

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF  
COMMITTEE of the Conservation  
Chilterns Area of Outstanding  
HELD ON Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September**



**Chilterns  
National  
Landscape**

**THE EXECUTIVE  
Board for the  
Natural Beauty  
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**

*Handwritten signature/initials*

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 remuneration 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 Mains 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 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025.



1. There is a Core deficit of £29k for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> 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 31<sup>st</sup> 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 settlement 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 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 Mains, as this was their last Executive Committee meeting, for the significant contributions made during their tenure.

**25/26.5 Next Executive Committee meeting**

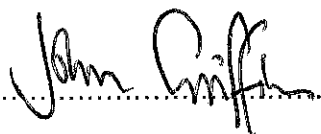
Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025 at 10am, at The Village Centre, Chinnor.

**Further meeting Dates:**

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

The meeting was closed at 12.12.

The Chair.....



Date.....

13<sup>th</sup> November 2025

