



Chilterns National Landscape

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Conservation Board for the
Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
HELD ON Thursday 13th November 2025 at The Village Centre, High Street, Chinnor OX39 4DH
commencing at 10.10 AM.**

Present:

Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member – Chair
Cllr Philip Spicer	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Louise Price	Board Member
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
Cllr Gavin Mclauchlan	Board Member
Cllr Martin Tett	Board Member
Matthew Stanton	Board Member

In attendance:

Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Andy Brock-Doyle	Head of Operations
Graham Hurst	Finance Officer (s151 Officer)
Matt Thomson	Head of Strategy and Planning; Deputy Monitoring Officer
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager
Kate Heppell	Head of Landscape

25/26.6 Standing Items

6.1 Apologies for absence

Board Members:

Baljit Dhillon

Nicola Thomas

Officers:

None

Guests:

Richard Newcombe

6.2 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

6.3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed new members to the Executive Committee, and everyone introduced themselves. Cllr Griffin volunteered to be Vice-Chair, he was proposed by Cllr Sants, seconded by Cllr Mclauchlan, and duly appointed.

6.4 Notice of Urgent Business

Cllr Griffin raised the role of the Executive Committee following the Board approving at the September Board meeting that the HR Advisory Group ceases to operate. This item will be added to the next Executive Committee agenda.

Elaine King, CEO raised the role of the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer for discussion should there be time.

6.5 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 09/09/25

The minutes of the meeting 09/09/25 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

6.6 Matters Arising

All items covered on the agenda.

6.7 Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members

None at this meeting.

6.8 Public Questions

No members of the public were present.

25/26.7 Items for Decision

7.1 Quarter 2 Finance Report

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, reported on the accounts to 30th September 2025.

1. There is a Core deficit of £39k for the year to 30th September 2025, against a budgeted deficit of £68k for the same period. Income exceeded budget forecasting due higher than budgeted interest from various bank accounts. The forecast is in line with the budget deficit. However, some costs may need to be carried forward to next year due to timings and therefore included in next year's budget.
2. Defra allocated £348k of Capital Funds for the financial year 25/26. 100% of these funds have now been drawn down. Understanding the complexity of permitted spending has taken a lot of Officer time but progress has now been made regarding the interpretation of its use. CDEL is being used to fund our rent as a capital five-year lease. We are awaiting assurances from Defra on how we ensure these funds are ringfenced for us in future years. CDEL funds cannot be 'top sliced' to cover staff costs.
3. Three of the Local Authorities do not make their full financial contribution, leaving a shortfall of £30k. Work is being carried out to ensure LAs understand the work the organisation carries out and that it was created at the request of its LAs. The National Landscapes Association is also advocating for Defra to develop a clear funding formula. The Local Authority Task and Finish Group met recently and agreed actions to support Officers engaging with Local Authorities.
4. Project income is £1326k, costs are £804k and there is a surplus on projects of £522k overall. This surplus arises due to timings of funding received in advance and will be spent by year end.
5. The AGAR has been signed off by the external auditor PKF Littlejohn, and the completed paperwork is available on the Chilterns National Landscape website.
6. The VAT review being undertaken has highlighted that the organisation may be able to recover VAT payments under Section 33 of the VAT Act. and eligibility continues to be investigated. The current legislation results in National Parks and National Landscapes hosted by a Local Authority being able to claim refunds of VAT, but Conservation Boards cannot. We are investigating formal application to the Treasury for CCB to be eligible for VAT refunds but will first seek the views of the National Landscapes Association and Defra.

It is planned to provide a "break even" budget for financial year 26/27, and a budget envelope will be provided for the Executive Committee at the February meeting. Cllr Tett commented his surprise that



only a one-year budget is provided, given that several projects run over multiple years. Projects are self-funded and therefore separate from core activities which are funded by Defra and Local Authority contributions and are mainly salaries.

Elaine King, the CEO clarified that the Committee agreed this approach, given capacity issues before the Senior Finance Manager joined and the lack of visibility of our income from Defra one year to the next, making budgeting a challenging process. The recently implemented Reserves Policy provides clarity around earmarked reserves and will be forwarded to Committee members. Project reserves are strictly for those projects and cannot be used elsewhere.

The CCB pays £7k per annum for our premises in business rates to SODC. We are investigating an application for full exemption from rates as a not-for-profit organisation as we understand the Cotswold Conservation Board have been successful in obtaining this exemption in the past.

1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK and NOTED the Q2 Finance report

Clr Price arrived at 10.21.

7.2. Quarter 2 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 July and September 2025 against the financial year 2025-26 Delivery Plan. In Q2 (July – September 2025):

- 44 (52 in Q1) delivery lines reported as completed or progressing on track (53)
- 35 (26 in Q1) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness
- 19 (13 in Q1) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness
- 6 (15 in Q1) delivery lines have not yet started
- 3(2 in Q1) delivery lines have been postponed or cancelled

Capacity remains an issue. While work was carried out last year to carefully allocate resources, but it is still proving difficult to progress and complete some work, such as the transformation programme. The Senior Leadership Team is scrutinising the delivery plan with a view to delaying items until next year. This will show in reporting on the following quarters. Some work cannot be delayed without an impact on other projects, and some are behind schedule due to external factors. It was agreed to include a narrative in future reporting to identify the cause of delays, along with an assessment of risk where delivery is postponed or cancelled. The "Key Achievements" section is a new element to the quarterly reporting, to give a more balanced view of not only areas delayed but also achievements, of which there are many.

1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK and NOTED the Q2 Delivery report

7.3. Annual Planning 2026-27

The Executive Committee was provided with a paper by Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations as an update on the Annual Planning cycle taking place between October 2025 and March 2026 for the next financial year. Annual planning is carried out through five workstreams and there is no plan to alter this. The key principles for annual planning this year were set out in the paper. include:

- Increasing ownership of the annual business plan across the 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

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business plan

- o Expanding the annual business plan to incorporate and reflect risks and the risk register more closely
- o Increasing the efficiency of the annual planning process to that the plan can be completed on time
- o 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

Cllr Sants requested that the Executive Committee have sight of the draft plan to influence prioritisation and understand any questions around deliverability, before being presented with a finished plan for approval to the Board.

1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK and NOTED the Annual Planning 2026-27

Cllr Sants left the meeting at 11.38 and Cllr Griffin took over as Chair.

7.4. Funding Report

A comprehensive report from the CEO was circulated and taken as read. It was noted that Officers and staff are currently operating within a climate of financial uncertainty and are developing a funding strategy for the next financial year, aligned with the Annual Planning cycle. Defra has indicated that further information regarding the Core Revenue Grant will be available in early 2026. Staff are required to complete a mandate form when seeking to apply for external funding. These are reviewed and approved by the Senior Leadership Team to avoid a scattergun approach, manage risk and ensure alignment with strategic priorities. This can be challenging when there is a short window to apply for government funding.

1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK and NOTED the CEO's update

Cllr Spicer left the meeting at 12.07.

7.5 Committee Dates in 2026

Thursday 26th February

Tuesday 19th May

Tuesday 1st September

Thursday 19th November

It was noted that whilst all dates may not work for all individual Committee members, dates were organised to reflect quarterly reporting and to work alongside Board meeting dates.

1. The Committee APPROVED the dates for the Executive Committee meetings in 2026

7.6 Chief Executive Officer's Report

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. A key focus of attention has continued to be on ongoing budgeting and business planning.
- New Board members inductions have been conducted and there is a full complement of Secretary of State appointees.
- A working group to raise awareness and visibility of the Chilterns Management Plan and the s85 Duty amongst our local authorities has been convened.
- Collaboration with other National Landscapes and the National Landscapes Association continues, with all parties trying to raise awareness of challenges, especially regarding funding, to MPs and central Government as well as liaising with Defra officials on several areas including governance, legislative changes and funding.



The Chair thanked the CEO for putting together the report.

1. The Committee OFFERED FEEBACK and NOTED the CEO's update

25/26.8 Any Urgent Business

Due to time constraints, the CEO will bring a paper to the Board on the role of the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer at its December meeting.

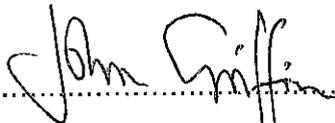
25/26.9 Next Executive Committee meeting

Thursday 26th February 2026 at 10am, at The Village Centre, Chinnor.

Further meeting Dates:

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
		Thursday 11 th December, 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 22 nd January 2026 10am CCB Offices, Chinnor	Thursday 26 th February 2026, 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 26 th March 2026 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 30 th April 2026 10am CCB Offices, Chinnor	Tuesday 19 th May 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 26 th June 2026 (including AGM) 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
No meeting	Tuesday 1 st September 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 1 st October 2026 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 29 th October 10am CCB Offices, Chinnor	Thursday 19 th November 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 10 th December 2026 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 12.15.

The Chair..... 

Date..... 