Chilterns National Landscape

Members of the Executive Committee of the Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are hereby summoned to a meeting of the

Executive Committee

On Tuesday 1st September 2026 at 10.00am at

Chinnor Village Hall, Church Rd, Chinnor OX39 4PQ
and by remote video conferencing.

Voting (Executive Committee) members are encouraged to attend in person to ensure the meeting is quorate; voting is not permitted for remote attendees. Remote access will be available for non-voting members.

The online session will be available from 9.45am

AGENDA

1. **Standing Items**
   - 1.1 Apologies for absence
   - 1.2 Declaration of interest in any of the agenda items
   - 1.3 Chair's announcements
   - 1.4 Notice of urgent business
   - 1.5 Approval of minutes of the previous meeting (19th May 2026)
   - 1.6 Matters arising
   - 1.7 Consideration of motions submitted by members
   - 1.8 Public questions
2. **Items for Decision**
   - 2.1 Quarter 1 Finance Report
   - 2.2 Members' Allowances
   - 2.3 HR Policies
   - 2.4 Climate Adaptation Plan
   - 2.5 Business Planning
3. **Items for Noting / Information**
   - 3.1 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Update
   - 3.2 Funding Report
   - 3.3 Chief Executive Officer's Report
4. **Any Urgent Business**
5. **Next Meeting**: 19th November 2026, The HUB conference centre, High Wycombe.

Dr Elaine King, CEO

Future Meeting Dates 2026

Executive Committee	Board
	Thursday 1st October 2026, 10am Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF
Thursday 19th November 2026 10am, The HUB conference centre, High Wycombe	Thursday 10th December 2026, 10am Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF

Future Meeting Dates 2027

Executive Committee	Board
Thursday 25th February 2027 10am The Village Centre, High St, Chinnor OX39 4DH	Thursday 25th March 2027, 10am Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF
Thursday 20th May 2027 10am The Village Centre, High St, Chinnor OX39 4DH	Thursday 17th June 2027, 10am Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF
Thursday 2nd September 2027 10am Venue tbc	Thursday 30th September 2027, 10am Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF
Thursday 18th November 2027 10am The Village Centre, High St, Chinnor OX39 4DH	Thursday 9th December 2027, 10am Buckinghamshire Council Offices, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty HELD ON Tuesday 19th May 2026 at Chinnor Village Hall, Chinnor OX39 4PQ commencing at 10.00 AM.

Present:

Cllr Philip Spicer	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Gavin McLauchlan	Board Member
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member – Chair
Baljit Dhillon	Board Member
Nicola Thomas	Board Member
Matthew Stanton	Board Member

In attendance:

Elaine King	Chief Executive Officer
Andy Brock-Doyle	Head of Operations
Kathryn Foster	Senior Finance Manager; S151 Officer
Annette Weiss	Head of Engagements and Partnerships
Lorna Coldwell	Clerk to the Board and Minute taker

25/26.15 Standing Items

15.1 Apologies for absence

Board Members:
Cllr Hector Sants – Buckinghamshire Parish Councils
Cllr Sue Rowland – Oxfordshire Parish Councils
Cllr Louise Price – Three Rivers District Council

Officers:
Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning; Monitoring Officer
Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape

Introductions were made by all.

15.2 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

15.3 Chair's Announcements

No announcements were made.

15.4 Notice of Urgent Business

All items covered on the agenda.

15.5 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting 26th February 2026
The minutes of the meeting 26/02/26 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.
It was noted that two new representatives from Buckinghamshire Council are needed, the Chief Executive Officer has written to them advising.

15.6 Matters Arising
All items covered on the agenda.

15.7 Consideration of Motions Submitted by Members
None at this meeting.

15.8 Public Questions
No members of the public were present.

25/26.16 Items for Decision
16.1 Quarter 4 Finance Report
The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, reported on the accounts to 31st March 2026. These are draft figures, with further work to be carried out before the completion of the AGAR. Highlights include:

1. There is a Core deficit of £6k for the full year end 31st March 2026. This is a significant improvement on the original budget forecast deficit of £118k, achieved due to a combination of better than anticipated interest income, improved recovery of Core costs against projects, and better utilisation of CDEL funding against Core costs following extensive work to determine what CDEL can be used against. Savings were made against staff costs with the use of consultants rather than employing additional team members.
2. The organisation was allocated £348k of Capital Funds by Defra for financial year 2025/26. A small amount of £5,750 was returned unspent at the end of the year, and £105,750 of funds were returned in respect of the value of the capital lease which will be released annually, effectively meaning that rent costs are funded for the next 4.5 years.
3. Local Authority contributions, as discussed at the March Board meetings, have unfortunately decreased. Officers continue to engage with the LAs to demonstrate where the required contributions are spent in their areas.
4. Project income is £2.566m, costs are £3.122m and there is a deficit of £555k overall. Much of this deficit is driven by the Mend the Gap programme where all funds were received in advance and taken to reserves. The project is now progressing with high levels of expenditure.
5. As of 31st March 2026, cash balances held are £4.6m with £3.76m of these funds held in higher interest earning accounts, the remaining £764k held in instant access accounts.
6. Officers continue to evaluate other options and are in the process of opening a savings account with Unity Trust Bank and are mindful that future funding needs to be invested carefully to ensure the maximum interest is achieved for the benefit of the project.
7. Officers are completing the paperwork for a VAT 33 refund scheme for submission to HMRC and will be completed by Q2 of 2026/27.
8. A business rate exemption application for the office that was made to South Oxfordshire District Council was rejected. Cllr Mclauchlan offered to share contacts to discuss this further with SODC.

It was noted that the summary costs are different to the budget due to funding by CDEL, redeployment of funds and some transformational costs. Officers are mindful to spread monies between different banks and not have it all in one. More work needs to be carried out with regards to month to month forecasting.
With regards to Local Authority and Defra funding, the organisation is most vulnerable in terms of staffing costs. Contingencies are in place, and there is a degree of flexibility within this. Some

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operations improvement work is ongoing, with the Data Protection Officer and HR and IT Policy/Improvements falling into this category.

1. **The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and APPROVED the Q4 Finance report to 31st March 2026**

16.2 2026/27 Budget

The Senior Finance Manager, Kathryn Foster, provided a detailed paper to set out a proposed 2026/27 core budget. Since the original budget envelope was presented to the Board at the Match meeting, there has been a £176k one year RDEL uplift from Defra, which relieves pressures on what was originally forecast to be a deficit budget. The RDEL funding will be used in part for the Head of Programmes role, which will be recruited this year, rather than CDEL as originally planned.

The significant reduction in Local Authority contributions has meant that additional funding has needed to be identified to support the budget.

Transformation works (IT and HR) were approved last year to be funded from reserves. The CEO advised that the one-off RDEL uplift from Defra will be in part used to give additional staff the opportunity to attend the National Landscapes Association conference for training and networking purposes, with team development sessions another part of continuing to invest in the team.

The budget includes provisions for external support from a Data Protection Officer, a necessary role that cannot be performed by existing staff in-house, along with enhanced training provision for staff.

Cllr Spicer suggested that with elections in upcoming years across the various Local Authorities, that to contact all parties to educate who the Chilterns National Landscape are and the work that they carry out would be a good idea so that the organisation is known to all should there be a change in power in the future. Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager, confirmed that the CEO is writing to all LAs to set out our expectations for their contributions over the next three years. it was suggested that the letters cc the S151 Officers.

The CEO, Elaine King, advised that Defra is planning to send to all LAs a letter explaining what they need to do and what is expected of them in relation to National Landscapes. This should help explain Conservation Boards, which were set up to provide services so the LAs do not have to deliver the statutory purposes of the designation themselves. The National Landscapes Association has agreed to advocate for Conservation Boards in this regard.

It was noted that aspects of the budget feel uncertain, which is an accurate reflection of the current situation. Funding is often provided or offered at short notice, which is helpful nevertheless, with income this year being greater than had been anticipated.

1. **The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and APPROVED the updated 2026/27 Budget for recommendation to the Board in June**

16.3. Quarter 4 Delivery Report

The Head of Operations, Andy Brock-Doyle, had provided a paper which was taken as read to update the Executive Committee on the progress of the CCB team between January and March 2026 against the financial year 2025-26 Delivery Plan. In Q4:

- 47 (54 in Q3) delivery lines reported as completed or progressing on track
- 31 (28 in Q3) delivery lines reported as being slightly delayed / slightly limited in effectiveness
- 9 (16 in Q3) delivery lines reported as being significantly delayed / significantly limited in

effectiveness
- o 0 (0 in Q3) delivery lines have not yet started
- o 1 (2 in Q3) delivery lines have been placed on hold
- o 16 (8 in Q3) delivery lines have been postponed
- o 5 (1 in Q3) delivery lines have been cancelled

The Head of Operations commented that, in line with risk around capacity, there has been increased focus on identifying and making clearer decisions around delivery lines to postpone and reconsider in next year's planning (see number of items that have been postponed). Apart from this there is no significant change from Q3 in terms of work being on track or delayed, and the Head of Operations emphasised the significant amount of amazing work being delivered.

The knock-on impact of delays in some delivery lines was also highlighted with the delay in the delivery / publication of the Management Plan, which has absorbed a lot of time for various teams. At the start of the year, it was underestimated how much time even the "light touch review" would take and this has therefore had an impact, for example on the Communications Team, in delivering other elements of their work.

HR compliance continues to progress, but at a slower rate than originally planned. To this, there has been a focus on addressing high-risk areas along with key points of the employee cycle such as recruitment, onboarding and offboarding. Additional time is being taken to test these processes to make sure that templates and guidance are improved to ensure successful embedding when implemented.

Cllr McLauchlan asked whether certain areas of work could be replicated from other agencies or shared with others on a consultancy basis for a fee. The Head of Operations advised that this had been explored previously but that this generally ended up being more time consuming and that the way that the CNL Team functioned was different from larger organisations. However, the CCB does exchange information with the Cotswolds National Landscape team.

It was identified that an Administration Officer is being recruited to enable fuller coverage across all operational areas, and that the new Head of Programmes role will also free up capacity for the Head of Landscape and Head of Operations.

An external Data Protection Officer has been appointed and is currently carrying out a gap analysis to identify areas where the Chilterns National Landscape is not compliant or work needs developing.

It was confirmed that by the end of March 2027 the majority of the HR process work should be completed, with only a few items remaining.

Cllr Hussey proposed the use of AI as staff capacity is and remains a problem. It was discussed that a policy and guidance regarding the use of AI within the organisation would be needed, as well as identifying the benefits it would provide. Cllr Hussey will forward guidance for the use of AI within central government. It was noted a "human touch" is always needed, and strong security measures to guarantee safety, along with assessing any ethical issues staff may have concerning its use.

It was identified that cyber training and the need for all staff to be aware of the issues would be addressed in the training programme for the organisation with such training becoming mandatory for all staff going forward.

1. **The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and APPROVED the Q4 Delivery report**

25/26.17 Items for Noting

17.1 Annual Planning

Elaine King, CEO, circulated a paper to show the progress in developing a four-year strategic plan. She flagged to the Executive Committee that collaboration takes time, and the Senior Leadership Team want to make sure that all staff are involved in the planning process including being clear how their objectives are linked to the Management Plan. Once this process has been completed, subsequent years should be quicker and result in a robust and well understood plan where staff can see how they contribute to the organisation's priorities.

Matthew Stanton asked how it was decided which areas would stop, as this may affect staff morale. The Head of Operations advised that a prioritisation exercise was being undertaken, and a "top down" strategic look would take place alongside a "bottom up" resource led review.

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

17.2 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Update

Annette Weiss, Head of Engagement and Partnerships along with Board Member Baljit Dhillon, EDI Advisory Group Co-Chair, presented the key priorities for EDI in the organisations Business Plan to 2030.

Baljit Dhillon reported encouraging discussions by the EDI Advisory Group on supporting the Board following the appointment of new members. She proposed, time permitting, a breakout session at the June Board meeting to reflect in small groups on how Board Members work together, contribute in meetings and feel able to ask questions. This would sit alongside existing EDI training and opportunities for Board Members to be involved.

It was noted that this exercise will work better in person, so all Board Members are encouraged to attend the June meeting in person, which is also the AGM so an important meeting regardless. Breakout rooms can be organised for anyone who is only able to attend online.

Cllr McLauchlan detailed his experiences in a previous role to identify and implement ideas from staff for them to input into thought processes and will share with the CEO further.

1. **The Committee OFFERED FEEDBACK as detailed above and NOTED the update and AGREED the inclusion of a more substantive EDI discussion at the June Board meeting**

17.3 Funding Report

Elaine King, CEO, had circulated a paper to update on progress regarding the delivery of the Funding Strategy, which was taken as read. funding from Defra to create Wildlife Rich Habitats has been secured and will be announced publicly next week.

The CEO is investigating diversifying income and exploring corporate funding in collaboration with the National Landscapes Association. Further research is needed to identify suitable opportunities.

This financial year is the first of a three year flat cash settlement from Defra with year one figures confirmed and indicative for subsequent years. Local Authority contributions, as previously discussed, have decreased this year and staff will continue to engage with LAs to ensure they are aware of the requirement to contribute financially to reflect the Chilterns National Landscape's role in delivering their statutory duties.

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

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17.4 Chief Executive Officer's Report
Elaine King, CEO, provided a paper updating on key work carried out since the last Executive Committee meeting in February. Highlights included:

- The Senior Leadership Team continue to oversee the organisation's operations and strategic priorities, coordinating delivery across all areas of work with a significant focus on budget setting and business planning.
- Engagement with local MPs and Local Authorities, liaising on a wide range of subjects such as chalk streams protection, water quality, planning, nature recovery, and airport expansion.
- There have been a number of staff changes, with various staff members leaving and new recruits. The job specification for the new role of Head of Programmes will be shared to all Executive Committee members for comment prior to going out to recruitment
- We are supporting Defra in circulating recruitment information for two new Secretary of State roles has been circulated, with existing Board Members offering to discuss the role with prospective candidates.

1. **The Committee NOTED the update**

25/26.18 Any Urgent Business
None at this time.

25/26.19 Next Executive Committee meeting
Thursday 1st September at 10am, at The Village Centre, Chinnor.

Further meeting Dates:

Planning Committee	Executive Committee	Board
		Thursday 26th June 2026 (including AGM) 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
No meeting	Tuesday 1st September 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 1st October 206 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury
Thursday 29th October 10am CCB Offices, Chinnor	Thursday 19th November 2026 10am, The Village Centre Chinnor	Thursday 10th December 2026 10am Gateway Offices, Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury

The meeting was closed at 13.00.

The Chair…………………………………………… Date……………….

Item 2.1 **Quarter 1 Finance Report**

Author: Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose: To provide an update to the Executive Committee on Financials to 30 June 2026 and other finance matters.

Quarter 1 26/27 – 1 April – 30 June 2026 – Management Accounts - Core

£'000s	Quarter 1 Actual 26/27	Quarter 1 Budget 26/27	Quarter 1 Variance Act v Budget	Full Year Budget 26/27
Defra Income	179	178	0	718
Local Authority Income	30	30	0	122
Other income	48	49	(1)	260
Total Income	**257**	**258**	**(1)**	**1,099**
Staff costs	163	168	5	762
Office costs	17	17	0	71
Governance costs	5	5	0	21
Communications costs	1	1	0	10
Telecoms & IT costs	6	6	0	26
Other costs	29	29	0	210
Total Costs	**221**	**226**	**5**	**1,099**
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	**35**	**31**	**4**	**(0)**

1. Our results for the first quarter 1 April to 30 June 2027 show us very much on track with our budget. There is a small shortfall in income which represents lower core project recovery due to delays on recruitment of project staff. We also have some modest savings on Core staff costs for the quarter (timing differences on FTE changes and leavers/starters). We will be reforecasting our financials following Quarter 2 finalisation in September and present this at the ExCo meeting in November. Full details of our Core Management Accounts can be reviewed in **Appendix 1.**
2. **Appendix 2** shows overall CCB profit and loss for Quarter 1. Projects show an income of £1.4m (mainly Mending the Misbourne funds of £1m that have been received in 26/27) and expenditure of £409k, net surplus of £1m.
3. **Appendix 3** shows the overall CNL balance sheet as at 30 June 2026. Core reserves are **£798k** including the year-to-date surplus; general reserves £573k; development reserves £224k.

Cashflow and Banking

4. As at 30 June we held **£4.9m** in cash (see Balance sheet in **Appendix 3**). We continue to utilise a number of HSBC Money Market accounts with notice periods of 60 – 90 days along with our Nationwide 95-day notice account to maximise interest.
5. We are in the process of opening another savings account with Unity Trust Bank who offer attractive interest rates (3.85% for a six-month notice account versus 3.1% with HSBC). This will diversify our portfolio and allow more flexibility on term invested and

interest rates. The application process is taking longer than anticipated due to a high volume of applications and our unusual board governance arrangements has resulted in extra due diligence being required. We have noted following this and other bank reviews that we need to amend our Board member onboarding process to obtain appropriate identity information for all new members.

Development Reserves 26/27

6. As agreed at the Board meeting in June, we have retained Development Reserves of £224k in line with our reserves policy. We have identified a number of areas where we will be seeking approval for the use of Development Reserves in 26/27. However, we will also continue to explore any opportunity to use in year surpluses or CDEL to fund where possible):

- **Transformation costs - £20k**. At the Board meeting in June 2025, The Board approved **£80k** of transformation costs being funded by Development reserves. As a result of careful management of costs and use of CDEL, it has been possible to cover these costs from in year funds. In 26/27 we are further funding these activities from the additional Defra RDEL uplift, with additional costs of £20k needing to be funded from reserves to complete this work.
- **Not Bourne Yesterday (NBY) project delay – net cost £20k.** The application for Delivery phase funding has moved from July to November 2026, delaying the decision and start date to 1 April 2027. The project is more complex than expected, with major river restoration, a potential laboratory build, cost delays and up-front funding requirements. The delay improves the chance of National Lottery approval but means funding two staff from January - March 2027 and losing overhead recovery. The £30k cost is partly offset by £10k from the Defra RDEL uplift.
- **Climate Consultancy £30k.** Development of the Climate Adaptation Plan will require commissioning consultancy work. Item 2.4 sets out a proposal for the Committee to approve to cover this work from Development Reserves.

Local Authority Funding

7. The CEO has written to our local authorities outlining our required contributions for the next three years including this year. We have received positive response from SODC, Oxfordshire County Council, Three Rivers District Council, North Hertfordshire District Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Dacorum Borough Council, which have all accepted the 5% inflationary increase for this year and have either already paid or raised a purchase order for us to facilitate invoicing. Revenue from these councils will provide £66k of critical unrestricted income in 26/27.

8. Luton Borough Council's contribution of £4,499 is less than the required contribution for this year, but more than in previous years. We have outlined our expectations for contributions at the full amount of £9,370 in 27/28 and £9,839 in 28/29.

9. Buckinghamshire Council has reiterated its decision to cut its contribution by £14k in 26/27. In 25/26, the Council contributed £55k instead of the required £61k. Its contribution of £41k in 26/27 is therefore a real term cut of £20k. The CEO has written to the Council's CEO to seek a meeting with her and our Chair, Cllr Louise Price.

10. Central Bedfordshire has contributed £10,000 in recent years. This is significantly below the requested level of £28,110 in 26/27. We have explained the required figures for the next three years (£29,515 in 27/28 and £30,991 in 28/29), emphasised the inward investment brought to the Council's area by the CCB and asked to meet with them. The Council has not responded to any of our efforts to engage. Board member Cllr Philip Spicer has therefore tabled a written question on the matter.

11. If all local authorities contribute in full, total local authority income for 26/27 would be £122k. The reduction in contributions, or complete failure to contribute, currently leaves the CCB with a shortfall on expected income of **£45.5k.**

CDEL Spend

12. **CDEL Capital lease funding** – Defra has confirmed the release of £23.5k per annum of CDEL for our premises capital lease and this has been factored into our budgets for 26/27 onwards. These funds are being released to match our rent costs. The remaining CDEL will be allocated to a combination of 30x30 biodiversity projects and innovate/Invest to save initiatives.

13. In addition to a CDEL pot of £348k for 26/27 (as for 25/26) we have also been allocated a portion of Defra's Wildlife Rich Habitat fund (£207k). We are currently reviewing proposals on spend for these funding streams.

Year end 31 March 2026

Internal Audit

14. Our internal audit report for 25/26 is attached in **Appendix 4**. Note we received an **overall audit opinion of "reasonable assurance"**. The reasons we did not achieve substantial assurance on this occasion are:

- Medium priority recommendation to review our financial regulations
- Low priority recommendation relating to the annual review of the risk register

15. We had opportunity to comment on both these recommendations – see Appendix A of the report. The updated Risk Register was approved by the Board in June 2026, and the review of our Financial Regulations is in our workplan for 2026/27.

16. In addition, they highlighted the need for further clarity on payment of members allowances which is being addressed via a proposed update to our **Members' Allowances scheme** – see item 2.2.

External Audit

17. We have submitted our AGAR and supporting analysis to our external auditors along with the internal audit report. We expect to hear from them by 30th September with a final audit report which will be published on our website. This report will be circulated with papers for the November ExCo meeting.

Cost of being a Conservation board

18. The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) is conducting an inquiry into the role of protected landscapes in delivering the government's 30by30 biodiversity targets. The review includes exploring the challenges and opportunities for protected landscapes, including the unusual governance arrangements of Conservation Boards. As part of this work, we have updated our analysis of the additional costs of being a Conservation Board, compared to a National Landscape hosted by a local authority (see analysis in **Appendix 5**).

19. The estimated annual additional cost, based on our 26/27, budget is £267k. It is illustrative rather than precise as some National Landscapes also pay for certain services provided by their host local authority, and our calculations are therefore intentionally transparent.

VAT and Rates

20. No further work has been done on appealing against SODC's decision not to grant us a rates exemption. We note that the Cotswolds National Landscape are currently applying for rates exemption to their local authority and we will keep in touch with them on any responses. For your information, please see the email received from SODC **(Appendix 5)** with their reasons for refusal. Note the primary reason is that we cover an area wider than SODC.

21. As noted in the Q4 Finance report, the paperwork for a VAT 33 refund scheme for submission to HMRC is being prepared and will be submitted by the end of Quarter 2. This requires five-year projections of our recovery of VAT, which involves being clear on both core and project costs. We now have long term budgets for most of our major projects - Not Bourne Yesterday, Chess Smarter Water Catchment, Mend the Gap and Mending the Misbourne - and so are able to make reasonable estimates. However, we want to maximise our chance of success with the application and have therefore consulted with Defra, the National Landscapes Association and the Cotswolds National Landscape on the application. The applications take up to six months to process so our intention is to include a requested effective date of 1 April 2027.

Recommendation

1. **That the Executive Committee NOTES the Quarter 1 Management accounts.**
2. **The Executive committee APPROVES the proposed use of Development Reserves for 26/27**
3. **The Executive Committee NOTES the other finance updates provided.**

APPENDIX 1
Budget Variance
Chilterns Conservation Board
For the 3 months ended 30 June 2026

Core is Communications, Corporate Services, Engagement & Partnerships, Landscapes, Planning.

Account	Year to date Actual	Year to date Budget	Variance	Variance %	Full Year Budget	Comments
Trading Income						
Defra Income						
Defra Core Grant	172,655	172,680	(25)	-0.01%	690,719	
Defra Capital Grant	5,875	5,875	0	0.00%	27,382	This relates to £23.5k capital lease funding to offset rent
Total Defra Income	**178,530**	**178,555**	**(25)**	**-0.01%**	**718,101**	
Other income						
Local Authority Contribution	30,516	30,492	24	0.08%	121,967	
Project Income	8,295	8,625	(330)	-3.83%	57,886	FDRI, Landscapes Connections, Nature Towns & Cities, Hs2AP & Review
Interest Income	10,616	9,999	617	6.17%	40,000	
Internal Fee Income	28,445	30,252	(1,807)	-5.97%	161,873	Delay on River Restoration Officer recruitment, overhead charge cannot be recovered £2k
Sale of merchandise	105	0	105	0.00%	0	
Total Other income	**77,977**	**79,368**	**(1,391)**	**-1.75%**	**381,726**	
Total Trading Income	**256,507**	**257,923**	**(1,416)**	**-0.55%**	**1,099,827**	
Gross Surplus	**256,507**	**257,923**	**(1,416)**	**-0.55%**	**1,099,827**	
Operating Expenses						
Staff costs						
Salaries	119,666	123,172	(3,506)	-2.85%	549,551	LB budgeted as 1.0 FTE currently (0.91), Saving on Lynne finish £500 and LC 23 hours per month, average 12 hours per month, £750 saving Q1 (holiday pay adjustment provided for in 25/26 accounts), Delay on Comms new role end of April budgeted beginning
Employers National Insurance	16,030	16,258	(228)	-1.40%	72,579	
Pensions Costs	19,267	19,875	(608)	-3.06%	88,812	
Medical Insurance	581	717	(136)	-18.91%	3,143	
Staff expenses	0	0	0	0.00%	500	
Staff Training	5,048	5,100	(53)	-1.03%	41,000	Phased much of spend in later part of year.
Travel Expenses	351	440	(89)	-20.25%	4,020	
Recruitment	1,984	2,000	(16)	-0.82%	2,000	
Total Staff costs	**162,926**	**167,562**	**(4,636)**	**-2.77%**	**761,605**	
Office costs						
Cleaning	838	876	(38)	-4.35%	3,500	
Rates and Water rates	2,177	2,175	2	0.11%	8,700	
Rent	5,875	5,875	0	0.00%	23,500	
Light, Power, Heating	740	1,125	(385)	-34.20%	4,500	
Repairs & Maintenance	988	999	(11)	-1.07%	4,000	
Insurance	6,540	6,501	39	0.60%	26,000	
Office Equipment	0	0	0	0.00%	500	
Total Office costs	**17,159**	**17,551**	**(392)**	**-2.23%**	**70,700**	
Governance costs						
Board Meetings	120	624	(505)	-80.85%	2,500	June board meeting online
Members Allowances	2,811	2,970	(159)	-5.36%	11,880	New scheme to be drafted for Sept Exco
Finance costs	1,625	1,749	(124)	-7.09%	7,000	
Total Governance costs	**4,555**	**5,343**	**(788)**	**-14.74%**	**21,380**	
Communications						
Advertising & Marketing	650	650	0	0.00%	5,000	
Website running costs	248	250	(2)	-0.64%	5,000	
Total Communications	**898**	**900**	**(2)**	**-0.18%**	**10,000**	
Telecoms & IT costs						

IT Software and Consumables	2,692	2,635	57	2.17%	11,500	
IT support and maintenance	2,764	2,544	220	8.64%	10,000	
Telephone & Internet	953	903	50	5.53%	4,360	
Total Telecoms & IT costs	**6,409**	**6,082**	**327**	**5.38%**	**25,860**	Reconciliation work on IT costs being undertaken with some catch up. Will be carefully reforecasting after Q2
Other costs						
Consulting	25,907	25,724	183	0.71%	138,700	Have phased budget for later part of year
Legal Expenses	0	0	0	0.00%	6,500	
Event costs	0	0	0	0.00%	8,100	
Project donations	0	0	0	0.00%	45,182	This will be £20k higher in reforecast due to supporting NBY to 31 March 2026
General Expenses	173	175	(2)	-1.28%	2,050	
Postage, Freight & Courier	(5)	0	(5)	0.00%	500	
Printing & Stationery	154	155	(1)	-0.62%	4,250	
Subscriptions	3,250	3,279	(29)	-0.88%	4,850	
Publicity and promotion	(1)	0	(1)	0.00%	0	
Bank Fees	(98)	39	(137)	-350.69%	150	
Total Other costs	**29,380**	**29,372**	**8**	**0.03%**	**210,282**	
Total Operating Expenses	**221,328**	**226,810**	**(5,482)**	**-2.42%**	**1,099,827**	
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	**35,179**	**31,113**	**4,066**	**13.07%**	**0**	

APPENDIX 2
Profit and Loss
Chilterns Conservation Board
For the 3 months ended 30 June 2026

Account	Total Core	Total Projects	Total
Turnover			
Defra Capital Grant	5,875	0	5,875
Defra Core Grant	172,655	0	172,655
Interest Income	10,616	5,938	16,554
Internal Fee Income	28,445	(28,445)	0
Local Authority Contribution	30,516	0	30,516
Other Revenue	0	90	90
Project Income	8,295	1,437,297	1,445,592
Sale of merchandise	105	0	105
Total Turnover	**256,507**	**1,414,879**	**1,671,386**
Gross Profit	**256,507**	**1,414,879**	**1,671,386**
Administrative Costs			
Access grant expenditure	0	626	626
Advertising & Marketing	650	0	650
Bank Fees	(98)	0	(98)
Board Meetings	120	0	120
Citizen Science	0	1,543	1,543
Cleaning	838	0	838
Consulting	25,907	8,749	34,656
Education Costs	0	3,109	3,109
Employers National Insurance	16,030	15,715	31,745
Enhancements	0	438	438
Event costs	0	204	204
Finance costs	1,625	0	1,625
FiPL Grant	0	7,248	7,248
FIPL Grant 26/27	0	8,936	8,936
General Expenses	173	157	330
Insurance	6,540	0	6,540
Irrecoverable VAT	0	8,044	8,044
IT Software and Consumables	2,692	991	3,684
IT support and maintenance	2,764	537	3,301
Light, Power, Heating	740	0	740
Medical Insurance	581	597	1,178
Members Allowances	2,811	0	2,811
Nature Recovery	0	102,935	102,935
Pensions Costs	19,267	20,082	39,349
Postage, Freight & Courier	(5)	0	(5)
Printing & Stationery	154	62	216
Professional fees (activity)	0	44,967	44,967
Publicity and promotion	(1)	0	(1)
Rates and Water rates	2,177	0	2,177
Recruitment	1,984	0	1,984
Rent	5,875	750	6,625
Repair and conservation work	0	24,850	24,850
Repairs & Maintenance	988	332	1,320
Research and survey expenditure	0	26,317	26,317
Salaries	119,666	123,136	242,802
Staff expenses	0	93	93
Staff Training	5,048	2,690	7,738
Subscriptions	3,250	285	3,535
Telephone & Internet	953	736	1,689
Training for volunteers	0	1,966	1,966
Travel Expenses	351	2,770	3,121
Website running costs	248	0	248
Total Administrative Costs	**221,328**	**408,867**	**630,195**
Operating Profit	**35,179**	**1,006,012**	**1,041,191**
Profit on Ordinary Activities Before Taxation	**35,179**	**1,006,012**	**1,041,191**
Profit after Taxation	**35,179**	**1,006,012**	**1,041,191**

APPENDIX 3
Balance Sheet
Chilterns Conservation Board
As at 30 June 2026

Account	30 Jun 2026	31 Mar 2026
Current Assets		
Total Cash at bank and in hand	**4,867,278**	**4,611,408**
Accounts Receivable	33,992	252,481
Accrued Income	191,477	8,267
Inventory	1,000	1,000
Prepayments	8,941	13,438
Total Current Assets	**5,102,688**	**4,886,594**
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year		
Accounts Payable	144,489	609,833
Accruals	99,476	138,666
Business Card - Laura Baker	1,142	409
Business Card - Lynne Cordice	0	11
Capital Grant	1,840	0
Income in Advance	16,225	340,118
Net Zero Activities	768	0
Rounding	(3)	(2)
Total Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	**263,937**	**1,089,034**
Net Current Assets (Liabilities)	**4,838,750**	**3,797,559**
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	**4,838,750**	**3,797,559**
Net Assets	**4,838,750**	**3,797,559**
Capital and Reserves		
Beacons of the Past: Earmarked Reserves	24,095	24,095
Central Chilterns Conservation Agriculture	70,362	70,362
Chalk Streams Earmarked Reserve	213,151	213,151
Chess Smarter Water Catchment Earmarked Reserves	283,893	283,893
Commons: Earmarked Reserves	21,837	21,837
Current Year Earnings	1,041,191	(577,790)
Development Reserve	224,123	224,123
Earmarked Reserves: Small Projects	3,846	3,846
Farm Advice: Earmarked Reserves	9,541	9,541
FIPL Earmarked Reserve	158,540	158,540
HS2 AP Reserve	18,509	18,509
Mend the Gap: Earmarked Reserves	2,020,489	2,020,489
Mending the Misbourne Project Reserve	49,449	49,449
Nature Towns & Cities Project Reserve	400	400
NBY Reserve	(19,380)	(19,380)
North Chilterns Farm Cluster	41,728	41,728
Red Kites Earmarked Reserve	5,859	5,859
Retained Earnings	(577,790)	0
Revenue Reserve	1,116,098	1,116,098
Tracking the Impact (Rebel Restoration) Reserve	51,002	51,002
Younghusband Legacy Fund	81,808	81,808
Total Capital and Reserves	**4,838,750**	**3,797,559**
Summary of Reserves:		
Project Reserves	3,035,128	3,613,760
Current Surplus/Deficit	1,006,012	(578,632)
Total Project Reserves	4,041,141	3,035,128
Core reserves Split		
Development Reserve	224,123	224,123
General reserve	573,487	538,308
Total Core Reserves	797,610	762,431
Total CCB Reserves	**4,838,750**	**3,797,559**

Shared Internal Audit Service
Hertfordshire in Partnership

Final Internal Audit Report

Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) 2025/26

June 2026

Issued to:	Kathryn Foster – Senior Finance Manager
Copied to:	Dr Elaine King – Chief Executive Officer Chilterns Conservation Board
Report Status:	Final
Reference:	SIAS-1272
Overall Assurance:	Reasonable
Recommendations:	One Medium & One Low Priority and One Advisory Action

INDEX

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1.1 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has provided the Internal Audit function to the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) since 2005. SIAS reports on the robustness of the financial control environment annually at the request of the Chilterns Conservation Board.

1.2 This audit focused on the internal controls linked to the requirements set out in the annual return which needs to be completed and sent to the external auditors. The audit sought to ensure that the identified controls were in place throughout the 2025/26 financial year and supported the achievement of the objectives of the CCB.

Overall Audit Opinion

1.3 Based on the work performed during this audit, we can provide overall **reasonable assurance** that there are effective controls in operation for those elements of the risk management processes covered by this review. These are detailed in the Assurance by Risk Area Table in section 2 below.

1.4 In arriving at our overall opinion, we were satisfied that appropriate governance, internal control and accounting arrangements were in place and operated for the 2025/26 financial year, however we identified two areas that should be considered to enhance processes. This is outlined in more detail in Appendix A.

1.5 CCB uses Xero as its accounting system and ApprovalMax for purchase order and invoice approval workflows. These systems are integrated and update automatically. In addition, CCB uses Crezco for BACS payments, which links directly with both Xero and HSBC banking.

1.6 As part of our review, we tested a selection of eight invoices and confirmed that payments were being authorised in line with the current regulations. We confirmed with the Finance Officer that no VAT evidence was needed as CCB are not VAT registered.

1.7 The CCB Financial Regulations were due to be updated this year, and this has since been pushed back to 2026/27. We acknowledge that an update to the financial signoffs has been approved at Executive & Board level, therefore we recommend that the Financial Regulations are reviewed at the earliest opportunity.

1.8 CCB has a risk register in place, however this was last reviewed in December 2024 and has just been approved at the latest Board meeting in June 2026. We have therefore raised a recommendation that this is reviewed on an annual basis moving forward.

1.9 In relation to managing fraud risk, CCB has recently consolidated its Counter Fraud and Corruption policies into a comprehensive Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy, which references both the Bribery Act 2010 and the Fraud Act 2006. This policy was initially approved at the Board meeting in December 2024 and next due for renewal in December 2027.

1.10 We confirmed that CCB has well-established budget setting and monitoring processes, with both the Board and the Executive Committee receiving quarterly budget monitoring reports. The 2026/27 budget was considered by the Executive Committee in February 2026 and formally approved by the Full Board in June 2026.

1.11 The Senior Finance Manager confirmed that the four main sources of income for CCB are from DEFRA, Thames Water, Affinity Water and National Lottery Heritage Fund. We reviewed five different invoices across the companies and found that the income was received and recorded accurately.

1.12 No testing was performed in relation to cash transactions, as the Senior Finance Manager confirmed that this function is no longer in operation and that all expenses are processed via the purchase ledger.

1.13 We reviewed the months of October 2025 and January 2026 and selected two employees at random and found that their salary, NI, tax and pension were processed and paid in a timely and accurate way.

1.14 We were informed that in September 2025 it was agreed Members, who are entitled to receive an allowance based on their role, could have their payments backdated. Six Members subsequently requested backdated payments, which totalled £5,909.92, and from our testing we confirmed that the payments were appropriate and accurate

1.15 However, we would **advise** that the backdated payment of Members' allowances should be recognised as a one-off exception and not adopted as standard practice with future payments processed in a timely manner in accordance with the approved Members' Allowance Scheme. Consideration should also be given to updating the Members' Allowance Scheme to clearly reflect this position and to reinforce that allowances must be claimed and paid in line with the policy requirements.

1.16 We reviewed the organisation's Asset Register and found it to be complete and appropriately reconciled. We also confirmed that adequate insurance cover is in place for the organisation's assets. In addition, the Senior Finance Manager confirmed that the Asset Register is subject to annual review.

1.17 We were provided with monthly and year-end bank reconciliations for the HSBC current account, together with year-end reconciliations for the Nationwide Business 95-day Saver and HSBC Rewards accounts. No issues were identified from our review.

1.18 We were provided with the year-end accounts for the 2025/26 financial year, which are scheduled for Board approval on 24 June 2026. We also noted that the completed AGAR is due to be presented for approval at the same meeting.

1.19 We confirmed that all required information had been published on the CCB website in line with the relevant guidelines, including the 2024/25 AGAR, Board and Executive Committee minutes, details of the public exercise of rights, and the annual accounts.

1.20 The AGAR for this year includes a new requirement relating to compliance with laws, regulations and proper practices for digital and data governance. Assurance was received that appropriate arrangements are in place to meet these requirements and is supported through Board-approved policies, including Information Technology, Acceptable Use and Confidentiality Policies. The Privacy Policy is also available via the CCB website.

1.21 We acknowledge that CCB is currently enhancing its data governance framework through updates to the Document Retention Policy and overarching Data Protection Policy. Responsibility for maintaining and updating these policies sits with the Head of Operations, and these will be reviewed in conjunction with the newly appointed external Data Protection Officer (DPO). Based on the information provided and assurance given we find that CCB is compliant with laws, regulations and proper practices and is in the process of strengthening its arrangements in relation to this newly added section.

1.22 For definitions of our assurance levels, please see Appendix B.

<u>Summary of Recommendations</u>

1.23 Our recommendations are set out in Appendix A. We have made one medium priority recommendation relating to the review of the Financial Regulations and one low priority recommendation relating to the review of the Risk Register.

1.24 The responsibility for a sound system of internal control rests with the Board and work performed by internal audit should not be relied upon to identify all strengths and weaknesses that may exist. Neither should internal audit work be relied upon to identify all circumstances of fraud or irregularity.

2. ASSURANCE BY RISK AREA

2.1 Our specific objectives in undertaking this work, as per the Terms of Reference, were to provide the Council with assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls, processes and records in place to mitigate risks in the following areas:

Risk Area	No	Limited	Reasonable	Substantial
Maintenance of proper financial records				
Compliance with the Organisations Financial Regulations and proper accounting for VAT				
Adequacy of Risk Management arrangements				
Effective budgeting and budgetary control				
Identification of income due and timely collection and banking of such monies				
Proper administration of cash				
Proper administration of salaries of employees including PAYE and allowances for Members				
Maintenance of an accurate and reliable Asset Register and insurance				
The completion of regular bank reconciliations				
The proper preparation of year-end accounts and completion of annual return				
Digital and Data Compliance				

Overall				

2.2 See definitions for the above assurance levels at Appendix B

Appendix A – Management Action Plan **CCB 2025/26**

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response
1.	**Financial Regulations** During the audit, we were informed that the Financial Regulations, which are dated January 2022, have not been reviewed. Although it was indicated in the previous year's audit that this would take place in 2025/26, the review has been deferred until 2026/27. We acknowledge that an update to the financial signoffs has since been approved at Executive & Board level. <u>Associated Risk</u> There is a risk that financial governance arrangements have become outdated and ineffective due to the postponement of the scheduled review of the Financial Regulations. This could result in non-compliance with current legislation and best practice, increased likelihood of control weaknesses, and potential financial loss or reputational damage for the organisation.	Medium	We recommend that Chilterns Conservation Board completes a review of the Financial Regulations at the earliest opportunity.	We agree with this recommendation and it is scheduled for review in 2026/27. **Responsible Officer:** Senior Finance Manager/S151 Officer **Target Date:** March 2027

Appendix A – Management Action Plan **CCB 2025/26**

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response
2.	**Risk Register** During the audit we were provided with the latest Risk Register, which was last reviewed in December 2024. We acknowledge that this item was listed on the agenda for the Board meeting on the 24/06/2026 and has since been reviewed and approved. Associated Risk Failure to be able to fully identify, assess or monitor risks due to a lack of the management reviewing or updating the Risk Register, could lead to operational disruption, financial loss and or reputational damage to the Board.	Low	We recommend that the risk register is formally reviewed and updated at least annually, with interim reviews undertaken periodically to capture emerging risks and changes in risk exposure.	The delay in our risk register review arose to better align with our annual planning process (Jan – June). Going forward the risk register review will take place each year following completion of our business planning cycle (June). CCB are committed to an annual review of our risk register. Any emerging risks would be identified from our regular finance/CEO and business planning updates. **Responsible Officer:** Chief Executive Officer **Target Date:** June 2027 (last reviewed June 2026)

Appendix B – Definitions of Assurance and Finding Priorities

Assurance Level	Definition
Substantial	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exist, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Reasonable	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Limited	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
No	Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Priority Level			Definition
Corporate	**Critical**		Audit findings which, in the present state, represent a serious risk to the organisation as a whole, i.e. reputation, financial resources and / or compliance with regulations. Management action to implement the appropriate controls is required immediately.
Service	**High**		Audit findings indicate a serious weakness or breakdown in control environment, which, if untreated by management intervention, is highly likely to put achievement of core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required urgently.
	Medium		Audit findings which, if not treated by appropriate management action, are likely to put achievement of some of the core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required in a timely manner.
	Low		Audit findings indicate opportunities to implement good or best practice, which, if adopted, will enhance the control environment. The appropriate solution should be implemented as soon as is practically possible.

Appendix 5
Chilterns Conservation Board - Year ended 31 March 2027

Annual Conservation board cost	**£**	**Comments**
Rent, Rates & Utilities	**13,200**	CDEL reduction for rent £23.5k per annum
Insurance	**26,000**	All insurances
Office Maintenance	**10,050**	
IT costs	**23,365**	Only corporate services IT costs
Office Consumables (Printing, Postage, Equipment, Subscriptions)	**4,750**	Doesn't include NL subs
Governance (board meetings and members allowances)	**13,580**	
HR (recruitment, training & HR Support)	**34,398**	
Admin Staff (Office, IT & Finance)	**31,747**	Office Admininstrator costs
Finance (Internal & External Audit, Finance Manager & Finance Officer)	**88,512**	
Data Protection Officer	**12,750**	DPO
Health & Safety	**5,000**	Risk Fluent
Legal	**4,000**	Est of ongoing legal
	267,352	

Costs are based on 26/27 budget

Assumptions:
Rent is funded by CDEL until 29/30
SLT costs not included above
Planning, Engagement & Partnership, Landscapes and Comms services not included above
Cost of CCB Planning activities (inc external consultants) £158k

Kathryn Foster

From: Vicky Johnson <Vicky.Johnson@southandvale.gov.uk>
Sent: 24 March 2026 14:47
To: Kathryn Foster
Cc: Business Rates South
Subject: Relief Application The Chilterns Conservation Board

This email is from an EXTERNAL SENDER - please be CAUTIOUS, particularly with any links and attachments

Dear Ms Foster,

SECTIONS 43 & 47 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988: MANDATORY & DISCRETIONARY RELIEF
ACCOUNT REFERENCE: 5208548

Thank you for your application for rate relief which was passed to me to assist you on 4 February 2026. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in responding.

The Local Government Finance Act 1988 provides that mandatory relief of 80 per cent should be awarded where an organisation is a charity and the property concerned is used for charitable purposes. Discretionary relief is split into two parts. The first part is top-up relief which may be awarded to those organisations in receipt of mandatory relief. The second part allows council's the discretion to award relief of up to 100 per cent to organisations not established or conducted for profit.

From reviewing your application and the set-up of your organisation it appears to be a statutory/public body rather than a voluntary or charitable one and, in many respects, acts like an extension of local government functions with statutory duties, functions and powers similar to local authorities, governed by a board containing members appointed via public methods for example. Therefore, the council does not believe that mandatory or discretionary rate relief is applicable in these circumstances.

Furthermore, in relation to discretionary relief, I note that the property in question is used as an office and meeting place and that your organisation covers an area wider than South Oxfordshire District Council's. At a meeting on 4 December 2008 the council's Cabinet reviewed the process for making awards of discretionary rate relief. As part of this it set categories of organisations that it wished to support through discretionary rate relief in accordance with delivering its strategic objectives and key aims.

However, the council decided not to support organisations which have an area of operation or benefit which covers a wider geographical area than the councils or properties used for administration.

Although you may be disappointed with the council's decision I hope you understand the reasons behind it. However, if you wish to discuss the matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards

Vicky Johnson
Revenues & Benefits Client Officer
Finance
Vale of White Horse District Council &
South Oxfordshire District Council

Direct Line: 01235 422481 (Abingdon - VWHDC) Text phone users add 18001 before you dial
Mobile: 07917 088332
Email : vicky.johnson@southandvale.gov.uk

Visit us at:
www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk
www.southoxon.gov.uk

To find out more about how the council holds, uses and stores your personal data, please click on the appropriate council's link:
South Oxfordshire District Council Vale of White Horse District Council

Our address is:

Abbey House
Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

Item 2.2 **Members' Allowances**

Author: Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Manager

Purpose of Report: Outline Proposed updates to our Members Allowances Scheme – Appendix 1 of CCB's Constitution.

Background

1. The CCB's Members' Allowances Scheme forms part of our Constitution (Appendix 1) and has been in place since June 2016 without review.
2. This year, our internal audit report noted that we had paid historic back dated allowances to eligible members. They advised that backdated payments should be recognised as a one off exception and not adopted as standard practice, with future payments processed in a timely manner in accordance with the approved Scheme. They recommended we update the Scheme to clearly reflect this and reinforce that allowances should be claimed and paid in line with the scheme.
3. We also need to make other updates. The newly established Planning Advisory Group needs to be included in the Schedule as a special case and as previously agreed by the Board. This change is necessary as currently advisory groups are not eligible for Members Allowances.
4. The Scheme also needs to be updated to reflect new HMRC mileage rates.
5. Currently only 11 out of 25 Members claim allowances, costing approximately £10k per annum. If all allowances were claimed the annual cost would be approximately £20k representing a significant additional cost in our budget.
6. Note that under CCB's Constitution (September 2025), the Schedule of Delegated Functions confirms that "Approval of changes to Members' allowances and expenses rates under the Scheme that is in the Constitution" is delegated to Executive Committee, unless "changes to the rates would alter the structure of the scheme in the Constitution, or could not be accommodated within the Budget." **The Committee will need to consider whether that criterion has been met in this case**. It is officers' view that the changes proposed in Appendix 1 (a) would not alter the structure of the Scheme, and (b) could be met within the existing budget. However, further changes suggested below as "potential changes for future consideration" could necessitate a referral to the Board.

Proposed Changes to the Members Allowances Scheme (see Appendix 1)

7. It is proposed that the changes to the Scheme be effective from 1 October subject to approval by the Board.
8. We have added the statement that the Scheme will be reviewed on annual basis.
9. We have added the Planning Advisory Group specifically into the Scheme as determined by the Board in June. This reflects the importance that the Board places on the work of this Group.
10. As noted above, the Scheme now specifies that allowances must be claimed in-year and no backdating of allowances will be permitted beyond the current financial year.
11. We have included a generic statement that payments of mileage allowances will be paid in line with prevailing HMRC rates.

Potential future changes for consideration

12. As part of our ongoing review of the Constitution, we need to consider the roles and responsibilities of committees/groups and their Chairs and Deputy chairs. Linked to this, we recommend consideration be given to the level of Members allowances for the Chair and Deputy of the Board and Executive Committee. Under the existing Scheme, these roles have parity, but this does not reflect the significant additional responsibilities of the Board Chair over and above meeting attendance. The same is not the case for the Executive Committee Chair, whose role is closer to the chair of the Planning Committee/Advisory Group. It is understood that the current Scheme was drafted on the understanding that the Board Chair also chaired Executive Committee (which is the case with the Cotswolds National Landscape Board).
13. Review of the Members Allowances for the Planning Advisory Group. The Scheme is currently amended to ensure that the Planning Advisory Group members can claim allowances on the same basis as the previous Planning Committee. However, a historic disparity exists whereby the Chair of Planning Committee is eligible for the same allowances as the Deputy Chair of ExCo and the Deputy Chair of the Planning Committee is only eligible for a committee allowance.
14. We recommend consideration be given to a general allowance for membership of our advisory groups to encourage and recognise participation. The Cotswolds National Landscape include this additional allowance (£200 per annum, per group, for a maximum of two groups per member).
15. We also recommend consideration be given to childcare allowance and dependent care allowances for members.
16. Consideration might also be given to paying allowances to all Members by default with an option for members to formally opt out/forego their allowances on annual basis. This is how the Cotswold Conservation Board operates. Whilst an additional cost to the CCB, this approach would promote clarity both for members and for budgeting.

Recommendation

1. **That the Executive Committee approves the proposed changes and recommends them to the Board for approval at its meeting on 1st October**
2. **That the Executive Committee considers the other future possible changes to the Members Allowances Scheme**

Appendix I: Members' Allowances Scheme

From October 2026 (once approved by the Board)

Role	Annual Allowance
Board Member	**£300 per annum**
Executive Committee / Planning Advisory Group Member	**£555 per annum**
Deputy Chair (Board & Executive Committee)	**£832 per annum**
Chair (Planning Advisory Group)	**£832 per annum**
Chair (Board or Executive Committee)	**£2,224 per annum**

All members are entitled to register for the allowances as outlined above.

The determination of allowances and other benefits for Board Members is governed by the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 2003/1021).

Allowances are offered to ensure that no one is excluded from Board membership on the grounds of cost. The Board will review and agree its Scheme of Members' Allowances on an annual basis, determining the types and levels of financial allowances and/or expenses to enable Board Members to participate fully in Board activities while being sufficiently economical to avoid damaging the Board's activities or becoming a financial reward for Members.

Whilst all members are entitled to claim the allowances described the relevant allowance must be claimed in the current year of service, claims for prior financial years will not be backdated.

Once a member has registered to receive allowances, they will continue to be paid until the end of their period of office. Any allowances are paid via CCB's payroll and board members must provide all relevant payroll information to allow registration.

1. **Basic Allowance**

This is a general allowance which all Board Members are entitled to. All Board Members receive the same amount per annum. Once formally registered for, this allowance is paid monthly.

2. **Special Responsibility Allowances**

These are special allowances paid to Board members who hold positions with significant responsibilities over and above the general duties of an ordinary Board member. As for the basic allowance once registered for, these allowances are paid monthly.

Membership of the Executive Committee and Planning Advisory Group gives eligibility for the special responsibility allowances above including Chair.

We do not pay special allowances for our other advisory groups.

No member is entitled to receive more than one special responsibility allowance at any time.

3. **Mileage Allowance**

This is an allowance paid in respect of mileage incurred by a Board Member in travelling to and from official meetings and other approved duties. The business mileage rate will be based on the pence per mile rate using HMRC's approved Mileage Allowance Payment (MAP).

4. **Fares and Parking**

A Board Member can seek reimbursement of actual expenditure incurred on other fares or parking fees in respect of attendance at official meetings and other approved duties. Receipts must be produced.

5. **Withholding Allowances**

Where a member is suspended or partially suspended from their responsibilities or duties as a member of the Board and/or from their responsibilities or duties which attract a special responsibility allowance, that part of the basic allowance and/or special responsibility allowance, and travelling and subsistence allowances, payable to them in respect of the period of suspension or partial suspension will be withheld.

6. **Approved Duties**

The following are deemed to be qualifying approved duties for the purposes of the Conservation Board's Members' Allowances Scheme:

1. Attendance at a meeting of the Board.
2. Attendance at a meeting of any committee/sub-committee of the Board.
3. Attendance at a meeting of any panel, working party or other group authorised in advance by the Board.
4. Attendance at a meeting of an association of which the Board is a member, and to which the Board Member concerned has been appointed by the Board to represent it.
5. Attendance at seminars/conferences/official visits arranged by or authorised by the Chief Executive Officer or Chair.
6. Attendance at meetings of outside bodies to which a Board Member has been appointed to serve as the Board's representative (except where such allowances are payable by the outside body).

The CCB has many other events and occasions when Board Members are invited to attend such as walks, festivals, tourism networks, evening lectures and training days. We appreciate Board Members attending these, but are unable to pay expenses.

Item 2.3	**HR Policies**
Author:	Andy Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations
Purpose of Report:	To approve changes that we are proposing to the Family Related Leave and Bereavement & Compassionate Leave Policies as a result of legislative changes to statutory family-related leave introduced by the government in Apr 2026 and additional changes that we are proposing to improve paternity leave, parental bereavement pay and to bring shared parental leave payments in line with maternity leave payments.

Background

1. From 6th April 2026, changes introduced under the Employment Rights Act 2025 and Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave Regulations 2026 expanded statutory family-related leave rights in Great Britain. The principal changes relevant to the CCB's HR policies are summarised below.
2. Working with our HR Advisor we ran through all of the statutory changes and identified which impact us and where we would need to make changes to our HR policies, resulting in the proposed changes in this paper.
3. At the same time as making these statutory changes we have also reviewed our Family-Related Leave Policy and Bereavement and Compassionate Leave Policy to make our enhanced benefits more inclusive, flexible and supportive of different family circumstances, as was suggested in the Board Meeting in June 2026.
4. The key changes for each policy are identified below.

Family Related Leave Policy (see Appendix 1)

5. Statutory Change: Paternity Leave is now a day-one employment right, with the previous requirement for 26 weeks' continuous service having been removed. The eligibility rules for Statutory Paternity Pay have not changed, so employees must still satisfy the applicable service and earnings requirements to receive statutory pay. Paternity Leave and Pay may also now be taken after a period of Shared Parental Leave and Pay, which was not previously permitted.
6. Statutory Change: Unpaid Parental Leave is now a day-one employment right, whereas previously, employees needed one year's service to qualify. Unpaid Parental Leave is time off for employees to care for a child. The statutory entitlement is up to 18 weeks for each child, normally available until the child's 18th birthday and subject to the statutory rules on how leave is taken.
7. Non-Statutory Change: It is proposed that the existing enhanced maternity, adoption and surrogacy leave benefit of 6 weeks at full pay followed by 12 weeks at 50% pay (in addition to the applicable statutory allowances) is extended to employees taking Shared Parental Leave. This would give families greater flexibility in how they share caring responsibilities following the birth or placement of a child.
8. Non-Statutory Change: We are also proposing to increase paternity leave from 2 weeks at full pay to 4 weeks at full pay, providing additional support for new parents, and in line with what a number of organisations are doing to demonstrate greater inclusivity and commitment to our employees.

Bereavement & Compassionate Leave Policy (see Appendix 2)

9. Statutory Change: Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave is a new day-one right for an eligible father or partner where the child's mother, main adopter or main intended parent in a surrogacy arrangement dies. It provides a single continuous period of unpaid leave, potentially up to 52 weeks depending on when the death occurs and must generally end by the child's first birthday or the first anniversary of the relevant adoption placement or arrival. There is no statutory pay for this leave.
10. Non-Statutory Change: We are also proposing to change the eligibility requirement for enhanced Parental Bereavement pay from 1 years' continuous employment with the CCB, to 26 weeks. This change would align the enhanced benefit with the qualifying period for statutory Parental Bereavement pay. Parental Bereavement pay provides financial support following the death of a child under the age of 18, or a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Recommendation

11. **That the Executive Committee NOTES the statutory family-related leave changes effective from the 6th April 2026 and the corresponding updates made to the Family Related Leave Policy and the Bereavement & Compassionate Leave Policy**
12. **That the Executive Committee APPROVES the updated Family Related Leave Policy**
13. **That the Executive Committee APPROVES the updated Bereavement & Compassionate Leave Policy**

CHILTERNS CONSERVATION BOARD

FAMILY RELATED LEAVE POLICY

Appendix 1.

Last Approval Date	September 2025
Approved By	The CCB Board
Last Review Date	August 2026
Version	2.0
Approval Cycle	Every 3 Years
Review Deadline	September 2028
Responsible Officer	Head of Operations

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1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) provides clarity to its employees in dealing with requests for leave in relation to family related matters in a way that prioritises employee welfare whilst ensuring effective operational continuity.

1.2 The CCB values the wellbeing of all its employees and is committed to a policy that allows employees to plan and take time off work to raise and care for their family.

1.3 The CCB acknowledges its responsibilities under the Employment Rights Act 1996, the Employment Relations Act 1999, the Maternity & Parental Leave Regulations 1999 and the Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act 2023. If there is anything contained in this policy that differs from legal requirements, the statutory provisions will always take precedent.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all employees and its principles apply to anyone working for or with the CCB in any capacity (including Board Members, volunteers, consultants, contractors and casual workers).

2.2 This policy does not form part of any employment contract and the CCB may update it at any time.

3. Overview

3.1 This policy covers family related matters including Maternity, Paternity, Adoption, Neonatal Care, Shared Parental, and Ordinary Parental Leave, in addition to time off for dependants who require long-term care.

3.2 This policy outlines the provisions for leave and pay employees are entitled to in relation to the different types of family related leave. This policy also sets out how employees must notify the CCB when leave is requested and when returning to work as well as information on how the CCB will support employees returning to work after an extended period of leave.

3.3 For Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Leave the rights set apply to each pregnancy, not each baby, so periods of leave are the same whether an employee has one baby or twins. Neonatal Care Leave has slightly different rules, please see Section 11.

4. Maternity Leave: Pregnancy

4.1 All female employees are entitled to Statutory Maternity Leave, regardless of their length of service. To take Statutory Maternity Leave, the employee must inform their line manager in writing before the end of the Qualifying Week (the fifteenth (15^{th}) week before the Expected Week of Confinement) providing the following information:

- confirmation of the pregnancy
- the week that the baby is due
- the date that maternity leave is requested to begin

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4.2 To qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay, employees must meet the eligibility requirements as set out in Section 5 below.

4.3 Although there is no obligation for an employee to tell the CCB that they are pregnant before the end of the Qualifying Week, where an employee is able to inform the organisation earlier it allows for more time to plan and to address operational and health & safety matters in relation to the pregnancy.

4.4 Employees should submit a MAT B1 form as soon as possible. This will normally be provided by the employee's midwife at the first antenatal appointment after the 20-week scan, or a copy can be obtained from the employee's GP surgery. It must be signed by the employee's doctor or midwife and confirm the date the baby is due.

4.5 If an employee is due any holiday before their Maternity Leave begins, they should try to take it where practical.

4.6 If an employee unfortunately suffers a miscarriage before the end of the twenty-fourth (24^{th}) week of pregnancy then, in line with statutory provisions, any time off work is treated as Compassionate Leave (please refer to CCB **Bereavement and Compassionate Leave)**. The CCB will provide appropriate support to the employee.

5. Maternity Leave: Antenatal Appointments

5.1 Employees are entitled to paid time off for antenatal appointments during working hours but should give as much notice as possible. The CCB reserves the right to request confirmation and evidence of appointments such as an appointment card for all but the first appointment.

5.2 If an employee has a "Qualifying Relationship" with a pregnant person or the unborn child, they are entitled to unpaid time off to accompany the pregnant person to a maximum of two (2) antenatal appointments. A "Qualifying Relationship" is one where an employee is:

- the baby's father
- the expectant mother's spouse or civil partner
- in a long-term relationship with the expectant mother
- the intended parent (if they are having a baby through a surrogacy arrangement)

5.3 Legally, an employee in a "Qualifying Relationship" is entitled to six and a half (6.5) hours off work for each appointment (which includes travelling and waiting time). If more time is needed this should be accommodated where possible using the flexitime provisions, Time off in Lieu (TOIL), or annual leave allocation. If this is not possible, employees should speak to their line manager.

5.4 The CCB reserves the right to ask an employee in a "Qualifying Relationship" to provide a signed statement which confirms that:

- the employee is eligible under the Qualifying Relationship criteria
- the time off is solely to accompany the pregnant person to their appointment
- a doctor, midwife, or nurse has advised that the pregnant person needs the appointment

5.5 The CCB may ask an employee to rearrange an appointment and reserves the right to refuse a request for a particular day or time. This will only ever be done in exceptional circumstances and never without good reason.

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6. Maternity Leave: What happens during Maternity Leave

6.1 Employees are entitled to fifty-two (52) weeks of Statutory Maternity Leave, made up of twenty-six (26) weeks of Ordinary Maternity Leave and twenty-six (26) weeks of Additional Maternity Leave (an employee's rights differ during the Additional Maternity Leave, as set out in this policy). This is an employee's right regardless of how long they have worked for the CCB or how many hours they work.

6.2 Employees can decide when they want their Maternity Leave to begin, so long as it's not earlier than the eleventh (11th) week before the Expected Week of Confinement, being the week in which the baby is expected to be delivered.

6.3 The CCB will write to an employee within twenty-eight (28) days of being told of the pregnancy to tell them when their Maternity Leave will end (if they take their full entitlement).

6.4 Employees can change the start date for their Maternity Leave as long as they inform CCB the new date in writing at least twenty-eight (28) days before the earlier of the original or revised date. The CCB will write to employees within twenty-eight (28) days of being given the new date to tell them when their Maternity Leave will end (if they take their full entitlement).

6.5 Maternity Leave will start earlier than the date requested if an employee is off work because of their pregnancy at any time in the four (4) weeks leading up to their Expected Week of Confinement. Maternity leave will also start early where a baby is born before the preferred start date.

6.6 No-one who has just given birth is allowed to return to work for the two (2) weeks immediately after the baby is born. This is called Compulsory Maternity Leave.

6.7 If an employee and their spouse or partner are both eligible, they can use the Shared Parental Leave scheme so that they have more flexibility around childcare in the first year after birth (see Section 12).

6.8 The CCB will try to avoid contacting the employee for any work-related reasons whilst they are away. If an employee prefers the CCB not to contact them to they should inform their line manager in writing. In this situation the organisation will look to contact the employee only to discuss arrangements for when the employee returns, promotion or other job opportunities, redundancies or reorganisations that could affect their job.

6.9 Employees may also be offered up to ten (10) days' work whilst on Maternity Leave at a rate of pay agreed in advance. These days are sometimes used for purposes such as keeping a qualification valid, or attending key meetings, team training days, appraisals or consultation meetings. Employees on Maternity Leave do not have to come to these meetings if they do not want to and a decision about whether to work some or all of these will not affect an employee's right to Statutory Maternity Leave and Statutory Maternity Pay. These are known as Keeping in Touch Days.

6.10 Employees will continue to receive benefits due to them under their employment contract whilst on Maternity Leave. Except for terms relating to pay, all normal terms and conditions will apply, and employees will continue to accrue holiday entitlement.

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7. Maternity Leave: Maternity Pay

7.1 The standard Statutory Maternity Pay rate is set by the government and is subject to change. Employees will be entitled to the rates in effect at the time their leave begins. Current rates can be seen here.

7.2 Employees may be eligible for Statutory Maternity Pay if they have at least twenty-six (26) weeks' service with the CCB by the end of the Qualifying Week which is the fifteenth (15th) week before the Expected Week of Confinement. Whether or not an employee qualifies then depends on whether an employee:

- has average weekly earnings at or above the National Insurance lower earnings limit
- is able to give at least twenty-eight (28) days' notice that they intend to take Maternity Leave
- is still pregnant, or has already had their baby, eleven (11) weeks before the Expected Week of Confinement.

7.3 Eligible employees will be entitled to receive Statutory Maternity Pay for up to 39 weeks. This will be paid at 90% of their average weekly earnings for the first six (6) weeks and then at the standard Statutory Maternity Pay rate for the remaining thirty-three (33) weeks. Average weekly earnings are calculated for the eight weeks that end with the qualifying week.

7.4 The CCB offers a non-contractual enhanced Maternity Pay benefit for employees who have been with the CCB for one (1) year or more (refer to Appendix 1).

7.5 Employees who are not eligible for Statutory Maternity Pay as their average weekly earnings may fall below the Statutory Maternity rate, or they do not have twenty-six (26) weeks service at the Qualifying Week, may be eligible for Maternity Allowance. More information can be found here.

7.6 Both Income Tax and National Insurance contributions will be deducted from Statutory Maternity Pay in the same way as they are from an employee's regular salary.

7.7 If an employee suffers a stillbirth after twenty-four (24) completed weeks of pregnancy, they will receive full Statutory Maternity Leave and Statutory Maternity Pay to which they would otherwise have been entitled to.

8. Maternity Leave: Returning to Work

8.1 If an employee intends on returning to work at the end of their full fifty-two (52) weeks' Maternity Leave, there is no need to let the CCB know. However, if an employee is looking to return earlier, they must give their line manager at least eight (8) weeks' written notice.

8.2 The CCB may delay an employee's return to work by up to eight (8) weeks, or the end of the Maternity Leave period if that's earlier, if an employee fails to give the CCB at least eight (8) weeks' notice of their revised plans.

8.3 Employees are entitled to take up the same job, on the same terms and conditions that they had before going on Maternity Leave, if they return to work immediately after their Ordinary Maternity Leave ends (ie at the end of the first twenty-six (26) week's maternity leave). Where an employee

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chooses to return after taking any Additional Maternity Leave they may be offered a similar job (on no less favourable terms) if it is not reasonably practical for them to resume their previous role.

8.4 Four (4) weeks before an employee is due to return to work after their Maternity Leave, they will be contacted by their line manager to arrange a Return to Work meeting, that should take place before the date they are due to return, at which they will be able to discuss how they return to work and can also talk about other matters that may be of concern, such as breastfeeding and expressing milk during working hours.

8.5 Employees should tell the CCB in writing as soon as possible if they decide not to return at all after Maternity Leave and must give notice as required under their employment contract.

8.6 Employees should refer to the CCB **Flexible Working Policy** if they wish to make a flexible working request on returning from Maternity Leave. Again, it is helpful to make any request as early as possible to allow the organisation time to consider it properly.

8.7 If an employee's job is one that has been identified as posing a risk to their health and safety as a new mother, or because they are breastfeeding, the employee will be notified by their line manager and take measures to eliminate all risks. If an employee has any concerns about their health and safety, they should speak to their line manager.

9. Paternity Leave and Pay

9.1 Paternity Leave allows an employee to spend time with a new child and support their partner.

9.2 Employees may be eligible for Statutory Paternity Leave, from the first day of employment, provided they meet the statutory eligibility requirements. One of the following must also apply:

- the employee is the biological father and has the main responsibility with the mother for the child's upbringing
- the employee is the biological father and has some responsibility for the child's upbringing
- the employee is the mother's partner and expects to have the main responsibility with the mother for the child's upbringing

9.3 Eligible employees are entitled to a maximum of two (2) weeks' Statutory Paternity Leave. This must be to care for the child and / or to support the child's mother.

9.4 Statutory Paternity Leave must be taken either in two (2) separate one (1) week blocks or in a single two (2) week block.

9.5 Statutory Paternity Leave cannot be taken before the child's birth and must be taken within fifty-two (52) weeks of the birth (or due date if the baby is early).

9.6 Paternity Leave may be taken either before or after a period of Shared Parental Leave, provided it is taken within fifty-two (52) weeks of the child's birth (or due date if the child is born early).

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9.7 Eligible employees must tell the CCB the due date in writing at least fifteen (15) weeks before the week that the baby is expected and must give the CCB twenty-eight (28) days' notice in writing of when they want their leave to start and how much leave they want to take.

9.8 Whilst on Statutory Paternity Leave, all terms and conditions not relating to pay in an employee's contract will continue to apply. When an employee returns, they have the right to the same job with the same terms and conditions as they had before their Statutory Paternity Leave began.

9.9 Employees on Statutory Paternity Leave who have at least twenty-six (26) weeks' continuous service with the CCB by the end of the fifteenth (15th) week before the Expected Week of Confinement and meet then statutory earnings and notice requirements will be entitled to Statutory Paternity Pay. The standard Statutory rate is set by the government and is subject to change. Employees will be entitled to the rates in effect at the time their leave begins. Current rates can be seen here.

9.10 The CCB offers a non-contractual enhanced Paternity Pay benefit for employees who have completed at least twenty-six (26) weeks' of continuous employment by the week in which the baby is due, or, they have twenty-six (26) weeks' continuous service by the adoption approval date (refer to Appendix 1).

9.11 Both Income Tax and National Insurance contributions will be deducted from Statutory Paternity Pay in the same way as they are from an employee's regular salary.

9.12 Employees are still entitled to Statutory Paternity Leave and Statutory Paternity Pay if the baby is either still born after twenty-four (24) weeks of pregnancy or is born alive at any point in the pregnancy but later dies.

9.13 Employees can take any Statutory Paternity Leave booked before losing the baby. If after losing the baby the employee has leave left to book, they can still book and take this. They must do this within eight (8) weeks of the death. The employee may also be eligible for Statutory Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay. They should refer to the CCB **Bereavement and Compassionate Leave Policy.**

9.14 Eligible employees will be able to take up to 52 weeks of unpaid bereaved partner's paternity leave if the mother or primary adopter dies. They must take this leave within 52 weeks of the child's birth (including surrogacy), adoption placement, or entry to Great Britain for overseas adoptions.

10. Adoption Leave / Surrogacy

10.1 The CCB has arrangements in place for adoption or having a child by a surrogate mother that are similar to Maternity / Paternity Leave and Pay (except in relation to adoption appointments). They may also be eligible for Shared Parental Leave and Shared Parental Pay. Employees should refer here for more information.

10.2 Employees are entitled to time off to attend an adoption appointment once they have been matched with a child. This right is only for appointments arranged by an adoption agency, usually for the employee to get to know the child who will be placed with them, but sometimes for other reasons related to the adoption.

10.3 If more than one child is being placed with the employee at the same time, the CCB treats this as one adoption and will not give the employee time off to attend additional appointments.

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10.4 Employees may attend up to five (5) appointments per adoption, on paid time off if they are adopting on their own or will be the primary adopter.

10.5 Employees may attend up to two (2) appointments, on unpaid leave, if they are the secondary adopter. If more time is needed this should be accommodated where possible using the flexitime provisions, Time off in Lieu (TOIL), or annual leave allocation. If this is not possible, employees should speak to their line manager.

10.6 Employees are entitled to take up to 6.5 hours for each appointment. This includes travelling and waiting time. The CCB will need a signed statement with details of the time and date of the appointment as well as confirmation that:

- the adoption agency has arranged or requested the appointment
- the employee is either adopting the child on their own or jointly with someone else
- the employee is electing to take either paid or unpaid time off work if they are adopting jointly.

10.7 It may be necessary to ask an employee to rearrange an appointment, and the CCB reserves the right to refuse a request for a particular day or time in exceptional circumstances. The organisation will however never do this without good reason.

10.8 The CCB also offers a non-contractual enhanced Adoption/Surrogacy Pay benefit for employees who have been with the CCB for one (1) year or more (refer to Appendix 1).

11. Neonatal Care Leave and Pay

11.1 The CCB understands that things don't always go to plan when it comes to pregnancy and giving birth. The organisation is committed to supporting employees during challenging times, including if a child requires neonatal care.

11.2 Neonatal Care includes:

- medical care received in a hospital
- medical care received elsewhere following discharge from hospital under the direction of a consultant (including ongoing monitoring by, and visits to the child from, healthcare professionals)
- palliative or end of life care

11.3 Employees who have shared or sole responsibility for a child are eligible for Statutory Neonatal Care Leave if they are:

- the mother or birth parent
- the father
- married to, the civil partner of or partner of the mother or birth parent – this includes same-sex partners
- adopting a child, including fostering to adopt
- intended parents in a surrogacy

11.4 All employees are entitled to Statutory Neonatal Care Leave, regardless of their length of service. Each eligible parent will be entitled to a separate amount of leave which includes parents who work for the same employer.

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11.5 If an employee's baby requires seven (7) or more days of continuous neonatal care starting within the first twenty-eight (28) days following their birth, employees are entitled to take one (1) week's Statutory Neonatal Care Leave for every week their child spends in neonatal care up to a maximum of twelve (12) weeks.

11.6 Statutory Neonatal Care Leave may be taken while the child is receiving the care or after but must be taken before the end of the sixty-eighth (68th) week of the date of the child's birth (or the adoption placement date for adoption within the UK / official notification confirming you are allowed to adopt if adopting a baby from overseas).

11.7 Statutory Neonatal Care Leave is classified as Tier 1 for the period when the child is receiving neonatal care and including one (1) week after the care has ended. This leave can be taken in non-consecutive blocks of a minimum of one (1) week.

11.8 Statutory Neonatal Care Leave is classified as Tier 2 when any accrued leave is taken more than a week after the baby stops receiving neonatal care but must be taken before the end of sixty-eight (68) weeks after the child's birth. It must be taken in a single consecutive block.

11.9 If an employee has more than one child receiving neonatal care, then their entitlement to leave applies to each of them individually. However, if they are receiving neonatal care at the same time then they will only be entitled to one accrual of leave.

11.10 If the baby is in neonatal care, or in the first week after, Statutory Neonatal Care Leave can be interrupted by other types of pre-booked parental leave (such as Paternity or Shared Parental Leave). The remaining period of Neonatal Care Leave can be tagged immediately onto the end of other Parental Leave or can be accrued to take later. Employees must take Neonatal Care Leave after any Statutory Maternity or Adoption Leave.

11.11 If an employee wishes to take a period of Statutory Neonatal Care Leave, they must let the organisation know in writing giving the following notice:

- For Tier 1 Leave: before their start time on the day they want the leave to begin, or as soon as is reasonably practicable
- For Tier 2 Leave: at least fifteen (15) days before they want the leave to begin (if taking a single week) or at least twenty-eight (28) days before if they are taking two or more weeks)

11.12 The employee must also let the organisation know in writing the date the neonatal care ends if they apply for leave while the care is underway.

11.13 Employees are eligible for Statutory Neonatal Care Pay during any period of Statutory Neonatal Care Leave if they have:

- have been employed for at least twenty-six (26) weeks before the fifteenth (15th) week before the Expected week of Confinement (week in which the baby is due)
- earn at least the lower earnings limit for National Insurance contributions; and
- provide the necessary documentation and notification

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11.14 The standard Statutory Neonatal Care Pay rate is set by the government and is subject to change. Employees will be entitled to the rates in effect at the time their leave begins. Current rates can be seen here.

11.15 While an employee is on Statutory Neonatal Care Leave, all the terms and conditions not relating to pay in their employment contract will apply. When the employee returns to work, they have the right to the same job with the same terms and conditions as they had before their Statutory Neonatal Care Leave begun. They are also protected from dismissal, detriment, or any form of unfair treatment due to taking their Statutory Neonatal Care Leave entitlement.

12. Shared Parental Leave & Pay

12.1 Employees wanting more flexibility in the first year after their baby is born, may be eligible to take Statutory Shared Parental Leave and get Statutory Shared Parental Pay instead of just taking Maternity and Paternity Leave.

12.2 Statutory Shared Parental Leave allows employees to split available leave, so that both parents can be off work at the same time or one after the other. It can be taken in a single block or in up to three (3) blocks separated by work. Employees do not need to work for the same organisation in order to be eligible.

12.3 Statutory Shared Parental Leave can be taken where an employee or their partner is having a baby, using a surrogate to have a baby, adopting a child or fostering a child with plans for adoption.

12.4 There is a total of up to fifty-two (52) weeks of Statutory Shared Parental Leave available, less any weeks the mother has been on Maternity Leave (or receiving Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance if they are not entitled to Maternity Leave). The two (2) weeks compulsory Maternity Leave period must be taken off the fifty-two (52) weeks available. Statutory Shared Parental Leave is in addition to Paternity Leave that might be taken.

12.5 To be eligible for Statutory Shared Parental Leave one or more of the following must apply:

- they are the mother and share the main childcare responsibility with the child's father or their partner
- they are the father and share the main childcare responsibility with the child's mother
- they are the mother's partner and share the main childcare responsibility with the mother in place of the father
- both parents share the responsibility for the child from birth

12.6 In addition to both parents being responsible for the child, to be eligible for Statutory Shared Parental Pay both parents must meet work and pay criteria – this is different depending on which parent wants to use the shared parental leave and pay (see below).

12.7 The parent who is to take Statutory Shared Parental Leave must:

- have worked for the same employer for at least twenty-six (26) weeks by the end of the fifteenth (15th) week before their baby is due or their adoption match date
- still be working for the same employer a week before the start of each block of leave they take
- be legally classed as an employee

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12.8 The other parent must have:

- worked for at least 26 of 66 weeks before the expected birth date or adoption match date
- earned an average of at least £30 a week in any 13 weeks of those 66 weeks (that's £390 in total)
- be legally classed as an employee, a worker, or self-employed earner

12.9 If both parents meet the eligibility requirements, they can choose how to use Statutory Shared Parental Leave between them and, where they also meet the relevant pay criteria, may be entitled to Statutory Shared Parental Pay. Employees are not eligible if they started sharing responsibility for the child after it was born.

12.10 The specific rules around taking Statutory Shared Parental Leave, including the notices that need to be given to the organisation, documentation that needs to be supplier, curtailment of Maternity Leave and the rules around Period of Leave Notices are complex. The policy in this area has very specific statutory regulation, which will be followed by the CCB. More information can be found here and employees are encouraged to review this information and to speak to the organisation if they are considering taking Statutory Shared Parental Leave.

12.11 The CCB offers a non-contractual enhanced Shared Parental Pay benefit for employees who have been with the CCB for one (1) year or more (refer to Appendix 1).

13. Ordinary Parental Leave

13.1 Ordinary Parental Leave, which is a statutory requirement, can be taken at any time until a child's 18th birthday and comprises of eighteen (18) weeks' unpaid leave per child.

13.2 Eligible employees who have responsibility for a child, are entitled to take Ordinary Parental Leave if they are named on one of the following:

- the child's birth certificate
- the child's adoption certificate
- a parental order, for surrogacy
- a legal guardianship

13.3 If an employee is separated from the other parent or does not live with their child, they have the right to Ordinary Parental Leave if they have parental responsibility for their child. Step-parents can also have parental responsibility where it's agreed between all parents.

13.4 Eligible employees can take Parental Leave from their first day of employment, and must already have, or expect to have, responsibility for a child, and intend using the leave only to care for the child or otherwise spend time with him or her.

13.5 Ordinary Parental Leave must be taken in blocks of weeks up to a maximum of four (4) weeks a year for each child. Employees cannot take less than a week at a time, unless the child is disabled.

13.6 Employees need to give their line manager twenty-one (21) days' notice that they intend to take Ordinary Parental Leave. The CCB will always try to accommodate the request but employees may have to rearrange their dates if the absence would disrupt the organisation by, for example, leaving it

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short-staffed. If the leave has to be postponed, the organisation will tell the employee why in writing, within seven (7) days of the request, and provide the employee with a new start and end date.

13.7 The CCB is unable to postpone Ordinary Parental Leave if the employee has asked for it to start immediately after a child's birth or adoption. The organisation is also unable to postpone Ordinary Parental Leave more than six (6) months or beyond the child's eighteen (18th) birthday.

13.8 The employee's contract of employment and all its terms and conditions remain in force throughout Ordinary Parental Leave, other than the fact that it is unpaid. The employee's holiday entitlement continues to accrue in the normal way.

14. Carer's Leave

14.1 Employees who have a dependant with a long-term care need are entitled to take time off. The right to Carer's Leave applies from the first day of work.

14.2 Employees can choose to take one (1) week of Statutory unpaid Carer's Leave in a twelve (12) month period to provide or arrange care for them. A dependant can be a spouse, civil partner, child or parent or someone who lives in the same household as the employee (not a lodger or tenant) or who reasonably can rely on the employee for care.

14.3 Employees do not have to take the week in one go. They can use shorter periods at separate times, but they must inform the organisation in writing each time they want to use some leave. Employees must give at least twice the amount of notice than the period of leave requested and also confirm if they have taken any Carer's Leave in the last twelve (12) months.

14.4 The CCB will always try to accommodate the employees request but may have to rearrange the dates if their absence will disrupt the organisation, for example by leaving it short-staffed. If an employee's leave has to be postponed, this will be explained in writing before the leave is due to begin. The organisation will, in discussion with the employee, make arrangements to reschedule the leave so that it can be taken within one (1) month of the date originally requested.

15. Data Confidentiality and Record Keeping

15.1 All information will be treated in line with the CCB **Confidentiality**, **Data Protection** (in review) and **Data Retention Policies** (in review) with records of investigations, statements, interviews and actions being stored securely in the appropriate employee's personnel file.

15.2 The Data Protection Act 2018 identifies that any data kept should be necessary, fairly and lawfully processed, adequate, relevant, accurate and secure.

16. Effective Application of this Policy

16.1 The CCB is committed to addressing concerns raised by employees who feel they have been unfairly treated in the application of this policy or believe the organisation has breached the policy. If an employee wishes to raise a grievance, they should refer to the CCB **Grievance Policy.**

16.2 If an employee is found to have breached this policy, the CCB may consider that to be misconduct. The organisation might deal with it by providing (additional) training, however in serious cases it may lead to disciplinary proceedings under the CCB **Disciplinary Policy**.

HR15 – FAMILY RELATED LEAVE POLICY

Chilterns National Landscape

Managers have a responsibility for ensuring that all employees have been made aware of this Policy

This policy is subject to periodic reviews and amendments to ensure it remains up-to-date with current laws, regulations, and organisational needs.

Appendix 1: Enhanced Maternity, Adoption & Shared Parental Pay and Paternity Pay

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Chilterns National Landscape

Type of Leave	Eligibility (for Enhanced Pay)	Details of Enhanced Pay
Maternity Leave	More than 1 years' service at the 15th week before the Expected Week of Confinement.	• Entitled to an enhanced maternity pay package • 6 weeks at full pay, 12 weeks at 50% of full pay plus statutory pay, followed by 21 weeks statutory pay. (as opposed to 6 weeks at 90% of full pay and 33 weeks statutory pay).
Adoption Leave	More than 1 years' service leading into the week in which the employee is notified of being matched with a child for adoption, or surrogacy.	• Entitled to an enhanced adoption pay package • 6 weeks at full pay, 12 weeks at 50% of full pay plus statutory pay, followed by 21 weeks statutory pay. (as opposed to 6 weeks at 90% of full pay and 33 weeks statutory pay).
Shared Parental Leave	More than 1 years' service at the 15th week before the Expected Week of Confinement, or more than 1 years' service leading into the week in which the employee is notified of being matched with a child for adoption or surrogacy.	• Entitled to an enhanced shared parental pay package • 6 weeks at full pay, 12 weeks at 50% of full pay plus statutory pay, followed by 21 weeks statutory pay. (as opposed to 6 weeks at 90% of full pay and 33 weeks statutory pay).
Paternity Leave	At least 26 weeks of continuous employment by the week in which the baby is due, or, 26 weeks' continuous service by the adoption approval date.	• Entitled to an enhanced paternity pay package • 4 weeks full pay (as opposed to 2 weeks statutory pay). If an employee is taking 4 weeks leave, this can be taken together, or as 4 separate weeks.

If an employee decides not to come back after their Maternity, Adoption or Shared Parental Leave or leaves the organisation within 3 months of returning from leave, they must repay the enhanced part of their Maternity, Adoption or Shared Parental Pay.

Enhanced Maternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Pay is capped at a maximum of eighteen (18) weeks in total. Eligible employees may choose how to use this entitlement across the relevant types of leave and may use it as a combination of enhanced Maternity, Adoption and/or Shared Parental Pay, provided the total amount of enhanced pay received does not exceed eighteen (18) weeks. However, employees cannot receive eighteen (18) weeks' enhanced Maternity or Adoption Pay and then a further eighteen (18) weeks enhanced Shared Parental Pay.

For birth parents, the compulsory two (2) week Maternity Leave period immediately following childbirth will count towards the total eighteen (18) week enhanced pay entitlement. The same applies to paternity, where the enhanced four (4) weeks' pay will count towards the total eighteen (18) week enhanced pay entitlement.

CHILTERNS CONSERVATION BOARD

BEREAVEMENT & COMPASSIONATE LEAVE POLICY

Appendix 2

Last Approval Date	September 2025
Approved By	The CCB Board
Last Review Date	August 2026
Version	2.0
Approval Cycle	Every 3 Years
Review Deadline	September 2028
Responsible Officer	Head of Operations

HR16 – BEREAVEMENT & COMPASSIONATE LEAVE POLICY

Chilterns National Landscape

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) provides clarity to its employees in dealing with requests for leave in relation to bereavement or on compassionate grounds in a way that prioritises employee welfare whilst ensuring effective operational continuity.

1.2 The CCB values the wellbeing of all its employees and is committed to a policy that ensures that employees can take the necessary time off to manage their personal affairs and emotional wellbeing without the added stress of work responsibilities.

1.3 The CCB acknowledges its responsibilities under the Employment Rights Act 1996, the Employment Relations Act 1999 and the Equality Act 2010. If there is anything contained in this policy that differs from legal requirements, the statutory provisions will always take precedent.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all employees and its principles apply to anyone working for or with the CCB in any capacity (including Board Members, volunteers, consultants, contractors and casual workers).

2.2 This policy does not form part of any employment contract and the CCB may update it at any time.

3. Overview

3.1 This policy outlines the provisions for leave and the pay employees are entitled to in relation to Bereavement Leave (as a result of the death of dependant or close family member) and Compassionate Leave (where employees face an urgent and unforeseen situation such as a serious illness or injury to a dependant or close family member). The policy also sets out how the CCB will support employees returning to work after an extended period of leave.

3.2 All employees, irrespective of how long they have worked for the CCB, are eligible for leave under this policy. However, there is no right for employees to receive Bereavement or Compassionate pay (aside from Parental Bereavement Pay).

3.3 A close family member is defined as a spouse, civil partner, parent, child (including adopted child) or sibling.

3.4 A dependant is defined as a close family member or someone who lives in the same household as the employee (not a lodger or tenant), or a person who relies on the employee to care for them such as an elderly neighbour.

4. Bereavement Leave

4.1 An employee is entitled to two (2) weeks unpaid Statutory Parental Bereavement Leave from the first day of their employment with the CCB if they lose a child aged under eighteen (18); this includes a stillbirth after twenty-four (24) weeks of pregnancy. The organisation will be flexible about how the employee takes this leave (e.g. they might want to take it in one block, or as two separate weeks, or only one week).

4.2 An employee is eligible for Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay if they have at least twenty-six (26) weeks' service with the CCB up to the end of the 'relevant week'. The 'relevant week' is the week

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(ending with a Saturday) immediately before the week of the death or stillbirth. The standard Statutory rate is set by the government and is subject to change. Current rates can be seen here.

4.3 As a compassionate organisation the CCB offers a non-contractual enhanced Parental Bereavement Pay benefit for employees who have been with the CCB for at least twenty-six (26) weeks of continuous employment (refer to Appendix 1).

4.4 In the event of the death of a dependant or close family member (excluding a child under the age of eighteen), employees are entitled to Bereavement Leave.

4.5 While there is no statutory entitlement to paid Bereavement Leave, the CCB is committed to supporting employees who may request up to five (5) days of paid Bereavement Leave (e.g. to arrange and/or attend a funeral). This will also apply to any employees who are not eligible for Parental Bereavement Pay as per point 4.2.

4.6 The CCB understands that employees may not be in a position to have a detailed discussion with the organisation if somebody close to them dies. Employees should inform their line manager what has happened as soon as is reasonably possible to do so.

4.7 Requests for Parental and Bereavement Leave should be approved by the employee's line manager.

4.8 In addition, if an employee needs an extended period of leave they may request this. This will be at the discretion of the CEO, including whether the leave will be paid or unpaid, with each request being judged on the individual circumstances.

5. Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave (BPPL)

5.1 Employees may be entitled to a single period of leave of up to 52 weeks if their partner dies.

5.2 Eligible employees are entitled to take BPPL for the purpose of caring for a child where:

- The mother, child's primary adopter or intended parent dies; and
- They are either the child's father; a civil partner of the child's mother/adopter; or married to the child's mother/adopter; and
- They have responsibility for the upbringing of the child.

5.3 If an employee is separated from their partner, they can still take this leave if they have ongoing responsibility for bringing up the child.

5.4 For those employees not eligible for BPPL leave, the CCB recognises that it's likely they will still need some time off. They should speak with their line manager to agree what leave may be taken. This will be at the discretion of the CEO, including whether the leave will be paid or unpaid, with each request being judged on the individual circumstances.

5.5 BPPL must be taken within (fifty-two) 52 weeks of the child's birth, date of placement for adoption. However, if the bereavement occurs within thirteen (13) days of this fifty-two (52) week leave window, employees will be entitled to take up to fourteen (14) days of leave regardless.

5.6 For those employees not eligible for BPPL leave, the CCB recognises that it's likely they will still need some time off. This will be at the discretion of the CEO, including whether the leave will be paid or

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unpaid, with each request being judged on the individual circumstances. There is no statutory entitlement to paid BPPL.

6. BPPL: Giving Notice and Starting Leave

6.1 Eligible employees who wish to start BPPL within eight (8) weeks of the bereavement date must notify their line manager either verbally or in writing. The CCB do not require any specific period of notification, if they let their line manager know before the time they are due to start work on the first day of leave.

6.2 Where BPPL is proposed to start within eight (8) weeks of the bereavement, the employee must also confirm how much leave they're taking. They do not need to do this straight away, but they must confirm this in writing within eight (8) weeks and at least one (1) week before the return date.

6.3 Eligible employees who wish to start BPPL more than eight (8) weeks following the bereavement must give their line manager at least one (1) weeks' notice before they want the leave to start. The notice of this must be given in writing. In either case, the employee must inform the CCB:

- The date of the bereavement
- The date the leave will start
- The child's date of birth/date of placement for adoption

6.4 Where BPPL is proposed to start more than eight (8) weeks after the bereavement date, the notice must include the following additional information:

- The intended return date
- A declaration that the leave is being taken to care for a child; and
- A declaration of the employee's relationship with the child

6.5 If an employee is entitled to other types of leave (paternity, shared parental, ordinary parental or neonatal care leave), they can add BPPL to it, either before or after the other leave. This might allow the employee more time off to care for their child.

7. BPPL: Varying the Start Date, Return Date and Cancelling BPPL

7.1 Eligible employees are able to vary their BPPL start date. If the new leave start date is no more than eight (8) weeks after the bereavement date then this can be done verbally or in writing before the original leave start date. No notice is required for this new date (as long as notice is given before the date itself).

7.2 Where the new leave start date is more than eight (8) weeks after the bereavement date then notice of any variation must be made in writing at least one (1) week before the last notified leave start date, and at least one (1) week before the new leave start date.

7.3 Eligible employees are also able to vary their return date from BPPL in writing. If the previous notified return date was no more than eight (8) weeks after the bereavement date, notice of a varied return date must be given at least one (1) week before the last notified intended return date and at least one (1) week before the new intended return date.

7.4 Where the previous notified return date was more than eight (8) weeks after the bereavement date, notice of varied return must be given at least eight (8) weeks before the last notified intended return date and at least eight (8) weeks before the new intended return date.

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7.5 Eligible employees may cancel a period of BPPL that they have previously notified to their line manager. Any notice of cancellation must be provided in writing.

7.6 If the leave had been due to start in the first eight (8) weeks following bereavement, then there are no notice requirements for any cancellation.

7.7 If the leave had been due to start more than eight (8) weeks following the bereavement date than one (1) weeks' notice is required to cancel it

7.8 If an employee returns to work without giving the required notice or does not properly notify their line manager of a change to their return date, the CCB may postpone the employee's return to a later date to ensure the organisation receives the required notice. Any postponement for this reason will be confirmed in writing. The organisation will not postpone the employee's return beyond the day immediately after the end of the BPPL eligibility period.

7.9 If the CCB has postponed the employee's return and the employee returns to work before the postponed date, the organisation is not required to pay the employee for that period unless it has confirmed in writing that the postponement has been withdrawn.

7.10 When returning from a period of BPPL, employees are entitled to take up the same job with the same employment terms they had before going on BPPL. However, in certain circumstances, it may not be reasonably practical for the employee to resume their previous role. In this situation the CCB may place the employee in another appropriate post with no less favourable terms and conditions. This would only happen in the following case:

- Where the employee has taken a period of BPPL consecutively with a period of parental leave of more than four weeks, or
- Where the employee has taken BPPL consecutively with periods of other statutory leave taken in relation to the same child which, when added together with the period of BPPL, means that the total amount of statutory leave taken in relation to that child is more than twenty-six (26) weeks.

8. BPPL: When the Child also dies or an Adoption Ends

8.1 There are special rules regarding BPPL if, as well as the child's primary carer dying, something also happens to the child themselves. These special rules apply in the following situations (Relevant Events):

- The child dies; or
- In a domestic adoption case, the child is returned after being placed for adoption; or in an overseas adoption case, the child ceases to live with the employee, or
- There's a problem with the employee's parental order for surrogacy and there's no time to appeal or reapply e.g. the employee does not apply in time, or their parental order is refused, withdrawn or otherwise terminated.

8.2 One of the requirements for taking BPPL is that it is being taken to care for the child. If the employee would be entitled to BPPL but for a Relevant Event then, provided that they had not already taken a period of BPPL prior to the Relevant Event, they will be entitled to be away from work until the earliest of:

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- the end of a period of eight weeks following the end of the week in which the Relevant Event occurred; and
- the 52-week period from the date of the child's birth/placement for adoption.

8.3 The notice requirements in these circumstances mirror those set out above with the additional requirement that the employee must inform their line manager of the date and nature of the Relevant Event verbally or in writing; and before the first day of absence from work on BPPL following the Relevant Event.

9. Compassionate Leave: Eligibility

9.1 The majority of personal circumstances which necessitate time off work should be accommodated where possible using the flexitime provisions, Time off in Lieu (TOIL), or annual leave allocation.

9.2 However, in exceptional circumstances where this is not possible, and subject to operational requirements, the CEO may grant Compassionate Leave on full pay up to a total of five (5) days in any year.

9.3 In addition, if an employee needs an extended period of Compassionate Leave they may request this. This will be at the discretion of the CEO, including whether the leave will be paid or unpaid, with each request being judged on the individual circumstances.

9.4 Compassionate Leave is intended to be used for those with caring responsibilities where there is a serious illness or injury to a dependant or close family member, or where there is another significant personal emergency that requires immediate attention. It is not intended to cover long-term care of a dependant (please refer to the CCB **Family Related Leave Policy**), or general home issues such as wanting to take time off to deal with a problem with a boiler.

9.5 Employees can request a reasonable amount of unpaid time off to attend an emergency relating to close family members or dependant. The CCB will always consider the circumstances of each case to allow for some flexibility, but the time employees take off must be both reasonable and necessary for them to deal with something immediately and / or to respond to an emergency.

9.6 Requests for Compassionate Leave should be submitted to the employee's line manager and are subject to approval by the CEO.

10. Returning to Work

10.1 The CCB will try to avoid contacting the employee for any work-related reasons whilst they are away.

10.2 The CCB recognises that employees are more likely to return to work if they are well supported during their absence and on their return.

10.3 When an employee takes long-term Bereavement or Compassionate Leave (for three (3) weeks or more), the organisation will always contact the employee to discuss arrangements for when the

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employee returns, promotion or other job opportunities, redundancies or reorganisations that could affect their job.

10.4 It is also important for the line manager to keep in touch with the employee to check on their wellbeing, to see if they need any support and to make sure that they continue to feel connected to the CCB during this period. The line manger and the employee should agree.

- who the employee will be in contact with (usually this will be their line manager, but might for example be a member of the Senior Leadership Team)
- how often contact will be made (this will vary depending on the employee's individual circumstances)
- how to contact each other (for example by e-mail, phone or face-to-face)

10.5 When an employee intends to return to work, they should talk with their line manager first. This is to make sure they are ready to return. A Return to Work Meeting will be conducted between the employee and line manager to discuss any on-going issues, and support needed once the employee returns to work.

10.6 If necessary, reasonable adjustments will be made to the employee's duties or work environment to facilitate their return. This may include adopting a phased return to work or flexible working arrangements, and the introduction of a Wellbeing Plan. The line manager will also direct the employee to the CCB Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

10.7 Regular follow-up meetings will be scheduled to monitor the employee's wellbeing and address any concerns.

11. Death of a Family Pet

11.1 The CCB understands the emotional impact that the loss of a pet can have. If an employee’s pet dies, at the discretion of the CEO the employee may request one (1) day Compassionate Leave with pay.

11.2 In addition, if an employee needs an extended period of unpaid leave they may request this. This will also be at the discretion of the CEO, with each request judged on the individual circumstances.

11.3 Employees should notify their line manager as soon as possible if they want to take leave following the death of a pet.

12. Data Confidentiality and Record Keeping

12.1 All information will be treated in line with the CCB **Confidentiality**, **Data Protection** (in review) and **Data Retention Policies** (in review) with records of investigations, statements, interviews and actions being stored securely in the appropriate employee’s personnel file.

12.2 The Data Protection Act 2018 identifies that any data kept should be necessary, fairly and lawfully processed, adequate, relevant, accurate and secure.

13. Effective Application of this Policy

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13.1 The CCB is committed to addressing concerns raised by employees who feel they have been unfairly treated in the application of this policy or believe the organisation has breached the policy. If an employee wishes to raise a grievance, they should refer to the CCB **Grievance Policy.**

13.2 If an employee is found to have breached this policy, the CCB may consider that to be misconduct. The organisation might deal with it by providing (additional) training, and in serious cases, it could be dealt with under the CCB **Disciplinary Policy**.

Managers have a responsibility for ensuring that all employees have been made aware of this Policy

This policy is subject to periodic reviews and amendments to ensure it remains up-to-date with current laws, regulations, and organisational needs.

Appendix 1: Enhanced Parental Bereavement Pay

Type of Leave	Eligibility (for Enhanced Pay)	Details of Enhanced Pay
Parental Bereavement Pay	At least 26 weeks' of continuous employment up to the 'relevant week'. The 'relevant week' is the week (ending with a Saturday) immediately before the week of the death or stillbirth.	• Entitled to an enhanced parental bereavement pay package • 2 weeks full pay (as opposed to 2 weeks at the standard statutory rate).

Item 2.4: **Climate Adaptation Plan**

Author: Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape

Purpose of Report: Request that funding be allocated from Development Reserves to support production of the CCB's Climate Adaptation Plan.

Background

1. The Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP) is a mandatory component of the Chilterns National Landscape Management Plan and we are required to produce and publish the CAP by 1 January 2028. Like the Chilterns Management Plan, it is a plan for the landscape, not simply the organisation.

2. Production of the plan will be led by Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape, with support from the Senior Leadership Team and staff team.

3. A six-step schedule has been created to complete the Climate Adaptation Plan, which will be accompanied by five meetings of a Climate Change Stakeholder Working Group comprising representatives from external partners. In parallel, we will also work with the staff team to develop climate adaptation solutions for use in practical delivery (see attached Gantt chart).

4. Embedding the plan into the practices of the organisation will require activities to be held with the staff team to help upskill them and develop relevant practice.

5. We estimate that up to £30k of Development Reserves may be required during development of the Plan and are requesting that this spend be agreed in principle for use over the next 18 months. All spending will be in line with our Financial Regulations.

6. Items that we expect to require funding from reserves are as follows:

- Collation of relevant risk assessments and other documents from external organisations into spreadsheets for use in working groups when producing the CAP
- Administrative support in meetings for note taking and follow up on amendments to key documents, such as risk assessments
- Co-creation of ecosystem services risk assessment evaluation
- Trialling and developing Resist-Adapt-Direct methodology for climate-smart management in the Chilterns National Landscape
- Provision of activities supporting mental health and wellbeing of staff team members during production of the CAP
- Design and printing
- Launch event with external partners to include event organiser, venue, refreshments, workshop.

Recommendation

1. **For the Executive Committee to approve use of the Development Reserves to support development of the Climate Adaptation Plan.**

High-Level Climate Adaptation Plan Gantt Chart for the Chilterns National Landscape Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP)

	FY25/26	FY26/27				FY27/28			
	Q4	Q1 (MJJ)	Q2 (ASO)	Q3 (NDJ)	Q4 (FMA)	Q1 (MJJ)	Q2 (ASO)	Q3 (NDJ)	Q4 (FMA)
Climate Journey for Chilterns National Landscape (i.e. AONB)									
Step 1: Gather Evidence for vulnerability and risk assessment									
Step 2: Carry out risk assessment									
Step 3: Identify, evaluate and select adaptation options									
Step 4: Link climate plan to policy, management plan and LURA									
Step 5: Emissions inventory, carbon footprint and pathway/roadmap to Net Zero for the landscape									
Step 6: Completing Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP)									
Climate Journey for Chilterns Conservation Board (i.e. the organisation)									
Step A: Pathway/roadmap to Net Zero for the organisation									
Step B: Activities with staff team to improve understanding of climate change and enable contribution to CAP									
Step Bi: 1-day workshop to brainstorm elements of risk assessment relating to special qualities									
Step Bii: Familiarisation with outputs from Climate R&D work									
Step Biii: Working on adaptation solutions for specific issues									
Climate Change Stakeholder Meetings (Working Group)									
Meeting 1: Explain CAP and risk assessment; gather information from other organisations									
Meeting 2: Review outputs produced for report (risks assessment)									
Meeting 3: Review outputs produced for report (proposed adaptation solutions)									
Meeting 4: Review outputs produced for report (RAD framework)									
Meeting 5: Finalise plan having circulated before meeting									

Item 3.1 **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Update**

EDI Advisory Group: Juliet Vickery and Baljit Dhillon – Co-Chairs

Author: Annette Weiss, Head of Engagement & Partnerships, and Baljit Dhillon, EDI Advisory Group Co-Chair

Purpose of Report: To update the Executive Committee with progress on the CCB's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Ambition.

Update and recommendation

The EDI Advisory Group met on 16 July. Main points arising:

1) Board reflective session

- Baljit presented a discussion paper for the Board reflective session scheduled for the 1 October Board meeting. The session sits within our wider commitment to inclusion and effective governance and will provide an opportunity to reflect on the conditions that enable different perspectives, experience and expertise around the Board table to contribute effectively to discussion and decision-making.

- The objective is to arrive at a shared understanding of how we can draw more effectively on the breadth of experience, expertise and perspectives on the Board, share insights and make better decisions together. Baljit will facilitate the session, support open and thoughtful conversation, with the emerging insights synthesised into practical learning that can support ongoing Board effectiveness. The group felt the discussion paper is clear and concise.

- Recognising that Board members are at different starting points, the briefing paper will signpost existing information on the respective roles of the Board and Executive Committee, together with Board member roles and responsibilities. This is intended to provide a common foundation for the discussion, rather than duplicate induction material.

- The paper will be circulated in advance to provide a clear understanding of the purpose, scope and intended outcomes of the session and to ensure members have the relevant background information. The detailed facilitation approach will not be set out in advance, allowing perspectives and themes to emerge naturally through the discussion.

2) Staff and Board EDI upskilling – induction, training & development, communication

- The Board induction programme was discussed and suggestions made for how this could be enhanced over time to help new Board members understand and connect with the organisation and landscape, including through site visits which can provide important first-hand context for Board discussions and decisions. In the immediate term, existing induction materials are being updated and the one-hour presentation format will continue, alongside opportunities for Board members (not just new ones) to participate in the wider training and development programme, covering current areas of work, government policy and priorities, and challenges and opportunities. A programme of on-line presentations by CNL staff showcasing our projects will continue. Learning from these activities can help inform the longer-term development of the induction approach.

- The discussion also highlighted the importance of two-way communication in supporting Board engagement. Recent examples where changes or cancellations to development sessions had not reached attendees demonstrated the need for clear and reliable communication arrangements. As Board members volunteer their time and may rearrange other commitments to participate, ensuring timely communication of changes is an important part of creating the conditions for successful engagement. It was agreed that communication arrangements around Board training and development opportunities should therefore be reviewed and strengthened.

- The programme of confirmed 2026/27 CNL staff and Board training events was shared. This includes both formal and informal training, providing an excellent opportunity to get an in-depth look at CNL projects, spend time with staff and key partners, learn about our work and get out and about in the landscape. There was discussion around encouraging greater Board participation. It was agreed that there should be a clear expectation that Board members engage in at least one training / development opportunity each year, alongside ensuring opportunities are accessible through appropriate formats, timings, advance notice and a range of options. Louise and Elaine will circulate the events programme separately to Board members, making clear expectations on their attendance.

- The group also discussed the Protected Landscapes Partnership's recent Sense of Belonging research and the potential synergies with CNL's EDI work. Baljit has since met with the author, Saskia Luqmani, to explore the findings further, including how insights around belonging, participation and contribution may help inform the Board reflective session and CNL's wider thinking about inclusion.

3) EDI Action Plan update

- Annette ran through the EDI Action Plan. Over the last 3 months main activity has been:
  - ➢ Promoting Defra Access for All programme 26/27 and assessing applications. So far £203,513 of funding has been allocated (total budget £429,229).
  - ➢ Supporting CNL and partner projects, including input to the Natural England-led North Chilterns Partnership EOI for a Lottery bid with proposals for youth work experience and traineeships.
  - ➢ Launching the CNL Youth Hub.
  - ➢ We are scaling up our EDI Comms, including showcasing projects we've supported through the Defra Access funding. Key events in June/July include:
    - Launch of new Access trail and sensory garden at Dunstable Downs, part funded and supported by CNL with Defra Access for All funding. Follow-on Comms promoting two new Access Guides and videos at Dunstable Downs added to our Accessibility Hub.
    - Supported University Bedfordshire with a Greenstakeholder event as part of Luton Nature Towns & Cities in June
    - Organised training event at Centre for outdoor Accessibility Training for CNL staff and key partners 1 July
    - Launch of new Chilterns National Landscape Youth Hub 28 July, with communications campaign taking place throughout August

Recommendation:

1. **To NOTE and OFFER FEEDBACK on updates.**

ITEM 3.1 Appendix 1

Board Reflection: Better Conversations, Better Decisions
Briefing for Board members – 1 October 2026

Prepared and facilitated by: Baljit Dhillon, Board Member and EDI Advisory Group Co-Chair. Developed with input from the EDI Advisory Group

This paper provides the context, purpose and intended outcomes for the facilitated Board reflection session taking place at the 1 October Board meeting. It is intended to give all members a common foundation for the discussion while deliberately leaving the detailed facilitation approach to the session itself.

1. Why this session?

To provide a short, facilitated Board reflection that explores the conditions which help the Board make the best use of the breadth of experience, expertise and perspectives around the table in support of effective governance and decision-making.

If the Chilterns National Landscape aspires to be welcoming, inclusive and collaborative in its work with communities and partners, it is equally important that the Board reflects on how those same principles support its own discussions and decisions.

Why now?

The Board continues to evolve with new members and diverse perspectives, whilst the organisation enters an important period of delivering its Management Plan and organisational strategy.

This provides a timely opportunity to reflect on what helps us work effectively together in support of the Chilterns National Landscape, our partnerships and our strategic ambitions.

2. What will we reflect on?

The session will explore what helps the Board to:

- make good decisions together;
- support constructive challenge and participation;
- make effective use of the breadth of experience, expertise and perspectives around the table;
- strengthen the relationship between inclusion, effective governance and Board effectiveness.

The intended result is a stronger shared understanding of the conditions that support effective Board dialogue, alongside practical learning that can inform ongoing Board effectiveness.

Through this, the session aims to:

- strengthen collective reflection;

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Board Reflection: Better Conversations, Better Decisions
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- support effective governance;
- reinforce the Board's collective stewardship role;
- identify practical themes that can support ongoing Board effectiveness.

3. How will the session work?

The session will be facilitated by Baljit Dhillon and will create space for open and thoughtful reflection.

The detailed facilitation design is intentionally not included in advance: the aim is to encourage genuine reflection rather than prepared responses, allowing insights and themes to emerge through the conversation.

Emerging insights will be synthesised into practical learning that can support ongoing Board effectiveness.

This is intended to be a facilitated reflective governance discussion. It is not:

- EDI training;
- a Board evaluation;
- a governance review;
- or a forum to redesign structures or processes.

4. Where does this sit within our governance role?

This reflection sits within the Board's existing governance responsibilities.

It **does not revisit or change those responsibilities**.

Members are asked to r*efresh themselves on the existing information about the respective roles of the Board and Executive Committee and Board member roles and responsibilities* **before the session**: **Board members | Chilterns National Landscape**

The purpose of the reflection is to consider the conditions that help us fulfil those responsibilities effectively together.

5. Before the session

Please read the linked information on Board/Executive Committee roles and responsibilities **before 1 October**.

No other preparation is required.

The session is intended to encourage genuine reflection rather than prepared responses.

Item 2.5 **FY26-27 Business Planning**

Author: Andrew Brock-Doyle, Head of Operations

Purpose: To update the Executive Committee on work carried out since the last Executive Committee meeting in May 2026 (and the Board signing off the Annual Delivery Plan in June 2026). This report includes addressing concerns raised on the ambition of the planning and the capacity of the organisation to deliver. It is requested that the Executive Committee recommend that the Board sign off both the 4-Year Strategic Plan (FY26-30) and the updated Annual Delivery Plan (FY26-27).

Background

1. The capacity of the staff team remains one of the highest risk areas for the organisation, and it is not anticipated that this will change given the additional requirements from government and continued challenges with limited Defra funding, including the funding formula by which it apportions funding to individual National Landscapes and National Parks.

2. During the planning cycle last year (for FY25-26), there was an increased focus on identifying capacity within the organisation. This detailed mapping work took two months to complete and was useful in identifying capacity constraints within the organisation. However, despite this work, the organisation has not been able to fully address capacity constraints due to a number of factors, including:

   a) The lack of a multi-year strategic plan for the organisation, impacting the ability to prioritise and plan activity on a longer-term time scale

   b) The need to address the ambitious deadlines from government, for example on delivering nature recovery and climate adaptation work

   c) Continued limitations in revenue funding from government to address these extra requirements as well as the additional corporate costs of running a Conservation Board not being recognised in Defra's funding formula

   d) Budget constraints and capacity issues in the Senior Leadership Team delaying the ability to hire added resource needed to address capacity issues

   e) A lack of robustness in planning across the organisation meaning that identified timelines and capacity for completion were under-estimated in a number of areas in FY25-26

   f) Limited capacity can impact on the resilience of the organisation to recover from impacts / delays in one area which often result in knock-on delays in other areas

3. The publication of the new Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape in 2026 allowed the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to step back and review its approach to planning.

4. As such, the SLT decided that it would work on a 4-year Strategic Plan (FY26-30) aligned to the timing of the Management Plan (2025-30) which would improve planning by focussing on more medium term outcomes for the organisation rather than immediate annual delivery goals. This will also provide a better framework for prioritising future work and more robustly address capacity issues.

5. In May 2026 the Senior Leadership Team presented its work on the 4-year Strategic Plan (FY26-30). This included consultation with both the Executive Committee and with managers in the organisation.

6. In June 2026 the Annual Delivery Plan was agreed by the Board, with an acknowledgement that work was still underway to finalise the planning and that any significant changes to the plan would be re-presented to a subsequent Board Meeting.

7. At both the Executive Committee in May 2026 and the Board Meeting in June 2026, the SLT was challenged on the ambition of the planning in terms of the capacity of the organisation.

8. The SLT has therefore met on several occasions since June 2026 both to increase the robustness / completeness of the planning and to re-assess the ambition 4-Year Strategic Plan with a clear focus on capacity to deliver.

Taking a Pragmatic Approach

9. Because capacity mapping in the FY25-26 planning cycle was time-consuming, created further capacity pressures and had limited impact, the SLT identified the need for a more pragmatic approach, including:

    - Recognising that the recruitment of two new roles will, over time, have a significant positive impact on capacity issues for some of the key capacity-constrained individuals

    - Reviewing the 4-year Strategic Plan against the agreed organisation outcomes to identify whether the structure below was correct (key delivery areas and sub-delivery areas) or whether it could be improved (noting that the number of sub-delivery areas in particular was raised as a point of concern at the Board Meeting in June 2026).

    - Reviewing the 4-year Strategic Plan to identify activities that the organisation should de-prioritise or stop, or may be carried out differently (lighter touch, requiring fewer resource) or could be delayed.

    - Reviewing the 4-year Strategic Plan to reduce generic and broad statements on activity to more clearly articulate the scope of activities.

    - Identifying the key roles with capacity constraints (based on the work done the previous year) and reviewing the 4-year Strategic Plan and Annual Delivery Plan to understand how changes being made to the plans was impacting these particular roles.

    - Introducing a more formalised method of checking that actions to address capacity issues have been put in place, and remain in place, during the course of the year (i.e. ensuring that there is no unplanned scope creep).

Recruitment

10. The switch from having two generic administrators to a dedicated Finance Administrator and a dedicated Office Administrator is now complete, with the new Office Administrator having joined in August.

11. This means that, for the first time, the organisation has an Office Administrator who is a qualified HR practitioner (CIPD and safeguarding qualified). Also, in contrast to the previous model, where finance elements of the role often took priority over other areas of administrative support, this role has responsibility for HR, IT, Office Administration and support to the Board.

12. In terms of capacity, more progress can be made in areas such as HR and IT transformation, which have slowed over the last couple of years due to the Head of Operations' limited capacity.

13. The recruitment of a new Head of Programmes is also underway. Whilst this may improve capacity during the current planning year, from the start of FY27-28, capacity to oversee our programmes and projects will be significantly enhanced. This will also have a significant impact on the Head of Landscape's capacity to focus on developing a Climate Adaptation Plan and embed the Nature Recovery Plan, and will also greatly improve the Head of Operations' capacity.

Review of 4-year Strategic Plan

14. The five priority outcomes for the organisation, approved by the Executive Committee, have not been changed (see Appendix 1).

15. The 20 Key Delivery Areas remain the same as those reported to the Executive Committee in May 2026. Reviewing these areas has simply resulted in some minor changes to their labels to more accurately reflect their content (see Appendix 1)

16. During the review process, the SLT looked at combining some of the Key Delivery Areas but felt that this would not result in any meaningful change in activity and could risk reducing transparency and the ability to reflect differentiated approaches in different areas.

17. The 71 sub-delivery areas have been reduced to 60 (see Appendix 1). Whilst this reflects some activities being stopped (e.g. under Outcome B where the scope has been tightened), it also reflects a more strategic way of thinking about the plan so that previously stand-alone areas have been combined (e.g. development of the target operating model for the organisation has now been incorporated into the review of the Management Plan).

18. Whilst this does not necessarily represent a reduction in activity, it will address capacity in a number of ways:

    - Enabling the movement of activity from this year to the appropriate time in the planning cycle
    - Reducing the amount of overlap between activities
    - Improving understanding and making reporting easier

19. For a fuller breakdown of changes to the strategic plan see Appendix 1.

Update of the Annual Delivery Plan

20. The Annual Delivery Plan is not developed as a stand-alone document. It builds on the 4-year Strategic Plan by breaking activity down into the component years.

21. Changes to the 4-year Strategic Plan have therefore been reflected in the Annual Delivery Plan as well as specific changes around when to carry out activity to address capacity issues.

22. The overall impact of these changes is shown in the following table (please note where we had not competed sections in the plan in May 2026, the change in activity has been identified as n/a to avoid distorting the figures.

Key Delivery Area	Activities (Jun 2026)	Activities (Aug 2026)	Change
A1 Climate Adaptation & Mitigation	11	10	-1
A2 Nature Recovery & Strategic Work	10	9	-1
A3 Nature Recovery Delivery	22	22	0
A4 Planning & Development	8	9	+1
A5 Cultural Heritage	5	7	+2
B1 Awareness, Understanding & Enjoyment	7 (non comms)	5	-2
	tbc (comms)	21	n/a
B2 CNL Priority Audiences	17	14	-3
B3 Promoting Volunteering & Lifelong Learning	5	8	+3
C1 Data & Evidence Strategy	10 (activity level too detailed)	0	-3
C2 Improving Management & Use of Data	5	2	-3
C3 Monitoring & Evaluation	4	0	-4
C4 Analysis & Understanding	4	2	-2
D1 Partnership Development & Delivery	22	12	-10
D2 Advocacy	tbc	4	n/a
D3 Sustainable Finance	15	16	+1
E1 Organisation Strategy	11	7	-4
E2 THE CCB Board	14	8	-6
E3 Staff Wellbeing & Culture	13	14	+1
E4 Organisation Resilience	14	10	-4
E5 Organisation Effectiveness	28	24	-4
Total	225	204	-39*

* Number of activities reduced by is not the same as the difference between June & August to ensure non distortion from areas not fully planned in June

<u>Key Changes Made to the Delivery Plan</u>

Outcome A: The Chilterns' natural beauty and landscape character is conserved / enhanced, making it more resilient to threats including climate change and development

23. Limited change as most of the activity here relates either to funded programme / project work or to activity around the development of the Climate Adaptation Plan which has been identified as critical to deliver and for which there is a clear deadline from government.

24. The key mitigation around capacity is the recruitment of the Head of Programmes, which will allow the Head of Landscape to focus more on climate adaptation work. However, this mitigation will likely only be fully felt in FY27-28.

25. Other mitigation in this area includes:
    - commissioning an events organiser to launch the Nature Recovery Plan rather than doing this in-house
    - pushing some of the embedding of climate change work across the team into next year
    - delegating interaction with Local Authorities on Local Nature Recovery Plans across the CNL Landscape Team
    - focusing on completing technical approach documentation on farmed land and postponing those for water-based habitats to the following year.

Outcome B: More people are benefitting from a sense of place and connection to the Chilterns National Landscape

26. There has been significant movement in terms of planned activity in this area between June and August, in a large part due to clarifying where communications activity is articulated (note this is changed from last year) and then including this activity.

27. The key mitigation around capacity has been to focus non communications work on understanding and enjoyment and to work towards integrating work in this area into the delivery of other programmes / projects rather than developing / managing substantial stand-alone projects. This recognises the fact that the organisation only has one non project person working in this area outside of the comms team.

28. Other mitigation in this area includes:
    - not pursuing the Disability Confidence Scheme in this planning cycle or running the Chilterns Walking Festival
    - taking developing new opportunities around understanding & enjoyment out of the plan so that the focus is on delivering what has already been identified in the existing plan
    - taking out the provision of stand-alone external support to other organisations around EDI. This will now be addressed through our grant giving (Access for All) and other programmes / projects
    - clarifying and limiting the work that we will do around promoting volunteering and lifelong learning opportunities so that, apart from project activities, this will be focused through maintaining the new volunteer hub and specific targeted promotional campaigns
    - taking any stand-alone activity around tourism and supporting local businesses out of the plan (noting that the CNL Team will continue to support local businesses in the way it operates and contracts work).

Outcome C: We demonstrate our impact through improved data and evidence leading to a better understanding of the landscape and more effective advocacy

29. This amount of work planned for this year in this area has been significantly reduced. This is because much of the development work is dependent on the Head of Landscape having the capacity to initiate it, following recruitment of a new Head of Programmes.

30. The key mitigation has therefore been to delay the start of this work until FY27-28, with the notable exception of embedding the Nature Recovery Action Data into the work of the Landscape Team to provide more consistency and clarity on data that need to be collected on programmes / projects. Some work will also be done on upskilling the team on GIS, but on a 1:1 basis where a need is identified and there is capacity to deliver, rather than a more formalised programme.

Outcome D: We deliver our statutory purposes more effectively through improved strategic partnerships enabling a more sustainable operating model for the organisation

31. Whilst this is not a new area of focus for the organisation, the work to achieve the outcome has been brought together here. As with outcome B, there has been a significant amount of change around the activity and in clarifying the framework under which we will approach advocacy.

32. The key mitigation around capacity has been to develop a more focused and targeted approach that recognises more transparent differentiation between local and national advocacy. It also creates more clarity between communications in Outcome B and advocacy in Outcome D.

33. Other mitigation in this area includes:
    - removing a focus on green finance, in line with the NLA, recognising that unlocking opportunities in this area can often result in significant time and effort being expended with limited return (note that in undertaking horizon scanning we will keep abreast of new initiatives and if something is identified that is worth pursuing we will be able to do so)
    - building in a specific activity around horizon scanning. This, and the recruitment of the Head of Programmes, should enable us to identify funding opportunities earlier and address capacity issues around governance of new work.
    - ensuring that work around an overarching partnership model is more effectively explained and tied to the Management Plan cycle, to avoid unrealistic timetables, as well as ensuring we are clear on the additional burden on staff capacity that different partnership models might impose.

Outcome E: We are an ambitious and confident organisation that values and respects its staff and operates in an effective and efficient way

34. This is the second area where we have made significant reductions in activity for FY26-27 by extending it over a longer timeline within the 4 yr Organisation Strategic Plan.

35. The key mitigation has been to look at ways to extend work over a longer timeframe so that the impact on delivery roles is less concentrated, and to ensure greater notice of changes and improved change management. This also recognises the recruitment of a new Office Administrator in August 2026, who will be able to lead more work, especially after the end of their probationary period.

36. Other mitigation in this area includes:

- embedding the articulation of a fuller organisation strategy and articulation of a target operating model into the next cycle of the Management Plan (ie aligning it to the Management Plan review in FY28-29)
- reflecting a longer time period in which to embed specific changes to ways of working / processes

- postponing to next year the use and embedding of a training programme / platform for staff and requirements around mandatory training, recognising that the focus for the remainder of this year needs to be on safeguarding and data protection.

Focus on Key Roles

37. Whilst we need to acknowledge the capacity issues across the organisation, it is also fair to identify that pressure on capacity impacts specific roles more than others. We are therefore aiming to tackle ongoing capacity issues for staff in the following ways:

38. From the work undertaken last year, which was not fully rolled out or embedded, clarifying and agreeing with staff time that needs to be set aside for activity such as line management, team development, support to other parts of the organisation, training, reporting etc).

39. Focusing on roles where there are significant capacity issues. As part of the review of the Annual Delivery Plan, we have (utilising the detailed resource planning conducted last year) identified a number of key positions where there are significant capacity issues. These are the Head of Landscape / Head of Operations / Chief Executive / Nature Recovery Manager / CCSP Project Manager.

> Note that last year the Head of Planning was also one of the roles identified with significant capacity issues. This has been at least partially addressed by sharing with SLT some of the strategy elements of the role.
>
> The Finance Administrator is a role that, for the last six months, has had significant capacity constraints due to covering two roles. However, this has been addressed through the recruitment of a new Office Administrator.
>
> A key element of the recruitment of a new Head of Programmes and a new Office Administrator has been to address capacity issues. It is therefore recognised that both of these new roles will need to be clearly monitored to ensure that they also have the capacity to deliver. In addition, we have two key roles that will need to be monitored, as they are part time or have recently adopted more restricted hours. This applies to the Head of Engagement and Partnerships and the Senior Finance Manager.

40. We have deliberately focused on addressing capacity issues for these roles when reviewing the Annual Delivery Plan and have developed a spreadsheet where we can monitor progress on the actions identified to reduce capacity constraints (see example in table below).

Sub Delivery Area	Capacity Risk	Capacity Issue	Key Roles Impacted	Mitigation Actions	Progress
A1.1 Understanding Climate Change Impact	High	There is a significant amount of work that needs to be undertaken in order to understand the impact of climate change across the Chilterns and to embed this in the way in which we approach and undertake work. Note that along with theincreasing impacts of climate change, there is a deadline of July 2028 to have a Climate Adaptation Plan in place that is driving this work	Head of Landscape: A significant amount of work falls to the Head of Landscapes to drive forward in terms of developing this area as other staff within the Landscape Team are focused on delivery of their programmes and projects	Pay for a consultant to undertake a significant element of this work under the direction of the Head of Landscape - this also brings in the ability to leverage expertise in this area	tbc
				Recruit a Head of Programmes that will allow the Head of Landscape to have greater focus and capacity around this area	The recruitment of a Head of Programmes is underway with interviews taking place in August 2026
				Focus activity in FY26-27 on collating information, push socialisation and embedding back to FY27-28	Postponment of work reflected in the 4 year plan

Next Steps

41. Prior to the Board Meeting in September:

- Address outstanding SLT clarification questions (these are limited and will not impact the Annual Delivery Plan significantly).

- Review the latest version of the 4-year Organisation Strategic Plan and the Annual Delivery Plan with managers to ensure aligned understanding and address any issues.

Recommendations

1. **That the Executive Committee NOTES and PROVIDES FEEDBACK on the work done by the SLT to advance the strategic planning for the organisation, especially in relation to balancing the ambition of the planning against known capacity constraints**

2. **That the Executive Committee APPROVES the 4-Year Strategic Plan (FY26-30) for recommendation to the Board with some minor adjustments between now and the Board Meeting in October 2026**

3. **That the Executive Committee APPROVES the updated Annual Delivery Plan (FY26-27) for recommendation to the Board with some minor adjustments between now and the Board Meeting in October 2026**

Item 2.5 Appendix 1 **Updated 4-Year Strategic Plan**

Priority Organisation Outcomes

The 5 overarching outcomes for the organisation for FY2026-30 remain the same as presented to the Executive Committee previously.

Priority Organisation Outcomes (2026-2030)

What we will deliver

How we will deliver

Outcome A: The Chilterns' natural beauty and landscape character is conserved / enhanced, making it more resilient to threats including climate change and development

Outcome B: More people are benefitting from a sense of place and connection to the Chilterns National Landscape

Outcome C: We **demonstrate our impact** through improved data and evidence leading to a better understanding of the landscape and more effective advocacy

Outcome D: We deliver our statutory purposes more effectively through **improved strategic partnerships** enabling a more sustainable operating model for the organisation

Outcome E: We are an **ambitious and confident organisation** that values and respects its staff and operates in an effective and efficient way

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Key Delivery Areas

The 20 key delivery areas remain the same as presented to the Executive Committee previously but with some changes in the titling (highlighted in blue) to simplify and increase clarity

Key Delivery Areas (2026-2030)

20 Key Delivery Areas have been identified that the organisation needs to focus on to effectively deliver the 5 organisational outcomes

Outcome A: The Chilterns' natural beauty and landscape character is conserved / enhanced, making it more resilient to threats including climate change and development

A1 Climate Adaptation & Mitigation
A2 Nature Recovery Strategic Work
A3 Nature Recovery Delivery
A4 Planning & Development
A5 Cultural Heritage

Outcome B: More people are benefitting from a sense of place and connection to the Chilterns National Landscape

B1 Understanding & Enjoyment
B2 CNL Priority Audiences
B3 Social & Economic Wellbeing

How we will deliver

Outcome C: We demonstrate our impact through improved data and evidence leading to a better understanding of the landscape and more effective advocacy

C1 Data & Evidence Strategy
C2 Data Collection & Management
C3 Monitoring & Evaluation
C4 Analysis & Understanding

Outcome D: We deliver our statutory purposes more effectively through improved strategic partnerships enabling a more sustainable financial model for the organisation

D1 Partnership Development & Delivery
D2 Advocacy
D3 Sustainable Finance

Outcome E: We are an ambitious and confident organisation that values and respects its staff and operates in an effective and efficient way

E1 Organisation Strategy
E2 The CCB Board
E3 Staff Wellbeing & Culture
E4 Organisation Resilience
E5 Organisation Effectiveness

It is at this level that it is proposed to report to the Executive Committee on a quarterly basis

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Sub Delivery Areas

The following changes have been made to the sub-delivery areas (that will be reported to and reviewed by the SLT) under each of the 5 outcomes. Note that this section does not identify changes that have been made to the timing of activity to ensure capacity by for example moving it from the first year into subsequent years.

Outcome A: **16 sub-delivery areas remain** as it was felt that these effectively cover the 16 areas of work needed to deliver this outcome. However, the wording of some sub-delivery areas has been changed to reflect more clarity in the scope of specific activities.

Outcome B: **13 sub-delivery areas have been reduced to 7**. This reflects a thorough review of the sub-delivery areas to areas of overlap and uncertainty but also to reflect the limited capacity that we currently have in this area. This means that a lot of the focus in this area is now on internal upskilling and delivery through existing programmes / projects as well as grant giving (access grants) rather than broad outside support to partner organisations. The review also provided an opportunity to make simpler and more transparent communications work in the organisation.

Outcome C: **12 sub-delivery areas remain** as it was flet that these effectively cover the 12 areas of work needed to deliver this outcome. The wording of some sub-delivery areas has been changed to reflect more clarity in the scope of specific activities. It is acknowledged that this is a new area for the organisation and as such is impacted by capacity issues, and to address this the timing of much of the activity has been delayed so that it starts in the second rather than the first year of the strategic plan when the new Head of Programmes is recruited and had time to find his/her feet.

Outcome D: **14 sub-delivery areas have been reduced to 11**. This reflects a rethinking of this area to bring together different threads around strategic partnership activity into a more focused strand and also to rethink the way we prioritise advocacy work so that it is focused on local versus national rather than segmented into different audiences. It also removes overlap with communications work under Outcome B. In addition, the wording of some sub-delivery areas has been changed to reflect more clarity in the scope of specific activities.

Outcome E: **16 sub-delivery areas have been reduced to 14**. This reflects thinking to tie in some work with the development of the next management plan and communications work in other outcomes, there by making it more strategically aligned and avoiding potential overlap

Overall, this means that through reviewing the 4-year Organisation Strategic Plan **the sub-delivery areas in the plan have been reduced from 71 to 60**. This reflects the reduction of activity in some areas as well as a change in thinking about how we achieve the same outcome with limited resource. It will also mean there is less overlap and more clarity in the different areas as well as a reduced reporting requirement.

Outcome A: Draft Key Delivery Areas and Sub Delivery Areas (2026-30)

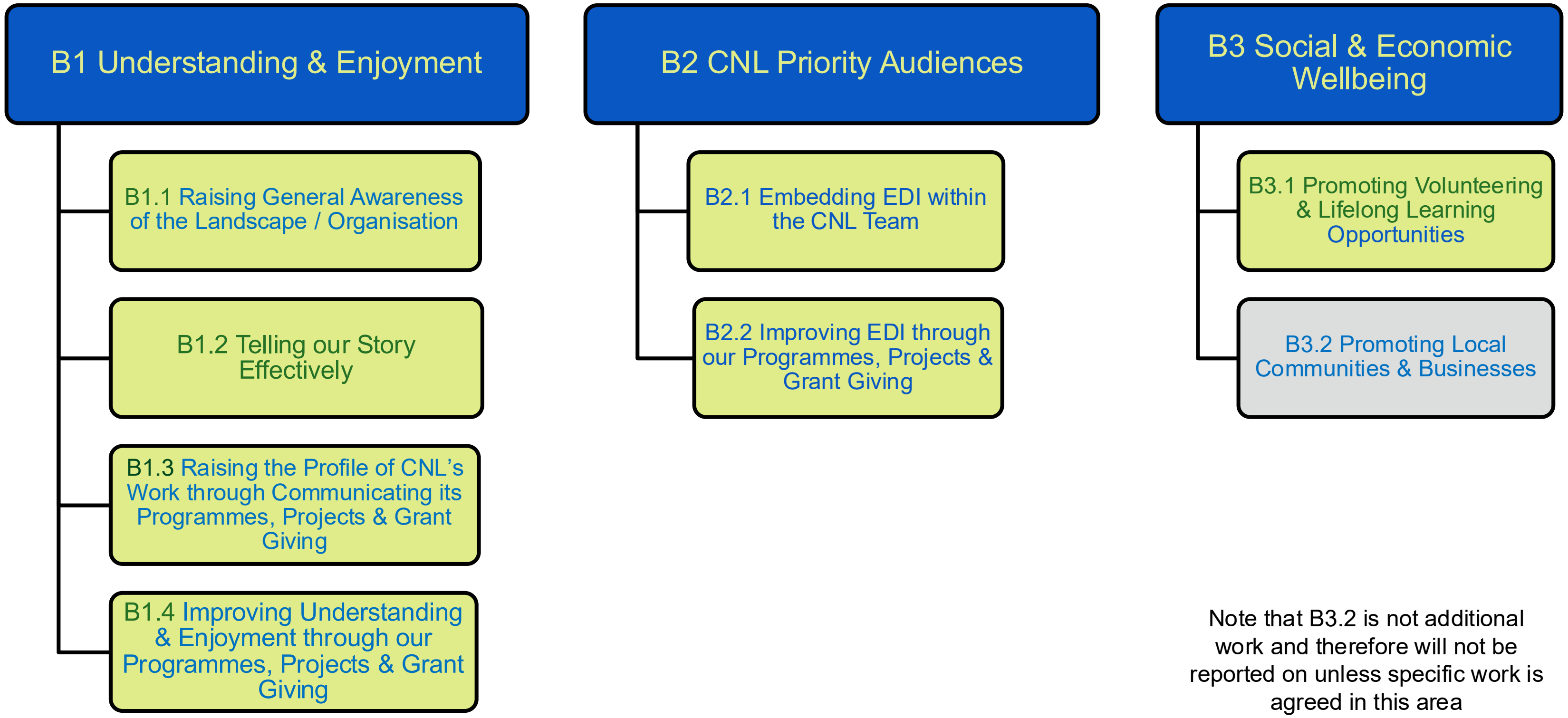
The 5 Key Delivery Areas under Outcome A can be further split into 16 Sub Delivery Areas

- **A1 Climate Adaptation & Mitigation**
  - A1.1 Understanding Climate Change Impact
  - A1.2 Improving Climate Literacy in the CNL Team
- **A2 Nature Recovery Strategic Work**
  - A2.1 Launching & Embedding the Nature Recovery Plan (NRP)
  - A2.2 Supporting Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs)
  - A2.3 Developing Key Technical Approaches
  - A2.4 Supporting Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)
- **A3 Nature Recovery Delivery**
  - A3.1 Facilitating Land Manager Delivery
  - A3.2 Delivering Nature Recovery Components of Landscape Scale Programmes
  - A3.3 Delivering Specific Habitat & Species Focused Nature Recovery Projects
  - A3.4 Distributing Government Funding
- **A4 Planning & Development**
  - A4.1 Providing Planning Guidance
  - A4.2 Engaging on Planning Policies
  - A4.3 Engaging with Planning Proposals
  - A4.4 Delivering Landscape Mitigation Projects arising from Major Developments
- **A5 Cultural Heritage**
  - A5.1 Embedding Consideration of Cultural Heritage across our Work
  - A5.2 Delivering Conservation & Enhancement of Cultural Heritage through our Existing Programmes / Projects

Note that delivery in this area is often matrixed – e.g. a single project can be on a catchment scale, working with farmers and on specific habitats – therefore these sub-delivery areas may change as we build up the reporting structure

Outcome B: Draft Key Delivery Areas and Sub Delivery Areas (2026-30)

The 3 Key Delivery Areas under Outcome B can be further split into 7 Sub Delivery Areas



Note that B3.2 is not additional work and therefore will not be reported on unless specific work is agreed in this area

Note that whilst Health is not brought out separately as the CNL Team is not focusing on this there are clear health benefits from the work in Outcomes A and B that will help to deliver these benefits

Outcome C: Draft Key Delivery Areas and Sub Delivery Areas (2026-30)

The 3 Key Delivery Areas under Outcome C can be further split into 12 Sub Delivery Areas

- **C1 Data & Evidence Strategy**
  - C1.1 Creating a Data & Evidence Strategy
  - C1.2 Embedding the Data & Evidence Strategy
- **C2 Data Collection & Management**
  - C2.1 Improving & Aligning Data Collection for Monitoring & Evaluation
  - C2.2 Improving the Management & Use of Data
  - C2.3 Aligning Data Collection to Advocacy Requirements
- **C3 Monitoring & Evaluation**
  - C3.1 Developing & Embedding KPIs
  - C3.2 Developing & Embedding an Environmental Monitoring Framework
  - C3.3 Developing Outcome Focused Narratives to support the Environmental Monitoring Framework
  - C3.4 Aligning Citizen Science Activities to the Environmental Monitoring Framework
- **C4 Analysis & Understanding**
  - C4.1 Improving the Robustness of Citizen Science Approaches
  - C3.2 Maximising the Value of Data through Enhanced Analysis
  - C3.3 Upskilling Internal Analysis Capability

Outcome D: Draft Key Delivery Areas and Sub Delivery Areas (2026-30)

The 3 Key Delivery Areas under Outcome D can be further split into 11 Sub Delivery Areas

- **D1 Partnership Development & Delivery**
  - D1.1 Putting in place an Overarching Partnership Model
  - D1.2 Articulating the Long-Term Vision for the Landscape
  - D1.3 Reviewing the Management Plan
  - D1.4 Increasing Effective Partnership Working through our Programmes & Projects
- **D2 Advocacy**
  - D2.1 Improving Impact & Influence on Local Issues
  - D2.2 Improving Impact & Influence on National Issues
- **D3 Sustainable Finance**
  - D3.1 Developing a Longer-Term Fundraising Strategy to Diversify Income
  - D3.2 Horizon Scanning Future Funding Opportunities
  - D3.3 Securing Restricted Funding for Projects & Legacy Work
  - D3.4 Securing Unrestricted Funding
  - D3.4 Amplifying Advocacy for Increased Core Funding

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Outcome E: Draft Key Delivery Areas and Sub Delivery Areas (2026-30)

The 5 Key Delivery Areas under Outcome E can be further split into 14 Sub Delivery Areas

- **E1 Organisation Strategy**
  - E1.1 Articulating & Embedding the Organisation Vision, Mission & Values
  - E1.2 Driving Improved Strategy Alignment
- **E2 The CCB Board**
  - E2.1 Implementing an Updated Governance Framework
  - E2.2 Improving Support to the Board
  - E2.3 Maximising Board Effectiveness
- **E3 Staff Wellbeing & Culture**
  - E3.1 Focusing on Health & Wellbeing
  - E3.2 Embedding Health & Safety
  - E3.3 Developing a High Performing Team Culture
- **E4 Organisation Resilience**
  - E4.1 Balancing Ambition with Capacity
  - E4.2 Addressing Capability & Staff Development
- **E5 Organisation Effectiveness**
  - E5.1 Improving Information Management & Technology
  - E5.2 Optimising Ways of Working
  - E5.3 Improving Operational Governance
  - E5.4 Ensuring Effective Compliance

Item 2.5 Appendix 1 **Updated Annual Delivery Plan (FY26-27)**

As part of the development of a 4-year Organisation Strategic Plan (aligned to the timing of the Management Plan) we have identified the key activity that will need to be undertaken in each of the 4 years.

The Annual Delivery Plan (FY26-27) represents the first of those 4 years. It was first presented to and agreed by the Board in June 2026 with the acknowledgement that there were a few areas to complete, such as the communications activity.

In addition both the Executive Committee (in May 2026) and the Board (in June 2026) requested that we review the plan further to address capacity constraints (see Business Planning paper presented to the Executive Committee in September 2026), and it was agreed that any substantive changes would be reported back to the Board for approval.

The full updated Annual Delivery Plan is presented here, because there are a number of substantive changes (see 2.5 Business Planning paper presented to the Executive Committee September 2026 for an overview of the work carried out and the key changes made) and to ensure that the plan is presented in a complete format as the changes have inevitably impacted all parts of the plan.

Key to the Annual Delivery Plan

Black Font = Individual non project / programme funded activities (note that these activities may take place over more than one year but are not ongoing annual activities). Note that whilst these activities are currently funded externally this does not mean they would automatically stop if there was no funding available – however a decision would need to be made on whether to use core funding to continue these activities

Green Font = Activities that are currently mainly externally funded through programmes / projects (does not include our grant giving programmes)

Blue Font = Ongoing annual activity (note that these activities may not start in Year 1 of the 4-Year Strategic Plan but are likely to occur on an ongoing basis for a number of years as part of the core activity of the organisation (e.g. responding to planning applications)

Purple Font = CCB Grant giving activity (from Defra funds) – note this does not include grant giving from within projects like Mend the Gap

<table>
<tr><th>Key Delivery Area</th><th>Sub Delivery Area</th><th>Key Activities (FY26-27)</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Outcome A - The Chilterns’ natural beauty and landscape character is conserved / enhanced, making it more resilient to threats including climate change and development</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">A1

Climate Adaptation & Mitigation</td><td>A1.1

Understanding Climate Change Impact</td><td>A1.1.1 Complete Research & Development climate report (CHESS-SCAPE modelling)

A1.1.2 Review final R&D report & carry out additional analysis (Local Authority climate explorer to fully understand impact of climate change)

A1.1.3 Create & convene climate change working group with external partners

A1.1.4 Carry out climate change risk assessment

A1.1.5 Identify, evaluate & select climate adaptation actions

A1.1.6 Work with UKCEH through Flood & Drought Research Infrastructure (FDRI) project to better understand impact of climate change on Chilterns chalk streams

A1.1.7 Convene NetZero working group for the organisation</td></tr>
<tr><td>A1.2

Improving Climate Literacy in the CNL Team</td><td>A1.2.1 Complete Climate Literacy training

A1.2.2 Present key findings from R&D work to CNL staff team

A1.2.3 Run 2 CNL team workshops to identify risks & opportunities alongside key proposed actions in response to enhanced understanding of impacts of climate change on landscape</td></tr>
<tr><td>A2

Nature Recovery Strategic Work</td><td>A2.1

Launching & Embedding the Nature Recovery Plan</td><td>A2.1.1 Finalise design of plan & leaflets

A2.1.2 Set launch date, book venue & speakers & advertise event

A2.1.3 Run launch event

A2.1.4 Embed NRP outcomes internally & externally into funding proposals, work plans & activities</td></tr>
</table>

	A2.2 Supporting Local Nature Recovery Strategies	A2.2.1 Familiarise the CNL team with the content of the 4 LNRS A2.2.2 Embed LNRS priorities into new work process so that CNL team use LNRS priorities when planning work A2.2.3 Attend LNRS Delivery meetings (Bucks, Oxon, Beds, Herts) to start to align activity (CNL team)
	A2.3 Developing Key Technical Approaches	A2.3.1 Finalise farmed land technical approach document A2.3.2 Consider how to operationalise farmed land technical approach document
	A2.4 Supporting Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)	No activity scheduled for this year
A3 Nature Recovery Delivery	A3.1 Facilitating Land Manager Delivery	A3.1.1 Facilitate farmer cluster meetings for Chess/Misbourne, North & Central Farmer Clusters (Nature Recovery Team) A3.1.2 Manage delivery projects for Chess/Misbourne, North & Central Farmer Clusters (Nature Recovery Team) A3.1.3 Develop agreed priorities for farmer clusters (Nature Recovery Team) A3.1.4 Provide strategic support for Christmas Common & South Chilterns Farmer Clusters (Nature Recovery Team) A3.1.5 Develop delivery plans with land managers, stakeholders & partners for catchment initiatives (focus on Chess & Misbourne) (CCSP) A3.1.6 Publish the catchment plan for the Hughenden Stream (CCSP) A3.1.7 Develop the catchment plan for the Ver (following nationally recognised methodology) inc partner workshops (CCSP)

	A3.2 Delivering Nature Recovery Components of Landscape Scale Programmes	A3.2.1 Collate Nature Recovery data, align with North Wessex Downs & hold 3 workshop across CNL to assess partners' appetite for projects and develop potential project list (Nature Ridge) A3.2.2 Deliver large scale (>1km) river restoration project on the Chess (CCSP) A3.2.3 Enable the Cholsey Marshes/Withymead/ Beale Park & Pangbourne Riparian habitat enhancements (MtG) A3.2.4 Strengthen the catchment approach along the Thames with Thames 21 (MtG) A3.2.5 Enable the Rectory Farm and Equi centric grazing chalk grassland projects & support the South Chilterns Farm Cluster & botanical consultant to do further chalk related projects (MtG)
	A3.3 Delivering Specific Habitat & Species Focused Nature Recovery Projects	A3.3.1 Publish our deer management website to raise awareness A3.3.2 Fund appropriate deer management activities through Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) A3.3.3 Fund appropriate conservation grazing & species-rich grassland creation/restoration projects (FiPL) A3.3.4 Support the work of South Chilterns Deer Management Group (FiPL) A3.3.5 Complete Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) plant survey audit of the Misbourne catchment (CCSP) A3.3.6 Treat known & new INNS plant sites on the rivers Chess & Misbourne (CCSP) A3.3.7 Collect & analyse monitoring data & use it to shape restoration projects, land management & community education (CCSP) A3.3.8 Provide advice to homeowners & landowners on how to best maintain their section of chalk stream (CCSP)
	A3.4 Distributing Government Funding	A3.4.1 Raise awareness of Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) funding & distribute grants across the CNL in line with strategy A3.4.2 Distribute CDEL funding aligned with 30by30 and PLTOF 1 outcomes

A4 Planning & Development	A4.1 Providing Planning Guidance	A4.1.1 Identify & prioritise programme for development or review of standing advice (inc model policies & consultation protocols) A4.1.2 Produce planning guidance in line with agreed programme (to be defined once programme has been agreed) A4.1.3 Support the planning team to understand the impacts of development & how they can be mitigated through planning guidance
	A4.2 Engaging on Planning Policies	A4.2.1 Work with policy makers (where possible) and/or respond to consultations on planning policy (prioritising around key issues where appropriate in line with Management Plan & standing advice) A4.2.2 Support the Planning team to understand the impacts of development & how they can be mitigated through planning policy
	A4.3 Engaging with Planning Proposals	A4.3.1 Respond to consultations on planning proposals (prioritised according to agreed protocol in line with Management Plan & standing advice) A4.3.2 Support the Planning team to understand the impacts of development proposals & how they can be mitigated
	A4.4 Delivering Landscape Mitigation Projects arising from Major Developments	A4.4.1 Deliver mitigation work in the Mend the Gap area (Mend the Gap) A4.4.2 Deliver HS2 AP mitigation funding projects (Biodiversity & Connectivity project)
A5 Cultural Heritage	A5.1 Embedding Consideration of Cultural Heritage across our Work	A5.1.1 Add consideration of cultural heritage into new work process documentation A5.1.2 Assess each new project for important cultural heritage considerations & incorporate information into project accordingly A5.1.3 Work with CHAP CIC and Planning Team to embed consideration of cultural heritage into programme work

	A5.2 Delivering Conservation & Enhancement of Cultural Heritage through our Programmes / Projects	A5.2.1 Deliver cultural heritage work of Not Bourne Yesterday (development phase) A5.2.2 Embed cultural heritage work within delivery phase proposal for Not Bourne Yesterday (Not Bourne Yesterday) A5.2.3 Develop cultural heritage aspects of proposed Nature Ridge project (Nature Ridge) A5.2.4 Provide cultural heritage funding grants (FiPL)
Outcome B: More people are benefitting from a sense of place and connection to the Chilterns National Landscape		
B1 Awareness, Understanding & Enjoyment	B1.1 Raising General Awareness of the Landscape / Organisation	B1.1.1 Develop & deliver comms activity that raises awareness of the Chilterns National Landscape & the organisation's role (inc staff profiles, brand) B1.1.2 Plan promotional campaigns for the year B1.1.3 Deliver identified promotional campaigns for the year B1.1.4 Review CNL comms & marketing assets to identify requirement for updating / developing new assets B1.1.5 Update / develop new comms & marketing assets (as required) B1.1.6 Promote comms & marketing assets through planned campaigns B1.1.7 Manage media relations & respond to media enquires (as required) B1.1.8 Develop & maintain digital comms channels inc website (e.g. readibility, structure, simplification, interactive map) B1.1.9 Work with partner to amplify key messages B1.1.10 Redesign & restructure Annual Review to demonstrate greater impact & delivery against key areas B1.1.11 Develop plan for delivering new signage across the Landscape

	B1.2 Telling our Story Effectively	B1.2.1 Identify the stories that we want to tell internally & externally B1.2.2 Develop internal and external comms strategy (inc impact & opportunities) B1.2.3 Start developing priority stories
	B1.3 Raising the Profile of CNL's Work through Communicating its Programmes, Projects & Grant Giving	B1.3.1 Provide strategic communications advice, planning & support to programme & project teams, ensuring activity is aligned with organisational priorities, audiences and key messages B1.3.2 Undertake comms on the work of the CNL Team around conserving & enhancing natural beauty & landscape character (e.g. Nature Recovery, FiPL etc) B1.3.3 Undertake comms on the work of the CNL Team around improving understanding & enjoyment of the Chilterns (e.g. Access for All, EDI etc) B1.3.4 Undertake comms that demonstrates our impact through partnership working & increased focus data & evidence B1.3.5 Work with partners to amplify programme / project work B1.3.6 Undertake specific comms around Not Bourne Yesterday (Not Bourne Yesterday) B1.3.7 Undertake specific comms around delivery of Mend the Gap (Mend the Gap) B1.3.8 Undertake specific comms around the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project (CCSP)
	B1.4 Improving Understanding & Enjoyment through our Programmes, Projects & Grant Giving	B1.4.1 Advise & support CNL programme & project managers B1.4.2 Deliver engagement activities through Not Bourne Yesterday (development phase) (NBY) B1.4.3 Deliver engagement activities through Mend the Gap (MtG) B1.4.4 Deliver engagement activities through the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP)
	B2.1 Embedding EDI	B2.1.1 Convene & support the EDI Advisory Group B2.1.2 Update the Ambition Statement & action plan (as required)

B2 CNL Priority Audiences	within the CNL Team	B2.1.3 Develop a programme of EDI training for CNL Team (Staff & Board Members) B2.1.4 Undertake training / awareness work with the CNL Team (Staff & Board Members)
	B2.2 Improving EDI through our Programmes, Projects & Grant Giving	B2.2.1 Advise & support CNL programme & project managers around EDI B2.2.2 Award grants through Access for All funding & promote projects funded B2.2.3 Award grants for access through FiPL funding B2.2.4 Embed engagement with economically & socially disadvantaged communities into development of Nature Ridge Landscape Connections (pre-development phase) (Nature Ridge) B2.2.5 Expand youth pages on the CNL website with additional digital assets & videos B2.2.6 Embed EDI in the development of Not Bourne Yesterday development phase (NBY) B2.2.7 Deliver schools programme in Mend the Gap (MtG) B2.2.8 Deliver Trout in the Classroom (CCSP) B2.2.9 Launch Accessibility Hub & update with digital assets B2.2.10 Develop & agree technical approach paper on Access
B3 Social & Economic Wellbeing	B3.1 Promoting Volunteering & Lifelong Learning Opportunities	B3.1.1 Develop & agree technical approach paper on Volunteering B3.1.2 Launch the CNL Volunteering Website B3.1.3 Promote volunteer opportunities through the Volunteer Hub B3.1.4 Ensure volunteering / apprenticeship opportunities are embedded in the Not Bourne Yesterday Delivery Phase application (NBY) B3.1.5 Provide citizen science volunteering opportunities around water monitoring (CCSP) B3.1.6 Provide citizen science volunteering opportunities / upskilling through Tracking the Impact (TTI)

		B3.1.7 Undertake guided walks & talks (CCSP) B3.1.8 Undertake guided walks & talks as part of Not Bourne Yesterday development phase (NBY)
Outcome C: We **demonstrate our impact** through improved data and evidence leading to a better understanding of the landscape and more effective advocacy		
C1 Data & Evidence Strategy	C1.1 Creating a Data & Evidence Strategy	No activity scheduled for this year
	C1.2 Embedding the Data & Evidence Strategy	No activity scheduled for this year
C2 Data Collection & Management	C2.1 Improving & Aligning Data Collection for Monitoring & Evaluation	C2.1.1 Identify key learnings from pilot project & next steps (inc key requirements in relation to the Landscape Team) C2.1.2 Embed the Nature Recovery Action Data model into the work of the Landscape Team
	C2.2 Improving the Management & Use of Data	No activity scheduled for this year
	C2.3 Aligning Data Collection to Advocacy Requirements	No activity scheduled for this year

C3 Monitoring & Evaluation	C3.1 Developing & Embedding KPIs	No activity scheduled for this year
	C3.2 Developing & Embedding an Environmental Monitoring Framework	No activity scheduled for this year
	C3.3 Developing Outcome Focused Narratives to support the Environmental Monitoring Framework	No activity scheduled for this year
	C3.4 Aligning Citizen Science Activities to the Environmental Monitoring Framework	No activity scheduled for this year
C4 Analysis & Understanding	C4.1 Improving the Robustness of Citizen Science Approaches	No activity scheduled for this year

	C4.2 Maximising the Value of Data through Enhanced Analysis	No activity scheduled for this year
	C4.3 Upskilling Internal Analysis Capability	C4.3.1 Determine GIS training needs for Landscape Team C4.3.2 Deliver 1:1 upskilling in the Landscape Team (as required)
Outcome D: We deliver our statutory purposes more effectively through **improved strategic partnerships** enabling a more sustainable operating model for the organisation		
D1 Partnership Development & Delivery	D1.1 Putting in place an Overarching Partnership Model	D1.1.1 Review & update paper on strategic partnerships to clarify options around our overarching partnership model D1.1.2 Clarify how different overarching partnership models would work in practice D1.1.3 Agree overarching partnership model to be established
	D1.2 Articulating the Long-Term Vision for the Landscape	No activity scheduled for this year

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>D1.3

Reviewing the Management Plan</td><td>D1.3.1 Publish the Management Plan for 2025-30

D1.3.2 Develop & publish the delivery plan for the Management Plan 2025-30

D1.3.3 Monitor national level developments around Management Plans

D1.3.4 Develop a clear plan & timetable for the review of the current Management Plan & development of the next Management Plan</td></tr>
<tr><td>D1.4

Increasing Effective Partnership Working through our Programmes & Projects</td><td>D1.4.1 Identify lessons from the North Chilterns Landscape Partnership to test / clarify effective partnership working

D1.4.2 Develop more effective partnership working through the development of the Nature Ridge Landscapes Connection bid

D1.4.3 Continue to develop new partnerships through the Not Bourne Yesterday development phase (NBY)

D1.4.4 Develop new partnerships through the Mending the Misbourne project (CCSP)

D1.4.5 Address partnership legacy for the Mend the Gap Programme (discuss with RSR - what does this actually mean we are doing)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">D2

Advocacy</td><td>D2.1

Improving Impact & Influence on Local Issues</td><td>D2.1.1 Develop & agree an advocacy strategy covering local & national issues

D2.1.2 Advocate on local issues as they arise</td></tr>
<tr><td>D2.2

Improving Impact & Influence on National Issues</td><td>D2.2.1 Support NLA & PLP advocacy focused on where we have expertise / significant interest

D2.2.2 Advocate & raise awareness of national issues related to Protected Landscapes with Local MPs, Local Officers & Elected Members</td></tr>
</table>

D3 Sustainable Finance	D3.1 Developing a Longer-Term Fundraising Strategy to Diversify Income	D3.1.1 Develop & agree medium-term funding strategy (inc programmes / projects / unrestricted funding) D3.1.2 Clarify fundraising roles, responsibilities & ways of working
	D3.2 Horizon Scanning Future Funding Opportunities	D3.2.1 Clarify what horizon scanning entails and how it will be used D3.2.2 Start exploring potential of Green Finance for farmed land
	D3.3 Securing Restricted Funding for Projects & Legacy Work	D3.3.1 Identify key diversified income sources for specific programmes / projects D3.3.2 Develop funding action plan for farmed land (for farmer clusters & FiPL) D3.3.3 Bid for & consolidate longer term funding for facilitation across the Central Chilterns, Chess/Misbourne & North Chilterns farm clusters (Nature Recovery) D3.3.4 Apply for delivery funding across the Central Chilterns, Chess/Misbourne & North Chilterns farm clusters (Nature Recovery) D3.3.5 Develop funding bid with the North Chilterns Landscape Partnership (inc farm cluster facilitator & delivery funding) D3.3.6 Secure development phase funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for Not Bourne Yesterday (NBY) D3.3.7 Secure matched funding commitments for Not Bourne Yesterday (NBY)
	D3.4 Securing Unrestricted Funding	D3.4.1 Identify potential funders (inc charities & HNWs) D3.4.2 Generate relationships with potential funders in line with strategy (e.g. Nature Circle) D3.4.3 Develop & submit funding proposals to identified potential funders in line with strategy

	D3.5 Amplifying Advocacy for Increased Core Funding	D3.5.1 Review strategy with the Cotswolds and identify if any information needs to be updated to support advocacy D3.5.2 Seek further opportunity to advocate for increased core funding
Outcome E: We are an **ambitious and confident organisation** that values and respects its staff and operates in an effective and efficient way		
E1 Organisation Strategy	E1.1 Articulating & Embedding the Organisation Vision, Mission & Values	E1.1.1 Review & update the organisation vision, mission & values E1.1.2 Agree the organisation mission, vision & values with staff & the Board
	E1.2 Driving Improved Strategy Alignment	E1.2.1 Develop 4-year strategic plan for the organisation (FY26-30) with SLT & Managers E1.2.2 Agree 4-year strategic plan with the Board E1.2.3 Identify & agree ways to embed understanding of the strategic plan across the organisation (inc links between Management Plan, 4-year Organisation Strategic Plan & Annual Delivery Plan) E1.2.4 Review personal objective setting & make changes to objective setting form / process (as required) to ensure alignment of personal objectives to plans E1.2.5 Clarify approach to mapping programme & project objectives to the strategic plan in future years
E2 The CCB Board	E2.1 Implementing an Updated Governance Framework	E2.1.1 Complete & agree updated Constitution (inc Scheme of Delegation) E2.1.2 Advocate for improved governance arrangements (i.e. through legislation inc our Establishment Order)

	E2.2 Improving Support to the Board	E2.2.1 Service the Board & Executive Committee E2.2.2 Complete & agree Board processes (inc meeting preparation & onboarding) E2.2.3 Start to embed new processes to improve effectiveness of support to the Board & its committees
	E2.3 Maximising Board Effectiveness	E2.3.1 Resolve the status of Planning Committee E2.3.2 Agree required Advisory Groups E2.3.3 Finalise consistent terms of reference for Committees and Advisory Groups
E3 Staff Wellbeing & Culture	E3.1 Focusing on Health & Wellbeing	E3.1.1 Investigate & if appropriate undertake a mental health survey for the organisation E3.1.2 Develop a wellbeing plan for the organisation (inc addressing issues in the annual staff survey / mental health survey) E3.1.3 Make mental health support more transparent across the organisation E3.1.4 Review provision of healthcare benefits E3.1.5 Develop, agree & embed a new policy on menopause
	E3.2 Embedding Health & Safety	E3.2.1 Complete development of standard operating procedures E3.2.2 Clarify further work needed on health & safety policies & procedures (inc contracts) & develop a clear plan for implementation E3.2.3 Develop draft calendar of health & safety activity needed E3.2.4 Identify required ongoing health & safety training for the organisation (as part of the wider Organisation Training Plan)

	E3.3 Developing a High Performing Team Culture	E3.3.1 Identify next steps around Team Development work E3.3.2 Deliver programme of activity around Team Development work (inc Lumina Sparks) E3.3.3 Establish more effective & planful ongoing SLT: Manager consultation E3.3.4 Develop & agree plan for improved internal comms E3.3.5 (improve internal brand alignment
E4 Organisation Resilience	E4.1 Balancing Ambition with Capacity	E4.1.1 Undertake resource planning review of Annual Delivery Plan & update 4-yr Strategic Plan (as required) E4.1.2 Clarify requirements for staff around non day-to-day delivery E4.1.3 Develop more efficient way to undertake resource planning for FY27-28 (inc requirement to record time) E4.1.4 Establish effective on-going review of capacity alongside risk within SLT
	E4.2 Addressing Capability & Staff Development	E4.2.1 Identify mandatory training for staff E4.2.2 Establish & pilot new staff training plan E4.2.3 Undertake key compliance training (e.g. fire, safeguarding, EDI, GDPR) E4.2.4 Develop staff training technical paper (inc identification of future capability requirements, career development opportunities) E4.2.5 Identify on-line training portal to establish in FY27-28 E4.2.6 Undertake recruitment of Office Administrator, Head of Programmes and programme / project recruitment (as required)

E5 Organisation Effectiveness	E5.1 Improving Information Management & Technology	E5.1.1 Continue transition of information to new Sharepoint structure (Nature Recovery / Admin / Governance) E5.1.2 Start work on establishing effective image library E5.1.3 Write up key controls, processes & procedures around information management E5.1.4 Train staff on information management changes & to equip them with skills to manage information on an ongoing basis E5.1.5 Complete & launch volunteer management system (inc all content) E5.1.6 Review the effectiveness of the CRM system & action accordingly E5.1.7 Review IT service provision / cost & establish more robust contractual arrangements
	E5.2 Optimising Ways of Working	E5.2.1 Complete HR processes & procedures for key lifecycle stages E5.2.2 Launch & embed HR processes & procedures through staff training E5.2.3 Identify & agree work needed on finance / IT policies & processes (inc prioritisation) E5.2.4 Clarify roles & responsibilities around EDI, staff wellbeing & operations
	E5.3 Improving Operational Governance	E5.3.1 Review & update risk register E5.3.2 Review way in SLT operates & implement new ways of working to increase robustness E5.3.3 Agree & put in place SLT ways of working to review & mitigate risk more consistently during the year E5.3.4 Complete crisis comms work E5.3.5 Complete annual planning with greater consultation with Senior Managers) E5.3.6 Complete redesign of new work process

	E5.4 Ensuring Effective Compliance	E5.4.1 Appoint & train Safeguarding Lead E5.4.2 Review & update safeguarding policies & procedures E5.4.3 Appoint Data Protection Officer E5.4.4 Identify & establish data protection lead / champions E5.4.5 Undertake gap analysis of data protection requirements E5.4.6 Clarify roles and responsibilities around safeguarding & data protection (inc training) E5.4.7 Review DBS ways of working to fit into onboarding & other processes

Item 3.2 **Funding Report**

Author: Elaine King, CEO

Purpose of Report: To update the Executive Committee on progress with delivering the Funding Strategy.

Background

1. This paper provides an update on the CCB's Funding Strategy since the Committee's last meeting in May 2026 and sets out key observations on the current pipeline of externally funded projects.

Future Funding

2. As reported previously, this financial year is the first of a three-year flat cash settlement, with year one figures confirmed by Defra and years two and three indicative. Our income this year therefore comprises: Core Revenue (RDEL) funding (£513,896); Core Capital (CDEL) funding (£347,722) and Access Capital funding (£429,229).

3. The three year Defra Access for All programme formally ended on 31 March 2026 and the Access Capital funding for this financial year is confirmed for this year and indicative for the following two years. In January, Defra also confirmed grant funding for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, comprising £818,310 each year for the next three years.

4. Defra also this year allocated to National Landscapes an additional £3m one-off uplift in RDEL funding, in addition to our RDEL Core grant (£176,723). More detail on can be found in the Funding Report for the meeting in May 2026.

5. Defra announced its new Wildlife-Rich Habitat Fund on 25th May, which will support projects across National Parks, National Landscapes and the Broads over a three-year period, from April 2026 to March 2029, that help to restore and reconnect important habitats for wildlife. More on the fund and our response here. The CCB has been allocated £206,540 In 26/27 and we intend to apply for further funds in 27/28 and 28/29.

Local Authority contributions

6. We have continued to proactively engage with local authorities, largely to ensure that we collaborate and use resources most efficiently, and to ensure that local authorities understand the relationship between themselves and the Conservation Board, particularly the requirement to contribute financially to reflect our role in delivering their statutory duties. The Finance Report at item 2.1 provides more detail on progress with securing local authority contributions for this and the next two years.

Diversifying income

7. We continue to work to secure funds that enable us to recharge to cover core overheads. This includes recharging from projects - where funder rules allow - and from other sources of restricted income. The National Landscapes Association has also increased staff capacity for fundraising and are currently developing a programme to secure philanthropic funding for National Landscapes. This initiative is expected to be launched early in 2027.

Funding pipeline

8. The Funding Pipeline is populated and regularly updated and reviewed by the SLT. The bullet points below highlight some key observations that we believe will be of interest to the Executive Committee, focussing especially on risk.

Heritage and nature recovery

9. We are working with National Landscapes Association to explore corporate funding for the Tracking the Impact project (and the River Chess citizen science programme) through their green finance platform 'Your Natural Partner'. Tracking the Impact and the Chess citizen science project are the two Chilterns National Landscape projects currently showcased. For Tracking the Impact, we are also exploring corporate funding with Rebel Restoration which has funded the project previously and connects organisations such as ours with businesses that want to support nature recovery initiatives.

10. **HS2 Additional Projects: Mending the Misbourne** **(Secured)** In August 2025, we secured £1m from the HS2 Review Group for the 'Mending the Misbourne' project, which will develop and deliver a strategic river catchment plan for the River Misbourne using a similar delivery template to River Chess Smarter Water Catchments initiative. See news item here. A legal agreement confirming the £1m grant was signed off in early January 2026 and the funds were transferred to our bank account in May. We continue to liaise with HS2 regards a requested inflationary uplift to these funds of £36,000 due to the delays in finalising funding.

11. **HS2 Chilterns Review Group** – this group was set up under Select Committee assurance in 2019 to develop detailed design principles and oversee allocation of the £3m Additional Project budget. After many months of chasing, we received back payments for March 2020 to December 2024 of £15k and are liaising with HS2 for reimbursement of staff time from January 2025 to March 2026 totalling £4.6k. This will be the final funding received for our contribution to this group's activities, due to lack of further HS2 funds.

12. **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** **(Secured)**: In January 2026, Defra announced the extension of the programme until FY28/29 with an additional three years for project delivery at £818,310 total allocation per annum for the Chilterns National Landscape. Of this, £548,996 per annum is available for capital project delivery and £115,372 for revenue project delivery. A further six months of administration funding will be available in FY29/30 to cover programme closure costs. The FiPL panel has approved funding for a number of internal CCB activities, in addition to external ones. A summary of funds allocated so far this year will be provided at the next ExCo meeting.

13. **Defra Wildlife-Rich Habitats Fund** **(Secured)**: This fund is being administered as part of the FiPL programme. Our allocation of £206k for FY26/27 has been fully allocated to initiatives comprising creation of hedgerow, wood-pasture and parkland, pond, calcareous grassland and wetland priority habitats.

14. **Landscape Connections – Nature Ridge** **(Secured)**: Launched in July 2024, Landscape Connections is the National Lottery Heritage Fund's 10 year, £150m grants programme, focussing on nature recovery, heritage and people in protected landscapes. We have worked with the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (leading the bid) and National Trails UK to help secure £259k for 18-months for a project pre-development stage. This includes £21k to pay for technical advice from CCB staff.

15. Nature Ridge aims to create a nature corridor focused on the chalk ridge and Ridgeway National Trail as it passes through the two National Landscapes. The Project Development Manager and Project Support Officer have both now been recruited to the project by North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

16. **Chess Smarter Water Catchments (SWC)** **(Secured)**: Thames Water has advised its intention to offer a further £1.4m to fund work in the Chess catchment for four years until 31 March 2030 through the Chalk Streams Flagship Restoration Project. Any existing underspend can also be used to support the programme of activities in 2026/7. While a welcome development, this is less funding than we had sought and has necessitated

reprofiling the proposed work programme and discussing plans and funding allocations with partners. A legal agreement has been signed for one-year of funding for CCB staff, totalling £178k and we are in receipt of all the staff and pre-delivery funding for this financial year. The project delivery budget is still to be determined.

Diversity Equity and Inclusion

17. **Defra Access for All funding 2023/24 to 2025/26:** this three year programme was aimed at improving access to protected landscapes for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds and ended in March 2026. We reported on spend, outcomes and impact to Defra to help inform future arrangements and demonstrate the difference it's made in the Chilterns. Defra has now made available a new tranche of funding from 2026/27 for three years. Our allocation for 2026/27 is £429,229 and we are expecting a similar allocation for the next two years (provisional at this stage).

18. We are promoting the fund as widely as possible to encourage a diverse range of applications and are actively assessing applications and awarding grants. £228,153 of grants have been awarded so far this year, including electric trikes and a trailer for Cycling without Age Oxfordshire, a Talking Trail and accessible interpretation at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, new access guides and videos for our Accessibility Hub and accessible board walks at two important wetland sites. This leaves £201,076 to allocate this financial year. Three applications totalling £113,243 will be reviewed at the panel meeting on 2 September, with several expressions of interest for some substantial projects also being received. We expect to be able to allocate all funds by year end. Details of previous projects funded are on our website. In addition to allocating grants to others, we have also used the funding to support substantial projects of our own including the Accessibility Hub, the Youth pages, an improved Chilterns volunteering hub (in progress) and accessible interpretation and digital assets.

19. **Nature Calling**: The Chilterns National Landscape was one of six hubs participating in this Arts Council and Defra funded programme designed to deepen people's engagement with nature and heritage, and to reach new, underserved communities. The CCB received over £60,000 to support the programme. Activity focused in and around Luton leading to the development and launch of Luton Henge in July 2025. More on the project here. The Nature Calling programme finished in November 2025 but legacy activity is in place, with partners using the Henge as an asset for community engagement, including a Luton Henge Festival in August 2026 and an Autumn Equinox event on 23 September.

20. The CCB is a strategic partner on Luton Borough Council's Nature Towns and Cities programme, 'Roots to Healthy Places', a two-year programme which commenced in January 2026 led by Luton Council and funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project is focused on nature recovery, providing better physical and emotional connections to nature and ensuring more equal access to public green spaces. The CCB is being funded to provide advice and deliver some programme activities (£7,500 over two years). We have also supported Luton Borough Council with its ambitious River Lea linear park vision and application to be included in DEFRA's National River Walks Programme.

21. A **Collaborative Targeted Outreach Programme** (CTOP), developed by the University of Bedfordshire, following research funded by the CCB's Chalkscapes project, has also been incorporated into the Nature Towns and Cities project, and is currently being delivered across diverse communities in Luton. More here.

Recommendation:

1. **To NOTE and OFFER FEEDBACK on updates on delivering the Funding Strategy.**

Item 3.3	**CEO Update**
Author:	Elaine King, CEO
Purpose of Report:	To update the Executive Committee on key areas of work since the last Board meeting in June.

Background

1. This report comprises highlights since the Board meeting on 25th June 2026.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

2. The SLT continues to oversee the organisation's operations and strategic priorities, meeting weekly to plan activity, monitor risk, share information and coordinate delivery across all areas of work. A strategy day was also held on 30 July.

3. A significant focus has been making final improvements to the four year Business Plan and the Annual Plan that flows from it. More detail is in the Business Plan paper at item 2.5. Other key areas of focus include planning the launch of the new Nature Recovery Plan, planning development of a new Climate Adaptation Plan, recruiting for a new Head of Programmes, supporting and guiding programmes and projects both proactively and troubleshooting reactively, assessing proposals from the team for making external funding applications - which are now submitted to the SLT using a standard Mandate Form - and responding to requests for information and reporting from Defra and others.

4. This period has been a particularly busy one for meetings and wider engagement with partners, stakeholders and others connected to our work. The sections below give a flavour of some of the activities and is not an exhaustive list.

Engagement with local and national government

5. Engaging with our local authorities continues to be a priority and the team collaborates with all of them to varying extents on many areas of our work. I've continued to work with our Senior Finance Manager to secure full financial contributions from our local authorities. See the Q1 Finance Report at item 2.1 for more detail.

6. A very recent welcome development is that, following difficulties for many months in engaging **Central Bedfordshire Council**, our Chair and I have been invited to meet with the CEO and we are currently identifying a suitable date. With thanks to Cllr Philip Spicer, appointed to the Board by the Council, who tabled a written question this month asking that the CEO meet us to discuss their financial contribution to the CCB.

7. Other senior meetings during this period have included bi-monthly discussions with senior management, including the CEO, at **Dacorum Borough Council**, and a meeting with Tony Bradford, Head of Environmental Management Services at **Hertfordshire County Council**, exploring further opportunities to collaborate, the potential impacts of Local Government Reorganisation and planning for our teams to get together. A meeting with Dave Keeley, Operations Manager (Countryside) at **Oxfordshire County Council**, also explored greater communication and collaboration between the Council's officers and the CCB, building on the proactive role that Cllr McLauchlan is already playing as a CCB Board member.

8. This reporting period has involved less engagement with local MPs, largely due to the need to focus on other work. However, I am meeting with the CEOs at the National Landscapes Association and the Campaign for National Park in September to plan a site visit for MPs

and Peers that are members of the **All Party Parliamentary Group for National Parks and National Landscapes**. More on the APPG from its Chair, Barry Gardiner MP, here.

9. Defra's recruitment campaign for Secretary of State appointments to Conservation Boards and National Park Authorities is progressing, aiming to fill two vacancies on our Board. The Chair and I have assisted Defra by talking with prospective candidates, sifting and short-listing and Louise interviewing alongside Defra on 21 and 27 August.

10. Defra and the NLA continue to explore governance challenges across Protected Landscapes, including Conservation Boards. Members of the SLT contributed evidence and insight to a Defra commissioned review by the Countryside & Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire and Ecorys, which aimed to develop a clearer understanding of the values, behaviours, and organisational cultures that shape governance across Protected Landscapes. We are still waiting for the report, and Defra's response, to be published.

11. This work is considered an exploration of 'soft governance' and we continue to seek clarification from Defra on its plans, if any, to explore 'hard governance', which is where the greatest improvements can potentially be made. We are also expecting that the report comments and makes recommendations on the specific challenges faced by Conservation Boards, given the contributions made to workshops and information that Matt Thomson and I shared with the researchers.

<u>**Engagement with Arms Length Bodies and government agencies**</u>

12. In parallel to the Defra-led soft governance work above, we have continued to support and contribute to an **Office for Environmental Protection** (OEP) inquiry into the role of National Parks and National Landscapes in delivering the government's biodiversity targets. The inquiry comprises a number of specific lines of exploration, focussing on the legal, policy and governance factors affecting delivery of environmental outcomes. We have provided a great deal of insight and evidence in the past few months, especially to a deeper dive into the governance arrangements at the CCB as a Conservation Board, and a focus on the role of strategic planning and our collaborative work with farmers.

13. Members of the SLT have met together with the OEP team, in addition to 1 to 1 interviews being conducted with SLT members, selected staff, partners and Board member Cllr James Norman. A table of the additional costs of being a Conservation Board, rather than a National Landscape hosted by a local authority, has also been provided to the OEP researchers. See Appendix 5 at item 2.1 for more detail.

14. The OEP also ran a very informative workshop at the NLA's annual conference in July. Workshop material, including background to the inquiry and some early conclusions, is here.

15. In July, Board member Baljit Dhillon, represented the CCB at a very productive meeting with Oliver Munn, the new CEO at the **Rural Payments Agency**. Follow up actions include providing examples of where the CCB can support the RPAs work, exploring opportunities to share data and evidence, and organising a site visit to the Chilterns in the Autumn to demonstrate our partnership working.

<u>**Engagement with the National Landscapes Association and other Protected Landscapes**</u>

16. We continue to work closely with the **National Landscapes Association** (NLA) and other National Landscapes on a range of areas. These relationships are hugely valuable and we appreciate the opportunities to share insight, experiences and information, and plan strategically with our colleagues across the country as the NLA team continues to grow in capacity and expertise. Activities include monthly online Lead Officer meetings, communities

of practice on specific areas such as planning, access and communications, and a new programme of Town Hall online events for all members of National Landscapes staff teams.

17. A specific example is the National Landscapes Association's initial reaction to the government's revised **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF), published on 17 August. The CCB's Planning Team contributed to the response, which can be viewed via LinkedIn here. The planning team is collaborating with the NLA and other National Landscapes to develop a more comprehensive briefing, which will be circulated to Board members and discussed by the new Planning Advisory Group (PAG) in October.

18. In summary, there is a continued and deeply concerning further shift, including by changing the understanding of sustainable development, towards favouring proposals for new development, even where these conflict with other national priorities. Our Planning Team's view is that the outcome for planning policy on Protected Landscapes (PLs) is mixed – as follows:

Good:
- New reference to the Protected Landscape Duties (e.g. s.85 of the CROW Act).
- New reference to PL Management Plans as evidence for development plans.
- New inclusion of chalk streams as examples of natural features that need special consideration.
- New requirements for protecting or improving watercourses.

Bad:
- Weight to be attributed to PLs in the planning balance reduced from 'great' to 'substantial' (the same as is applied to everything else).
- Removal of PLs having "the highest status of protection".
- Removal of wildlife and cultural heritage as important considerations in NLs (but retained for National Parks).
- 'Exceptional circumstances' considerations for major development proposals in PLs continue to be weakly defined as meeting need, the cost of alternatives and the capacity for mitigation.

Frankly bizarre:
- Proposals for development *within* settlements must take account of PL policy, but consideration of PLs for proposals *outside of* settlements is ambiguous, especially in relation to an apparent presumption in favour of developing land within 800m of a railway station.

19. In early July, 15 of the team, and Board member Jen Morgan, attended the **NLA's Annual Conference** at the University of East Anglia. This was an excellent opportunity to connect with colleagues, gather information and share our own insight, too. Our Head of Landscape, Kate Heppell, ran a workshop with Clare Downing, Climate Change Coordinator at the NLA, on tools for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, focussing on the R&D work that we commissioned on the impacts of climate change at a landscape scale in the Chilterns and other chalk landscapes. Ruth Staples-Rolfe and Janet Tuppen, Programme Manager and Project Support Officer, respectively, for the Mend the Gap programme also hosted a fringe event exploring monitoring and evaluation. Presentations and workshop material from the conference can be viewed here.

20. We are also liaising with the NLA on means by which Defra can more robustly support National Landscapes in making clear to local authorities their legal obligations to deliver statutory Management Plans and advocating the range of services that we can provide. This is in part due to concerns over the lack of engagement and financial support from some local authorities, the implications of the Local Government Reorganisation and the rapidly shifting political context following the May 2026 local elections.

21. We continue to collaborate with the **Cotswolds Conservation Board** on a range of matters. I meet online with Rebecca Waite, the CEO, at least once a month and also joined her and the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, Dame Fiona Reynolds, on a walk and talk in June on a Gloucestershire farm that is employing some very innovative regenerative practices. Shared areas of work include contributing insight to the OEP and Defra on the financial, legal, policy and governance challenges and opportunities of being a Conservation Board, planning for developing new Management Plans, strategic and operational planning issues, and Defra funding arrangements.

Engagement with partners

22. Close collaboration continues with Tom Beeston, Chief Executive at the **Chiltern Society**, particularly in advocating for the Chilterns National Landscape with MPs, local councils, and their elected members, and working on shared areas of work. I also brought together Tom and Em Adler, CEO at the **Surrey Hills Society** in July, which was a great opportunity to swap notes on areas of shared interest.

23. Specific meetings with other partners include: James Blake, CEO at the **YHA** and taking up the role of CEO at the **Yorkshire Dales National Park** in late September; Richard Benwell, CEO at **Wildlife and Countryside Link** to discuss their forthcoming campaign on Protected Landscapes; Martin Gallagher, CEO at the **Clare Foundation** - a charity that connects organisations and communities to create positive change in Buckinghamshire; and **UKELA** – the UK Environmental Law Association - to discuss mentoring schemes and other ways to provide experience and insight into the application of environmental law for undergraduates from under-represented backgrounds.

24. We have also supported key partners with funding bids focused on nature recovery, climate adaptation and community engagement. This includes supporting **Three Rivers District Council** with a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) funding application, due to be submitted this Autumn, which is seeking around £5 million and proposes to deliver major conservation and community engagement activity at Rickmansworth Aquadrome. This links well to one of the accessibility guides produced by the CCB through Defra's Access for All programme. We have also supported **Luton Borough Council's** vision for a River Lea linear park and their application to DEFRA to be part of its National River Walks Programme. We have also contributed staff time to supporting the Natural England-led **North Chilterns Partnership** with its Expression of Interest to the NLHF.

25. We continue to liaise with **HS2 Ltd** through the Chilterns Review Group. We appear to be close to securing an inflationary uplift to the £1m awarded to us earlier this year for the Mending the Misbourne project. HS2 Ltd and Buckinghamshire Council is still progressing our other request for an inflationary uplift to the remaining assurance funding, which has devalued due to the delays to the scheme. We also continue to chase the publication of minutes of the Review Group meetings dating back to January 2025 and ensure that remaining assurance funds are distributed in the most equitable and effective way.

26. Upcoming meetings and events include **Natural England** on future governance arrangements; Kathryn Brown, Executive Director of Science at the **UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology**; **Affinity Water** water security roundtable; **Wild Oxfordshire** nature recovery celebrations (Cllr Gavin McLauchan attending on our behalf); **Phab** celebration and awards reception at the House of Lords and **CPRE's** centenary celebrations at the House of Commons.

Nature Recovery Plan

27. Supporting the recently published Chilterns Management Plan, the Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan was published during this period and brings together the latest evidence on where nature recovery is most needed across the Chilterns. A shared framework to help

organisations align their work, identify opportunities to collaborate and focus effort where it can have the greatest impact, we would very much appreciate all Board members sharing the Plan with colleagues and other relevant contacts.

Staff changes

28. In mid-August, we said a fond farewell to our **Landowner and Farming Engagement Advisor, North Chiltern**s, Melinda Dresser. In her short time at the CCB, Melinda established herself as a very competent and popular member of staff. Melinda will be joining the Freshwater Habitats Trust and we hope to continue to work with her through collaborative projects in future.

29. Other staff changes include Laura Baker transitioning into the role of Finance **Administrator**, coinciding with our new **Office Administrator**, Louisa Merrett-Richardson, joining us in August. Eloise Small has also transitioned from Administration Officer to **Farming in Protected Landscapes and GIS Support Officer.**

30. On recruitment, a **Rivers Officer** was appointed this month and we are recruiting for a **Head of Programmes**. With thanks to Board members Cllr Louise Price and Nicola Thomas for their valuable contributions on the interview panel for Head of Programmes. More details on both roles will follow in due course.

Staff Wellbeing

31. One of the CCB's five key outcomes is to develop a resilient organisation, key to which is supporting the wellbeing of our staff. A number of measures are in place, with others being explored. Existing measures include: an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for all staff, provided by Westfield Health, our group healthcare provider; providing clear information to staff on how to access the elements of the EAP; organising training for a number of staff as Mental Health First Aiders; establishing a Wellbeing Group which meets every 6-8 weeks; ensuring robust health and wellbeing policies; developing a Wellbeing Plan and establishing a Wellbeing Lead for the organisation.

32. We are also progressing the team development work, initiated at the end of last year, by continuing to work with Future Nature, comprising facilitators and coaches Howard Davies and Richard Clarke, who both have a strong background in Protected Landscapes and understand us as an organisation very well. Next steps include whole-team workshops and Lumina Spark profiling for every member of staff. The programme represents a capital investment which will equip the team with the behavioural insight, collaborative tools and structured action-learning discipline required to translate our vision and strategic priorities into coherent, accountable and sustainable delivery, while building and strengthening leadership capability across the organisation.

Board Induction programme

33. Finally, please note that an induction/refresher session for all Board members is scheduled for 28th September. We are working on improving the programme in the longer term, with updated material and follow up sessions. In the meantime, two site visits for Board members and staff have been organised (7 October and 18 November), Baljit Dhillon will be facilitating a Board workshop session at the next Board meeting, and we have published a programme of online presentations from the staff team for Board members.

Recommendation:

1. **That the Board NOTES and PROVIDES FEEDBACK on the update.**