



# 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 26<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at The Village Centre, High Street, Chinnor OX39 4DH  
commencing at 10.00 AM.**

Present:

Cllr Hector Sants	Board Member – Chair
Cllr Philip Spicer	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Louise Price	Board Member – Chair of the Board
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
Baljit Dhillon	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)
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager
Kate Heppell	Head of Landscape
Annette Weiss	Head of Engagement and Partnerships
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker

## 25/26.10 Standing Items

### 10.1 Apologies for absence

Board Members:

Sue Rowland – Oxfordshire Parish Councils

Cllr Gavin Mclaughlan – Oxfordshire County Council

Nicola Thomas – Secretary of State

Officers:

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning; Deputy Monitoring Officer (*listened online*)

### 10.2 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

### 10.3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair commented that Cllr Tett has resigned from the Board and therefore the Executive Committee, so a new representative must be appointed from Buckinghamshire Council.

The strategic feedback workshop has been rearranged for 17<sup>th</sup> March, to be held online.

### 10.4 Notice of Urgent Business

All items covered on the agenda.

**10.5 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

The minutes of the meeting 13/11/25 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**10.6 Matters Arising**

All items covered on the agenda.

**10.7 Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members**

None at this meeting.

**10.8 Public Questions**

No members of the public were present.

**25/26.11 Items for Decision****7.1 Quarter 3 Finance Report**

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, reported on the accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025.

Highlights include:

1. There is a Core deficit of £52k for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 with a full year deficit of £66k forecast, which is a significant improvement on the original estimated deficit of £118k. This is a combination of better than anticipated additional interest, delays on recruitment, and net cost savings.
2. The organisation was allocated £348k of Capital Funds (CDEL) by Defra for financial year 2025/26. 100% of these funds have been drawn down, with a small amount yet to be allocated. Confirmation from Defra regarding items that can be treated as capital, such as the office tenancy, means that CDEL funds in the accounts have been released. £20k is earmarked for IT transformation, £23k for developing the Climate Adaptation plan, £5k for Fire Safety equipment. The small remaining balance of CDEL allocation is £25k and options are being explored to allocate core costs such as website development.
3. All Local Authorities have now made contributions for this financial year, with Buckinghamshire, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Councils contributing less than required.
4. Project income is £1,575k, costs are £1,497k and there is a surplus of £78k overall.
5. Currently £4.94m is held in cash with £4m of these funds held in higher interest earning accounts. The Senior Finance Manager asked members to share details if they are aware of any high interest earning accounts. Cllr Sants suggested the CCLA, which will be explored.
6. The VAT review is now complete and the report has been shared with the Board. Guidance has been provided and shared with staff, and the levels of business income that contributes to the VAT registration threshold of £90k will be monitored carefully. The organisation is not registered for VAT and, unlike other National Landscapes (except the Cotswolds Conservation Board) and National Parks, are not eligible to claim VAT refunds on non-business activities. This means most non-staff costs are effectively 20% higher than other National Landscapes and National Parks. An application is being submitted to the Treasury to seek admittance to the refund scheme. Certain conditions are not met by the CCB, but other bodies have been admitted that do not meet all the criteria. All members in agreement for the Senior Finance Manager to proceed with the application.
7. The Buckinghamshire Council Pension Triennial Valuation has taken place; contribution rates will provisionally decrease for the next three years.
8. A business rate exemption for the office premises has been applied for to South Oxfordshire District Council. A response has not yet been received. The Senior Finance Manager will speak with Cllr Norman who is their representative to see if the application can be followed up. This would amount to a saving of £7k.
9. Changes to the bank mandate are required, it is proposed to remove the Senior Administration Officer, who is retiring, and add the new Administrative Officer as well as removing the former

Chair. It was further proposed to not add any Board Members to the mandate going forward. All in agreement.

Significant work has been undertaken to determine eligible CDEL expenditure, with Defra consulted throughout to ensure full compliance with all requirements. Cllr Spicer commented that he has campaigned for Central Bedfordshire Council to contribute the full amount required, and he will be raising the matter again with full Council to amend their budget. His efforts were acknowledged and thanks were given for his continued diligence.

The Chief Executive Officer, Elaine King, acknowledged the work of the Senior Finance Manager and the Head of Operations to create the reports to enable the Board and Executive Committee to make informed decisions. Thanks were given to both and the extended team.

- 1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and APPROVED the Q3 Finance report to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 and the full year forecast to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026**
- 2. The Committee NOTED the other finance updates**
- 3. The Committee APPROVED the changes to the bank mandates**

## 7.2. Quarter 3 Delivery Report

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle, had provided a paper which was taken as read. The paper updated the Executive Committee on the CCB team's progress between October and December 2025 against the financial year 2025-26 Delivery Plan. In Q3:

- 52 (44 in Q2) delivery lines reported as completed or progressing on track
- 27 (35 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness
- 15 (19 in Q2) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in effectiveness
- 0 (6 in Q2) delivery lines have not yet started
- 1 (2 in Q2) delivery lines have been placed on hold
- 9 (2 in Q2) delivery lines have been postponed
- 2 (xx in Q2) delivery lines have been cancelled

Several areas have caught up, and more delivery lines are on track. There has been a tightening of processes regarding decisions to delay or cancel items, which shows in the reporting figures. Some of the delays are caused by external factors, such as awaiting information from Defra, and the reason for delays (internal or external) is now more clear in the reporting. Cllr Sants requested that any items that pose a serious risk, either financially or reputationally, be highlighted at the start of the report. One item flagged is the need for a Safeguarding Officer and a Data Protection Officer, which will likely need to be provided externally. The Head of Operations is investigating options, including sharing with other National Landscapes. Dedicated leads for each area have been created in the interim, and a temporary Officer is in place. Lack of capacity remains an issue across the organisation.

Following feedback from the last meeting, reporting now includes more specific information regarding risks and subsequent impacts, which has altered the report format and made it longer. A reporting format is being developed for the next financial year and will be more outcome based, with fewer specific delivery lines. The current format will remain for the next two quarters. A suggestion was made to have quarterly Management Plan updates, which will be address in the changes to the report next year. Cllr Sants asked that the proposed format be circulated to the Executive Committee for comment before it is formally introduced. This will be partly shaped by the workshop on 17<sup>th</sup> March and also reflect reporting requirements from Defra. As much as possible, we will avoid producing multiple reports for different audiences.

Whilst the Management Plan appears to be behind, this has been signed off by the Board as the delay



relates to the Plan being designed externally, which is almost complete. The new Sharepoint site was discussed. Roll out has been held up due to management pressures but is progressing. An annual digital strategy update was proposed and the Head of Operations will report on this in the future.

**1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and APPROVED the Q3 Delivery report**

**11.3 2026/27 Budget Envelope**

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, provided a detailed paper to set out a proposed 2026/27 core budget envelope, for recommendation to the Board. This is proposed following preparation with the CEO, Head of Operations and other members of the Senior Leadership Team. The initial budget shows a deficit of £58k for 2026/27, with an improved forecast for 2025/26 which predicts a net deficit of £14k aggregated over the three years 2024/25 to 2026/27. The core (RDEL) Defra grant is confirmed as a flat cash settlement for 2026/27 with indicative figures for 2027/28 and 2028/29. We have also been advised our allocation of CDEL, FiPL and Access for All for 2026/27. Note the FiPL programme will run for another three years to 2028/29. The others are one year only.

The proposed budget envelope has been subject to detailed discussion and scrutiny and will be refined further as more information becomes available. A funding strategy is being developed to secure unrestricted income and address other funding gaps, as the Defra core grant leaves a shortfall, in part due to rising inflationary costs. Any VAT money recoveries would help with this, and other CDEL funding opportunities continue to be explored. Dialogue continues between National Landscape teams and Defra regarding the need for additional revenue funding, in addition to capital.

Some assumptions have been made, such as creating a new Senior Programme Manager role, which is increasingly essential to ensure the effective development, delivery and oversight of our various programmes and projects.

d. Whilst figures beyond 26/27 show an increasing deficit, this is a worst case scenario and it remains the intention to deliver a annual budget deficit of below £50k. Officers continue to monitor budgets closely and have a range of actions identified that can be taken to reduce the deficit closer to year end, should it be necessary.

- 1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and APPROVED the 2026/27 Budget Envelope recommendation to the Board**
- 2. The Committee NOTED the initial projections for 2027/28 onwards and PROVIDED FEEDBACK as noted above**

**11.4. Job Grading Framework**

Elaine King, the Chief Executive Officer, provided a paper with an updated Job Grading Framework. Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations, has worked to update elements beyond adding annual inflationary salary increases, such as clarifying salary ranges and ensuring these better reflect the job roles and job titles in the organisation. It also links to the HR policy work that has been carried out. The updated Framework should inform both existing staff and recruitment purposes. Feedback has been sought from the staff team, who are happy with the transparency the framework now provides.

- 1. The Committee APPROVED the framework**

**12.1 Annual Planning**

Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations, provided a paper to update the Committee on the annual planning process and to set the context for the strategic workshop being held on 17<sup>th</sup> March. The new Management Plan is in place and the team is now developing a prioritised plan for the organisation for the next four years of the Plan. These plans will be discussed in detail at the strategic workshop. Cllr

JHG  
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Spicer stressed the need to monitor and evaluate impact, especially after a project or piece of work has been completed.

**1. The Committee NOTED the report and gave FEEDBACK as detailed above**

Cllr Sants left the meeting at 11.40, Cllr Griffin took over as Chair.

**12.2 Strategic and Operational Planning Cycles**

Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations, has provided the Executive Committee Chair Cllr Sants a document which he will circulate to all members. The paper summarises the Executive Committee's role in relation to HR matters following the agreed dissolution of the HR Advisory Group. He will circulate that paper for any newer members for clarity purposes.

**1. The Committee NOTED the update**

**12.3 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Update**

Annette Weiss, the Head of Engagement and Partnerships and Board Member Baljit Dhillon, as representatives of the Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Advisory Group provided a paper to give an update on the progress of the EDI Ambition. A co-chair model for the group was agreed, with Baljit Dhillon and Juliet Vickery assuming this role. A lot of activity is already being carried out in the Chilterns, and the aim is to strengthen what is already being carried out across the landscape. Recognising the value that different communities can bring to the landscape and taking guidance from others will enable to the organisation to continue to strengthen the resilience of the landscape and how various communities can be built into this.

Annette Weiss, Head of Engagement and Partnerships, advised that the EDI Advisory Group has new members who will play an important role in terms of business planning. Plans are being developed to generate more visibility, including an [Accessibility Hub](#) is being launched this week, which will showcase much of the EDI and access work being carried out across the Chilterns by the CCB and its partners. Annette requested that members share the work we are doing to maximise visibility, and to give any feedback to the group.

**1. The Committee NOTED the update**

**12.4 Funding Report**

Elaine King, the Chief Executive Officer provided a paper to update on progress with delivering the Funding Strategy. The predicted deficit was discussed earlier, which highlights the need to bring in additional funding to the organisation. A more strategic approach is wanted for additional visibility to avoid duplications of work or various staff approaching the same external partners.

As previously mentioned, a significant amount of time has been spent to understand the CDEL funding parameters. This means that going forward when settlements are allocated the criteria will stand and therefore be distributed more efficiently. The flat cash settlement for 2026/27 from Defra is roughly the same as previous years with an indicative figure given for the years until 2028/29. Local Authority contributions have been discussed, with additional advocacy work needed to try to receive full contributions from all.

Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape, discussed a joint bid being worked on alongside the North Wessex Downs from the National Lottery which would be the first step of a large, exciting piece of work to do with how to enable nature recovery across the two landscapes. Discussions are ongoing with HS2 Ltd regarding funding for the Mending the Misbourne project, and legacy lessons learned from the Chess catchment are informing our approaches.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme has been extended for a further three years, with a similar amount of capital money granted. A bid for funding from the Natural England Species

Recovery Programme led by an external partner was unsuccessful, whilst many others have been successful.

It was commented that when staff leave the organisation, it is important to make sure their knowledge is retained to ensure the resilience of the team. The Chief Executive Officer agreed and said it was a priority for the Senior Leadership Team. Handover documents are created, files created on Sharepoint and meetings are held for forward planning before leaving. Additional handover time has been built in before the retirement of the Senior Administration Officer, to enable a seamless transition.

**1. The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and NOTED the update**

**12.5 Chief Executive Officer's Report**

Elaine King, the Chief Executive Officer provided a paper to update on works carried out since the last Committee meeting. Highlights included:

- The Head of Landscapes has commissioned a consultant to carry out work to look at the impacts of climate change in the National Landscape. This will look terms of climate change, biodiversity, and nature recovery over the next 30 and 60 years using climate modelling and then be used as a framework for other National Landscapes. The findings will be brought to the Board in the future.
- The Senior Leadership Team continue to meet weekly to plan, monitor and share information and deliver across a range of areas, focus recently has been places on the upcoming budget and business planning.
- Ongoing engagement with MPs and local authorities via email and face to face meetings. The need to protect chalk streams in legislation will be debated in Parliament. The desire to reinstate the Boundary Review continues.
- The CEO attended an even hosted by UCL Law School for "Environmental Governance in Turbulent Times: Ten Years on from Brexit" which concerned the direction of travel. She will share notes with members, which included discussion on water regulation and the new framework.
- The Senior Leadership Team continue to ensure that staff feedback from surveys is delivered, and wider organisational development is met.

**1. The Committee NOTED the update**

**25/26.13 Any Urgent Business**

None at this time.

**25/26.14 Next Executive Committee meeting**

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2026 at 10am, at The Village Centre, Chinnor.

**Further meeting Dates:**

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
		Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> March 2026 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2026 10am CCB Offices, Chinnor	Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> June 2026 (including AGM) 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

*Handwritten signature/initials*

No meeting	Tuesday 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> October 206 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> October 10am CCB Offices, Chinnor	Thursday 19 <sup>th</sup> November 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 10 <sup>th</sup> December 2026 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 12.27.

The Chair.....

Date.....