



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 Tuesday 9th September 2025 at 10.00am at

The Village Centre, High St, Chinnor OX39 4DH 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 9.45am

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 (07.05.25)
- 1.6 Matters arising
- 1.7 Consideration of motions submitted by members
- 1.8 Public questions

2. Items for Decision

- 2.1 HR Advisory Group

3. Items for Noting / Information

- 3.1 Quarter 1 Finance Report
- 3.2 Quarter 1 Delivery Report
- 3.3 Funding Strategy
- 3.4 Chief Executive Officer's Report

4. Any Urgent Business

- 5. **Next Meeting:** 13th November 2025

Future Meeting Dates 2025

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thursday 23 rd October @10am Location Chinnor Offices	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
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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 (07.05.25)	APPROVE
1.6	Matters arising	
1.7	Consideration of motions submitted by members	
1.8	Public questions	
2	Items for Decision	
2.1	HR Advisory Group	APPROVE
3	Items for Noting / Information	
3.1	Quarter 1 Finance Report	NOTE
3.2	Quarter 1 Delivery Report	NOTE
3.3	Funding Strategy	NOTE
3.4	Chief Executive Officer's Report	NOTE
4	Any Urgent Business	
5	Next Meeting: 13 th November 2025	



Chilterns National Landscape

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**HELD ON Wednesday 7th May 2025 at The Meeting Room, Chilterns Conservation Board,
90 Station Road, Chinnor OX39 4HA commencing at 11.00 AM.**

Present:

Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member – Chair
Sue Rowlands	Board Member – online
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Louise Price	Board Member
Cllr Richard Newcombe	Board Member
Cllr Phillip Spicer	Board Member
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
John Nicholls	Board Member – Chair of the Board
Richard Newcombe	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
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager
Kate Heppell	Head of Landscape
Annette Weiss	Head of Engagement and Partnerships - online

The Chair welcomed all present.

24/25.52 Standing Items

52.1 Apologies for absence

Paul Mains – Secretary of State.

52.2 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

52.3 Chair's Announcements

No announcements from the Chair.

Cllr Richard Newcombe advised that, as he is not standing for re-election at Buckinghamshire Council, he will therefore be replaced after its Annual General Meeting.

Cllr Louise Price has been elected to Hertfordshire County Council and remains appointed to the Board by Three Rivers District Council.

52.4 Notice of Urgent Business

None.

52.5 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 24/02/25

The minutes of the meeting 24/02/25 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair. The Chair of the Board asked if papers can be presented to the next Executive Committee relating to minute 48.2, recommendation to identify any further functions to be performed by the Executive Committee.

52.6 Matters Arising

All items covered on the agenda.

52.7 Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members

None at this meeting.

52.8 Public Questions

No members of the public were present.

24/25.53 Items for Decision**53.1 Reserves Policy**

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, advised that there is currently a brief Reserves Policy set out in the Constitution and that it would be useful to have a more comprehensive policy to be included in the new Financial Regulations, which are being drafted. Based on assessments that have been carried out, it is proposed that an overall Unrestricted Reserves comprises a new consolidated General Reserve of £338k (combining the current General Reserve and Revenue Reserve) and a separate Development Reserve of £258k.

- 1. The Executive Committee APPROVED the proposed new framework for the Reserves Policy and that this be incorporated into the Financial Regulations being updated as part of the review of the Constitution**
- 2. The Executive Committee APPROVED the consolidation of reserves into General Reserve for recommendations to the Board.**

53.2 2025/26 Budget

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, had provided a paper to set out the proposed final 2025-26 Core Budget. This budget envelope shows a £97k deficit for 2025-26 and proposes to use the current 2024-25 year surplus, estimated to be £111k, to fund the deficit. The anticipated position after two years is a surplus of £14k and relieves pressure on reserves to fund the deficit. The guidance from Defra on the use of the allocated £348k Capital (CDEL) funds is being assessed. There is still uncertainty over how those funds will be used. It is hoped that the forthcoming three-year settlement from Defra will make future budget setting easier going forward.

- 1. The Executive Committee APPROVED the final 2025/26 Budget for recommendation to the Board**
- 2. The Executive Committee APPROVED the use of reserves towards the organisational transformation work that are not deemed to be eligible for Defra CDEL funding for recommendation to the Board.**

53.3 Financial Approvals

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, had provided a paper detailing the need to make changes to the Financial Approvals. This is an interim measure whilst the Constitution review and updating of Financial Regulations is being undertaken. The increased limits proposed better reflect inflationary costs and the current economic reality, making the approval of payments more efficient.

- 1. The Executive Committee APPROVED the changes to Financial Approvals effective from 01/04/25 for recommendation to the Board.**
- 2. The Executive Committee NOTED that these changes will be incorporated into the Financial Regulations as part of the updated Constitution**

53.4 Local Authority Engagement Advisory Group

The Chair of the Board, John Nicholls, proposed to establish an informal working group to address working relations with Local Authorities within the Chilterns National Landscape. The group would meet infrequently to discuss items set out in his paper, including how to improve the relationship between the organisation and Local Authorities. Board members Cllr Richard Newcombe, Gemma Harper, Cllr Louise Price, and Cllr Hector Sants have volunteered to take part in the working group, which will also involve the CEO Elaine King and the Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster. Similar work with town and parish councils would be conducted later.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer, Matt Thomson, advised that it would be prudent to co-opt Cllr Newcombe to the Executive Committee when he ceases to be a Board member, which will be addressed before the next meeting.

- 1. The Executive Committee APPROVED the establishing of a group and IDENTIFIED participants**

53.5 Exclusion of the Public and Press

The Head of Strategy & Planning and Deputy Monitoring Officer, Matt Thomson, advised that the procedure for a confidential session is being reviewed to enable a proportionate approach. As there were no members of the public present, it was proposed to leave the video and sound of the Zoom call enabled, which was unanimously agreed. The call is not recorded. It was resolved to exclude the public, of which there were none present.

- 1. The Executive Committee APPROVED the motion to exclude any members of the public and press**

53.6 Natural England's Boundary Review project (confidential paper)

This agenda item was discussed in closed session because, while Natural England had advised the CCB's Chief Executive in April that it would be cancelling its Chilterns Boundary Review project, the announcement was not expected to be made public until after the Executive Committee meeting. The paper sought to inform the Committee, advise it on current and planned actions and seeking observations and advice from the Committee.

The Committee expressed its significant concern at the cancellation of the work, not least due to the lost opportunities and the significant investment of time and resources by the Chilterns National Landscape team and various stakeholders already expended on the project. Members questioned whether the decision was connected to the government's apparent drive for economic growth at all costs.

CCB Executive Committee Meeting

Wednesday 7th May 2025

The CCB's CEO and Chair have written to Natural England's CEO to make clear the CCB's deep disappointment at the decision and to request assurances that the review can be resumed in the future.

Further actions include drafting a statement for publication at the time Natural England announces its decision, outlining the CCB's concerns and highlighting the potential environmental implications of this decision. The CEO will also prepare a paper for the next Executive Committee meeting, with an update and next steps.

1. The Executive Committee NOTED the paper and its contents in closed session

Update: Natural England announced its decision on 9th May. The CCB responded with a [statement](#) published on its website and circulated to key stakeholders and partners, including MPs and local authorities. The CCB is now able to publish the confidential paper, and this is included in an updated set of papers for this Executive Committee meeting, posted [here](#) on the CCB's website.

24/25.54 Items for Noting/Information

54.1. Quarter 4 Finance Report

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, reported on the accounts to 31st March 2025.

Core profit was £111k for the year to 31st March 2025, against a budgeted surplus of £10k. This is mainly due to better than anticipated interest income which will continue next financial year, lower planning consultancy costs, and legal contract review being deferred into financial year 2025-26.

An additional £114k capital funds were received from Defra for 2024-25. These monies have been spent on Core and Project activities, including a drone, water monitoring equipment and IT investments. Project income is £3.277m, costs are £3.572m and there is a deficit on projects of £295k overall.

The year-end review and reconciliation work are being undertaken.

1. The Committee NOTED the financial position as of 31st March 2025

54.2. Quarter 4 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 January and March 2025 against the financial year 2024-25 Delivery Plan. In Q4 (January-March 2025):

- 51 (49 in Q3) delivery lines reported as completed or progressing on track (51) (50%)
- 24 (29 in Q3) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness (23%)
- 13 (15 in Q3) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness (13%)
- 15 (9 in Q3) delivery lines have been postponed for reconsidering in FY25-26 planning (15%)

1. The Committee NOTED the Q4 Delivery report

54.3. Funding Strategy

The Executive Committee was provided with a paper detailing the progress on delivering the Funding Strategy by Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer, which was taken as read. Whilst overall funding from Defra has increased this year, revenue funding has declined in real terms because of inflation, increases to employer National Insurance contributions, and new requirements being placed on

National Landscapes by the government. The three-year settlement from Defra is expected in June/July. The CCB continues to press Defra to recognise the additional funding challenges of conservation boards, and to contribute its views on a fairer funding formula.

The CEO and members if the team are also actively exploring, with some success, securing funds from other sources. She gave thanks to the team for their efforts.

1. The Committee NOTED the Funding Strategy update

54.4. Chief Executive Officer’s Update

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

- The SLT continue to oversee the organisation’s activities, planning, monitoring, and delivering across a wide range of areas.
- The public consultation for the Nature Recovery Plan will commence on 6th May.
- Support has been given to Defra in the recruitment campaign for new Secretary of State Board members, including ensuring succession planning amongst Board members.
- Final adjustments are being made to the Management Plan refresh, the final version of which will be taken to the next Board meeting on 19th June.
- Collaboration with the National Landscapes Association and other Protected Landscapes continues on a range of areas including funding arrangements, implementing Defra’s biodiversity targets, responding to the draft Land Use Framework and implementing s85 of the CRoW Act (as amended by s245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act).
- Following up on the staff engagement survey including establishing two focus groups, one on IT and Information Management, the other on improving the office environment. Work on the latter has included replacing the outside footpath, improving external lighting, purchasing new equipment and improving the office environment for staff, such as standing desks and new kitchen items.

1. The Committee NOTED the CEO’s update

24/25.55 Any Urgent Business

None, all items covered in the agenda.

Cllr John Griffin wished to flag that, whilst on the Risk Assessment already, cyber security is a big topic currently in the media. The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle, confirmed that information management is being addressed, including conversations with the CCB’s IT provider, who are happy with the current system in place.

24/25.56. Next Executive Committee meeting

Tuesday 9th September 2025 at 10am.

Further meeting Dates:

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
		Thursday 19 th June, 10am Location tbc

CCB Executive Committee Meeting

Wednesday 7th May 2025

	Tuesday 9 th September, 10am Chinnor Village Centre	Thursday 25 th September, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 23 rd October, 10am Chinnor Office	Thursday 13 th November, 10am Chinnor Village Centre	Thursday 11 th December, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 12.52.

The Chair.....

Date.....

Item 2.1 HR Advisory Group

Author: Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations

Purpose of Report: To seek approval from the Executive Committee to dissolve the HR Advisory Group and for its responsibilities to be redistributed between the Board, Executive Committee and Officers as appropriate.

Background: With the completion of a new set of HR policies and the difficulty in recruiting people to HRAG, consultation has been ongoing between the Chair of HRAG, Head of Operations, CEO and the rest of HRAG about the most effective way to address the responsibilities of HRAG under its current terms of reference (updated in Dec 2023) going forward. It was concluded that the HRAG should be dissolved and its responsibilities redistributed as set out below.

HRAG – Proposal for the Redistribution of Responsibilities**Overall**

It is proposed that the HR Advisory Group (HRAG) be dissolved and its responsibilities redistributed between the Board, Executive Committee and Officers as appropriate.

In making a recommendation for HRAG being dissolved rather than temporarily suspended or put on hold the following elements were considered important:

- 1) The governance status of a group that is not active (and one which by the nature of its establishment cannot make any decisions).
- 2) The need to go through essentially the same process in getting the group up and running again – e.g. there will need to identify members that are still available when it is called upon.
- 3) The fact that the current terms of reference would not necessarily be appropriate in terms of what was needed going forward.
- 4) The fact that it is possible to establish a Task and Finish Group at an Executive Committee meeting that could have a very specific terms of reference focused on a task that needs to be addressed.
- 5) That it has previously been hard to recruit people to HRAG and for them to commit time to being involved on an ongoing basis.

In agreeing any of the changes proposed here we will also need to ensure that there is alignment to the work that is being undertaken in through the Constitution Review.

Appeals

The current responsibilities of the HRAG identify that, whilst the Chair of the Executive Committee is responsible for selecting the members of the Appeals Panel, it is the Chair of HRAG who is responsible for convening the meetings. There are a number of issues with this arrangement including:

- a) There is a split in responsibilities between the Chair of the Executive Committee and the Chair of HRAG which is both confusing and not particularly efficient.
- b) The Executive Committee is more closely involved in the day-to-day running of the organisation and therefore an appeals process going through the Chair of Executive Committee may give the impression that it is less independent.
- c) The Board is constituted to have the ultimate oversight of the organisation and therefore not going directly to the Board for appeals may give the impression that we do not as an organisation treat appeals with the highest priority.

As such it is therefore proposed that in future:

- 1) All appeals be addressed to the Chair of the Board (with a mechanism of delivering them either through the CEO or directly to the Chair – in the latter case the CEO would be informed by the Chair).
- 2) The Chair of the Board be responsible for appointing an Appeals Panel including a Chair of the Appeals Panel. This will usually comprise three members of the Board, but it would be possible to co-opt others as needed. There would be no identification of specific, named Board Members as this will be dependent on the case in hand (to ensure as much independence as possible) as well as other factors (e.g. availability and expertise).
- 3) Prior to, and in setting up, the Appeals Panel it will be possible to call on the CNL's HR Advisor to assist with any complex or legal issues that need to be taken into account including in the selection of the Panel and clarifying any specific steps that need to be followed.
- 4) Any logistics for setting up the Appeals Panel can be supported by individuals in the staff team and this will be arranged with due note taken of the need for sensitivity and privacy in the process.

Remuneration

Currently, HRAG is not involved in remuneration discussions, even though this is part of the Terms of Reference for the Group. As such it is proposed that responsibility for remuneration be addressed in the following ways:

- 1) The CEO would be responsible for:
 - 1. Developing and annually reviewing the job grading framework and updating the Executive Committee to seek approval for any proposed changes
 - 2. Identifying the proposed inflationary uplift in salaries on an annual basis (that will be presented to ExCo as part of annual budget)
 - 3. Undertaking an annual salary review and making individual remuneration decisions for staff below the level of the CEO
- 2) The Executive Committee will be responsible for:
 - 1. Approving the overall job grading framework for the organisation which sets out the different grades and the salary ranges of these grades
 - 2. Reviewing and agreeing any inflationary uplifts in salaries as well as other staff remuneration recommendations (as an integral part of agreeing the Annual Budget).

- Where changes in staff remuneration are required during the course of the year these will need to be agreed by the Executive Committee only where these increases will result in an increase in expenditure against the core salary costs previously agreed in the Annual Budget.
3. Approving any changes in the remuneration of senior staff reporting directly into the CEO (as an integral part of the Annual Budget).
 4. Reviewing and recommending to the Board any changes to the remuneration of the CEO (over and above any inflationary uplifts).
 5. Approving any changes to the Senior Leadership Team.
- 3) The Board will be responsible for:
1. Approving the Annual Budget (under current constitutional responsibilities) with the Executive Committee recommending the budget to the Board for final approval.
 2. Approving any changes to the remuneration of the CEO (over and above any inflationary uplifts)

Performance Appraisals

Currently the HRAG is not involved in performance appraisals even though this is part of the Terms of Reference of the Group. As such it is proposed that responsibility for performance appraisals be addressed in the following way:

- 1) The CEO will continue to be responsible for reviewing and approving all annual appraisals of staff below the level of the CEO
- 2) The Chair of the Board will continue to be responsible for conducting the CEO's appraisal.
- 3) On an annual basis, the CEO will report any substantive issues in terms of staff performance to the Executive Committee
- 4) On an ongoing basis, the CEO will take specific concerns with performance to the Chair of the Board as required

Annual Staff Engagement Survey

Currently the HRAG is updated on the results of the annual staff engagement survey (this survey took place for the first time in 2024) and provides comments to the CEO. It is proposed that:

- 1) The HR Advisor will continue to send out the Staff Engagement Survey on an annual basis and provide a report highlighting the results and main areas of concern to the CEO.
- 2) The CEO will share the headline results and action plan with the Executive Committee for comment.

HR Policies and Staff Handbook

We have currently been going through an intensive exercise of updating HR Policies from 2016 and are looking to put in place clear governance arrangements that will ensure that these policies are reviewed and approved in line with recommended approval limits (in most

cases this is three years). Reviews will also be conducted when required as a result of legislative change or through continuous learning when they are . As such it is proposed that HR Policies:

- 1) Be reviewed by the appropriate and identified policy owner in line with the review cycle identified in the policy (or when needed in terms of legal changes and continuous improvement).
 - 2) A clear system be put in place to ensure that policies are clearly recorded as having been reviewed and approved.
 - 3) Any substantive changes that need formal approval go to the Executive Committee to be signed off (in some organisations this would remain with the CEO unless there was a need for escalation but, given the size of the organisation, the CEO is responsible for reviewing and updating number of the policies so cannot also approve them).
 - 4) Where there is a need to update a policy because of legislative change or because of continuous improvement, and where this change is substantive, the policy should be updated and go to the Executive Committee for approval at the next available Executive Committee.
 - 5) Where there is a need to update a policy because of continuous improvement, and the change not considered to be substantive, the policy will be updated internally and referenced as a minor change. Note that all updates to policies because of legislative change are likely to be substantive.
 - 6) Where policies need to be reviewed in line with the identified review deadline they will be reviewed and reported to the Executive Committee for approval before the deadline. This includes cases where no substantive change is being made. Generally, this will occur at the Executive Meeting before the review deadline.
- The procedure above will mean that policies will be due for review every three years, unless needing to be updated and approved in the meantime due to legislative change or continuous improvement.

September 2024 è September 2027

December 2024 è December 2027

March 2025 è March 2028

June 2025 è June 2028

September 2025 è September 2028

The organisation will keep a record of the owners of policies including when policies are reviewed and updated, and when the policies are updated and it is the role of the Head of Operations to ensure that owners review policies and have them ready for circulation to the Executive Committee in time for approval.

In taking this approach, the organisation will follow a continuous improvement cycle:



HR Processes and Procedures

Currently, HR process and procedures are being followed within the organisation to the extent that there are standard ways of working and some of these are documented (e.g. everyone knows how and when to submit travel and expenses or fill out PDR forms). However, overall procedures are not well documented and remedying this forms part of the next stage of the HR Transformation programme.

Going forward:

- 1) Responsibility for ensuring that all HR processes are mapped will lie with the Head of Operations (or in future if the organisation gets more dedicated HR support with that role).
- 2) Every HR process will have a dedicated owner and that owner will need to review the HR processes annually to identify if there is an update needed and to make that update. Note that processes will be updated prior to the review anniversary due to changes in legislation or continuous improvement.
- 3) A record will be kept confirming when HR processes are reviewed / changed to ensure that they are properly reviewed and kept up to date.
- 4) It is not expected that processes and procedures will come to the Executive Committee for review or sign off – this will remain within the organisation at the operational level.

Appendix – Current HRAG Terms of Reference

The HRAG shall

- a) *Comprise a minimum of four (4) members including the Board Chairman, Deputy Chairman and one member of the Executive Committee and at least one co-opted member all chosen by the chairman of the Executive Committee in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer.*
- b) *Invite the HR Advisor and the Chief Executive Officer to attend as appropriate.*

- c) Review all HR arrangements as necessary including, but not limited to, the HR policies, procedures, staff handbook and confidential staff survey.*
- d) Provide the Board Chairman with advice on performance appraisals and remunerations*
- e) Convene an appeals panel comprising members selected by the Chair of the Executive Committee as required to hear and determine any disciplinary and other appeals arising under the relevant conditions of service for all the Board's employees as provided in Section 68 b) of the Code of Governance and advise on appeals from Senior Managers and / or the Chief Executive Officer.*

Amended by the Board on 12 Dec 2023

Recommendation:

- 1. That the Executive Committee APPROVES dissolving the HR Advisory Group redistributing its responsibilities as identified in this paper.**
- 2. That the Executive Committee RECOMMENDS to the Board the deletion of the HRAG terms of Reference from the Constitution.**

Item 3.1**Finance Report**

Author: Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose: To provide the Executive Committee with a Finance Report for 01 April 2025 – 31 July 2025

1. Management Accounts to 31 July 2025**1.1 Core Financial Results for 01 April 2025 – 31 July 2025**

Appendix 1 shows the full detailed Core performance versus budget for the four months to 31 July 2025 along with our budget year to date and for the full year. See comments on the table regarding the main budget variances.

The CCB shows a Core deficit of **£29k** for the four months to 31 July 2025 versus a **budgeted deficit of £48k** for the same period (our full year budget deficit being **£118k**).

Income exceeded budget for this first part of the year mainly due to higher than budgeted bank interest and CDEL funds released against our lease costs (see below).

Costs are being carefully managed to budget. Overall, there is a small overspend versus budget for the period (£2k). This can be attributed to an “overspend” on consultancy costs which is due to costs linked to the transformation programme (£15k: HR Policy work and IT). These costs were budgeted to be covered by CDEL or reserves. This overspend is partially offset by savings on staff costs due to delays in recruiting our Planning Advisor and Administration Officer. These savings will not continue into Quarter 2 as recruitment should have concluded by then.

Note that, at this stage, the transformation programme costs are included within our core spend even though the Board has agreed that these can be funded from reserves if required. It was hoped that CDEL would fund most of our transformation costs but as discussions on CDEL have developed, it is likely we will only be able to fund limited expenditure from CDEL. We will continue to account for the costs within our normal activities and only look to utilise reserves at year end if we are unable to keep within the overall core budget of £118k deficit.

We will be completing a reforecast exercise following finalisation of our Quarter 2 managements accounts to 30th September. This will assist in forming a basis for our budget for 26/27 and beyond and incorporate updated assumptions regards our CDEL funding. As noted in the funding strategy report (item 3.3) we are still awaiting confirmation from Defra on future Core funding but recognise that we need to start considering our financial plans for 26/27 as soon as possible, as future years present a real challenge for our core costs.

1.2 Defra Capital Funds (CDEL)

The CCB has have been allocated **£348k** of Capital Funds by Defra for the financial year 25/26. We have drawn down 50% of these funds already and submitted an expenditure plan which includes £397.5k of spend across one of two of the Defra spending categories of ‘Progress towards 30x30 and Innovation, Invest to save or

Income generating'. However, use of these funds is restricted to capital expenditure and the criteria are strict. We are developing several nature recovery programmes to utilise these funds and have now confirmed allocation of funds to two projects with a total value of £71k which are now underway.

Understanding CDEL use has taken up a lot of Officer time, but we are now making some progress on the interpretation of its use. Defra has confirmed that long term leases, such as our office tenancy, can be treated as capital, and we have released CDEL funds in our accounts equivalent to our rent paid to date in this financial year. For the year a total of £21,000 of rental costs will be covered by CDEL funds. Currently, £92k of the overall CDEL funds of £348k are committed, with a balance of £255k of CDEL to allocate.

1.3 Projects

Appendix 2 shows the overall CCB position as at 31 July 2025. Project income is **£900k**, costs are **£465k** and there is a surplus on projects of **£435k** overall. This surplus arises due to timings ie £269k of Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) and £380k of Thames Water funding have been received in advance this year and will be spent by 31 March 2026.

2. Treasury Management

As at 31 July we held cash balances of **£5.13M** with £4.57M of these funds held in higher interest earning accounts. We are using a mix of 95 Day (Nationwide) and Money market (1-3 months) (HSBC) accounts to achieve better interest on our surplus funds and earned additional interest of £8.3k for the first four months of the year. Inevitably, as the funds we have received in advance (Thames Water, Mend the Gap, Defra FIPL and Core/CDEL) are spent, the opportunities to earn interest will diminish.

Note that we are currently undergoing a due diligence review by Nationwide which has prompted the recent requests for personal information from board members. In future, we will issue these information requests to all new board members as part of onboarding process.

3. Year end – Internal Audit report

Following approval of our AGAR at the June board meeting, we have undergone an internal audit. As in previous years, this was completed by the Shared internal Audit services at Hertfordshire County Council (see the Service Level Agreement outlining their work in **Appendix 3** and their findings report in **Appendix 4**).

The Auditors' opinion is **substantial assurance** that there are effective controls in operation for those elements of the risk management processes covered by their review.

Our AGAR, internal audit report and supporting schedules have been submitted to our external auditors and we await a final opinion. The deadline on this is 30 September 2025. Our final signed AGAR will then be uploaded onto our website.

4. VAT review

The CCB is not registered for VAT and, unlike other non-Conservation Board National Landscapes, who are hosted by local authority, we are not eligible to claim VAT refunds

on our non-business activities (VAT Preferential status under Section 33 of the VAT Act 1994). This means that most of our non-staff costs are effectively 20% higher than other National Landscapes and National Parks.

Whilst most of the CCB's income is deemed to be outside the scope for VAT purposes (ie largely comprises funding and grants, where payment is not given in return for a supply of goods or services), we are concerned that, as we develop other income sources, they may fall into the remit of VAT. The particular concern is that if we exceed the £90k registration for VAT we would need to start accounting for VAT on all income deemed to be business in nature (eg Drone services, Archaeology Field school and other activities). This would mean increasing the costs of these services by 20%, which may impact on income levels.

We have consulted with two firms of accountants and are in the process of appointing Azets, who have local authority VAT expertise, and will be completing a VAT Health check. This will involve a review of our historic and future income sources to ensure correct VAT accounting. The work will cost approximately £2.5k which was only partly budgeted for, but is an essential piece of work to protect the organisation in this area. We will feedback to the Committee once the work has been completed.

Alongside this income review, we will look again at our status and eligibility for recovery of VAT on non-business activities. To be eligible, a body must undertake a function ordinarily carried on by local government and have the power to draw funding directly from local taxation.

Recommendations

- 1. To NOTE the CCB financial reports as at 31 July 2025**
- 2. To NOTE the internal audit report for year end 31 March 2025 and the update on our year end AGAR and filing/external audit**
- 3. To NOTE the proposed VAT review taking place**

APPENDIX 1

Budget Variance

Chilterns Conservation Board
For the 4 months ended 31 July 2025

Core is Communications, Corporate Services, Engagement & Partnerships, Landscapes, Strategy & Planning.

Account	4 MONTHS JULY 25 ACTUAL	4 MONTHS JULY 25 BUDGET	Variance	Variance %	FULL YEAR BUDGET	Comments
Trading Income						
Access Grant	0	0	0	0%	10,000	Planned funds to be allocated against Core costs
Defra Capital Grant	9,250	0	9,250	0%	120,002	CDEL monies against Rent paid to date as agreed - 5 year lease treated as capital
Defra Core Grant	171,299	171,300	(1)	0%	513,900	
Interest Income	16,638	8,332	8,306	100%	24,996	Prudent budget, using money market accounts to invest funds
Internal Fee Income	47,609	46,715	894	2%	148,082	Core Fee income on track, budget variance is ad hoc cross charges
Local Authority Contribution	43,222	43,220	2	0%	129,660	
Project Income	13,784	11,500	2,284	20%	34,500	Represents FDR1 and HS2 Income
Sale of merchandise	149	0	149	0%	-	
Total Trading Income	301,950	281,067	20,883	7%	981,140	
Gross Profit	301,950	281,067	20,883	7%	981,140	
Operating Expenses						
Advertising & Marketing	720	360	(360)	-100%	19,070	Graphics for Light positioning statement
Bank Fees	30	52	22	42%	156	
Board Meetings	611	600	(11)	-2%	1,850	
Cleaning	1,062	952	(110)	-12%	2,856	
Computer and IT Equipment	(65)	0	65	-	-	
Consulting	32,973	18,300	(14,673)	-80%	59,900	This includes Transformation consultancy work to date totalling £15k which was not included within the budget. In the budget we assumed this would be funded by CDEL or Reserves
Defra Capital Spend	0	0	0		80,000	This is the Transformation works we assumed could be funded by CDEL
Employers National Insurance	24,072	24,795	723	3%	76,064	Recruitment delays
Event costs	18	0	(18)		2,950	
Finance costs	(15)	0	15		7,082	
General Expenses	251	325	74	23%	1,600	
Insurance	7,565	7,568	3	0%	23,000	
IT Software and Consumables	3,465	3,367	(98)	-3%	11,736	
IT support and maintenance	3,157	2,904	(253)	-9%	8,712	
Legal Expenses					7,000	
Light, Power, Heating	593	1,100	507	46%	4,000	
Medical Insurance	1,023	1,120	97	9%	3,356	
Members Allowances	3,523	2,560	(963)	-38%	9,816	Historic allowances claimed and weren't budgeted for
Pensions Costs	38,360	39,634	1,274	3%	120,625	Recruitment delays
Postage, Freight & Courier	(3)	84	87	104%	750	
Printing & Stationery	356	452	96	21%	3,582	
Rates and Water rates	2,967	2,972	5	0%	7,490	
Recruitment	299	250	(49)	-20%	500	
Rent	9,575	9,575	0	0%	21,975	
Repairs & Maintenance	3,741	4,430	689	16%	6,776	Likely timings on gardening works
Salaries	184,746	194,732	9,986	5%	592,035	Delays in recruitment of planner and admin officer
Staff expenses	8	100	92	92%	450	
Staff Training	6,269	6,270	1	0%	12,000	
Subscriptions	3,216	3,278	63	2%	4,724	
Telephone & Internet	1,234	1,268	34	3%	3,802	
Travel Expenses	920	1,618	698	43%	4,300	Likely timings and will spend full year's budget
Website running costs	618	496	(122)	-25%	1,488	
Total Operating Expenses	331,289	329,162	(2,127)	-1%	1,099,645	
Net Profit	(29,338)	(48,095)	18,757	39%	(118,505)	

APPENDIX 2**Profit and Loss**

Chilterns Conservation Board

For the 4 months ended 31 July 2025

Account	CORE	PROJECTS	TOTAL
Turnover			
Access Grant	0	4,950	4,950
Defra Capital Grant	9,250	0	9,250
Defra Core Grant	171,299	269,314	440,613
Interest Income	16,638	18,507	35,144
Internal Fee Income	47,609	18,665	66,274
Local Authority Contribution	43,222	43,971	87,193
Other Revenue	0	13,000	13,000
Project Income	13,784	531,350	545,133
Sale of merchandise	149	0	149
Total Turnover	301,950	899,756	1,201,706
Gross Profit	301,950	899,756	1,201,706
Administrative Costs			
Access grant expenditure	0	4,950	4,950
Advertising & Marketing	720	0	720
Bank Fees	30	0	30
Board Meetings	611	0	611
CCB Core Contribution	0	11,248	11,248
CCB recharges	0	56,185	56,185
Citizen Science	0	7,000	7,000
Cleaning	1,062	0	1,062
Computer and IT Equipment	(65)	48	(18)
Consulting	32,973	18,199	51,172
Education Costs	0	53	53
Employers National Insurance	24,072	20,117	44,189
Enhancements	0	82,227	82,227
Event costs	18	4,670	4,688
Finance costs	(15)	0	(15)
FiPL Grant	0	1,321	1,321
FiPL Grant Year 4 24/25	0	12,510	12,510
General Expenses	251	13,600	13,851
Insurance	7,565	0	7,565
Irrecoverable VAT	0	713	713
IT Software and Consumables	3,465	1,247	4,712
IT support and maintenance	3,157	617	3,773
Light, Power, Heating	593	0	593
Medical Insurance	1,023	915	1,938
Members Allowances	3,523	0	3,523
Mitigation	0	7,422	7,422
Nature Recovery	0	2,235	2,235
Other costs (activity) NLHF	0	30	30
Other costs NLHF	0	320	320
Pensions Costs	38,360	33,514	71,875
Postage, Freight & Courier	(3)	38	35
Printing & Stationery	356	101	457
Professional fees (activity)	0	14,430	14,430
Publicity and promotion	0	350	350
Rates and Water rates	2,967	0	2,967
Recruitment	299	449	748
Rent	9,575	1,000	10,575
Repairs & Maintenance	3,741	0	3,741
Research and survey expenditure	0	2,233	2,233
Salaries	184,746	158,638	343,384
Staff expenses	8	379	387
Staff Training	6,269	2,686	8,955
Subscriptions	3,216	35	3,251
Telephone & Internet	1,234	761	1,996
Training for volunteers	0	1,785	1,785
Travel Expenses	920	2,832	3,751
Website running costs	618	76	694
Total Administrative Costs	331,289	464,932	796,221
Operating Profit	(29,338)	434,824	405,486
Profit on Ordinary Activities Before Taxation	(29,338)	434,824	405,486
Profit after Taxation	(29,338)	434,824	405,486



SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR PROVISION OF INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE BETWEEN THE SHARED INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE (SIAS) AND CHILTERN'S CONSERVATION BOARD

1. The Service and Service Delivery

- 1.1. In consideration of the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) paying the fees (set out in part 2) SIAS shall provide the CCB with the following:
 - An assurance that the processes and controls for managing income, expenditure and significant risks are adequate.
 - An appraisal of the adequacy, reliability and effectiveness of those controls in offsetting any risks which may prevent the achievement of objectives.
 - A report that outlines the control opinion, findings and any recommendations for action as necessary.
- 1.2. The services provided will cover records for the 2024/25 financial year.
- 1.3. SIAS shall be contactable between the hours of 09:00 to 17:00 Monday to Friday excluding any public holidays or such other periods and times as the parties shall agree in writing.
- 1.4. The Services will be provided by the Hertfordshire County Council's Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS).

2. Fees

- 2.1 The fee and payment terms in relation to the services for the review of the 2024/25 financial year are set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.2 The Chilterns Conservation Board shall be invoiced upon issue of the final report and the Board shall pay such amounts within thirty (30) days of the date of such invoice.

3. Personnel

Services will be provided by the Shared Internal Audit Service.

4. Completion Date of Estimated Timeline

A new agreement will be required for the continuation of the service beyond the current year. In the event of either party wishing to dissolve the agreement a period of 30 days' notice should be given before the start of the financial year.

5. Accommodation/co-location of staff

The arrangements for providing the requirements of audit will be agreed at the time of audit.

6. Board Responsibilities

The Board shall comply with the obligations set out in Appendix 1 of this Specification.

7. Complaints

Where either Party has any complaints or issues which it wishes to discuss in relation to the Service, these should be, wherever possible, resolved through the normal day to day contacts or through the head of the relevant team providing the Service (contact names and numbers are provided below).

Board contact:

Dr Elaine King (Chief Executive Officer) Tel: 01844 355500

SIAS contact:

Alan Cooper (Client Audit Manager) Tel: 01438 845509

8. Dispute Resolution

Where a dispute arises in relation to any aspect of the Service which cannot be resolved through the process set out in paragraph 7 above, either Party may issue a notice of service review to the parties named below.

Board contact:

Dr Elaine King (Chief Executive Officer) Tel: 01844 355500

SIAS contact:

Darren Williams (Head of SIAS) Tel: 01438 844341

The Council will institute a period of formal review of the Service by both Parties of specified elements of the Service. The Parties shall agree the duration of the formal review period and any arrangements to withhold payments for the Service pending the outcome of the review. Where the Parties are still unable to agree on any matter, the Parties may refer the matter to the parties named in clause 8 of the Agreement and the provisions of that clause will apply to such dispute.

9. Representatives

The Parties' representatives for the purposes of this Agreement are as set out below:

Board Representative: Dr Elaine King (CEO)

SIAS Representative: Darren Williams (Head of SIAS)

10. Appendices to this Specification

Appendix 1 – Service Delivery

Appendix 2 – Fees

SERVICE DELIVERY**Appendix 1**

SIAS will:

1. Carry out internal control checks at a mutually agreed time.
2. Provide the Board with an initial booking letter confirming the details of documentation required in advance of and during the audit. The timings and contact details will be provided when agreed.
3. Review a sample of the previous year's finance information in respect of:
 - Accounting Records
 - Financial Regulations
 - Payments
 - Risk Management
 - Budget Setting and Budget Monitoring
 - Income
 - Petty Cash
 - Payroll
 - Assets and Investment Registers
 - Bank Reconciliations
 - Year-End Processes
4. Leave the Board with a summary of key findings and recommendations for improvement and agree timescales for implementation.
5. Review implementation of recommendations made during the previous internal control checks.
6. Send a draft and final report.

The Board will:

7. Provide the Internal Auditor carrying out the Internal Audit with desk space if required and / or meet virtually via MS Teams.
8. Ensure that the records are made available and key staff are available to answer questions and provide requested documentation.
9. Implement any recommendations made by the Auditor within the agreed timescales.

FEES**Appendix 2****SERVICE CHARGE FOR THE AUDIT OF THE 2024/25 FINANCIAL YEAR**

The fees in relation to the review of the 2024/25 financial year will be £1648 plus VAT.

PAYMENT TERMS

Bills will be paid within 30 days of the invoice date in accordance with stated payment terms.

Invoices shall be emailed/sent to:

office@chilternsaonb.org,

Chilterns Conservation Board
The Lodge
90 Station Road
Chinnor OX39 4HA

Where the Board wishes to withdraw from this agreement or provides less than 7 days notice of cancellation of an Internal Audit visit, it shall be liable for the full amount remaining for that financial year. No refunds will be given.



Final Internal Audit Report

Chilterns National Landscape (CNL) 2024/25

July 2025

Issued to:	Kathryn Foster – Senior Finance Manager
Copied to (Final only):	Dr Elaine King – Chief Executive Officer Chiltern Conservation Board
Report Status:	Final
Reference:	SIAS-245
Overall Assurance:	Substantial
Recommendations:	None

SIAS**CNL 2024/25**

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2. Assurance by Risk Area	5
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- 1.1 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has provided the Internal Audit function to the Chilterns Conservation Board (CNL) since 2005. SIAS reports on the robustness of the financial control environment annually at the request of the Chilterns Conservation Board.
- 1.2 This audit focused on the internal controls linked to the requirements set out in the annual return which needs to be completed and sent to the external auditors. The audit sought to ensure that the identified controls were in place throughout the 2024/25 financial year and supported the achievement of the objectives of the CNL.

Overall Audit Opinion

- 1.3 Based on the work performed during this audit, we can provide overall **substantial assurance** that there are effective controls in operation for those elements of the risk management processes covered by this review. These are detailed in the Assurance by Risk Area Table in section 2 below.
- 1.4 In arriving at our overall opinion, we were satisfied that sufficiently robust governance, internal control and accounting arrangements were in place and operated for the 2024/25 financial year.
- 1.5 The CNL Financial Regulations are planned to be updated this year, with two emergency amendments already having been agreed by the CCB. The changes were the reserves and financial approvals policies. As part of our review, we tested a selection of eight invoices and confirmed that payments were being authorised in line with the regulations. We confirmed with the Senior Finance Manager that no VAT evidence was needed as CNL are not VAT registered.
- 1.6 CNL has a risk register in place that is reviewed and updated by the CCB on an annual basis. In relation to managing the risk of fraud, CNL has a Counter-Fraud Policy that was adopted by the Board in 2021. This is due to be updated in the coming year. We were also provided with their new Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy, approved by the CCB in December 2024.
- 1.7 We established that the CNL has robust budget setting and budget monitoring processes, with the Board and the Executive Committee receiving quarterly budget monitoring reports. The 2025/26 budget was discussed at Executive Committee meetings in February and March 2025, before being agreed by the Full Board in June 2025.
- 1.8 The Senior Finance Manager confirmed that the main source of income for the CNL comes from DEFRA. In 2024/25, this came to a total of £742,394.11 for the non-FiPL grant. We also viewed DEFRA Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL), Thames21, Buckinghamshire Council and Affinity Water invoices and found that income was received and recorded accurately.

SIAS**CNL 2024/25**

- 1.9 No testing took place in the area of petty cash transactions as the Senior Finance Manager confirmed that this is no longer in use as all expenses are paid via the purchase ledger.
- 1.10 For payroll, we reviewed the month of September 2024 and found that all were processed and paid in a timely and accurate way. Further to this, we saw supporting evidence for the three expense claims for the same month and found that these had appropriate evidence and sign off. Last year, we found one discrepancy in relation to one employee's salary which was supposed to increase from three days a week (0.6fte) to four days a week (0.8fte) but was incorrectly paid at the full-time rate until April 2024 when the mistake was discovered. We followed up on the recommendation made last year and found that the organisation now implements a 'payroll changes' spreadsheet to minimise the risk of this occurring again.
- 1.11 We also reviewed the organisation's Asset Register. We found this to be reconciled and complete, and the organisation have an appropriate level of insurance to cover their assets. Further to this, the Senior Finance Manager confirmed that the Asset Register is reviewed on an annual basis.
- 1.12 Section I of the AGAR covers the requirements for regular bank reconciliations to take place. We were provided with monthly and year-end reconciliations for the HSBC current account and year-end reconciliation for the Nationwide Business 95-day Saver and HSBC Rewards accounts. We found no exceptions for these.
- 1.13 As with the previous year, the Annual Accounts were produced using the receipts and payments method and for the core budget, and the annual accounts were produced using the accruals method. We were provided with the year-end accounts for the 2024/25 financial year which were approved by the Board on 19 June 2025. We also found that the completed AGAR was presented and approved at the same meeting.
- 1.14 We established that all required information was published on the CNL website within the necessary guidelines. This including the 2023/24 AGAR, Board and Executive Committee minutes, the public exercise of rights and the annual accounts.
- 1.15 For definitions of our assurance levels, please see Appendix A.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1.16 No recommendations have been made as part of this report.

2. ASSURANCE BY RISK AREA





2.1 Our specific objectives in undertaking this work, as per the Terms of Reference, were to provide the Council with assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls, processes and records in place to mitigate risks in the following areas:

Risk Area	No	Limited	Reasonable	Substantial
Financial Regulations & Standing Orders				
Payments				
Risk Management				
Budget Setting & Monitoring				
Income				
Petty Cash				
Salaries to Employees				
Asset Register & Insurance				
Bank Reconciliations				
Year-End Procedures				
Review of Previous Recommendations				
Overall				

2.2 See definitions for the above assurance levels at Appendix B.

Appendix A - Definitions of Assurance and Finding Priorities**CNL 2024/25**

Assurance Level	Definition
Substantial	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exist, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Reasonable	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Limited	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
No	Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Priority Level			Definition
Corporate	Critical		Audit findings which, in the present state, represent a serious risk to the organisation as a whole, i.e. reputation, financial resources and / or compliance with regulations. Management action to implement the appropriate controls is required immediately.
	High		Audit findings indicate a serious weakness or breakdown in control environment, which, if untreated by management intervention, is highly likely to put achievement of core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required urgently.
Service	Medium		Audit findings which, if not treated by appropriate management action, are likely to put achievement of some of the core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required in a timely manner.
	Low		Audit findings indicate opportunities to implement good or best practice, which, if adopted, will enhance the control environment. The appropriate solution should be implemented as soon as is practically possible.

Item 3.2**Quarter 1 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 April – June 2025 against the FY25-26 Delivery Plan.

Overall Progress

- The Delivery Plan approved for FY25-26 was split into five workstreams and contains 28 active delivery areas (the same as last year) and 107 delivery lines (a slight increase from 103 last year).
- Appendix 1 sets out a summary of delivery against individual delivery lines.
- In Q1 (Apr-Jun 2025) the status of delivery across the CNL Team was as follows:

Completed	Slightly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Not due to have started	Cancelled / Postponed
On Track				
53 (50%)	26 (24%)	12 (11%)	15 (14%)	1 (1%)
compared to 50% in Q4 last year	compared to 23% in Q4 last year	compared to 13% in Q4 last year	compared to 0% in Q4 last year	compared to 15% in Q4 last year

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 with 16 delivery lines) reported 9 delivery lines on track, 6 slightly delayed and 1 significantly delayed. Those significantly delayed were:
 - **1.5.6 Programme Funding (Heritage):** A key element of funding for the Heritage Programme is based on subscriptions for the field school run during the summer and whilst the schools (which took place in Q2) were successful the level of subscription was lower than that modelled in the initial forecast for funding during the year.
- **Increase Operational Effectiveness** (Workstream 2 with 28 delivery lines) reported 6 delivery lines on track, 12 slightly delayed, 4 significantly delayed and 6 not yet due to have started. Those significantly delayed were:
 - **2.1.7 Staff Engagement / 2.6.3 Management Effectiveness:** Whilst the initial pulse survey was carried out in March 2025 following the Staff Engagement Survey in Sep 2024 it has not been possible to carry out another pulse survey in Jun 2025 due to capacity constraints. In addition, it has not been possible to schedule and hold combined SLT: Senior Manager Team meetings. Both focus groups that were established following the Staff Engagement Survey in Sep 2024 have continued to operate but 2 more that were due to be established in this quarter have not been established. The recruitment of a new Administration Officer in Sep 2025 will increase capacity and mean that more focus will be able to be put on this area in terms of support to schedule these meetings and work has now begun with an external consultant to address engagement within the organisation.

- **2.4.2 H&S Policies, Processes & Procedures (Organisation):** No work has been possible in this area due to the lack of capacity of the Head of Operations. As a result of this replanning has occurred with Risk Fluent and a new Administrator is being employed who will have overall responsibility for H&S Administrative matters to help drive this forward.
- **2.6.5 Collaborative Working:** A significant piece of work was completed in this quarter with the inclusion of a collaborative objective into the objectives of all staff. However, these have yet to be reviewed and a lack of SLT capacity means that a working group has yet to be established to address this area and there has been no work on clarifying roles and responsibilities with regard to external enquiries.
- **Conserve & Enhance Natural Beauty** (Workstream 3 with 33 delivery lines) reported 18 delivery lines on track, 6 slightly delayed, 4 significantly delayed and 5 not yet due to have started. Those significantly delayed were:
 - **3.2.8 HS2 Landscape & Biodiversity Connectivity Project:** No planned work has been started on this including initial planning for Combe Hill / Bacombe Hill project with BBOWT and the National Trust because of a lack of capacity in relation to the Nature Recovery Manager.
 - **3.6.3 Heritage Projects:** Whilst work has been undertaken in this area including the agreement of a SOAG partnership for working in Nettlebed, heritage advice being given to NCP and work being undertaken with CCSP and the River Thame Conservation Trust there has been a focus on field schools in Q1 (See 3.6.1) and a lack of other funding opportunities that would help to fund CHAP on an ongoing basis.
 - **3.8.1 Planning Strategy & Rationalisation / 3.8.2 Planning Advice:** There has been an ongoing lack of capacity within the Planning Team as a result of being unable to recruit a new Planning Officer and the broad range of strategic and deputy monitoring activities being undertaken by the Head of Strategy & Planning. To address this to some extent it was agreed in Q2 that we would recruit a consultant into the role of Planning Adviser.
- **Improve Understanding & Enjoyment** (Workstream 4 with 16 delivery lines) reported 13 delivery lines on track, 1 slightly delayed, 1 significantly delayed and 1 not yet due to have started. Those significantly delayed or moved were:
 - **4.1.5 PLTOF Access Targets:** Work in this area cannot be planned and commence until information is received from Defra.
 - **4.5.1 Volunteer Management:** It was agreed to move and plan this delivery line under Operational Effectiveness as a lot of the work in this area is tied into work being undertaken as part of Operational Effectiveness. No work was planned in this area for Q1.
- **Effectively Communicate** (Workstream 5 with 16 delivery lines) reported 7 delivery lines on track, 1 slightly delayed, 2 significantly delayed, 3 not yet due to have started and 1 cancelled. Those significantly delayed or cancelled were:
 - **5.2.3 Boundary Review:** cancelled by Natural England. Comms has been undertaken around the cancellation but planned work for this year has now been cancelled.
 - **5.2.5 Other Strategic Comms / 5.4.1 CNL Brand / 5.4.2 Internal Brand Guidelines / 5.5.2 Internal Messaging:** because of the need to focus on the Management Plan and the Nature Recovery Plan and as a consequence of the cancellation of the Boundary Review the Comms Manager has not been able to devote time to these element of work.

Recommendation

1. To NOTE and offer feedback on progress made in Quarter 1 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				
1.1.2 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act				
1.1.3 Nature Recovery Plan				
1.1.4 Climate Adaptation Plan				
1.2 Organisational Governance				
1.2.1 Constitution				
1.2.2 Board & Committee Operations				
1.3 Strategic Engagement / Influence				
1.3.1 Government Engagement				
1.3.2 National Landscapes Association / Protected Landscapes Network Engagement				
1.3.3 Strategic Partner Engagement				
1.4 Monitoring & Evaluation				
1.4.1 Nature Recovery Monitoring Indicators				
1.5 Financial Sustainability				
1.5.1 Income Diversity				
1.5.2 Core Funding				
1.5.3 Programme Funding (Nature Recovery)				
1.5.4 Programme Funding (Land)				
1.5.5 Programme Funding (Water)				
1.5.6 Programme Funding (Heritage)				
Workstream 2: Increase Operational Effectiveness				
2.1 HR				
2.1.1 Personnel Files				
2.1.2 HR Policies				
2.1.3 Staff Handbook	No activity scheduled			
2.1.4 HR Processes	No activity scheduled			
2.1.5 HR Compliance				
2.1.6 HR System	No activity scheduled			
2.1.7 Staff Engagement	Capacity			
2.1.8 Staff Wellbeing				
2.1.9 Organisation Development	No activity scheduled			
2.2 Finance				
2.2.1 Annual Budgeting & Forecasting				
2.2.2 Budget Management				
2.2.3 Capital Budget				
2.2.4 Financial Policies & Regulations	No activity scheduled			
2.2.5 Financial Processes & Procedures				
2.2.6 Financial Optimisation				
2.3 IT & Information Management				
2.3.1 Information Management Framework				
2.3.2 Information Management Transition				
2.3.3 Information Governance and Compliance				

2.4 Health & Safety				
2.4.1 Risk Assessments				
2.4.2 H&S Policies, Processes & Procedures (Organisation)	Capacity			
2.4.3 H&S Policies, Processes & Procedures (Field)	No activity scheduled			
2.5 Admin & Office Management				
2.5.1 Office Environment				
2.6 Internal Governance & Ways of Working				
2.6.1 Partnership Working				
2.6.2 Contract Management				
2.6.3 Management Effectiveness	Capacity			
2.6.4 New Work Governance				
2.6.5 Collaborative Working	Capacity			
2.6.6 Programme Governance & Legacy Planning (Mend the Gap)				
2.6.7 Volunteer Management	No activity scheduled			
Workstream 3: Conserve and Enhance Natural Beauty				
3.1 Operationalising Strategy				
3.1.1 PLTOF Targets				
3.1.2 Nature Recovery Delivery Plan	No activity scheduled			
3.1.3 Local Nature Recovery Strategies	No activity scheduled			
3.1.4 Farming Strategy	No activity scheduled			
3.1.5 FiPL Changes				
3.1.6 Scaling Citizen Science	No activity scheduled			
3.1.7 Citizen Science Strategy	No activity scheduled			
3.1.8 Landscape Character – Natural Beauty Capability				
3.2 Farming & Landowners				
3.2.1 Farming in Protected Landscapes				
3.2.2 Farming Clusters				
3.2.3 Christmas Common Farming Cluster				
3.2.4 Chess Farming Cluster				
3.2.5 North Chilterns Farming Cluster				
3.2.6 South Chilterns Farming Cluster				
3.2.7 Mend the Gap - Grasslands				
3.2.8 HS2 Landscape & Biodiversity Connectivity Project	Lack of capacity			
3.3 Water				
3.3.1 Chilterns Chalk Stream Project				
3.3.2 Mending the Misbourne				
3.3.3 Smarter Water Catchment				
3.3.4 Mend the Gap - Wetlands				
3.3.5 Not Bourne Yesterday – Water Projects				
3.3.6 Flood & Drought Research Infrastructure				
3.4 Woodland				
3.4.1 Deer Management				
3.5 Landscape Character				
No prioritised activity for FY25/26				
3.6 Heritage				
3.6.1 Field Schools				
3.6.2 Heritage Outreach				
3.6.3 Heritage Projects	Lack of opportunity			
3.6.4 Not Bourne Yesterday – Heritage Projects				
3.7 Citizen Science				
3.7.1 Tracking the Impact				
3.7.2 CCSP – Chess Citizen Science				
3.8 Planning				
3.8.1 Planning Strategy & Rationalisation	Capacity			
3.8.2 Planning Advice	Capacity			
3.8.3 Planning Consultations				

3.8.4 Internal Planning Advice				
4. Improve Understanding & Enjoyment / Social & Economic Wellbeing				
4.1 Strategy Development				
4.1.1 EDI Ambition Statement				
4.1.2 EDI & Youth Engagement Strategy / Development				
4.1.3 Volunteering Strategy & Approach				
4.1.4 Linking People & Nature Recovery				
4.1.5 PLTOF Access Targets	External Delay			
4.2 Access & EDI				
4.2.1 Defra Access for All Fund				
4.2.2 Access & EDI Project Support				
4.2.3 Walking Festival				
4.2.4 Mend the Gap – Access & EDI Projects				
4.3 Engagement				
4.3.1 Nature Calling				
4.3.2 North Chilterns Engagement				
4.3.3 North Chilterns Partnership				
4.3.4 Not Bourne Yesterday - Engagement				
4.3.5 Mend the Gap – Public Engagement				
4.4 Health & Wellbeing				
No prioritised activity for FY25/26				
4.5 Volunteering				
4.5.1 Volunteer Management	Moved to Organisation Effectiveness			
4.6 Education				
4.6.1 CCSP – Education Programme				
5. Effectively Communicate				
5.1 Operationalising Strategy				
5.1.1 Activation Plans				
5.1.2 Crisis Communications	No output scheduled			
5.1.3 Contact Management				
5.1.4 Image Library	No output scheduled			
5.2 Strategic Comms				
5.2.1 Management Plan				
5.2.2 Nature Recovery Plan				
5.2.3 Boundary Review	Cancelled			
5.2.4 Annual Review				
5.2.5 Other Strategic Comms	Capacity			
5.3 Operational Comms				
5.3.1 Brand & Profile				
5.3.2 CNL Website				
5.3.3 Project Comms & Support				
5.4 Brand & Profile				
5.4.1 CNL Brand	Capacity			
5.4.2 Brand Guidelines	Capacity			
5.5 Internal Comms				
5.5.1 Internal Comms Platform	No output scheduled			
5.5.2 Internal Messaging	Capacity			

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 since its last meeting in May 2025 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. As reported previously, we now have full sight of our Defra grant settlement for this 2025/26 financial year. This comprises: Core Revenue funding (£513,896) representing the same flat cash settlement as the previous three years; Core Capital (CDEL) funding (£347,722), 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 capital CDEL funding. However, revenue funding has declined in real terms due to 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 Defra criteria, while ensuring that we have the staff capacity to oversee delivery of the spending.

Confirmation on a further three-year core settlement, from 2026/27, was expected around June 2025, following the Spending Review in late spring, though we have been advised more recently by Defra that we will likely not be informed until early next year. This, inevitably, prolongs uncertainty and makes financial and resource planning more challenging.

The two areas where the CDEL 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. A significant amount of time has continued to be spent by staff - primarily the Head of Operations, Head of Landscape, Senior Finance Manager and the CEO - in liaising with Defra officials, other National Landscapes and the National Landscapes Association (NLA) to understand with certainty the CDEL spending criteria, which are, in places, different to the Farming in Protected Landscapes and Access for All capital spending criteria. In the past two to three weeks, we have received further clarity but are still exploring options for how we allocate the funds with a comfortable degree of certainty which reduces the risks of being required to return the funds if they are not used in line with government spending criteria.

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 in future years. The reasons for having higher operating costs were set out in the Funding Update to the Board in March. In summary, they comprise the fact that Conservation Boards cannot reclaim 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.

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. Both the NLA and Defra have recognised these challenges, though little progress has been made with Defra during this period, as they continue to allocate funds internally following the spending review.

Local Authority contributions

The Defra core grant to Conservation Boards comprises 80% of our core income, with Defra requiring that the other 20% be contributed by the local authorities whose area includes the Chilterns (and Cotswolds) National Landscape. This period has seen a push to more proactively engage with local authorities, largely to ensure that we collaborate and use resources most efficiently, and to ensure that local authorities understand the relationship between themselves and the Conservation Board, particularly the requirement to contribute financially to reflect our role in delivering their statutory duties in the designated area.

Engagement has focussed especially on those local authorities that do not contribute the full amount required. These comprise Luton Borough Council (in 2024/25 contributions were £1,019 instead of £8,500), Central Bedfordshire Council (£10,000 instead of £25,496) and Buckinghamshire Council (£55,455 instead of £58,228). For Luton and Central Beds in particular, we are collating figures to demonstrate the inward investment to the Council areas made by the CCB through our various programmes of work.

Productive meetings have also been held with the CEO, Director and Board member at Dacorum Council, which always contributes in full.

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.

Nevertheless, uncertainty over the timing and extent of our funding from Defra, from one year to the next, continues to create an imperative to explore 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 became insolvent 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.
- We are now working with National Landscape Association to explore alternative corporate funding for Tracking the Impact (and the River Chess citizen science programme) through their green finance platform '[Your Natural Partner](#)'. Tracking the Impact will be the first to go on the website in the next couple of weeks and the Chess citizen science programme shortly after.
- **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 (Secured)** An application was submitted recently to the HS2 Review Group for the 'Mending the Misbourne' project. This was successful and confirmation of a £1m grant has now been received in writing. We published a news item [here](#). The aim of the project 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. After many months of chasing, we have now received 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 been appointed 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. This will fund 0.2 FTE of Kate Heppell's time.

- **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 have worked with the North Wessex Downs National Landscape - which is leading the bid - to complete a Project Enquiry Form (PEF) for a project creating a nature corridor based on the Ridgeway National Trail as it passes through the two National Landscapes. The PEF 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 have received full payment of £149k and have invoiced for an additional £232k allocated to us in March 2025 for project delivery. A further £50k of funding for CCSP has been ring-fenced by Thames Water for applications to fund projects in 2025/6.

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:** The Chilterns is one of six hubs participating in this Arts Council and Defra funded programme designed to deepen people's engagement with nature and heritage, and to reach new, underserved communities. Activity has been focused in and around Luton leading to the development of Luton Henge. The CCB has received over £60,000 directly to support the programme to date. More on the project [here](#).
- 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 supported Luton Council with a multi-partner £1 million bid to the **National Lottery Heritage Fund's Nature Towns and Cities fund** which has been successful (one of only 19 successful applications). The CCB is a strategic partner on the two-year programme, which commences in September 2025. The project will focus on nature recovery, providing better physical and emotional connections to nature and ensuring 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 programme. In addition, £5k of CCB advisory time is included 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 since the last Committee meeting.

Background

This report comprises highlights since the Executive Committee meeting in May 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 continued to be on ongoing budgeting and business planning, in particular understanding the criteria for this year's capital (CDEL) uplift.

Our core grant from Defra was received in June. We also have greater clarity on the criteria for Capital (CDEL) funding, following ongoing exchanges of questions and information between National Landscapes and Defra. See Funding Update for more details.

Defra needed to deal with some internal issues before formally confirming this year's Access for All funding, and we received the green light in mid-July. The full allocation is £429k and we have invoiced for the first instalment of £321,921. Our Head of Engagement and Partnerships had kept potential applicants informed of progress and encouraged applications to be developed, while inevitably also managing expectations. The first panel meeting to start allocating funds was therefore held on the 22nd July and the second on 18th August.

The [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#) programme continues for another year, with our allocation for this financial year being just over £820k. With the current pressure on public finances, programme spend is under extra scrutiny and we are reporting more frequently and in more detail to Defra, to help provide the evidence to support the continuation of the programme beyond this financial year.

Other key work being led and managed by the SLT include finalising the refreshed Chilterns AONB Management Plan. Following Board approval in June, the document is being designed with an expected completion date in early September, pending final review by the SLT and Board Chair and including any necessary updates following discussion with Natural England. More detail on our website [here](#). Our Nature Recovery Plan - also approved at the last Board meeting - is also at the design stage and expected to be ready in early to mid-September.

Other work has included liaising with Natural England regarding its Boundary Review, supporting Defra in preparing to recruit new Secretary of State appointed Board members, ensuring succession planning amongst Board members, assisting and advising local authorities in appointing members to the Board following the local elections, exploring new funding opportunities, finalising the last tranche of new HR policies, managing risk, including implementing new systems for risk assessments, 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. Specific activity during this period includes going live on key HR policies (8th July) and increasing capacity in our planning team.

Changes to the Board

The process for recruiting new Secretary of State appointed Board members has concluded successfully, with Defra confirming six new Board members in mid-August. Defra's public announcement of the appointments is imminent. Four members take up their roles formally on 1st September and two on 1st October, replacing John Nicholls and Paul Mainds, whose extended terms (from 1 July to 1 October) come to an end. We are currently liaising with the new members regarding on-boarding, and an induction session was held on 28th August. Further sessions and on-boarding are being planned for the coming weeks. Slides from the session will also be circulated to members.

Following the May local elections in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire, I have liaised with local authority officers, new Leaders and new members appointed to the Board, which has included providing the new [briefing paper](#) on the Roles and Responsibilities of the CCB's Board members.

Two of our five Bucks Council appointed members are new - Cllr Martin Tett (former Leader of the Council) and Cllr Justine Fulford. Cllr Adrian England joins us from Dacorum Borough Council, replacing Council Leader, Cllr Sally Symington.

Hertfordshire County Council also appointed Cllr Caroline Smith-Wright to the Board in June, replacing Cllr Paula Hiscocks, and Oxfordshire County Council appointed Cllr Gavin McLauchlan to the Board in July. Elections are being organised for Hertfordshire Parish Council Board member, following the resignation of the previous member, Adrian Watney, who has sadly passed away.

Other local and national government engagement

A productive meeting was held on 4th August with Dacorum Borough Council: new Board member Cllr Adrian England, Darren Walsh, CEO and Diane Southam, Interim Strategic Director for Place and Communities.

Local authorities and Board members were also emailed in early July with a set of new planning resources comprising the [Chilterns Chalk Streams Planning Guidance](#), [Chilterns Lighting Planning Guidance](#) and the [Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit](#). The materials complement the existing [Chilterns Buildings Design Guide](#), along with our existing suite of technical guidance and planning position statements. Together, they support the delivery of the updated Management Plan and are intended to assist local authorities in demonstrating how they are meeting the strengthened duty under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, amended in 2023. The government's guidance on the new duty is [here](#)

In addition to supporting the Board and local authorities with new Board members, I have liaised closely during this period with Tom Beeston, Chief Officer at the Chiltern Society, to advocate for the Chilterns National Landscape with MPs, local councils, and their elected members.

A number of meetings and events have been held or are planned. For example, on 4th July, Tom and I met with former Board member, Cllr Carl Jackson, who is now Cabinet member for Environment, Climate Change and Waste at Bucks Council, and Cllr Thomas Broom, his predecessor, and who is now Cabinet member for Transport and Deputy Leader of the Council. Tom and I also met with Laura Kyrke-Smith MP (Aylesbury) on 12th August.

Ahead of a briefing session in Parliament on chalk streams, with Tom Beeston and our Head of Landscape Kate Heppell, and hosted by Henley MP, Freddie van Mierlo, a joint Chiltern Society and Chilterns National Landscape briefing was developed. This has subsequently been developed further to include reference to the Colne Valley Regional Park and will be published on our website shortly. The briefing sets out our aims, which include supporting the re-convening of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Chalk Streams, advocating for legal protection for chalk streams and sharing some of the data and evidence from our collaborative

project work in the Chilterns – for example the River Chess Citizen Science [Report](#), the [Chalk Streams Planning Guidance](#) and the outcomes of the [Smarter Water Catchment](#) project.

The briefing supports advocacy work being carried out by others in this area, such as the Wildlife Trusts, and one of our local Trusts, BBOWT in particular, linked in part to the government removing from the Planning and Infrastructure Bill proposals to provide legal protection to chalk streams.

Other engagement with MPs and the government has included contributing insight and practical examples, through the National Landscapes Association, to a Defra call for evidence on the role of private finance and an inquiry on improving access to the outdoors by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Outdoor Recreation and Access to Nature. On private finance, we shared our experience of working in partnership with Affinity Water and Thames Water, with the former funding our work on chalk streams and farmer clusters, and the latter funding River Chess Smarter Water Catchment project, and both providing financial support for the Chilterns Chalk Streams project.

Following the decision at the Board meeting in March to convene a group to advise on and plan local authority engagement, Richard Newcombe, Matt Thomson and I met in May to discuss the priorities for the group, and again in July to discuss a scoping paper produced by Richard Newcombe. The full group is scheduled to meet on 22nd September.

Discussions are also ongoing with Defra officials on a number of areas, including governance arrangements for Conservation Boards, funding for Protected Landscapes, a proposal for conservation boards to be statutory consultees, powers of competence, and advocating for one of the government's proposed nine new river walks to include one in the Chilterns (we are advocating the Lea, whose source is on the site of the Nature Calling project in Luton) and the River Chess.

External engagement

This period has also seen several meetings with partners and stakeholders, including Laura Burrows, new CEO at the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, with Conservation Director Tim Hill, Stewart Pomeroy, Manager at the Colne Valley Regional Park, and a networking reception at the Chiltern Open Air Museum. I also attended a discussion with key NGOs, Protected Landscapes and others in the landscape sector regarding current challenges for National Parks and National Landscapes.

I also attended a meeting with our Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson and Conservation and Landscape Officer, Neil Jackson, with Natural England and other partners, to hear more about Natural England's plans for a Super National Nature Reserve (NNR) in the North Chilterns area.

Natural England's Boundary Review

As reported in confidence at the May meeting, Natural England publicly announced its decision to cancel its project to review the Chilterns boundary in early June. Once the announcement was made, in the interests of open government, we published the paper taken to the Committee's May meeting.

The CCB's [response](#) to the announcement was circulated to all our stakeholders, including local authorities and MPs either with parts of their constituencies in the Chilterns National Landscape, or would potentially have had if the boundary review had been completed. John Nicholls and I also wrote in June to the Defra Secretary of State, Mary Creagh. A response was received in late July, confirming the pressure on public finances but nevertheless recognising the importance of National Landscapes to the government's priorities. The Minister also confirmed the intention to 'co-design new legislation to strengthen the statutory purposes of National Landscapes and National Parks to give them a clear mandate to recover nature'.

Following the communication to MPs, a number of meetings have been held to discuss the matter further, for example with Blake Stephenson MP (Mid Bedfordshire & PPS to the Shadow Chancellor), Laura Kyrke-Smith MP (Aylesbury), Freddie Van Mierlo MP (Henley), Sarah Green MP (Chesham and Amersham), Victoria Collins MP (Berkhamsted and Harpenden) and Chris Hinchliff MP (North East Hertfordshire). A number of these and other MPs have either written to the Minister or discussed the matter with them, including Emma Reynolds MP (High Wycombe and Economic Secretary to the Treasury).

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.

In addition to the examples in sections above, we are engaging with the NLA and the wider family of Protected Landscapes on a range of areas including:

- implementing Defra's Protected Landscapes [Targets and Outcomes Framework \(PLTOF\)](#)
- 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), including assessing the impacts of emerging case law
- sharing our insight on Biodiversity Net Gain, with a meeting arranged for 11th September
- delivering the Nature Calling project in Luton, including the [Luton Henge Festival](#) on 26th July, to officially open Luton Henge, the inspirational artwork created as a shared community space for people in Luton.
- Several of the staff team also attended the excellent NLA annual conference in Winchester in early July. Steph Horn, Smarter Water Catchment Project Coordinator, also produced a slide to explain our Chalk Streams Planning Guidance for the 'one slide, three minutes' briefing session at the conference, where National Landscape colleagues share a success with others. Steph led coordination of the guidance, and I presented the slide to showcase how it was developed in partnership with other staff, partner organisations, funders and experts in LUC planning consultants.

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.

More detail on progress being made is in the papers for the Executive Committee meeting in May. We are currently working towards repeating the annual survey in September 2025.

Recommendation:

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