

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
COMMITTEE of the Conservation
Chilterns Area of Outstanding
HELD ON Monday 24th February
Brunel Suite, Regus, Kingsmead



**Chilterns
National
Landscape**

THE EXECUTIVE
Board for the
Natural Beauty
2025 in The
Business Park,

1 Aston Court, High Wycombe HP11 1JU commencing at 10.00 AM.

Present:

Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member – Chair
John Nicholls	Board Member – Chair of the Board
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Paul Mains	Board Member – online
Cllr Louise Price	Board Member
Cllr Richard Newcombe	Board Member
Cllr Phillip Spicer	Board Member

In attendance:

Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Andy Brock-Doyle	Head of Operations
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer
Matt Thomson	Head of Strategy & Planning and Deputy Monitoring Officer – online
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager
Eloise Small	Administration Officer
Kate Heppell	Head of Landscape – online

The Chair welcomed all present. It was noted that the meeting planned to be held on May 1st is election day for some Local Authorities and would need to be moved. Alternative dates will be circulated.

24/25.40 Apologies for absence

Cllr Sue Rowland – Parish Councils
Cllr John Griffin – Parish Councils
Geeta Ludhra – Secretary of State

24/25.41. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

24/25.42. Chair's Announcements

None at this meeting.

24/25.43. Notice of Urgent Business

None.

24/25.44. Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 07/11/24

The minutes of the meeting 07/11/24 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

24/25.45. Matters Arising

All items covered on the agenda.

24/25.46. Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. D'.

None at this meeting.

24/25.47. Public Questions

No members of the public were present.

24/25.48. Items for Decision

48.1 2025/2026 Budget

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster had supplied a proposed Core Budget envelope for the financial year 2025/2026, with three scenarios based on differing funding from Defra. She is proposing a deficit over a two year period, on the understanding that more work will be carried out when figures are known. The project-based funding shown in the budget is secure and does not reflect any funding that is not yet guaranteed, so this figure is likely to increase but should not decrease.

It was requested that the paper to the Board includes further information about the reserves held and the reserves policy. It can therefore be determined whether the proposal to roll this year's surplus into the following financial year, instead of it topping up reserves, is acceptable.

The Committee supported the budget options being presented for approval at the March Board meeting, with a cumulative deficit of £22,000 over two years in the event the Defra funding package decreases. It was requested that a package of revised priorities be brought to the next Executive Committee meeting for discussion when exact figures will be known. The Senior Leadership Team is also exploring some restructuring to improve efficiencies.

Elaine King, CEO, gave thanks to the Senior Finance Manager and Head of Operations for their work. Cllr Phillip Spicer asked for requests to Local Authorities to be made earlier, preferably in the autumn, so that the funding can be included in their budget-setting processes. This could lead to an increase in contributions, and therefore less of a deficit for the CCB's budget. It was agreed that bespoke letters to Local Authorities will be sent annually from the CEO in the autumn outlining the work carried out by the Chilterns National Landscape team on their behalf, which saves Local Authorities both time and money, with letters copied to the relevant Board member.

- 1. The Committee APPROVED the draft budget for 2025/2026 and RECOMMENDED APPROVAL to the Board**

48.2 Executive Committee Functions

A paper was circulated by the Chair of the Board requesting opinions of Committee members. A lot of discussion held at the Executive Committee is referred to the Board for further consideration, where the Terms of Reference for the committee state that this is not necessary and is currently done as a courtesy, rather than obligation. This duplication can interfere with the Board's ability to consider strategic matters and contributes to long agendas at Board meetings. It is proposed to consider items at the Executive Committee, with just a summary report to the Board with recommendations or concerns. It was also agreed that an email would be sent to all Board members and the staff team when committee papers are published online so they are aware what is discussed.

- 1. The Committee APPROVED that customary practice be amended as follows:**

- a. The Executive Committee takes decisions prescribed to it in the Constitution, without routinely referring them to the Board for further discussion. In particular, the Executive Committee should continue its detailed consideration of quarterly finance and project delivery reports but report this to the Board on an exception basis.**
- b. The Executive Committee identifies any further areas to which this principle could be**

applied and proposes them at a future Board meeting.

- c. Officers' recommendations to the Executive Committee, and the Committee's decisions on them, will only recommend referral to the Board where there is either a constitutional requirement or where issues are raised that the Executive Committee believes need Board consideration.
- d. That future Board agendas focus more clearly on advocacy, scrutiny, policy, and strategy, and briefing on 'on the ground' delivery, including reporting on the latter at local authority level.

24/25.49. Items for Noting/Information

49.1. Quarter 3 Finance Report

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, reported on the accounts to 31st December 2024.

- 1. Core profit was £62k for the nine-month period versus a budgeted surplus of £30k. It is anticipated this surplus be maintained at £63k, with a full year budget out-turn of £10k.
- 2. Income (excluding Defra Capital income which nets off costs) is ahead of budget by £72k; this surplus is driven by additional interest income (£10k), unbudgeted project income (£16.5k) and internal fee income (£40k). The internal fee income represents staffing and overhead cross charges from Core to projects.
- 3. Costs are £39k over budget (excluding the Defra Capital uplift). The overspend relates to staff costs +£35k but this is more than offset by internal fee income from projects relating to staff costs (£50k) which is included within income.
- 4. The full year forecast includes the costs of the Management Plan (£7.5k), Nature Recovery Plan (£13k), elements of the Operational Effectiveness work (£18k plus IT work £7k) and developing a Communications Strategy (£10.5k) all of which can be absorbed due to the revenue uplift to our Core Defra funding in 24/25.
- 5. Project income is £2.68m, costs of £1.87m and "profit" on projects of £808k overall. This represents income received in advance of expenditure, particularly for projects including the Chess Smarter Water Catchment, FIPL and Access for All funding.

The additional Defra capital funds are expected to be spent by the end of the financial year with no risk of having to return them.

The Financial Regulations are currently included within the Constitution which is being reviewed. This is a large piece of work and includes the possibility of moving them to a separate document. In the meantime, interim changes to the Financial Regulations, to reflect increased inflation and costs, is proposed to be taken to the March Board meeting. The changes will reflect more sensible limits and include the Senior Finance Manager following the reduction in hours of the Finance Officer, Graham Hurst.

It was agreed that the Executive Committee is willing to recommend the proposed changes for approval by the Board, on the understanding that wider policies are being reviewed to ensure that appropriate scrutiny is in place and guidance is provided to staff. The Executive Committee will look at a transparent governance process around procurement and invoicing statements before the December Board meeting.

1. The Committee NOTED the financial position as of 31st December 2024 and project full year out-turn
2. The Committee NOTED the proposed changes to approvals and ADVISED on suggested amendments to be taken to the Board
3. The Committee NOTED other finance matters

49.2. Quarter 3 Delivery Report

PhwHS

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle had circulated a paper to update the Executive Committee on the progress of the Chilterns National Landscape team between October and December 2024 against the financial year 2024/2025 Delivery Plan. The overall position remains similar to quarter 2, however some work has been postponed and shown on a new line. These items will be reconsidered for inclusion in the 2025/26 Delivery Plan. In Q3 (October-December 2024):

- 49 (44 in Q2) delivery lines reported as progressing on track (42) or completed (7) (48%)
- 29 (35 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness (28%)
- 12 (16 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness (12%)
- 12 (0 in Q2) delivery lines have been postponed for reconsidering in FY25-26 planning (12%)

1. The Committee NOTED the Q3 Delivery report

49.3. Annual Planning

Staff capacity continues to be an issue, with a need to identify priority issues and identify work that can be deprioritised. The Climate Adaptation Plan is a requirement of the Management Plan, with a requirement from Defra for this to be embedded by 2028. Work will start on this soon and will include liaising with the new Climate Coordinator at the National Landscapes Association.

It was proposed to spend a significant amount of time at the next Executive Committee meeting, when the budget figures are known, to discuss priorities and the consequences of insufficient resources.

1. The Committee NOTED the Annual Planning update

49.4. Funding Strategy Update

The Executive Committee was provided with a paper detailing progress on delivering the Funding Strategy by Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer, which was taken as read. The uncertainty over future government funding remains, with Defra still having not advised the grant settlement for the next financial year. Confirmation of a further three-year settlement from 2026/2027 is expected around the same time. Defra has confirmed that the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme grant funding has been extended for a fifth year. Income generation continues to be challenging, especially ensuring that funding permits recharging for staff costs. Thanks were given to Kate Heppell who has been very successful in securing large amounts of funding in recent months.

1. The Committee NOTED the Funding Strategy update

49.5. Chief Executive Officer's Update

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

- The Senior Leadership Team continue to take oversight of and deliver a huge amount of work across the organisation's activities.
- The consultation on the proposed changes to the Management Plan ended on 3rd February. The responses are being reviewed.
- Formal consultation for the Boundary Review is expected in June 2025.
- The Nature Recovery Plan continues to be developed by Kate Heppell and Neil Jackson.
- Defra needs to recruit five new Secretary of State appointees. This could be potentially challenging, and she is encouraging and supporting an effective Defra recruitment campaign. Local Authority and Parish Council elections may also result in a change of membership to the Board.
- The CEO is seeking to meet with local MPs and members of the House of Lords.

Paul Mainds gave an update of the HR Advisory Group; the remaining HR policies should be completed and ready to be approved by the Board at its June meeting. He thanked everyone involved.

1. The Committee NOTED the CEO's update**24/25.50. Any Urgent Business**

None, all items covered in the agenda.

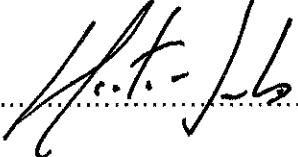
24/25.51. Next Executive Committee meeting

The date for the next meeting will be reconsidered as the planned date is the date of some Local Authority elections. It was agreed that the meeting would be extended to three hours to enable a full discussion of the Delivery Plan.

Further meeting Dates:

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
Thursday 17 th April, 10am Chinnor Office	Date TBC, 10am Location TBC	Thursday 27 th March, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 23 rd October, 10am Chinnor Office	Tuesday 9 th September, 10am Location TBC	Thursday 19 th June, 10am Gateway Office, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
	Thursday 13 th November, 10am Location TBC	Thursday 25 th September, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
		Thursday 11 th December, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 12.49.

The Chair.....

Date.....