



# Chilterns National Landscape

**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Chilterns Conservation Board  
HELD ON Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2024 in The Chilterns Room, the Village Centre, Chinnor  
OX39 4DH commencing at 2.00 PM.**

Present:

John Nicholls	Board Member – Chair of the Board
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Paul Mainds	Board Member
Cllr Sue Rowland	Board Member – online
Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member – online

In attendance:

Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Andrew Brock-Doyle	Head of Operations
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer
Matt Thomson	Head of Strategy & Planning
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker

The Chair welcomed all present and noted that the meeting was inquorate and therefore no decisions could be made.

**24/25.15. Apologies for absence**

Professor Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape – Chilterns National Landscape  
Cllr Richard Newcombe, Board Member – Buckinghamshire Council

**24/25.16. Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**24/25.17. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair of the Board, John Nicholls raised that there is currently no Chair for the Executive Committee, following Colin Courtney stepping down. Cllr Hector Sants is willing to be Chair, and John Nicholls as Vice-Chair. As this meeting is not quorate, elections will be deferred until the next Executive Committee meeting.

There are currently four Parish Council representatives on the Executive Committee and the constitution prescribes that there be two. As all representatives are highly valued, Cllrs Charles Hussey and Sue Rowlands have agreed to stay as observers and forgo any voting rights should a vote be necessary.

The Chair expressed the importance of responding to the notification sent by the Administration Officer to advise if members are attending meetings.

*Geeta Ludhra arrived at the meeting 14.07.*

**24/25.18. Notice of Urgent Business**

The Chair explained the different format of the agenda, following discussions with Board members and the CEO, which will also be the style for the September Board meeting.

Cllr Sue Rowlands flagged the new consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework and the importance of the CCB responding.

**24/25.19. Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 16/05/24**

The minutes of the meeting 16/05/24 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

It was noted that the rebranding has been successful.

There is a confidential minute for item 23.24/60 which will be circulated to members separately.

**24/25.20. Matters Arising**

All items covered on the agenda.

**24/25.21. Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members**

None.

**24/25.22. Public Questions**

No members of the public were present.

**24/25.23. Items for Decision**

**23.1. Terms of Reference for a new Finance Advisory Group**

It was agreed at the May 2024 Executive Committee meeting that a Finance Advisory Group should be established. It will not be a decision-making group and a Terms of Reference would be established ensure a clear understanding of its scope and the way in which it would operate.. Membership will draw on expertise from both Board members who have experience in the financial sector, and those experienced with local authority finances. The Finance Officer will chair. The Committee discussed and accepted the Terms of Reference subject to a point of clarification making clear that it will be quorate when it has at least one Officer and one Board member present. Cllr Hector Sants agreed to sit on the group, and a call will be made at the September Board meeting for additional volunteers.

1. The Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the terms of reference for the Finance Advisory Group be **ADOPTED** with the alteration noted above
2. The Committee **RECOMMENDS** to the Board **APPROVAL** to establish and convene the new Finance Advisory Group

**24/25.24. Items for Noting/Information**

**24.1. Quarter 1 Finance Report**

The Finance Officer, Graham Hurst, reported on the accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024.

1. Total income was £1,568,783, and total expenditure was £798,378.
2. The CCB core finances show it is operating with its budget.
3. Core funding income was £672k compared with a budget of £295k, mainly due to receipt of £315k Defra funding in advance of expenditure. The adjusted income for timing effects is £306k and in line with expectations.





4. Income from projects was £898k and expenditure was £509k, resulting in a surplus arising from receiving income in advance in particular the Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project received a total for £658k, largely funded by Thames Water.

The Finance Officer noted that there were initially no points raised by the Internal Auditor, however now one point has been raised regarding the running of payroll. The External Auditor has not made any comments yet.

**1. The Committee NOTED the Financial Position at year end on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024.**

**24.2. Future Years Planning**

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle, had circulated a paper to update the Executive Committee for the business plan for financial year 2024/25. Going forward, this will be put to the Finance Advisory Group for scrutiny.

It was observed that there would be a significant deficit in financial year 2025/26 should all the planned hires take place. This number would be slightly lower now if re-forecasted due to extra income streams such as FiPL, but action has also been taken to reduce the deficit by holding recruitment for two additional roles. The Senior Management Team are aware and taking action to ensure that there would be no need for redundancies, such as looking for fixed term contracts rather than permanent staffing.

The forecast position for the following two years 2026/27 and 2027/28 shows an improvement over next year based on current assumptions, although there remains a high level of uncertainty in these assumptions until there is more clarity on the Defra funding settlement going forward.

**1. The Committee NOTED the Future Years Planning report**

**24.3. Quarter 1 Delivery Report**

A paper was circulated to update the Executive Committee on the progress of the team with the Delivery Plan for the first quarter of financial year 2024/25.

A new less detailed template report has been created following comments from Board members. Board members agreed that the level of detail within the new format was appreciated and at an acceptable level of information, and expressed their appreciation for staff in reporting to the Board given their heavy workloads. Measures were discussed to improve the connection between staff and Board members, including staff presentations at the remaining Board meetings this year, and a new programme of online seminars in between Board meetings.

Concerns were raised about the lack of capacity. The Head of Operations confirmed that this remains an issue and that the Senior Management Team are exploring the use of the Defra revenue uplift for this financial year to bring in short-term support in a number of areas.

Thanks were given to the Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle.

**1. The Committee NOTED the Q1 Delivery report and OFFERED FEEDBACK**

**24.4. Funding Strategy Update**

The Executive Committee was provided with a paper detailing progress on delivering the Funding Strategy. The funding pipeline is regularly updated and monitored by the Senior Management Team. Items of particular note are the success with funding from Affinity Water and Rebel Restoration, with the possibility of further funding. The project application 'Not Bourne Yesterday' has been awarded funding



of £350k for the development phase. The CCB is still not eligible for full cost recovery but has included as much recovery of overheads as possible.

**1. The Committee NOTED and OFFERED FEEDBACK on the Funding Strategy update**

**24.5. Chief Executive Officer's Update**

A comprehensive paper was circulated by the CEO, with highlights including:

- Uncertainty regarding future funding and the need to diversify income streams
- Recruitment – currently recruiting two roles and a third fixed term contract will be advertised shortly
- The team continues to support Natural England in its Chilterns AONB Boundary Review
- A range of meetings have been held with partners and stakeholders

Paul Mains commented that with the new Government and new MPs in place it would be good to draw on Board members' connections with local MPs and make introductions to the CEO and Head of Operations.

The Chair gave his thanks to the CEO.

**1. The Committee NOTED the CEOs update**

**24.6. HR Strategy Update; Strategy, Policies and HR Advisory Group (HRAG)**

An update was provided to the Executive Committee on progress with delivering the HR Strategy Implementation Plan for 2024/25. There has been some slippage from the original timeline. The generic policies provided by the HR Consultant have needed significant alterations to ensure they are in the correct tone and appropriate for the organisation. The staff handbook also needs updating and made more user friendly and shorter than the existing one. A new version has been drafted and will be circulated to the HRAG.

Paul Mains raised that he is uncomfortable to accept further delay to the development of policies as the Board may be exposed. Officers stressed that a full set of HR policies already exist, and the current work is to update and improve these policies. The HRAG confirmed that its role is to provide a "light touch" review of final drafts of policies before they are brought to the Board for approval.

The Head of Operations Andy Brock-Doyle and the CEO Elaine King explained that the most important policies such as Harassment and Bullying, Grievance and Disciplinary have been prioritised to minimise exposure to risk.

Cllr John Griffin commented that it is much easier for large organisations to complete this work as they have HR teams, and that it is recognised that staff and Board members are doing their best to implement policies and procedures with limited resources.

It was agreed that going forward drafts would be sent to the HR Consultant to check that they meet all legal requirements, and only forwarded as a final draft to HRAG. The Head of Operations made clear that this approach is possible but introduced more steps to the process and would take longer to achieve.

Cllr Sants summed up by saying that the approach needed to first focus on mitigating risk and approving key policies and afterwards incorporate relevant feedback and undertake planned consultation with staff. It was agreed that, by the December meeting, the most important policies will be ready for Board approval.



It was noted that "right to work" checks on staff are carried out as part of the payroll process, and work is underway to ensure that any roles that require a DBS check are noted as part of the recruitment process.

**1. The Committee NOTED the HR Strategy update and OFFERED FEEDBACK**

*Hector Sants left the meeting online at 15.58.*

*Geeta Ludhra left the meeting at 16.00*

**24/25.25. Any Urgent Business**

The Finance Officer advised that an invoice from the pension scheme at Buckinghamshire Council for £58,000 has been received, in relation to a staff member who was made redundant in 2022. He will follow it up further, but it is an unexpected expense. He will see if it possible for the invoice to be paid via the current surplus in the pension scheme, or if a payment must be made.

Cllr Sue Rowlands raised the new draft revisions to the NPPF guidelines that have been published by central government. The changes are significant. It is likely an additional meeting of the Planning Committee will be called to discuss a response to the consultation which runs until the end of September and could therefore be signed off by the Board at the September meeting.

Cllr Rowlands asked for clarification of how the organisation should be referred to following the rebranding, particularly regarding legal documents. The Head of Strategy and Planning and Deputy Monitoring Officer Matt Thomson confirmed that legally, it is The Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, often referred to as the CCB. When referring to the area, it is the Chilterns National Landscape. There has been guidance issued to staff, which can be circulated to Board members.

The Chair asked for any feedback to the updated agenda format and it was agreed to continue with this new approach.

**24/25.26. Next Executive Committee meeting**

The next Executive Committee meeting was confirmed as Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at 2pm (venue TBC).

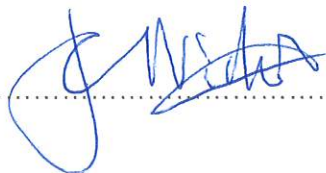
**Further meeting Dates:**

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
		Thu 19 <sup>th</sup> September @ 2pm Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Gateway Aylesbury
Thu 17 <sup>th</sup> October 2024 @ 2pm Location tbc	Thu 7 <sup>th</sup> November 2024 @ 2pm Location tbc	Thu 12 <sup>th</sup> December @ 10am Location tbc

The meeting was closed at 16.11.

The Chair.....

Date.....



7.11.24