

Board Meeting

Thursday 27th March 2025



**Chilterns
National
Landscape**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CONSERVATION BOARD FOR THE
CHILTERN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
Held at Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Jubilee Room,
The Gateway Offices, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 8FF
on Thursday 27th March 2025 at 10.00am.**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Louise Price
Cllr Richard Newcombe
Cllr Sally Symington
Cllr David Bartholomew
Cllr Philip Spicer
Cllr Patricia Birchley

Appointing Body

Three Rivers District Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Dacorum Borough Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Buckinghamshire Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Colin Courtney
John Nicholls (Chair)
Simon Mortimer

Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr John Harfield
Cllr Charles Hussey
Cllr Sue Rowland
Cllr Hector Sants

Bedfordshire Parish Councils
Buckinghamshire Parish Council
Oxfordshire Parish Councils
Buckinghamshire Parish Council

CCB Staff

Lorna Coldwell
Graham Hurst
Elaine King
Eloise Small
Kathryn Foster
Jenny Caprio

Clerk to the Board
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Chief Executive Officer
Administration Officer
Senior Finance Manager
Monitoring Officer

Other

Peter Phippen
Tom Beeston

The Chiltern Society
The Chiltern Society

No members of the public were present.

24/25.45 Standing Items

45.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Phippen'.

*Cllr John Griffin – Oxfordshire Parish Council, *Gemma Harper – Secretary of State, *Cllr James Norman – South Oxfordshire District Council, *Matt Thomson – Head of Strategy & Planning; Deputy Monitoring Officer, *Annette Weiss – Head of Engagement and Partnerships, *Cllr Paula Hiscocks – Hertfordshire County Council, *Paul Mainds – Secretary of State, *Andrew Brock-Doyle – Head of Operations, Geeta Ludhra – Secretary of State, John Shaw – Secretary of State, Cllr Greg Smith – Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Robert Roche – Luton Borough Council, Joe Stewart – Secretary of State.

*(Those * listened in on the meeting online)*

45.2 Declarations of Interest in any of the agenda items

None.

45.3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair said it is expected to bring the Nature Recovery Strategy and proposed amendments to the scheme of delegation element of the Constitution to the June Board meeting.

45.4 Notice of Urgent Business

There was no urgent business, with relevant items being covered in the agenda.

45.5 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12.12.24 were approved as a true record and signed.

45.6 Matters Arising

The inclusion in the Risk Register of improving the diversity of the Board Members was questioned. Elaine King, the CEO, clarified that we are recognising the risks of not ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to become a Board Member, regardless of ethnicity, sex, age, etc. The briefing note that is being drafted to circulate to Local Authorities after the upcoming elections in May is intended to help diversify the Board, identify further what the organisation is and does, and the skill sets that are required for Board Members, particularly where gaps have already been identified.

45.7 Considerations of motions submitted by members

No motions submitted.

45.8 Public Question Time.

No public present.

24/25.46 Items for Decision

46.1 2025/26 Budget

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, had circulated a budget envelope that was first presented to the Executive Committee in February. Following feedback, amendments were made. Defra has since confirmed a flat settlement of £513k for 2025/26. The draft budget indicates a deficit of £97k for 2025/26, with a proposal to use current year surplus to part fund the shortfall, leaving an overall deficit of £22k. If all Local Authorities were to pay their full contributions, this figure would fall by around £21k. There are substantial increases in costs for 2025/26 including increases to

employer National Insurance contributions, inflationary increases and insurance costs having risen this year. The level of reserves is currently healthy and using reserves as proposed, to lower the 2025/26 deficit, is within the means of the organisation. The Executive Committee will be considering a Reserves Policy at the May meeting. Other insurance providers were noted to be considered for a potentially more reasonable quotation.

1. **The Board NOTED and APPROVED in principle using the current year's surplus to part fund the 2025/26 deficit with the balance of the deficit to be funded from reserves**
2. **The Board NOTED the final consideration of the budget will be presented at the Executive Committee meeting in May**

46.2 Financial Approvals

Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager, had provided a paper outlining interim changes to the Financial Approvals. Following some points that need clarification, it was agreed to withdraw the paper for further amendments.

1. **The Board AGREED for the paper to be withdrawn to be discussed at the Executive Committee meeting in May.**

46.3 Executive Committee functions

The Chair, John Nicholls, had circulated a paper requesting opinions from Board Members regarding the current practice of referring budget and delivery progress reports from the Executive Committee to the Board. This is not required in the Constitution, which only requires the Board to set policy, budgets, and the scope of project activity. Therefore, to reduce the length of Board meeting agendas, it is proposed that the Executive Committee monitor these reports quarterly and only to refer them to the Board on an exception basis. This approach would allow the Board to focus more on strategic issues.

1. **The Board APPROVED the recommendations in the paper: that the Executive Committee should monitor budget and delivery reports, as prescribed in the Constitution, reporting to the Board only on an exception basis where there is a Constitutional requirement or where it considers an issue needs Board consideration. Board papers will contain a link to these reports**
2. **The Board invited the Executive Committee to make further recommendations on topics where this principle could be applied**

46.4 Board Operations and Succession Planning

Following the elections in May 2025 for some Local Authorities and Parish Councils, the Board will lose at least two Local Authority members who are not standing for re-election. Further to this, at least five of the eight Secretary of State appointees are either standing down or have reached the end of their term. Whilst the recruitment process for Secretary of State Board Members is expected to commence in March, it is likely to be a lengthy process. This leaves an immediate practical problem as a lot of expertise will be leaving at one time and raises the issue of how to manage this whilst waiting for new appointees, particularly in terms of quoracy for Committees. Defra ministers are not



agreeable to prolonging any terms, and therefore co-option to fill the gaps in the interim period is suggested.

There is no statutory limit on how many can be co-opted to the Board itself, although the Constitution specifies two, but they are required to be non-voting members. Further, a new Chair will be needed at the June meeting. Board Members are encouraged to speak with the current Chair if they would like more information on the role. The briefing note being drafted for Local Authorities will assist with helping potential new candidates to understand the time commitment involved along with information on key responsibilities and opportunities to get involved. Cllr Sants is willing to continue as Vice-Chair but welcomes a discussion with anyone who may wish to assume the role.

- 1. The Board APPROVED the recommendation in the paper authorising conversations to identify which Board Members would be willing to be co-opted on a temporary basis until appointees are in place**

46.5 HR Policies

Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations, reported that a further eight policies will be taken to the June Board meeting for approval. The policies for approval are:

- Health and Safety Statement of Intent, Arrangement and Roles and Responsibilities
- Confidentiality
- Equity, Equality, Inclusion and Diversity
- Annual Leave
- Performance Management
- Reward and Renueration
- Travel and Subsistence
- Flexitime and Time off in Lieu

The work of the Head of Operations, the HR Advisor, the HRAG Chair, Paul Mainds, and the rest of the HRAG in completing these policies and the upcoming policies was commended. It was recognised that they must be living documents and used going forward, updated when necessary with any changes to legislation or similar.

- 1. The Board APPROVED the seven policies and HR statement, and recognition of the need to ensure the policies are kept up to date and integrated with all staff, who will receive training where appropriate**
- 2. The Board NOTED the additional policies will be brought to the June Board meeting for approval**

46.6 Management Plan Review

An update on the latest position regarding the refreshed Management Plan was given by Gemma Harper, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, and Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy & Planning. Thanks were given to the Officers and others involved in working on the refresh. The responses to the consultation, which ended in February, are being analysed and the depth and breadth of the responses has meant a requirement to spend more time finalising the document.

Natural England has confirmed that there are no financial or legal implications to a revised timeline to defer approval until the June Board meeting. This will also allow

greater alignment with the boundary review and the Nature Recovery Plan. A project plan will be shared with Board Members as soon as possible. The discussion highlighted that Local Authority Board Members were unaware of their role in securing a response from Local Authorities to the consultation and, ultimately endorsement of the final Plan. All members reflected on this and committed to ensuring clearer and more effective communication moving forward. Cllr Sants suggested that as the lack of engagement between Board members and Local Authorities seems to be a recurring issue, along with other issues relating to engagement with Local Authorities, a group could be tasked with formulating an engagement strategy for each Local Authority.

1. **The Board APPROVED the recommendation for the Plan to be approved at the June Board meeting**
2. **The Board APPROVED the suggestion of forming a group to develop an engagement strategy for Local Authorities**

46.7 Chalk Streams Planning Guidance

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy & Planning, had circulated the draft Chilterns Chalk Streams Planning Guidance which had been recommended to the Board by the Planning Committee for adoption. Whilst specifically for the Chilterns, the document could easily be expanded beyond as would apply to any chalk stream.

1. **The Board APPROVED the guidance without changes and AUTHORISED Officers to make any final design or proofing amendments prior to publication and DELEGATED to Officers to incorporate the newly expanded Chalk Streams definition to the web portal and new document when future funding allows**

24/25.47 Items for Noting/Information

47.1 Quarter 3 Finance Report

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, had provided the accounts for four months of the year, ending 31st December 2024.

- Core profit was £62k for the nine month period compared to a budgeted surplus of £30k. The forecasted out-turn for the full year anticipates this surplus to be maintained at £63k, with a full year budget out-turn of £10k.
- Project income is £2.68m, costs are £1.87m and “profit” on projects is £808k overall. This represents income received in advance of expenditure, particularly for projects including the Chess Smarter Water Catchment project, FiPL and Access for All funding.

1. **The Board NOTED the Chilterns Conservation Board annual accounts for the year ending 31st December 2024.**

47.2 Quarter 3 Delivery Report

Overall Progress

The Head of Operation, Andy Brock-Doyle, provided a comprehensive paper that was taken as read.

The Delivery Plan that was approved for this year was split into five workstreams containing 28 delivery areas and a total of 102 delivery lines. Between October and



Board Meeting

Thursday 27th March 2025

December 2024:

- 49 delivery lines reported as progressing on track
- 29 delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed
- 12 delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed
- 12 delivery lines have been postponed for reconsidering in financial year 2025/26

1. The Board NOTED the Quarter 3 update

47.3 Annual Business Planning

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle had circulated a paper setting out the progress on annual planning for financial year 2025/26 including identifying priorities and the proposed way forward to developing a delivery plan. A key area of focus is capacity, which has for some time been identified as an organisational risk.

1. The Board NOTED the update

47.4 Funding Strategy Update

The CEO, Elaine King, updated the Board on progress with delivering the Funding Strategy. She emphasised the challenges of a flat cash settlement for financial year 2025/26, and the need to ensure that the Chilterns National Landscape is not disadvantaged for the subsequent three year settlement., especially as, unlike National Parks and National Landscapes hosted by Local Authorities, Conservation Boards must pay VAT. The lack of visibility of core funding until the start of the new financial year, and then only one year's funding, demonstrates the challenges of setting a budget and managing staff expectations.

1. The Board NOTED the update

47.5 Chief Executive Officer's Update

Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer, had provided a comprehensive paper detailing key recent work. This was taken as read. A key focus continues to be business planning and developing budgets for future years, plus strategic work including the Management Plan, Natural England's Boundary Review, supporting Defra in preparing to recruit new Secretary of State appointed Board members, developing a Nature Recovery Plan, exploring new funding opportunities, finalising our new HR policies, managing risk, and collaborating with the National Landscapes Association (NLA) and other National Landscapes. Also, the Senior Leadership Team is meeting more frequently with Senior Managers and Team Leads as has been implementing the recommendations from the Staff Engagement Survey in September 2024. A new lease has also been agreed for the office. She thanked the entire team for their hard work.

24/25.48 Minutes and Recommendations of Committees

48.1.1 Executive Committee Draft minutes (24.02.25)

John Griffin had sent apologies for the meeting which are not noted.

48.1.2 Planning Committee Draft minutes (23.01.25)

1. The Board NOTED the draft Committee minutes

Board Meeting

Thursday 27th March 2025

48.3 Any Urgent Business

None.

48.4 Next Meeting

The next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 19th June 2025, time and location TBC. This will include the AGM.

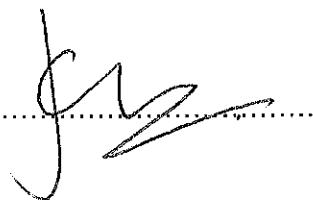
Future meeting dates:

Planning Committee Meetings	Executive Committee Meetings	Board Meetings
Thursday 17 th April, 10am Chinnor offices	Thursday 7 th May, 10am Chinnor offices	Thursday 19 th June, TBC
Thursday 23 rd October, 10am Chinnor offices	Tuesday 9 th September, 10am Chinnor Village Centre	Thursday 25 th September 10am, Gateway Aylesbury
	Thursday 13 th November, 10am Chinnor Village Centre	Thursday 11 th December, 10am Gateway Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 12.20.

Following the meeting, a presentation was given on the Heritage Lottery funded Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Project which finished in November 2024: Reporting on its success, legacy and lessons learned. Staff members that presented were Anna Foster, Fran Crowther, and Nick Marriner.

The Chairman.....



Date.....(9.6.25)

