



Chilterns National Landscape

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CONSERVATION BOARD FOR
THE CHILTERNs AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
Held in The Jubilee Room, The Gateway Offices, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire HP19 8FF on Thursday 11th December 2025 at 10.00am.**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Louise Price (Chair)
Cllr Justine Fulford
Cllr Gavin McLauchlan
Cllr Philip Spicer
Cllr Martin Tett
Cllr Caroline Smith-Wright
Cllr Adrian England

Appointing Body

Three Rivers District Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Dacorum Borough Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Juliet Vickery
Cat Moncrieff
Simon Mortimer
Gemma Harper
Jennifer Morgan
Baljit Dhillon
Matthew Stanton

Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State
Secretary of State

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr John Harfield
Cllr John Griffin
Cllr Charles Hussey

Bedfordshire Parish Councils
Oxfordshire Parish Councils
Buckinghamshire Parish Council

CCB Staff

Dr Elaine King
Dr Matt Thomson

Dr Kate Heppell
Dr Victoria Thomson
Graham Hurst
Kathryn Foster
Neil Jackson
Gareth Clay
Allen Beechey
Dr Wendy Morrison
Eloise Small
Lorna Coldwell

Chief Executive Officer
Head of Strategy and Planning
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Head of Landscape
Planning Adviser (Policy)
Finance Officer (s151 Officer)
Senior Finance Manager
Conservation and Landscape Officer
Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer
Chilterns Chalk Streams Project Manager
Heritage & Archaeology Manager
Administration Officer
Clerk to the Board

Other

No members of the public were present.

25/26.14 Standing Items

14.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from:

Officers:

Andy Brock-Doyle – Head of Operations

Board Members:

Cllr Greg Smith, Buckinghamshire Council

Cllr Hector Sants*, Buckinghamshire Parish Councils

Cllr Sue Rowland*, Oxfordshire Parish Councils

Cllr James Norman*, South Oxfordshire District Council

*(Those * joined the meeting online)*

14.2 Introductions

Introductions were made by all, including those online.

14.3 Declarations of Interest in any of the agenda items

None declared.

14.4 Notice of Urgent Business

There was none, with all matters covered on the agenda.

14.5 Chair's Announcements

The Chair discussed the National Landscapes Association Chairs and Lead Officers event and said it was good to meet other Chairs and to discuss their experiences and hear more about the issues they face.

14.6 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25.09.25 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

14.7 Matters Arising

None.

14.8 Considerations of motions submitted by members

No motions submitted.

14.9 Public Question Time.

No public present.

25/26.15 Items for Decision

15.1 Board and Committee Meetings and Dates 2026

The meeting calendar for meetings in 2026 was proposed as:



Board Meeting

Thursday 11th December 2025

Planning Committee:

Thursday 22nd January, 10am Chinnor Offices

Thursday 30th April, 10am Chinnor Offices

Thursday 29th October, 10am Chinnor Offices

Executive Committee:

Thursday 26th February, Chinnor

Thursday 19th May, Chinnor

Thursday 1st September, Chinnor

Thursday 19th November, Chinnor

Board:

Thursday 26th March, Aylesbury

Thursday 25th June (including AGM)

Thursday 1st October (Strategy tbc)

Thursday 10th December

Matt Thomson, Deputy Monitoring Officer, advised that he is aware that setting dates for the following year in December is proving difficult with diary management, and the dates for 2027 will be agreed earlier, likely at the June AGM.

There have been issues recruiting for the Planning Committee for some time, resulting in quoracy issues. A paper will be brought to the March Board meeting outlining options for the future of the committee including converting to an advisory panel, which would decrease the administrative burdens on Officers needed to run effectively and also allow members to meet online. There are very clear procedures set out in legislation that must be met for a Committee, including the requirement for attendance in person to contribute to being quorate.

The Chair of the Planning Committee, Cllr Sue Rowland, commented that should the Committee become an advisory group or similar that increased communications between members and Officers would be needed to make any panel more effective. She also said that planning is one of the most important functions of the CCB and would be disappointed to lose the perceived status that comments from a committee gives, versus those from a panel. Cllr Tett agreed that planning will be the most important issue to face the Chilterns over the coming years, following government proposals.

It was noted that the CCB is not currently a statutory consultee on planning matters or Local Plans, only for nationally significant infrastructure projects. Currently the Planning Committee tends to retrospectively ratify any comments that have been submitted by Officers, as per the scheme of delegation agreed at the September Board meeting and in line with the objectives contained within the Management Plan. The advantages and disadvantages of any proposals will be examined when ideas are presented to the board in March.

Elaine King, the Chief Executive Officer, confirmed that planning is a priority for the team and there are no plans to underplay its importance, it is about finding the most efficient way to proceed. Juliet Vickery suggested some form of training for Board members to increase knowledge regarding planning for those who do not feel equipped in this area, which was agreed as a good idea and will be investigated further.

The Planning Inspectorate runs webinars that could be utilised. It was noted that planning expertise is not necessarily needed, rather a "common sense" approach, with Officers using their expertise to explain planning points. The Real Time System was rarely utilised by board members, and more Officer time was spent supporting its use. Now the



organisation is moving to SharePoint, it is hoped this will address the problems and Board members will have greater and easier access to planning documents.

Matthew Stanton offered to join the Planning Committee as an additional Secretary of State appointee.

Cllr Sants suggested a standing item be included on the Board agenda for planning to signal the importance of the matter and to allow time to be given to it by Board members.

1. **The Board APPROVED the dates for the Board meetings to be held in 2026**
2. **The Board APPROVED the dates for the Executive Committee meetings to be held in 2026**
3. **The Board INSTRUCTED Officers to explore dates for the 2027 meeting schedule**
4. **The Board OFFERED FEEDBACK as set out above and INSTRUCTED Officers to develop options for the Planning Committee, for Board approval in March 2026, and in the meantime APPROVED the Planning Committee dates for 2026.**

15.2 English Devolution/Local Government Reorganisation

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, had provided a detailed paper regarding the plans for local authorities to seek approval from central government to replace the current tiers of local government with unitary and strategic authorities.

All Local Authorities have now submitted their expressions of interest. There has been some agreement between Local Authorities and still some outcomes yet to be revealed as to which will merge or not into new unitary authorities. There are many potential outcomes, with varying implications. It is likely that the western end of the Chilterns National Landscape area will become a single unitary authority covering South Oxfordshire and one strategic authority over that. Buckinghamshire Council is already a unitary authority and also its own strategic authority. It is expected that the eastern side will be a much denser concentration of unitary and strategic authorities, retaining two in Bedfordshire and two or three in Hertfordshire (for authorities in both counties covering the Chilterns), which will result in an odd pattern across the Chilterns National Landscape.

Where the organisation will fit into the new distribution of functions is still unclear and there may be a governance issue surrounding number of Local Authority appointees and a possible impact on funding. Local Authority members are asked to provide whatever intelligence they have. Cllr McLauchlan advised it is a tricky situation; proposals were submitted at the end of November, but no response is expected for several months, and postponements may happen. His opinion is that until more is certain there is nothing to proceed with. Cllr Tett advised that following a change of personnel in central government since the plans were originally announced, ideas may alter further. The powers for both authorities are still vague, and in nine priority areas have been identified, none of which include the Chilterns. Simon Mortimer commented that there may well be implications for the governance of the Board, as the original 15 Local Authorities may possibly decrease to six, which would influence numbers of Local Authorities appointees versus Secretary of State appointees. The Board agreed that at this time there was little point spending too much Officer time until more information is available from central government.

The Chief Executive Officer, Elaine King, explained how the Local Government Reorganisation may link to governance work being explored by Defra in relation to

National Landscapes and National Parks. For example, Defra is exploring the general power of competence for National Landscapes/Conservation Boards. Other, non-Conservation Board National landscapes are following developments more closely since they are embedded in local authorities so a reorganisation is significant for them. Defra ministers have also said they want our statutory purposes to emphasise nature recovery. However, this risks damaging the current holistic nature of our purposes in relation to the natural beauty of the landscape, and already includes nature along with cultural heritage, archaeology, chalk streams, etc. To make nature "front and centre" indicates a lack of understanding of our existing purposes.

Gemma Harper offered that whilst the Board needs to focus on the day to day business, it should consider the future and the appetite for risk. Whilst the Board cannot influence many elements, it can influence others. Focus should be on adapting to pressures on the landscape.

Cllr Sants suggested to liaise closely with Defra and ask what their vision is for National Landscapes and National Parks. The relationship with Defra is already good at different levels and the organisation has a good opportunity to influence.

Cllr Tett asked for a list of the organisation's current statutory purposes, the importance of them, and how they may change in the future. The CEO advised that these would be circulated.

Cllr Spicer suggested setting out a timeline of work that the organisation has carried out, along with how the political structure has altered along the way and how, if at all, this has changed the Board's aspirations. This would enable people to see the milestones and achievements from over the years.

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, advised that there are plans for a follow up induction session for new members and a refresher programme for longer-standing members. This will include detail on our statutory purposes and will be extended to staff members.

The Chair commented that it was a productive discussion, and a complex area with many uncertainties, so information sharing will be important as the situation unfolds. All Local Authority members agreed to engage with senior members and feedback information of importance.

Cllr Adrian England arrived at 10.54

1. **The Board NOTED the updates provided by Officers**
2. **The Board GAVE FEEDBACK as above in relation to the devolution and local government reorganisation programmes, and ADVISED officers not to devote further resources engaging with local authorities' reorganisation programmes for at least two years**
3. **The Board INSTRUCTED Officers to continue to engage with Defra to discover where the organisation should be heading towards for the future**

15.3 Statutory Officers

Matt Thomson, Deputy Monitoring Officer, provided a paper with details of the three statutory officers the Chilterns National Landscape is required to have. This is similar to a Local Authority. The roles are the Head of Paid Services (Chief Executive Officer), which is not altering, the Monitoring Officer and the S151 Finance Officer. Both of the latter are proposed to be altered.



The current Monitoring Officer is Jenny Caprio, Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer at Buckinghamshire Council. The S151 Officer is Graham Hurst who is employed by the CCB and plans to retire at the end of March 2026. It is proposed to bring both roles in house and to ensure best practice by bringing both roles onto the Senior Leadership Team. It was proposed that Matt Thomson, currently Deputy Monitoring Officer to become the Monitoring Officer, and Kathryn Foster, the Senior Finance Manager, to become the S151 Officer. There were no objections. Thanks were given to both previous officers for their assistance and support.

- 1. The Board APPROVED re-appointing the statutory role of Monitoring Officer and Finance (section 151) Officer and INSTRUCTED the CEO to take the necessary actions for Board approval in March 2026**

15.4 Planning Statutory Consultee Consultation

A current Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) consultation aims to review and simplify the statutory consultee system. It provides an opportunity for the Chilterns Conservation Board to seek identification as a statutory consultee which it is not for planning applications and Local Plans. Statutory consultees benefit from a requirement on the decision maker to consult them on certain types of plans or proposals; in return there is a requirement on statutory consultees to give a 'substantive' response when consulted.

Members agreed that this is not an opportunity to miss: the CCB is tasked with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape: there are currently no statutory consultees for this aspect of the environmental impact of development proposals; Natural England is a statutory consultee only for impacts on SSSIs and agriculture, but decision-makers expect them to respond on landscape matters too. Being a statutory consultee on planning applications would give the CCB ability to fulfil its statutory purposes. Board members expressed surprise that the CCB is not already a statutory consultee on all matters and gave full support to efforts to strengthen our influence

Matthew Stanton suggested that if not granted statutory consultee status, the team could instead work with existing statutory consultees to ensure that landscape and natural beauty matters are included in their responses. Any financial implications of the additional staff capacity required would need to be assessed, although there is a possibility that fees could be reclaimed.

The Head of Strategy and Planning requested that recommendation (b) be disregarded since statutory consultee roles should not be duplicated between organisations, and CCB were better placed to respond on landscape matters than NE.

- 1. The Board GAVE FEEDBACK as noted above and ADVISED Officers of its view with regards to principles and the nature of a consultation response, including with regard to other National Landscapes**
- 2. The Board ADVISED Officers to seek the identification of the Chilterns Conservation Board as a statutory consultee**
- 3. The Board ADVISED formalising the Chilterns Conservation Board's status in development plan preparation by seeking specific consultation body status and development plan prescribed body status**

Philip Spicer left the meeting at 12.00



15.5 Deer Management in the Chilterns

Neil Jackson, Conservation and Landscape Officer, advised the board that deer numbers are continuing to grow at a rapid rate, and this is impacting on the Chilterns National Landscape. The Nature Recovery Plan highlights the importance of sustainable deer management to ensure practical nature recovery. The Chilterns has a high number of wooded areas, many of which have no substantial ground flora, as it is all eaten by deer. Excessive deer numbers also have a detrimental effect on farmers' crops and can be responsible for road traffic accidents.

Other National Landscapes and the National Landscape Association are working on this issue and want to encourage decision makers to recognise the seriousness of this issue, and particularly to help with funding.

The proposed strategy will be evidence-led and include monitoring and evidence gathering to underpin decision-making. This will be made explicit.

The importance of good communications to educate the public was noted, and the Communications team is creating new webpages to explain our approach to highlight the importance of sustainable management and the need for reducing numbers. It was suggested that this work includes highlighting the health benefits of venison and the importance supporting local food supply chains.

1. The Board APPROVED the proposal to support improved deer management in the Chilterns National Landscape

Thanks were given to Allen Beechey and Neil Jackson who are both, after many years of service, leaving the CCB in December 2025. Their achievements and impact on the organisation are enormous, speeches as tribute were made by Cllrs Hussey and Fulford. The Chief Executive Officer, Elaine King presented them each with a gift from the Board.

Cllr Martin Tett left the meeting at 12.25

Cllr Adrian England left the meeting

A presentation was given by Gareth Clay, Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer:
An Update on the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FiPL) in the Chilterns National Landscape

The Chair, Cllr Price commented it was good to hear about the work being carried out on the ground, and the Chief Executive Officer, Elaine King advised that the FiPL Officer and team have been great at highlighting the wide range of projects funded through the programme, including reporting to Defra on our achievements and the value of the funding. Government ministers recognise the importance of the programme, and it is hoped that more funding will be allocated.

Matthew Stanton left the meeting at 13.03.

25/26.16 Items for Noting/Information

None.

25/26.17 Minutes and Recommendations of Committees



Board Meeting

Thursday 11th December 2025

17.1 Executive Committee Draft minutes (13.11.25)

1. The Board NOTED the draft Committee minutes

17.2 Planning Committee Draft Minutes (23.10.25)

1. The Board NOTED the draft Committee minutes

25/26.18 Any Urgent Business

None.

25/26.19 Next Meeting

The next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 26th March 2026, venue to be confirmed.

Future meeting dates for 2026:

Planning Committee Meetings	Executive Committee Meetings	Board Meetings
Thursday 22 nd January, 10am Chinnor Offices	Thursday 26 th February, 10am Chinnor	Thursday 26 th March, 10am Gateway Offices, Aylesbury
Thursday 30 th April, 10am Chinnor Offices	Thursday 19 th May, 10am Chinnor	Thursday 25 th June (including AGM)
	Thursday 1 st September, 10am Chinnor	Thursday 1 st October (Strategy tbc)
Thursday 29 th October, 10am Chinnor Offices	Thursday 19 th November, 10am Chinnor	Thursday 10 th December

The meeting was closed at 13.05.

The Chair.....



Date..... 26th March 2026.