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 Thursday 13th November 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 (09.09.25)
   - 1.6 Matters arising
   - 1.7 Consideration of motions submitted by members
   - 1.8 Public questions
2. **Items for Decision**
   - 2.1 Quarter 2 Finance Report
   - 2.2 Quarter 2 Delivery Report
   - 2.3 Annual Planning 2026-27
   - 2.4 Funding Report
   - 2.5 Committee Dates in 2026
   - 2.6 Chief Executive Officer's Report
3. **Items for Noting / Information**
   - 3.1 None.
4. **Any Urgent Business**
5. **Next Meeting**: 26th February 2026 (tbc – see item 2.5)

Future Meeting Dates 2026 (to be confirmed, see item 2.5)

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thu 22 January	Thu 26 February	Thu 26 March
Thu 30 April	Tue 19 May	Thu 25 June (inc AGM)
None	Tue 1 September	Thu 1 October (Strategy)
Thu 29 October	Thu 19 November	Thu 10 December

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	Approval of minutes of the previous meeting (09.09.25)	**APPROVE**
1.6	Matters arising	
1.7	Consideration of motions submitted by members	
1.8	Public questions	
2	**Items for Decision**	
2.1	Quarter 2 Finance Report	**NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK**
2.2	Quarter 2 Delivery Report	**NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK**
2.3	Annual Planning 2026-27	**NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK**
2.4	Funding Report	**NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK**
2.5	Committee Dates	**APPROVE**
2.6	Chief Executive Officer’s Report	**NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK**
3	**Items for Noting / Information**	
	None	
4	**Any Urgent Business**	
5	Next Meeting: 26th February 2026 (tbc)	

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty HELD ON Tuesday 9th September 2025 at The Village Centre, High Street, Chinnor OX39 4DH commencing at 10.10 AM.

Present:

Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member – Chair
Cllr Sue Rowlands	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Louise Price	Board Member
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
John Nicholls	Board Member
Paul Mainds	Board Member – online
Baljit Dhillon	Board Member – online
Matthew Stanton	Board Member as of 01/10/25 – online

In attendance:

Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Andy Brock-Doyle	Head of Operations – online
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer (s151 Officer)
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager
Kate Heppell	Head of Landscape
Eloise Small	Administration Officer
Richard Newcombe	Guest – online

The Chair welcomed all present, including new Board Members Baljit Dhillon and Matthew Stanton, who were attending their first Executive Committee meeting as observers.

25/26.1 Standing Items

1.1 Apologies for absence

Board Members:
None
Officers:
Matt Thomson – Head of Strategy & Planning and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Annette Weiss – Head of Engagement and Partnerships

1.2 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

1.3 Chair's Announcements

A nomination for the position of Deputy Chair to the Committee is required. It was agreed that this would be discussed with the Chair following the meeting, and any nomination to be brought for approval at the next meeting.

1.4 Notice of Urgent Business
None.

1.5 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 07/05/25
The minutes of the meeting 07/05/25 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

1.6 Matters Arising
All items covered on the agenda.

1.7 Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members
None at this meeting.

1.8 Public Questions
No members of the public were present.

25/26.2 Items for Decision
2.1 HR Advisory Group Policy
A paper was circulated by Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations, that proposes the HR Advisory Group (HRAG) be dissolved and its responsibilities redistributed between the Board, Executive Committee and Officers as appropriate. Following intensive work, all policies and procedures are now as robust as they should be. It was proposed that all appeals be addressed to the Chair of the Board, who will be responsible for appointing an Appeals Panel. The CEO will be responsible for developing and annually reviewing the job grading framework. The Executive Committee will be responsible for: approving the overall job grading framework for the organisation, approving any changes to the renumeration of senior staff; reviewing and recommending changes to the Board; and approving changes to the Senior Leadership Team.

It was suggested that the November Executive Committee meeting include an item with a briefing paper and discussion regarding the new role of the Committee to ensure it will be able to discharge the duty effectively.

Thanks were given to all involved with the HRAG over the years, especially Board member Paul Mainds as Chair of the group.

1. **The Executive Committee APPROVED dissolving the HR Advisory Group and redistributing its responsibilities**
2. **The Executive Committee RECOMMENDS to the Board the deletion of the HRAG terms of reference from the Constitution**

25/26.3 Items for Noting/Information
3.1. Quarter 1 Finance Report
The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, reported on the accounts to 31st July 2025.

1. There is a Core deficit of £29k for the year to 31st July 2025, against a budgeted deficit of £48k for the same period. Income exceeded budget for the first part of the year mainly due to higher than budgeted bank interest and CDEL funds released against the office lease costs.
2. There has been an allocation of £348k of Capital Funds by Defra for the financial year 25/26. Use of these funds is restricted to capital expenditure, and the criteria is strict. Several nature recovery programmes are being developed to utilise these funds and allocation of funds to two projects have been confirmed. These have a total value of £71k and are now underway.
3. Project income is £900k, costs are £456k and there is a surplus on projects of £435k overall. This surplus arises due to timings of funding received in advance and will be spent by year end.

Treasury Management
A mixture of bank accounts is being used to achieve better interest rates on the funds held. A due diligence review is being undertaken by Nationwide, which has prompted recent requests for personal information from Board members. The Chair emphasised the need for all Board members to respond positively, as the information is required to ensure compliance with money laundering regulations and it may not be possible to keep the account should members not comply.

Year End – Internal Audit Report
Following the approval of the AGAR at the June Board meeting, an internal audit has been undertaken. The opinion of the auditors is substantial assurance that there are effective controls in operation for those elements of the risk management processes covered by their review. The AGAR and supporting documents have been submitted to the External Auditor.
The Chair commended the Officers and Finance team for the results of the AGAR, which reported overall substantial assurance that effective controls are in place. The CEO emphasised that this is the result of effort by all staff in developing and complying with the CCB's financial processes and procedures.

VAT Review
The CCB is not registered for VAT and is therefore unable to claim VAT refunds on non-business activities, unlike non-Conservation Board National Landscapes hosted by a Local Authority, and National Parks. As a result, non-staff costs are effectively 20% higher than those of other National Landscapes and National Parks. An accounting firm with expertise in VAT has been appointed to undertake a VAT health check to ensure correct VAT accounting. In addition, the team's status and eligibility for the recovery of VAT on non-business activities will be reviewed once again. The CEO continues to raise this with Defra and the National Landscapes Association.

1. **The Committee NOTED the financial position as of 31st July 2025**
2. **The Committee NOTED the internal audit report**
3. **The Committee NOTED the proposed VAT review taking place**

3.2. Quarter 1 Delivery Report
The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle had provided a paper to update the Executive Committee on the progress of the CCB team between April and June 2025 against the financial year 2025-26 Delivery Plan. In Q1 (April-June 2025):
- 53 (51 in Q4) delivery lines reported as completed or progressing on track (53) (50%)
- 26 (24 in Q4) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness (24%)
- 12 (13 in Q4) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness (11%)
- 15 (0 in Q4) delivery lines have not yet started (14%)
- 1(15 in Q4) delivery lines have been postponed or cancelled (1%)

The Head of Operations will circulate the Delivery Plan, for the benefit of new Board members, which was approved by the Board at the June meeting. Capacity remains a key issue, however following recruitment of a new Planning Advisor and a new Administration Officer, it is hoped that this will ease and that any lines behind will be “caught up” by the November Executive Committee meeting. There are also budgetary constraints, and Defra is yet to confirm our grant settlment for 2026/27 and beyond. A second staff engagement survey is scheduled for the end of September, although it has been recognised that implementing changes following the original survey should take priority, along with updates to the staff team via team meetings.

1. **The Committee NOTED the Q1 Delivery report**

3.3. 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. The core grant from Defra is 80% of funding, the other 20% comes from Local Authorities. It continues to be challenging to secure the full amount. Significant time has been spent in recent months engaging with local authorities to ensure they understand the CCB’s work delivers their statutory duties and provides benefits to them. It is expected that a three-year settlement from Defra may be advised next year (not this summer as initially advised), but this may change to a one-year settlement due to challenges around government funding. This creates is a lot of uncertainty and it is imperative that external funding be found to enable the staff team to carry out all the work it needs to do. Any grant applications need to be approved by the Senior Leadership Team, which should result in a clearer idea of what funds are being applied for and secured. She gave thanks to the team for their efforts in accessing funding from a wide range of sources.

1. **The Committee NOTED the Funding Strategy update**

3.4. Chief Executive Officer’s Update

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

- The SLT continues to take oversight of the organisation’s activities, meeting weekly to plan, monitor and deliver across a range of areas.
- The CCB has recruited an Administration Officer, a Citizen Science Coordinator, and a Planning Advisor.
- The cancellation of the Boundary Review by Natural England continues to take up time by staff, for example in addressing queries and liaising with MPs in the Chilterns who are concerned at the work having been cancelled. The CEO is talking with MPs, stakeholders and partners about this and other areas of work, such as better protection for chalk streams.
- The National Landscape Conference was attended by eight members of the staff team. Staff feedback has been very positive, and the event as clearly of benefit, such as in making connections with colleagues in other National Landscapes. The CEO believes this a good investment in the staff team and intends to ensure a good number of the team can attend next year

1. **The Committee NOTED the CEO’s update**

25/26.4 Any Urgent Business

None, all items covered in the agenda. It was agreed that the names of the new Board member appointments by the Defra Secretary of State would be circulated to Board members, along with the dates for the 2026 Executive Committee meetings.

Thanks were given to John Nicholls and Paul Mainds, as this was their last Executive Committee meeting, for the significant contributions made during their tenure.

25/26.5 Next Executive Committee meeting
Thursday 13th November 2025 at 10am, at The Village Centre, Chinnor.

Further meeting Dates:

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thursday 23rd October, 10am Chinnor Office	Thursday 13th November, 10am Chinnor Village Centre	Thursday 25th September, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
		Thursday 11th December, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 12.12.

The Chair…………………………………………… Date……………….

Item 2.1	**Quarter 2 Finance Report**
Author:	Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager
Purpose:	To provide the Executive Committee with a Finance Report for Quarter 2 30 September 2025

1. Management Accounts to 30 September 2025

1.1 Core Financial Results for the 6 months 01 April 2025 – 30 September 2025

Appendix 1 shows the full detailed Core performance versus budget for the six months to 30 September 2025 along with our budget year to date.

As part of our half year review we have completed a full year reforecast for our Core cost areas which is included in the report alongside our full year budget figures.

See comments in the Appendix 1 regarding the main budget variances.

The CCB shows a Core deficit of **£39k** for the six months to 30 September 2025 versus a **budgeted deficit of £68k** 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. We have updated our forecast assumptions regards interest income, but interest rates and our cash balances will decline as the financial year progresses. We are achieving rates of 1.42% to 3.35% depending on the term, with Nationwide offering the best rates.

Costs are being carefully managed to budget. The saving to budget for the first half of the year of £29k is mainly on salary costs (£31k saving) – this is due to delays in recruitment of our Administration Officer (now appointed and started in October) (£12k), delays on the Planning Advisor (resource now to be deployed via consultancy) (£10k), along with an historic adjustment for an overpayment to HMRC of £5k. Offset against this are overspends on consultancy costs of £13k (we assumed transformation costs of £13k year to date would be fully recovered against CDEL). We also have some historic Board member allowances being claimed (£6k) and have some additional members registered for allowances. We will do further work before March 25 to ensure that any members who would like to receive their allowance are registered in the system, after which backdated claims will no longer be permitted.

For the full year we anticipate a deficit of £116k versus the original budget deficit of £118k but note that this includes all of our transformation costs of **£80k** which we assumed would be funded by CDEL in our budget. We are now only able to fund £20k of these works from CDEL. However, the good news is that CDEL funding can cover our rent as it can be treated as a “capital lease” of £21k (see more details below). The gap in income versus our budget has effectively been covered by savings on staff costs and additional interest income so that we are forecasting to meet our original (albeit deficit) budget and will not need to draw on reserves, as was anticipated.

Our full forecast includes consultancy costs of £15k (HR and IT) and legal costs of £2k that we may struggle to utilise by 31 March due to resourcing/timing. We will update on these costs and ensure they are carried forward in the budget for 26/27 if needed.

Our reforecast for 25/26 will now form a basis for our budget for 26/27 and beyond. As noted in the Funding Report we are still awaiting confirmation from Defra on future Core funding, but early indications are that at best RDEL will be maintained at £513k. We 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. This work will now commence, aligned with our business planning process.

1.2 Defra Capital Funds (CDEL)

The CCB has been allocated **£348k** of Capital Funds by Defra for the financial year 25/26. We have now drawn down 100% of these funds.

Understanding CDEL use has taken up a lot of Officer time, but we are now making 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. For the year a total of £21,000 of rental costs will be covered by CDEL funds. The remaining 4.5 years of costs for our five-year office lease (commenced 1 Oct 2025) will be funded by this year's CDEL. We are awaiting further assurances and guidance from Defra on how this can work and are particularly concerned to ensure that the funds are ringfenced for us in the future years. In addition, because we have to use current year CDEL to fund the capital lease we may be required to return that element of the funds which equates to £105,750.

Of the remaining CDEL funds; £20k is earmarked for our IT Transformation Project (£8k spent to date), £48k for the Climate Adaptation plan and £155k for 30x30 nature recovery projects either being internally delivered or via partners including The Chilterns Society and North Chilterns Partnership.

1.3 Local Authority Contributions

Three of our local authorities - Buckinghamshire, Central Bedfordshire and Luton - do not make their full financial contributions. This shortfall equates to £30k.We have calculated the inward investment that the CCB brings to these three Local Authority areas - such as through project funding, Access for All and Farming in Protected Landscapes -and it far exceeds the contributions that they are required to make to the CCB.

Bucks Council has advised that they are unable to increase contributions due to budget restrictions. They have also indicated that contributions for 26/27 will almost certainly be less.

The CCB's CEO is meeting with Luton Council's CEO at the end of November.

No response has been received from Central Beds Council, despite repeated requests for a meeting.

See Funding Report (item 2.4) for more detail.

1.4 Projects

Appendix 2 shows the overall CCB position as at 30 September 2025. Project income is **£1,326k**, costs are **£804k** and there is a surplus on projects of **£522k** 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. Balance sheet and Treasury Management

Appendix 3 shows the latest balance sheet as at 30 September and breaks down our reserves between Projects and Core reserves and highlights our minimum core reserves as calculated at 31 March 25 of £388k; Core reserves as at 30 September being £698k.

As at 30 September we held cash balances of **£5.598M** with £4.77M 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. 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 we are still waiting for conclusion on due diligence checks by Nationwide and subject to the outcome we will look to move further funds to them as their interest rates are much higher than HSBC.

3. Year end – External Audit report

We have now received our closure letter for the year end 31 March 2025 from our external auditors PKF (See Appendix 4) along with their external audit report (Appendix 5 which is page 6 of the AGAR).

As noted in the AGAR the external audit conclusion is *"On the basis of our review of sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation ad regulatory requirements have not been met."*

Our final signed AGAR has now been uploaded onto our website.

4. VAT review

The CCB is not registered for VAT and, unlike other National Landscapes, who are not Conservation Boards and are hosted by a 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. The CCB's CEO has raised this issue with Defra.

Our VAT review with Azets (which is still in progress) has highlighted that we should seek to investigate our eligibility again for Section 33 refunds. We have always understood that to be eligible we <u>must</u> meet the following criteria:

- Undertake a function ordinarily carried on by local government and

- Have the power to draw funding directly from local taxation.

However, reviewing Section 22 (3) K of the Act, the Treasury has the power to admit bodies to the refund scheme and it appears that a number of bodies who don't meet the criteria have been admitted. Examples being; Water authorities, Transport for London, BBC. There is a formal application process with the Treasury which we intend to pursue but we will first consult with National Landscapes and Defra.

Our estimate for the first 6 months of the year is that we have irrecoverable VAT of **£23k** split between Core (£8k) and Projects (£15k). Annually, we could hence be seeking to recover approximately **£46k** of VAT which would make a significant extra contribution to our Core and Project activities.

Azets are still completing the VAT income review for us but the initial fundings give comfort that the majority of our income is outside the scope for VAT. There were several areas of query but as an eligible body we have established that any training or education we provide (such as our Archaeology Field school) would be classed as exempt for VAT purposes. We also understand that any research work we are involved in would be exempt.

However, any consultancy work whereby we provide a service or advise including Drone reports would be in scope for VAT. Our forecasts for this year and next indicate we are well under the £90k VAT registration threshold for these "business activities" but we need to carefully monitor this going forward especially as we develop the Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership's (CHAP) activities and continue to seek other revenue generating opportunities to plug funding gaps. We also need to ensure that any agreements we sign up to correctly reflect the funding we are receiving, as if they are worded as consultancy, when the funding is a grant, we could be exposed to a VAT query.

5. Business Rates

We pay annual business rates to South Oxfordshire District Council (£7,135 for 2025/26). We receive a small business discount of 15% (£1,223 for 25/26) but it has been suggested that we may be eligible for a full exemption based on our not-for-profit status. The Cotswolds Conservation Board has been successful with their District Council in obtaining this in the past and are currently reapplying for it to cover their new office premises. An application form can be completed and, while this may be a lengthy process, we will pursue this for this year onwards. Note SODC are contributing the full £11,137 to us for 25/26 as their local authority contribution.

Recommendations

1. **To NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK on the CCB financial reports as of 30 September 2025 and the full year forecast to 31 March 2026.**
2. **To NOTE the external audit report for year end 31 March 2025 and the update on our year end AGAR and filing.**
3. **To NOTE and PROVDIE FEEDBACK on other updates highlighted – CDEL, Balance Sheet / Treasury, VAT Review and Rates.**

APPENDIX 1
Budget Variance
Chilterns Conservation Board
For the 6 months ended 30 September 2025

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

Account	Year to date Actual	Year to date Budget	Variance	Variance %	Full Year Forecast	Full Year Budget	Forecast v Budget Variance	Comments
Trading Income								
Access Grant	-	-	-	0%	10,000	10,000	-	
Defra Capital Grant	17,157	17,157	(0)	0%	88,999	120,002	(31,003)	Release of CDEL against Core Projects full year - Climate Adaptation, IT Transformation and Rent £21k
Defra Core Grant	256,948	256,950	(2)	0%	513,996	513,900	96	
Interest Income	29,124	12,498	16,626	133%	48,624	24,996	23,628	Better utilisation of HSBC Money Market accounts to maximise interest on funds 1-3 months
Internal Fee Income	69,054	70,851	(1,797)	-3%	145,425	148,082	(2,657)	
Local Authority Contribution	64,833	64,830	3	0%	129,666	129,660	6	
Project Income	17,534	17,250	284	2%	35,034	34,500	534	
Sale of merchandise	254	-	254	0%	254	-	254	
Total Trading Income	**454,903**	**439,536**	**15,367**	**3%**	**971,997**	**981,140**	**(9,143)**	
Gross Profit	**454,903**	**439,536**	**15,367**	**3%**	**971,997**	**981,140**	**(9,143)**	
Operating Expenses								
Advertising & Marketing	4,720	6,360	1,640	26%	16,830	19,070	2,240	Savings on Annual report used to fund new website host provider
Bank Fees	45	78	33	42%	90	156	66	
Board Meetings	806	800	(6)	-1%	1,806	1,850	44	
Cleaning	1,791	1,428	(363)	-25%	3,368	2,856	(512)	
Computer and IT Equipment	403	-	(403)		1,303	-	(1,303)	Unbudgeted IT costs - may use CDEL to fund once finalised
Consulting	40,362	27,450	(12,912)	-47%	131,998	59,900	(72,098)	Includes Planning consultant costs of £25k for the full year, Tranformation costs (HR and IT)
Defra Capital Spend	7,907	7,907	-	0%	68,000	80,000	12,000	This represents CDEL use for Climate Adaptation Plan £48k and Transformation IT works £20k
Employers National Insurance	29,642	37,485	7,843	21%	63,511	76,064	12,553	Historic overpayment to HMRC of £5k adjusted for in Q2
Event costs	78	850	772	91%	2,028	2,950	922	
Finance costs	3,322	3,300	(22)	-1%	10,059	7,082	(2,977)	VAT review work by Azets was unbudgeted estimated at £3k
General Expenses	283	300	17	6%	1,583	1,600	17	
Insurance	10,837	11,352	515	5%	24,920	23,000	(1,920)	Insurance has increased due to higher staff numbers and income. Also includes provision for Professional indemnity insurance in addition to our management liability insurance
IT Software and Consumables	5,740	5,229	(511)	-10%	10,562	11,736	1,174	
IT support and maintenance	5,004	4,356	(648)	-15%	10,301	8,712	(1,589)	
Legal Expenses	2,399	4,400	2,001	45%	6,999	7,000	1	Budget phasing, planned that spend will be budget for year - we have a paralegal firm doing some contracts review work
Light, Power, Heating	720	1,600	880	55%	2,870	4,000	1,130	
Medical Insurance	1,535	1,680	146	9%	3,057	3,356	299	
Members Allowances	10,251	3,840	(6,411)	-167%	14,365	9,816	(4,549)	Back dated allowances claimed. Addiitonal members have registered and these costs are now factored into the forecast.
Pensions Costs	56,263	59,858	3,595	6%	110,146	120,625	10,479	See overall staff costs below
Postage, Freight & Courier	465	126	(339)	-269%	965	750	(215)	
Printing & Stationery	594	678	84	12%	3,420	3,582	162	
Rates and Water rates	4,453	4,458	5	0%	7,486	7,490	4	
Recruitment	406	500	94	19%	406	500	94	
Rent	9,900	9,900	-	0%	21,813	21,975	163	This is being funded as a capital lease via CDEL
Repairs & Maintenance	5,878	5,180	(698)	-13%	7,378	6,776	(602)	
Salaries	274,694	294,048	19,354	7%	534,530	592,035	57,505	Delays on recruitment of Admin assistant. Better recovery of Core Landscapes staff from Projects. Saving on Planning Assistant £25k being used to fund consultancy costs to 31 March 25
Staff expenses	28	150	122	81%	450	450	(0)	
Staff Training	6,269	6,270	1	0%	11,999	12,000	1	
Subscriptions	3,211	3,278	68	2%	4,289	4,724	436	
Telephone & Internet	1,879	1,902	23	1%	3,715	3,802	87	
Travel Expenses	1,465	1,802	337	19%	4,117	4,300	183	
Website running costs	2,298	744	(1,554)	-209%	3,298	1,488	(1,810)	We have moved over hosting of our website to Fidget for resilience but add costs of set up. These are funded by savings on Advertising and marketing costs - we budgeted £5k for Annual report which has been done inhouse
Total Operating Expenses	**493,648**	**507,309**	13,661	3%	**1,087,660**	**1,099,645**	**11,985**	
Net (Deficit)/Surplus	**(38,744)**	**(67,773)**	**29,029**	**43%**	**(115,663)**	**(118,505)**	**2,842**	
Total Staff costs (Salaries, NI & Pensions)	**360,599**	**391,391**	30,792		**708,186**	**788,724**	**80,538**	Programme Manager in budget for £40k (CDEL funded) , Planning Officer £25k (reallocated to consultancy), Admin officer delayed recruitment £12k), Historic overpayment £5k

APPENDIX 2
OVERALL PROFIT AND LOSS
Chilterns Conservation Board - Core and Projects
For the 6 months ended 30 September 2025

Account	CORE	PROJECTS	Total
Turnover			
Access Grant	-	326,871	326,871
Defra Capital Grant	17,157	1,193	18,350
Defra Core Grant	256,948	269,314	526,262
Interest Income	29,124	39,725	68,849
Internal Fee Income	69,054	28,548	97,602
Local Authority Contribution	64,833	43,971	108,804
Other Revenue	-	13,000	13,000
Project Income	17,534	604,047	621,580
Sale of merchandise	254	7	261
Total Turnover	**454,903**	**1,326,675**	**1,781,579**
Gross Profit	**454,903**	**1,326,675**	**1,781,579**
Administrative Costs			
Access grant expenditure	-	16,750	16,750
Advertising & Marketing	4,720	-	4,720
Bank Fees	45	-	45
Board Meetings	806	-	806
CCB Core Contribution	-	16,872	16,872
CCB recharges	-	85,416	85,416
Citizen Science	-	7,000	7,000
Cleaning	1,791	-	1,791
Computer and IT Equipment	403	922	1,326
Consulting	40,362	29,340	69,702
Defra Capital Spend	7,907	1,193	9,100
Education Costs	-	53	53
Employers National Insurance	29,642	30,831	60,474
Enhancements	-	154,451	154,451
Event costs	78	4,240	4,318
Finance costs	3,322	-	3,322
FiPL Grant	-	13,121	13,121
FiPL Grant Year 4 24/25	-	12,510	12,510
General Expenses	283	48,824	49,106
Insurance	10,837	-	10,837
Irrecoverable VAT	-	2,909	2,909
IT Software and Consumables	5,740	1,859	7,599
IT support and maintenance	5,004	925	5,929
Legal Expenses	2,399	-	2,399
Light, Power, Heating	720	-	720
Medical Insurance	1,535	1,364	2,899
Members Allowances	10,251	-	10,251
Mitigation	-	7,422	7,422
Nature Recovery	-	9,622	9,622
Other costs (activity) NLHF	-	1,078	1,078
Other costs NLHF	-	370	370
Pensions Costs	56,263	50,814	107,077
Postage, Freight & Courier	465	42	507
Printing & Stationery	594	651	1,245
Professional fees (activity)	-	41,185	41,185
Publicity and promotion	-	983	983
Rates and Water rates	4,453	-	4,453
Recruitment	406	449	854
Rent	9,900	1,500	11,400
Repairs & Maintenance	5,878	18	5,896
Research and survey expenditure	-	4,429	4,429
Salaries	274,694	243,127	517,820
Staff expenses	28	794	822
Staff Training	6,269	4,356	10,625
Subscriptions	3,211	53	3,264
Telephone & Internet	1,879	1,379	3,258
Training for volunteers	-	2,389	2,389
Travel Expenses	1,465	5,113	6,578
Website running costs	2,298	76	2,374
Total Administrative Costs	**493,648**	**804,429**	**1,298,077**
Operating Profit	**- 38,744**	**522,246**	**483,502**
Profit on Ordinary Activities Before Taxation	**- 38,744**	**522,246**	**483,502**
Profit after Taxation	**- 38,744**	**522,246**	**483,502**

APPENDIX 3
Balance Sheet
Chilterns Conservation Board
As at 30 September 2025

Account	30 Sept 2025	31 Mar 2025
Current Assets		
Total Cash at bank and in hand	**5,598,416**	**5,176,522**
Total Debtors	**100,935**	**286,997**
Total Current Assets	**5,699,351**	**5,463,520**
Total Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	**840,500**	**1,088,171**
Net Current Assets (Liabilities)	**4,858,851**	**4,375,349**
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	**4,858,851**	**4,375,349**
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year		
Pension Scheme Liability	(1,102,000)	(1,102,000)
Total Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one ye	**(1,102,000)**	**(1,102,000)**
Net Assets	**5,960,851**	**5,477,349**
Capital and Reserves		
Project Reserves:		
Beacons of the Past: Earmarked Reserves	24,095	24,095
CCC Forward Plan	61,357	61,357
Central Chilterns Conservation Agriculture	86,976	86,976
Chalk Streams Earmarked Reserve	168,951	168,951
CHAP	18,611	18,611
Chess Smarter Water Catchment Earmarked Reserves	169,936	169,936
Earmarked Reserves: Small Projects	2,900	2,900
Farm Advice: Earmarked Reserves	9,901	9,901
FIPL Earmarked Reserve	180,295	180,295
HS2 AP Reserve	(18,128)	(18,128)
Mend the Gap: Earmarked Reserves	2,728,773	2,728,773
Nature Calling Reserve	19,131	19,131
NBY Reserve	(25,061)	(25,061)
New Shoots Reserve	(10,633)	(10,633)
North Chilterns Farm Cluster	21,876	21,876
Red Kites Earmarked Reserve	5,859	5,859
Tracking the Impact (Rebel Restoration) Reserve	97,047	97,047
Younghusband Legacy Fund	74,505	74,505
Commons: Earmarked Reserves	21,837	21,837
Current Year Project earnings	522,246	0
Total Project Reserves	**4,160,472**	**3,638,226**
Core Reserves:		
Development Reserve	231,123	231,123
General Reserve	506,000	396,500
Current Year Earnings	(38,744)	109,500
Total Core Reserves	**698,379**	**737,123**
Pension Reserve	**1,102,000**	**1,102,000**
Total Capital and Reserves	**5,960,851**	**5,477,349**

Minimum Reserves as at 31 March per policy	388,000
Reserves to Fund 31.3.26 Deficit	118,000
	506,000

Chilterns Conservation Board
BY EMAIL

DDI:
+44 (0)20 7516 2200
Email:
sba@pkf-l.com
Date:
25 September 2025
Our Ref:
OT0011
SAAA Ref:
SB01932

Chilterns Conservation Board
Completion of the limited assurance review for the year ended 31 March 2025

Dear Mr Hurst (RFO)

We have completed our review of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for Chilterns Conservation Board for the year ended 31 March 2025. Please find our external auditor report and certificate (Section 3 of the AGAR Form 3) included for your attention as an attachment to the email containing this letter along with a copy of Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR, on which our report is based.

The external auditor report and certificate details any matters arising from the review. The smaller authority must publish these documents immediately and at the next meeting consider the final external auditor report and decide what, if any, action is required.

Action you are required to take at the conclusion of the review

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234) set out what you must do at the conclusion of the review. In summary, you are required to:

- Prepare a “Notice of conclusion of audit” which details the rights of inspection, in line with the statutory requirements. We attach a pro forma notice you may use for this purpose (a Word version is available on request).
- Publish the “Notice” along with the certified AGAR (Sections 1, 2 & 3) before 30 September 2025 , which must include publication on the smaller authority’s website. (Please note that when the statute and regulations were amended in 2014 and 2015, they did not include a requirement for the length of time for which that the “Notice” must be published. The previous statute required 14 days; but it is now up to the authority to make this decision).
- Keep copies of the AGAR available for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum.
- Ensure that Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the published AGAR remain available for public access for a period of not less than 5 years from the date of publication.

PKF Littlejohn LLP
15 Westferry Circus,
Canary Wharf, London
E14 4HD

T: +44 (0)20 7516 2200
pkf-l.com

Fee
We enclose our fee note, on page 4 of this attachment, for the limited assurance review, which is in accordance with the fee scales set by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd which can be found at https://www.saaa.co.uk/audit-fees/. This fee is statutory, must be paid and is due immediately on receipt of invoice, please arrange for this to be paid **at the earliest opportunity.**

Additional charges are itemised on the fee note, where applicable. These arise where either:

- we have had to issue chaser letters and/or exercise our statutory powers due to a failure to provide an AGAR by the submission deadline; or
- it was necessary for us to undertake additional work.

Please return the remittance advice with your payment, which should be sent to: **PKF Littlejohn LLP, Ref: Credit control (SBA), 5th Floor, 15 Westferry Circus, Canary Wharf, London, E14 4HD.** Please include the reference OT0011 or Chilterns Conservation Board as a reference when paying by BACS.

Timetable for 2025/26

Next year we plan to set a submission deadline for the return of the completed AGAR Form 3 and associated documents (or Certificate of Exemption) in the usual way and this is expected to be Wednesday 1 July 2026. It is anticipated that the instructions will be sent out during March 2026, subject to arrangements for the 2025/26 AGARs and Certificates of Exemption being finalised by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Limited (SAAA). Our instructions will cover any changes about which smaller authorities need to be aware.

- The smaller authority must inform the electorate of a single period of 30 working days during which public rights may be exercised. The period must be ***exactly*** 30 working days, please do not set public rights dates that cover a longer period. This information **must be published at least the day before** the inspection period commences;
- The inspection period ***must*** include the first 10 working days of July 2026, i.e. 1 to 14 July inclusive. In practice this means that public rights may be exercised:
  - at the earliest, between Wednesday 3 June and Tuesday 14 July 2026; and
  - at the latest, between Wednesday 1 July and Tuesday 11 August 2026.

As in previous years, in order to assist you in this process we plan to include a pro forma template notice with a suggested inspection period on our website. On submitting your AGAR and associated documentation, as was the case for this year, we will need you to either confirm that the suggested dates have been adopted or inform us of the alternative dates selected.

We would like to draw your attention to a change within the Practitioners' Guide 2025 which is mandatory for the 2025/26 period. Paragraphs 1.47 to 1.54 relate to an additional assertion to be included in the 2025-26 AGAR, Assertion 10, regarding email management, websites, compliance with both the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the requirement to have an IT policy. The requirements in relation to Assertion 10 are listed in Paragraphs 1.47 to 1.54 and the local authority should review these requirements and take appropriate steps to ensure compliance.

Feedback on 2024/25

We would welcome feedback on your experiences with PKF Littlejohn LLP during the review for the year ended 31 March 2025. Such feedback is important to us to help us drive improvements in client service. If you wish to provide feedback, our satisfaction survey template can be used, which is available on our website on this page: https://www.pkf-l.com/services/limited-assurance-regime/useful-information-and-links/

Yours sincerely

PKF Littlejohn LLP

PKF Littlejohn LLP

3

Chilterns Conservation Board

Notice of conclusion of audit

Annual Governance & Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2025

Sections 20(2) and 25 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014

Section 16 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)

	Notes
1. The audit of accounts for **Chilterns Conservation Board** for the year ended 31 March 2025 has been completed and the accounts have been published.	This notice and Sections 1, 2 & 3 of the AGAR must be published by 30 September. **This must include publication on the smaller authority's website.** The smaller authority must decide how long to publish the Notice for; the AGAR and external auditor report must be publicly available for 5 years.
2. The Annual Governance & Accountability Return including the auditor's certificate and opinion is available for inspection and copying by any local government elector of the area of **Chilterns Conservation Board** on application to:	
(a) ____________________ ____________________ ____________________ ____________________	(a) Insert the name, position and address of the person to whom local government electors should apply to inspect the AGAR
(b) ____________________ ____________________ ____________________	(b) Insert the hours during which inspection rights may be exercised
3. Copies will be provided to any local government elector of the area on payment of £____ (c) for each copy of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return.	(c) Insert a reasonable sum for copying costs
Announcement made by: (d) ____________________	(d) Insert the name and position of person placing the notice
Date of announcement: (e) ____________________	(e) Insert the date of placing of the notice

Mr Graham Hurst
Chilterns Conservation Board

Our ref OT0011

SAAA Ref SB01932

Invoice No. SB20252583

VAT No. GB 440 4982 50

Email: sba@pkf-l.com

Date: 25 September 2025

INVOICE

Professional services rendered in connection with the following:

Limited assurance review of Annual Governance & Accountability Return for year ended 31 March 2025	£3,360.00
Additional charges (where applicable) as detailed on attached appendix A	£0.00
Additional fees (where applicable) as detailed by separate cover	£0.00
TOTAL NET	£3,360.00
VAT @ 20%	£672.00
TOTAL PAYABLE	£4,032.00

THIS IS A STATUTORY FEE WHICH MUST BE PAID. PAYMENT IS DUE ON RECEIPT OF INVOICE

The fees and charges are in accordance with the fee scales set by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd which can be found at https://www.saaa.co.uk/audit-fees/

For payments by cheque, please return the remittance advice with your payment to:
PKF Littlejohn LLP, Credit Control (SBA), 5th Floor, 15 Westferry Circus, Canary Wharf, London E14 4HD

For payments by credit transfer, our bank details are:-

HSBC Bank plc
Address: 1-3 Bishopsgate, London, EC2N 3AQ
Sort Code: 40-02-31
Account number: 11070797
Account Name: PKF Littlejohn LLP
Please include OT0011 or Chilterns Conservation Board as the reference.

For account queries, contact sba@pkf-l.com

PKF Littlejohn LLP
15 Westferry Circus,
Canary Wharf, London
E14 4HD

T: +44 (0)20 7516 2200
pkf-l.com

PKF

Mr Graham Hurst
Chilterns Conservation Board

Our ref	OT0011
SAAA Ref	SB01932
Invoice No.	SB20252583
VAT No.	GB 440 4982 50
Email:	sba@pkf-l.com
Date:	25 September 2025

REMITTANCE ADVICE

Professional services rendered in connection with the following:

Limited assurance review of Annual Governance & Accountability Return for year ended 31 March 2025	£3,360.00
Additional charges (where applicable) as detailed on attached appendix A	£0.00
Additional fees (where applicable) as detailed by separate cover	£0.00
TOTAL NET	£3,360.00
VAT @ 20%	£672.00
TOTAL PAYABLE	£4,032.00

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For account queries, contact sba@pkf-l.com

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Canary Wharf, London
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pkf-l.com

Section 3 – External Auditor's Report and Certificate 2024/25

In respect of **Chilterns Conservation Board – OT0011**

1 Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2025; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

2 External auditor's limited assurance opinion 2024/25

On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

None.

3 External auditor certificate 2024/25

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2025.

External Auditor Name

PKF LITTLEJOHN LLP

External Auditor Signature PKF Littlejohn LLP

Date 25/09/2025

Item 2.2 **Quarter 2 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 July - September 2025 against the FY25-26 Delivery Plan.

Overall

- The Delivery Plan approved for FY25-26 was split into five workstreams and contains 28 active delivery areas (the same as last year) and 109 delivery lines (a slight increase from 103 last year). In Q2 (Jul-Sep 2025) the status of delivery across the CNL Team was as follows:

Completed	On Track	Slightly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Not due to have started	On Hold (Requiring External Input)	Cancelled / Postponed
44 (52)		35 (26)	19 (13)	6 (15)	2 (1)	3 (2)

Note "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").

- Progress in each of the 5 workstreams is detailed below along with an identification of key achievements and where there are significant delays or where work has had to be put on hold, postponed or cancelled along with the key mitigating actions that it has been agreed to take.

- Appendix 1 identifies the delivery status against individual delivery lines.

Improve Strategic Alignment (Workstream 1)

Completed	On Track	Slightly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Not due to have started	On Hold (Requiring External Input)	Cancelled / Postponed
7 (8)		6 (6)	3 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Numbers in brackets represent pervious quarter figures

Key achievements this quarter:

- Scheme of Delegation approved by the Board in September
- Significant engagement with MPs on boundary review, funding, S85 Duty and chalk streams as well as with the new All Party Parliamentary Group on Protected Landscapes
- New Board members appointed and onboarded
- Inward investment case developed and presented to Local Authorities
- Initial conversations held with Defra / NLA re improved funding envelope for Conservation Boards
- CNL Team briefed on carbon literacy and significant number of staff signed up to training from NLA

Significant delays or where delivery has been put on hold, postponed or cancelled this quarter:

- **1.1.2 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act:** The potential that the government could repeal the s85 Duty has led to difficulty in getting traction with stakeholders, thereby reducing impetus on developing and disseminating information to stakeholders and need to transfer focus to defend need for the Duty

  Mitigation: New Adviser (Policy) will be tasked with developing a briefing and briefing staff

- **1.2.2 Board and Committee Operations:** Progress finalising Board and Committee processes and procedures has not taken place due to Head of Operations and Head of Strategy & Planning capacity.

  Mitigation: Ownership of the development of processes and procedures will be transferred to the Head of Strategy & Planning who will finalise these using the organisational templates.

- **1.5.1 Income Diversity:** Work to diversify income has been limited due to capacity of SLT and Senior Managers so that whilst there has been some action (including putting forward projects to NLA to showcase) a clearer strategy is needed to tackle this.

  Mitigation: Prioritise getting in place a Funding Strategy in line with the 5 year Management Plan and create capacity for the CEO to drive work in this area forward.

Increase Operational Effectiveness (Workstream 2)

Completed	On Track	Slightly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Not due to have started	On Hold (Requiring External Input)	Cancelled / Postponed
6 (6)		14 (12)	6 (3)	0 (6)	0 (0)	2 (0)

Numbers in brackets represent pervious quarter figures

Key achievements this quarter:

- All HR policies have been signed off by the Board and staff review phase undertaken (currently working through over 120 lines of feedback)
- Discussions held with staff to ensure services provided by the health and wellbeing provider (Westfield Health) were being utilised and were adequate
- All project budgets are now on the finance system and forecasting work within year now started / work to understand capital funding from Defra has resulted in ability to cover office rent for the next five years / cashflow forecasting and improved treasury function has significantly increased interest earned
- New organisation Sharepoint site established and security groups set up with 4 training sessions delivered to staff / transfer of files to the new site has commenced
- Risk Assessment training for all field staff with c. 100 assessments carried out to date in new system
- Terms of Reference and MoU for CCSP developed and presented to the Steering Group
- Improved ways of working for SLT to review delivery progress implemented and two Team Development sessions have been scheduled in for Q3

Significant delays or where delivery has been put on hold, postponed or cancelled this quarter:

- **2.1.3 Staff Handbook / 2.1.6 HR System:** A lack of capacity both within the Operations Team, and especially the Head of Operations, as well as the longer than expected time it has taken to develop the HR policies has meant that work in this area has not progressed.

  Mitigation: This lack of capacity and the need to reduce the level of transformation activity landing in the organisation from a staff point of view lead to a decision to postpone the finalisation of the staff handbook (to focus on standing up approved HR policies and HR processes) and the introduction of an HR system for the organisation to reconsider in FY26-27.

- **2.1.7 Staff Engagement:** A lack of capacity for the Comms Manager and the CEO meant that the Pulse Survey that was scheduled to be carried out in June was not carried out in Q2.

  Mitigation: It has been decided following informal consultation with a cross-section of staff that the number of pulse surveys during the year will be cut from 3 to 1 half-way between the annual Staff Engagement Surveys to allow more focus on addressing issues.

- **2.4.2 H&S Policies, Processes & Procedures (Organisation) / 2.4.3 H&S Policies, Processes & Procedures (Field):** A lack of capacity for the Head of Operations, and no internal support in addition to the time needed to focus on training field staff in new Risk Assessment procedures and addressing issues with the new system meant that it has not been possible to move forward with work in this area.

  Mitigation: A new Administrator has been appointed with a capacity built in to focus on Health & Safety and HR in addition to Finance. This will allow improved focus on H&S Policies, Processes & Procedures. Meeting with Risk Fluent has taken place to reprioritise plan.

- **2.6.5 Collaborative Working:** A lack of capacity with the Head of Operations means that a planned internal focus group on collaboration has not been established as planned.

  Mitigation: There will be a review of focus groups following a review of the Staff Survey results in Q3.

Conserve & Enhance Natural Beauty (Workstream 3)

Completed	On Track	Slightly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Not due to have started	On Hold (Requiring External Input)	Cancelled / Postponed
16 (18)		10 (6)	3 (4)	3 (5)	1 (0)	0 (0)

Numbers in brackets represent pervious quarter figures

Key achievements this quarter:

- £182, 937 funding has been granted through FiPL this quarter
- PLTOF target setting exercise completed
- 15 farms engaged on the farming insects project with 18ha of habitat created, demo plots established and workshops delivered, beetle and pollinator surveys completed on 15 habitat types and funding secured for Grey Partridge baseline surveys and winter supplement feeding (Central Chilterns)
- Spring bird survey completed for 6th year (Central Chilterns)
- £112,000 (Chess) / £285,000 (North Chilterns) respectively secured for ground projects
- Initial results of surveys carried out for 6 landowners showing presence of rare species and butterflies, enhancements to Cholsey Marsh continued, offer letters for projects at Withymead, Beale Park and Wallingford Brook are being completed
- INNS control programme on Gade and Misbourne completed / contractors appointed for work on Flaunden Brook & Dodds Mill, Hamble Brook & Mill End Farm and tender published for work on Hughenden Manor / Funding for Mending the Misbourne project confirmed in July / New Smarter Water Catchment Citizen Science Co-ordinator appointed and in post (CCSP / SWC)
- FDRI: First review of Catchment Management Plan completed for the Chess

Significant delays or where delivery has been put on hold, postponed or cancelled this quarter:

- **3.1.2 Nature Recovery Plan (Delivery Planning, Support & Reporting):** Work in this area has been delayed due to delays in the publication of the Management Plan and Nature Recovery Plan coupled with delays in the publication of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

  Mitigation: Continue to liaise with LNRS partnerships on the development of their LNRS delivery even when plans are not published to ensure Nature Recovery Plan priorities are included

- **3.1.5 FiPL Changes:** There has been no information from Defra about the future or otherwise of the FiPL programme so work in this area is essentially on hold until this is forthcoming.

- **3.8.1 Planning Strategy & Rationalisation**: Lack of capacity in 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 has meant work in this area has not progressed. To address this it was agreed in Q2 that a consultant would be recruited into the role of Planning Adviser (Policy) and this person is now in post.

  Mitigation: New Planning Adviser (Policy) will support delivery of non-radical changes this year. More radical changes that depend on successful Local Authority engagement postponed until FY26-27.

- **3.8.4 Internal Planning Advice: The** Head of Strategy & Planning has not had the capacity to more effectively define this delivery line in terms of what is required and therefore whilst external advice is being given it is not consistent and priorities for action are not defined.

  Mitigation: With the hiring of a Planning Adviser (Policy) the Head of Strategy & Planning should have more time to effectively define this delivery line.

Improve Understanding & Enjoyment (Workstream 4)

Completed	On Track	Slightly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Not due to have started	On Hold (Requiring External Input)	Cancelled / Postponed
12 (13)		1 (1)	2 (0)	0 (1)	1 (1)	0 (0)

Numbers in brackets represent pervious quarter figures

Key achievements this quarter:

- EDI Ambition Statement has been revised and a Youth Engagement approach drafted
- £127,935 funding has been granted through Access for All
- Luton Henge Festival delivered in July with c.1,060 attendees and significant volunteer input with 3 school visits (58 attendees) on official visits to Luton Henge (Nature Calling)
- Nature Towns and Cities bid was successful (North Chilterns Partnership)
- A survey was launched to understand how people want to engage with chalk streams and outreach event held in High Wycombe on World Rivers Day (Not Bourne Yesterday)
- South Stoke Community Garden opened (Mend the Gap)
- 3 education sessions delivered to schools /community groups along with 7 guided walks / community events and a water saving schools programme has been launched (CCSP)

Significant delays or where delivery has been put on hold, postponed or cancelled this quarter:

- **4.1.3 Volunteering Strategy & Approach:** Work in this area has not been able to move forward due to the Head of Partnerships and Engagement having a lack of capacity.

Mitigation: One of the Landscapes Team involved in citizen science (which is the focus of our volunteering) and who has more capacity will be asked to develop a 1-2 page strategic overview.

- **4.1.5 PLTOF Access Targets:** Work in this area cannot be planned until information is received from Defra. As such work in this area is effectively on hold until this input comes from Defra.

- **4.2.4 Mend the Gap – Access & EDI Projects:** The withdrawal of an expression of interest for a potentially large project means that there is pressure on allocating money in this area in time for delivery within the length of the project.

  Additional Mitigation: Landscape signage was raised at the Board meeting following the Boundary Review cancellation. Given capacity issues no work will be carried out in this area this year.

Effectively Communicate (Workstream 5)

Completed	On Track	Slightly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Significantly Delayed or Limited in Effectiveness	Not due to have started	On Hold (Requiring External Input)	Cancelled / Postponed
3 (7)		4 (1)	5 (4)	3 (3)	0 (0)	1 (1)

Numbers in brackets represent pervious quarter figures

Key achievements this quarter:

- Hubspot (contact management) system has been set up and 90% of the staff trained on its use
- Management Plana and Nature Recovery Plan design underway
- First draft of Annual Review completed
- Announcement of new Board Members
- New toolkit for planners and parish councils (inc new lighting guidance) launched

Significant delays or where delivery has been put on hold, postponed or cancelled this quarter:

- **5.2.1 Management Plan / 5.2.2 Nature Recovery Plan:** The design of the Management Plan has been delayed due to the number of rounds of design needed and capacity constraints with delays in people reviewing sections and feeding back, the need to gather new or better images and to write new case studies. The Comms Manager was also away for 3 weeks during this quarter and therefore unable to drive progress. Delays in the publication of the Management Plan are having a significant impact on the ability of the Comms Team to deliver other areas of their programme, inc. the publication of the Nature Recovery Plan as this follows the Management Plan and has experienced its own delays especially around the increased complexity in the recreation of infographics.

  Mitigation: Key SLT members need to set aside time to review and feedback in more timely manner. Advice being sought internally to increase speed around development of infographics.

- **5.4.1 CNL Brand / 5.4.2 Internal Brand Guidelines / 5.5.2 Internal Messaging:** Because of the delays and additional work needed to publish the Management Plan and the Nature Recovery Plan the Comms Manager continues to have no time to devote to these areas of work.

  Mitigation: All work in this area is currently not being progressed. There is a need to replan / prioritise work that has not been able to proceed because of this. This will be done once the Management Plan and Nature Recovery Plan are published when the Comms Manager has time to focus on this.

Recommendation

1. **To NOTE and OFFER FEEDBACK on progress made in Quarter 2 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
- On hold (requiring external input)
- 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	Postponed		
2.1.4 HR Processes	No activity scheduled			
2.1.5 HR Compliance				
2.1.6 HR System	No activity scheduled	Postponed		
2.1.7 Staff Engagement				
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)				
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				
2.6.4 New Work Governance				
2.6.5 Collaborative Working				
2.6.6 Prog Governance & Legacy Planning (Mend the Gap)				
Workstream 3: Conserve and Enhance Natural Beauty				
3.1 Operationalising Strategy				
3.1.1 PLTOF Target Setting				
3.1.2 Nature Recovery Delivery Plan (Delivery Planning, Support and Reporting)	No activity scheduled			
3.1.3 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (Internal Alignment)	No activity scheduled			
3.1.4 Farming Strategy	No activity scheduled	No activity scheduled		
3.1.5 FiPL Changes		On hold		
3.1.6 Scaling Citizen Science	No activity scheduled	No activity scheduled		
3.1.7 Citizen Science Strategy	No activity scheduled	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 / HS2 Panel Review Group				
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				
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				
3.8.2 Planning Advice				
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	On hold	On hold		
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	No output scheduled			
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	No output scheduled		
5.1.3 Contact Management				
5.1.4 Image Library	No output scheduled	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				
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				
5.4.2 Brand Guidelines				
5.5 Internal Comms				
5.5.1 Internal Comms Platform	No output scheduled	No output scheduled		
5.5.2 Internal Messaging				

Acronyms

Common acronyms used in the table are given below:

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
MTG = Mend the Gap
NBY = Not Bourne Yesterday
NRP = Nature Recovery Plan
PLTOF = Protected Landscape Targets & Outcomes Framework
SWC = Smarter Water Catchment

Item 2.3	**Annual Planning 2026-27**
Author:	Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations
Purpose:	To provide the Executive Committee with an update of the Annual Planning cycle for FY26-27 that is taking place between Oct 2025 and March 2026

Key Principles for FY26-27

Over the last 2 years the CNL Team has been on a journey to develop more robust, efficient and effective annual planning and this year we are looking to go further on that journey.

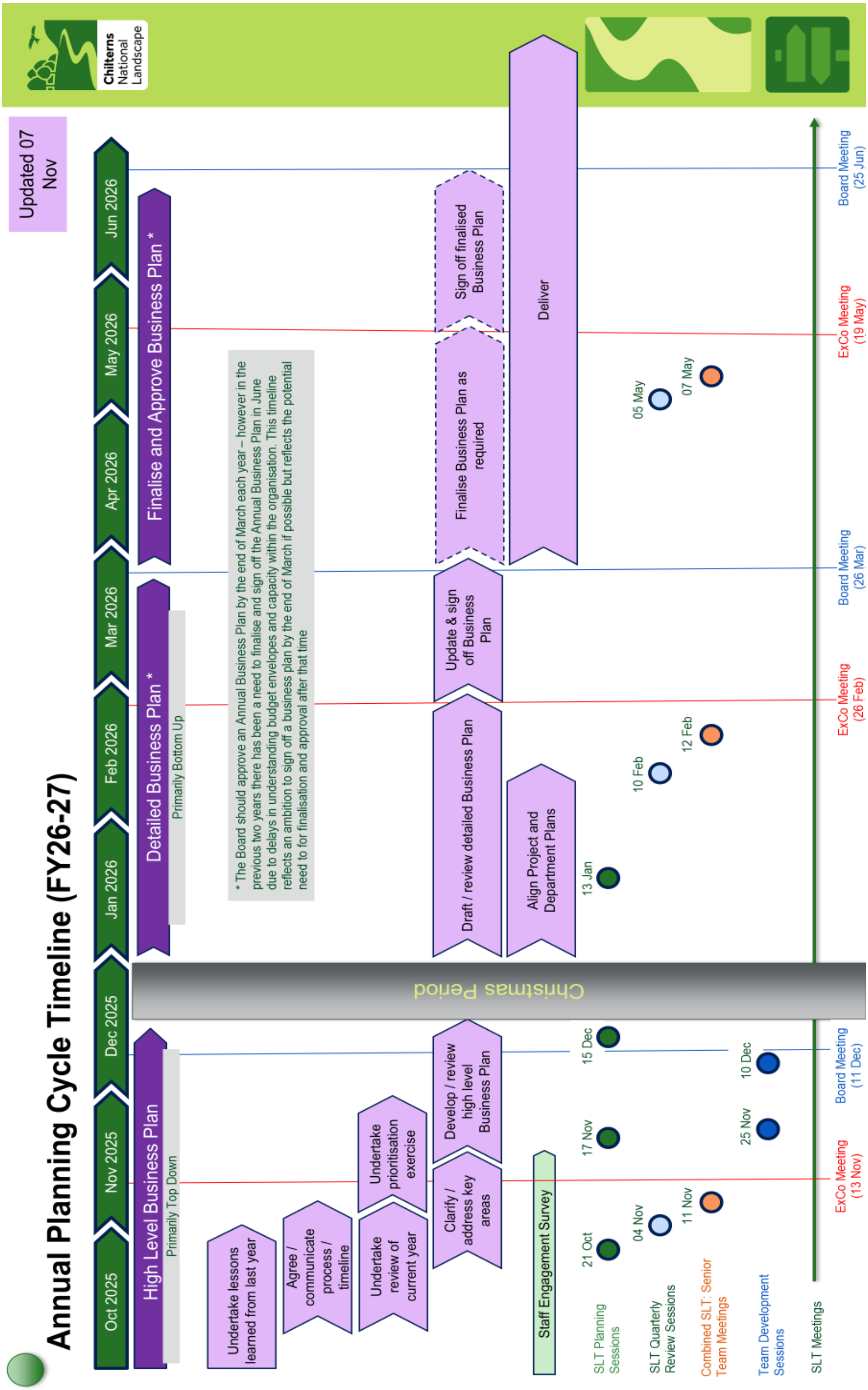
The key principles for annual planning this year include:

- Increasing ownership of the annual business plan across the CNL Team to improve the way that it is used throughout the year to improve monitoring and critical management decisions
- Increasing the transparency between programme and project plans and the annual business plan
- Increasing the transparency and links between the annual business plan and 5-year strategic planning
- Increasing line of sight for managers about what input will be required of them in terms of inputs into the planning cycle required from managers including time required of them
- Linking both the staff engagement survey and team development into the development of the annual business plan
- Expanding the annual business plan to more closely incorporate / reflect risks and the risk register
- Increasing the efficiency of the annual planning process to that the plan can be completed on time (eg on resource planning)
- Ensuring that there is enough time in the planning cycle to ensure that there can be a focus on addressing the deliverability of the plan during the planning process rather than acting retrospectively

On the following pages are slides that have been developed and presented to the CNL staff team around the business planning cycle (and will be discussed to get feedback from Senior Managers in the SLT : Senior Team combined meeting on 11 Nov 2025. These show:

a) The Annual Planning Cycle for this year
b) The different components of the Annual Business Plan that will be developed
c) How the Annual Planning Cycle fits into longer term strategic planning
d) Increased transparency around the process to provide greater clarity for the CNL Team

Annual Business Plan Cycle

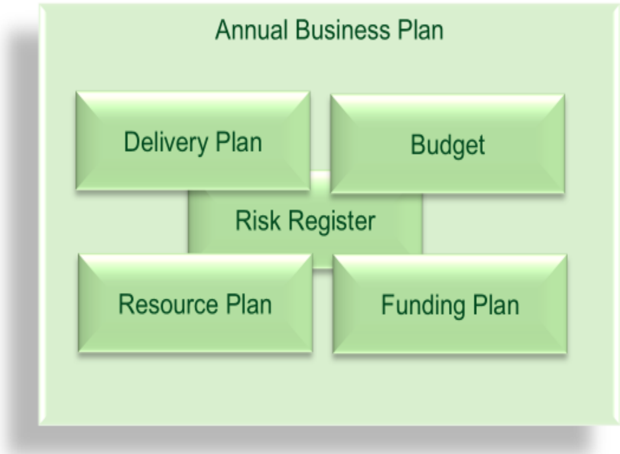


The different components of the Annual Business Plan

New slide

What are the different components of the Annual Business Plan

The Annual Business Plan consists of 5 separate but inter-related components that need to align and support each other



Delivery Plan: This sets what the CNL Team aims to deliver over the course of the following year (and at a higher level over the following 3 years). It is structured by specific delivery lines under workstreams and work areas and forms the basis against which reporting is undertaken to the Executive Committee.

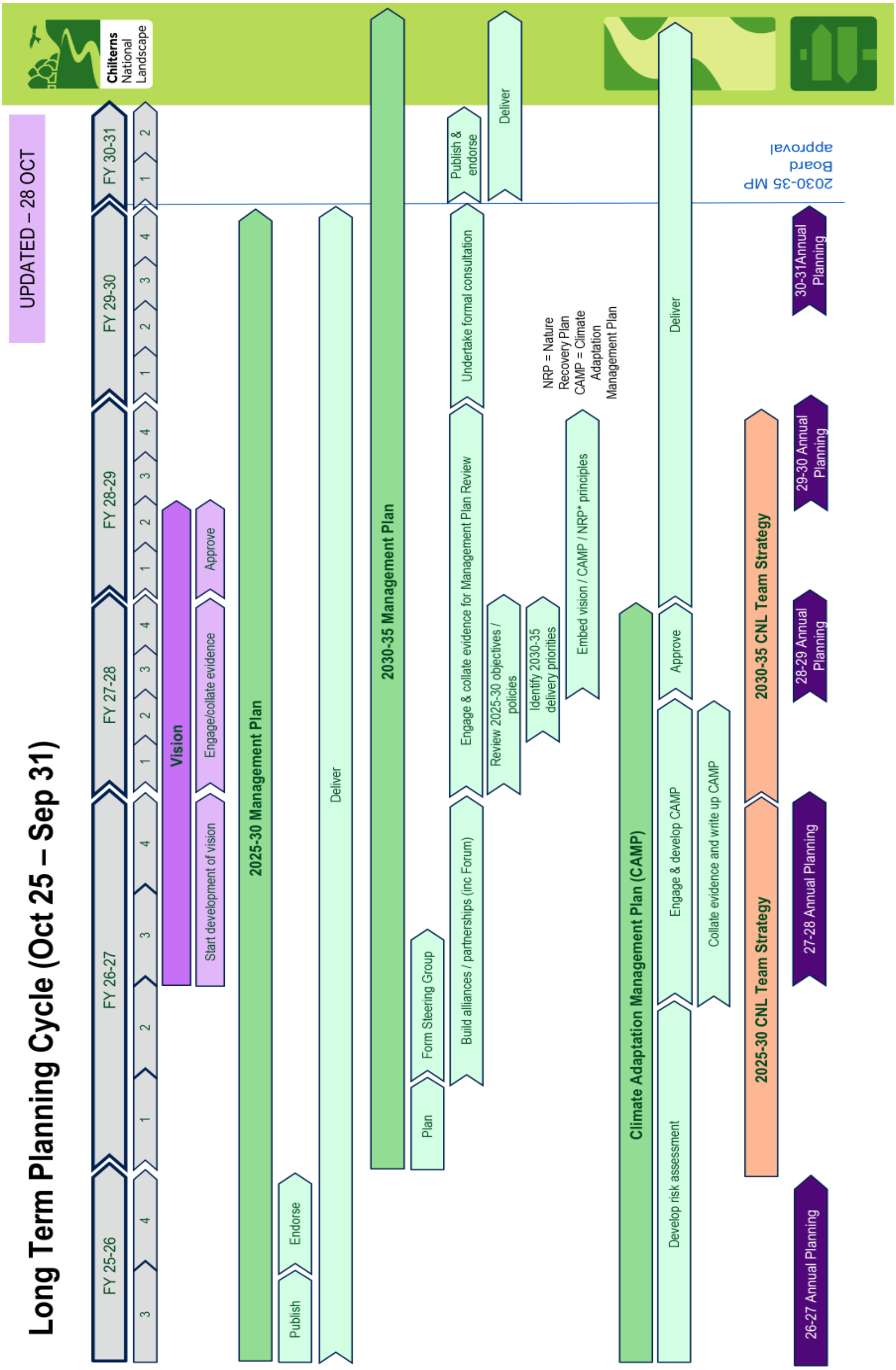
Budget: This sets out the expected expenditure of the CNL Team to successfully deliver the Delivery Plan over the course of the following year. The overall budget is made up of the core budget as well as programme and project budgets. The budget also identifies if and where there are gaps in funding with an identification of how these will be addressed.

Resource Plan: This sets out the expected allocation of staff time to successfully deliver the Delivery Plan over the course of the following year by breaking down each delivery line and understanding the staff resource requirement and approach needed to deliver it. The resource plan also identifies where there are gaps in staff capacity and capability with an identification of how these will be addressed. The resource plan also reflects the longer-term view of organisation development (i.e. how the organisation needs to adapt going forward to ensure that it can continues to deliver). A funding gap.

Funding Plan: This sets out the activity that needs to be undertaken over the course of the following year to secure funding to successfully deliver the Delivery Plan as well as other future work where there is a funding gap. It reflects the longer-term funding strategy for the organisation.

Risk Register: This sets out the key risks and issues for the organisation including how these will be mitigated. As such the Delivery Plan needs to reflect this work and the Risk Register in turn needs to capture any risks that may be identified in delivering the Delivery Plan as well as other underlying organisational risks.

How the Annual Planning Cycle fits into the Longer Term Planning Cycle



Increased Transparency and Planning being provided around the Annual Planning Cycle

Annual Planning Meetings

October – December — Primarily Top Down

The majority of the annual planning before Christmas will take place through SLT meetings and SLT offsites. Specific time has been put aside in each SLT meeting to advance this with 2 offsites scheduled to allow for more in-depth discussion.

However, to ensure that there is an understanding of the work that the SLT is doing in this regard and a chance for staff and in particular Senior Managers to input into this process a combined SLT : Senior Team meeting has been scheduled in November and there will be briefings in the Team Meetings around progress up to Christmas.

Normally we would look to put in another Combined SLT : Senior Team meeting before Christmas. However, we are also keen that we spend time on address Team Development so that we include this in any plan going forward. We have 2 workshops planned before Christmas and as a consequence felt this was more important than squeezing in another SLT: Senior Team meeting.

ALL STAFF	SENIOR TEAM	SLT
2 x 5-6 hr Team Development workshops Updates in Team Meetings	As All Staff plus 1 x Combined SLT : Senior Team Meeting (2 hr) Ongoing dialogue as needed	As Senior Team plus 2 x 6hr Offsites 45 min in weekly SLT meetings (as needed)

January - March — Primarily Bottom Up

From January we are looking at doing two things – fleshing out the high level business plan with more detail (e.g. being clear on scope, outcomes and quarterly outputs. Secondly, as part of this process we will ensure that there is clear alignment with partnership, programme and projects plans as well as associated budgets, clarity on resource, risks and funding requirements. A key element of this is to improve integration and ownership of the plan throughout the organisation.

To do this we will need to hold a series of meetings with each team (see next slide for more detail)

Alongside this we are looking to hold 2 SLT : Senior Team Combined meetings to discuss progress and ensure alignment in January and in February before the Business Plan is submitted to the Executive Committee for their input

ALL STAFF	SENIOR TEAM	SLT
Involvement in some Planning Alignment meetings for specific area (see next slide) Updates in Team Meetings Team Meeting presentation	As All Staff plus Involvement in all Planning Alignment meetings for specific area (see next slide) 2 x Combined SLT: Senior Team Meeting (2hr)	As Senior Team plus 1 x 6hr Offsite 45 min in weekly SLT meetings (as needed)

Senior Team refers to all Managers who report directly into the SLT

Chilterns National Landscape

Slide to be agreed

Planning Alignment Meetings

The purpose of the planning alignment meetings is as follows:

a) To ensure that there is clear alignment between existing partnership, programme and project plans and the overall organisation delivery plans

b) To ensure where there are no plans in existence that plans and associated budgets etc are created

c) To have critical discussions around priorities and resources (the point here being that having these discussions before the start of the year means that everyone is aligned and issues can be addressed and understood – rather than these coming to light later in the year

d) To ensure that there is clear understanding and ownership of the overall organisation business plan across the organisation

Proposed Planning Alignment Meetings for planning this year

- CCSP
- Nature Recovery
- Not Bourne Yesterday
- CHAP
- FiPL
- Understanding and Enjoyment
- Mend the Gap
- Operations
- Communications
- Planning

Senior Team refers to all Managers and Senior Officers who are responsible for a specific programme area and report directly into the SLT

Nick Marriner
Wendy Morrison
Allen Beechey / New CCSP Lead
Gareth Clay
Ruth Staples-Rolfe
Vicki Pearce
Kathryn Foster

There can be no one size fits all for the Planning Alignment meetings as different areas have different plans in place / are of different size and complexity and are at different stages in the strategic thinking around their area. As such discussions will be held with each area to agree the individual meetings required. However, there are two important principals at stake:

- There is the opportunity to fully involve the whole team – not necessarily in all meetings – but in some to ensure clarity and ownership of the plan
- There is the opportunity to flex the high-level plan based on increased input from these sessions

Meeting 1

Initial Planning and Reporting Alignment Meeting

Meeting 2

Resourcing Review Meeting

Meeting 3

Budget Meeting

Meeting 4

Team Alignment Meeting

Recommendation

1. **To NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK on the Annual Planning Cycle for FY26-27**

Item 2.4	**Funding Report**
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 the Committee's last meeting in September 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, this financial year is the last of a three-year flat cash settlement. Our income this year therefore comprises: Core Revenue funding (£513,896); Core Capital (CDEL) funding (£347,722), 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. Significant time has been spent by Officers in recent months 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.

Huge uncertainty of budgets for next year therefore remain, with Defra advising that we will hear more about our Core Revenue grant in early 2026. Furthermore, there is no clarity on whether the other funding sources above will exist in 2026/27. Again, we wait to hear from Defra. These timescales for securing clarity on funding prolongs uncertainty and makes financial and resource planning more challenging. This is explored further in the Q2 Finance Report (item 2.1).

We have continued to discuss and share information with the National Landscapes Association (NLA), the Cotswolds Conservation Board 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. 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.

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 (see Q2 Finance Report for more detail). 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.

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. As in the last reporting period, this period involved proactive engagement 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).

During this period, emails were sent to all three Councils setting out the inward investment contributed by the CCB's activities in those local authority areas in 2024/25. This comprises (at a minimum): £123k for Luton Council; £160k for Centrals Beds; and £1.35m for Bucks Council. A meeting is arranged in late November with Luton's CEO, Bucks have confirmed that they will not being contributing the full amount required (and will likely be contributing less next year), and Central Beds have failed to respond to our emails.

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

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. A recent review of the Q2 Delivery Plan has, however, highlighted the need to be more proactive in this area of work, and a full Funding Strategy will be developed for the coming financial year.

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 in early 2025 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, though the process of agreeing a contract and obtaining the funds has been very protracted. 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 funding bid for the pre-development project stage. The £259k bid for 18-months of funding was submitted on 30 October and includes £21k of technical advice from CNL. The project aims to create a nature corridor focused on the Chalk Ridge and Ridgeway National Trail as it passes through the two National Landscapes. We expect to hear whether the bid has been successful in February 2026.

- **Chess Smarter Water Catchments (Secured)**: Thames Water advised this month its intention to offer a further £1.4m to fund work in the Chess catchment for four years until 31 March 2030 to be put towards the Chalk Streams Flagship Restoration Project. Any existing underspend can also be used to support the programme of activities in 2026/7. While a welcome development, this is less than we had sought, and we will now be reprofiling the proposed work programme and discussing plans and funding allocations with partners.

- Earlier this year, we also secured one-year interim funding of £334k from Thames Water to support the SWC 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.

- **Natural England Species Recovery Programme:** We have worked in partnership with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trusts (GWCT) to submit an Expression of Interest to the Natural England Species Recovery Programme. GWCT will anchor the application that will cover work across the Central, Chess Valley and North Chilterns Farmer clusters and focus on targeted works for identified and named Red Listed species (eg Corn Bunting and Duke of Burgundy butterfly). The total request in the EOI is for £675,901 of which £359,930 is for work in the Chilterns (the balance is for works in two other clusters that are part of the partnership proposal). We are hoping to hear back by the end of November 2025 and, if the EOI is successful, will support the GWCT to develop a detailed application for submission by the end of February 2026. If successful, delivery would expect to start from June 2026 and finish by the end of March 2029.

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 focused in and around Luton leading to the development of Luton Henge. The CCB received over £60,000 directly to support the programme to date. More on the project here.

- The programme is now coming to an end, with work focussing on ensuring a strong legacy for the communities involved. This has included a successful bid by Revoluton Arts to the Arts Council England, securing £1m.

- We also supported Luton Council with a successful multi-partner £1 million bid to the **National Lottery Heritage Fund's Nature Towns and Cities fund** (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 2.5	**<u>Committee Dates in 2026</u>**
Author:	Matt Thomson, Deputy Monitoring Officer
Purpose of Report:	To agree meeting dates for the Executive Committee to be approved by the Board at its December meeting.

<u>Background</u>

1. This paper proposes meeting dates for the Executive Committee in 2026 for the Committee's consideration, and for recommendation to the Board for its approval at its December meeting.

2. Approval of a calendar of Board and Committee meetings is a matter reserved to the Board under the Scheme of Delegation approved by the Board in September 2025. Traditionally, committees determine their own meeting dates for the following year at their last meeting of the year during the Autumn, and propose these for the Board to approve, alongside its own meeting dates, at its December meeting.

3. It is proposed that Executive Committee's meetings follow the same pattern as in 2025, which enables alignment with quarterly reporting and business planning activities.

4. The dates suggested by officers for the Executive Committee to consider are as follows (the current suggested dates for Executive Committee and the Board are included for reference purposes – these dates have not yet been approved by the Board).

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thu 22 January	**Thu 26 February**	Thu 26 March
Thu 30 April	**Tue 19 May**	Thu 25 June (inc AGM)
None	**Tue 1 September**	Thu 1 October (Strategy)
Thu 29 October	**Thu 19 November**	Thu 10 December

5. Meetings will usually be held in the morning, starting at 10am, in CCB's office in Chinnor.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

1. **That the Committee AGREES dates for its meetings in 2026 to be submitted to the Board for approval at its December meeting.**

Item 2.6 **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 applying the criteria for this year's capital (CDEL) uplift), progressing the organisational transformation programme (especially HR Policies, IT and Health and Safety), liaising with Defra and the National Landscapes Association (NLA) on a range of areas, and engaging with MPs including the new Defra Secretary of State, Emma Reynolds, MP for High Wycombe.

Access for All funding from Defra was received in mid-July. The full allocation is £429k and some excellent projects have been funded to the value of around £188k. Projects already funded and delivered include Chiltern Way finger posts, an accessible path and benches at Luton Henge, an access workshop, accessibility improvements at Amersham Museum, path resurfacing at BBOWT's College Lake, National Trust's Dunstable Downs and the Chiltern Open Air Museum, videography, nature trail videos and countryside access leaflets, and work experience with the Chiltern Rangers.

Projects to the value of just over £100k are in the pipeline, including gates and paths at a range of National Trust sites. We expect to allocate the full amount and work to be complete by year end.

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 December, pending final review by the SLT and Board Chair and including any necessary updates following discussion with Natural England. More detail is available on our website here. Similarly, our Nature Recovery Plan - also approved at the last Board meeting - is also at the design stage and expected to be ready in early January.

Other work has included liaising with MPs and others regarding improving chalk streams protection and Natural England cancelling its project to review the Chilterns boundary – for which there remains considerable disquiet - supporting Defra in recruiting, onboarding and developing lessons learned for new Secretary of State appointed Board members, carrying out inductions and on-boarding, engaging with local authorities (including attempting to secure full financial contributions), exploring new funding opportunities, finalising the last tranche of new HR policies, conducting mid-term staff reviews, managing risk, including implementing new systems for risk assessments, and collaborating with the NLA and other National Landscapes.

Changes to the Board
The process for recruiting new Secretary of State appointed Board members concluded successfully in mid-August, with Defra confirming six new Board members. Four members took 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) came to an end. Defra conducted an induction session for new National Park and Conservation Board members on 8th September.

We also now have a full complement of local authority Board members, following the May local elections in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire. As part of the discussions, Local Authority officers, new Leaders and new members appointed to the Board, were provided with a briefing paper on the Roles and Responsibilities of the CCB's Board members.

The CCB held an induction session for new and existing Board members on 28th August and further sessions are planned. Slides from the session have also been circulated to all members.

Other local and national government engagement
This period has seen continued high levels of engagement with MPs and local authorities through meetings and emails. MPs continue to be kept abreast of our concerns and developments across the Protected Landscape sector, including our own specific challenges as a Conservation Board.

A new All Party Parliamentary Group on National Parks and National Landscapes held its first meeting in October. Hosted by the Campaign for National Parks and supported by the NLA and National Parks England, this first session attracted a good. Number of MPs, including some from the Chilterns. I have been invited to present to a forthcoming meeting.

One of our MPs, Freddie Van Mierlo, MP for Henley, also tabled an Early Day Motion in September, calling for the Chilterns boundary review to be resumed and recognising the value of National Landscapes and National Parks in delivering the government's nature recovery targets and improving access to these landscapes. It also asks for more detail on how the government will properly fund National Landscapes and National Parks.

We are also making this wider point that the network of Protected Landscapes will need to be properly resourced in future year if we are to be able to fully contribute to the government's 30x30 targets, and that we need the right kind of agri-environment schemes, policies, regulation and legislation, all with long-term funding certainty. To support this, the NLA have calculated the resources needed for Protected Landscapes to deliver the government's nature recovery targets here.

Time has been spent in this period informing MPs of the importance of the s85 Protected Landscapes Duty and the rumours that the government intended to repeal the Duty through a late amendment to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, as it perceived it as a block on housing development. I joined over 200 people and organisations in signing a letter to the Prime Minister that urged him not to repeal the Duty and explain its benefits. See here for more information and the letter, and my LinkedIn post here. The government's guidance on the new duty here.

We understand that the government is now exploring other ways by which it might repeal the s85 Duty and ongoing work now includes providing evidence through case studies to the NLA to demonstrate the importance of the Duty and that it does not inhibit economic growth.

We have also liaised with MPs over the government's response to a petition seeking proper protection for chalk streams, in which it announces that the Chalk Stream Recovery Pack, developed collaboratively by the best minds in the sector, under the last government 'falls short of the government's these wider ambitions and is no longer being taken forward'. This has caused considerable concern and is being challenged. In the meantime, I have a meeting scheduled to discuss the matter with a Defra official at the end of November.

We were pleased to welcome a team from the Office for Environmental Protection in mid-October, comprising the Chief Scientist, environmental analysts and a lawyer. They are scoping out a new inquiry into National Parks and National Landscapes and spent the day with us learning about our work, the challenges and opportunities and our views on how our governance, legislation and funding arrangements can be improved. It was really helpful to be joined by Ruth Larbey from the NLA to give a wider perspective from all National Landscapes.

We also took the team on a site visit to show first-hand how our nature recovery work with farmers and landowners, and the importance of well-functioning agri-environment schemes, is a key element of delivering nature recovery and other environmental outcomes in the Chilterns (and other Protected Landscapes). With thanks to colleagues Kate Heppell, Matt Thomson, Harriet Bennett, Melinda Dresser and Gareth Clay for their valuable insight. My LinkedIn post here.

Engagement with Local Authorities during this period included attending the September launch of Buckinghamshire Council's first Economic Growth Plan. My LinkedIn post here. Significant effort has been spent trying to secure full contributions from three of our local authorities who don't provide the full amount as required by Defra. See the Q2 Finance Report and Funding Report for more detail.

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 met on 22nd September and agreed some key actions including measures to raise awareness and visibility of the Chilterns Management Plan and the s85 Duty amongst our local authorities.

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.

Collaborating with the National Landscape Association and other Protected Landscapes
The NLA is developing significant momentum and expertise, resulting in some very helpful and timely strategic work that provides evidence to support advocacy to government on the value of National Landscapes.

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)
- 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
- delivering the Nature Calling project in Luton, including the Luton Henge Festival on 26th July
- Several of the staff team 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.

- More recently, the NLA has picked up on our concerns regarding the challenges of being a Conservation Board and is now actively seeking evidence in this regard. Detail on those challenges are outlined more fully in previous reports, with a major one being the additional costs burden, compared to National Landscape teams embedded in a host local authority, and not being exempt from paying VAT.
- We have also provided evidence to the NLA for its research looking at natural beauty in the original designation statements and reports, which is intended to support the NLA's work on its policy and advocacy priority 'shape the debate on National Landscape purposes and governance'.
- In September, we were joined by the NLA's Climate Change Coordinator for an inspiring and informative session on their work to support National Landscapes develop their Climate Adaptation Plans, which includes Carbon literacy training, webinars and toolkits. Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape is leading this work though the whole Landscapes team is involved to some degree.
- In August I supported the NLA in successfully interviewing and appointing a Policy and Advocacy Officer.

External engagement
In parallel with some of the discussions with the NLA, we are also talking with Defra officials on a range of issues, including our future funding settlement, the challenges of being a Conservation Board, legislative changes to give National Parks and Conservation Boards Power of Competence, and chalk streams.

We continue to liaise closely with Tom Beeston, Chief Officer at the Chiltern Society, to advocate for the Chilterns National Landscape with MPs, local councils, and their elected members.

Specific meetings with partners include attending, with David Willis, the CCB's Citizen Science Coordinator, the BTO-hosted opening evening of The Natural Eye, the annual exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists Marsh Awards (the CCB's Tracking the Impact won the Marsh Award in 2023). My Linkedin post here.

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 and have also secured additional funding – see 2.4 Funding Report for more detail.

Staff Engagement Survey
We are maintaining momentum in implementing actions arising from the Staff Engagement Survey conducted in October 2024 and a Pulse Check in March 2024, some of which were already being addressed through the organisational transformation project, such as improving IT systems and information management and improving the office environment.

The findings of the first survey were written up by our HR Advisor in October 2024, reviewed by the SLT and shared with both the staff and the HR Advisory Group (HRAG) in November 2024. Feedback from the HRAG was received in December 2024. Following this, a plan was created setting out a series of actions against the key priority areas. An overview of the plan was presented to staff in January 2025 and an update on progress provided to the team throughout the year, including a comprehensive slide deck in early October, setting out progress with actions following the surveys. The slides can be provided to Committee members on request.

Related work includes organising two upcoming team building sessions (24th November and 10th December) with Howard Davies, an experienced facilitator and former CEO of the National Landscapes Association, as well as circulating the 2025 annual staff engagement survey in mid-October. We have also scheduled regular meetings between the SLT and senior managers to ensure effective flow of ideas and information, especially as we start the annual planning process.

Other work includes: inviting all staff to confirm that they have read all the new HR policies; ensuring all field staff conduct risk assessments using our new system; migrating files from the F drive and various Teams / Sharepoint sites to the new Sharepoint filing system; and conducting further staff EDI training.

Recommendation:

1. **To NOTE and PROVIDE FEEDBACK on the update.**