made during recent months including:

- Replacing the path around the office, leading to the car park
- Improving external lighting
- Purchasing two stand up desks
- Replacing a fridge and kettle
- Fitting more window blinds in the office
- Establishing more work space in the out-house adjacent to the main office

We are currently working on other areas such as providing staff with locker space.

New HR system

In December, a working group comprising the CEO, Head of Operations, Senior Administration Officer and an external consultant (contracted for six months to help lead our HR work) reviewed a number of HR systems. A preferred provider has been identified, and this will be progressed once other transformation work has been completed.

Recommendation:

- 1. To NOTE and provide feedback on the update.**