



Chilterns National Landscape

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CONSERVATION BOARD FOR
THE CHILTERN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
Held in Room A, The Hive, Arnison Avenue, High Wycombe HP13 6DD
commencing at 10.10am**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Louise Price (Chair)
Cllr Justine Fulford
Cllr Gavin McLauchlan
Cllr Philip Spicer
Cllr Greg Smith

Appointing Body

Three Rivers District Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Buckinghamshire Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Juliet Vickery
Simon Mortimer
Jennifer Morgan
Baljit Dhillon

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

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr John Harfield
Cllr John Griffin
Cllr Sue Rowland

Bedfordshire Parish Councils
Oxfordshire Parish Councils
Oxfordshire Parish Councils

CCB Staff

Dr Elaine King
Dr Matt Thomson

Dr Kate Heppell
Annette Weiss
Graham Hurst
Kathryn Foster
Andy Brock-Doyle
Nick Marriner
Dr Wendy Morrison
Ruth Staples-Rolfe
Eloise Small
Lorna Coldwell

Chief Executive Officer
Head of Strategy and Planning;
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Head of Landscape
Head of Engagement and Partnerships
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Senior Finance Manager
Head of Operations
Nature Recovery Manager
Heritage and Archaeology Manager
Mend the Gap Programme Manager
Administration Officer
Clerk to the Board

Other

Tom Beeston

The Chiltern Society

No members of the public were present.

25/26.20 Standing Items

20.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from:

Officers:

None

Board Members:

Cllr James Norman*, South Oxfordshire District Council

Cllr Adrian England*, Dacorum Borough Council

Cllr Charles Hussey, Buckinghamshire Parish Councils

Cllr Hector Sants, Buckinghamshire Parish Councils

Matthew Stanton, Secretary of State

Cat Moncrieff, Secretary of State

Gemma Harper, Secretary of State

Cllr Caroline Smith-Wright, Hertfordshire County Council

Val Bryant, North Hertfordshire Council

Nicola Thomas, Secretary of State

*(Those marked * listened in on the meeting online)*

20.2 Introductions

Introductions were unnecessary, with all attendees having met previously.

20.3 Declarations of Interest in any of the agenda items

None declared.

20.4 Notice of Urgent Business

Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer, advised that she would raise a matter regarding the Management Plan at the end of the meeting.

20.5 Chair's Announcements

The Chair expressed her thanks to two valued members of the team that are leaving. Graham Hurst, the S151 Officer is retiring following many years of service, and Dr Wendy Morrison, Heritage and Archaeology Manager is forming a community interest company and will remain a partner on some of the CCB's projects. Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer gave her thanks to both for their efforts and their many accomplishments during their time at the Chilterns National Landscape. They were both presented with a token of appreciation.

20.6 Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11.12.25 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

20.7 Matters Arising

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, advised that Officers had taken guidance from Board members at the December meeting not to spend time engaging with the Local Government Reorganisation for now. However, central government has announced a development corporation for the Greater Oxford area, similar to the situation in Cambridge,



and will monitor the situation for any impacts this may have on the National Landscape. Cllr McLauchlan kindly offered to obtain further information and share it with Officers.

20.8 Considerations of motions submitted by members

No motions submitted.

20.9 Public Question Time

No public present.

25/26.21 Items for Decision

21.1 2026/27 Budget

Kathryn Foster, Senior Finance Officer, had provided a comprehensive paper detailing the proposed budget envelope for financial year 2026/27 for approval. The budget envelope was presented to the Executive Committee at the February meeting, which recommended approval. As a budget envelope, it is a high level budget and detail will be refined in the coming months alongside the business planning process.

There is a forecasted deficit for the financial year 2026/27 of £58k, and the forecasted deficit for the current financial year 2025/26 is £66k against a budgeted deficit of £118k. Savings have been made possible by, amongst other things, increased interest from savings accounts, and delayed staff and consultancy costs. More staff costs have been recovered from capital (CDEL) funds. When aggregated over previous years, this represents a £14k deficit. Additional revenue (RDEL) funds were provided by Defra in financial year 2024/25, giving a surplus which is now being used to offset current deficits. Now that Defra has confirmed both core revenue and capital funding for the year, a more concrete budget can be drawn together along with indicative figures for the following two years.

We may receive a further uplift of funding from Defra but this has not been confirmed. Some uncertainty remains and the Senior Finance Officer expects to take a more detailed budget to the Executive Committee meeting in May and then the Board meeting in June. Lots of work has been carried out with Local Authorities to secure their full contributions. Buckinghamshire Council has advised it will be reducing its contribution and Central Bedfordshire Council continues to not respond to attempts to contact them. Luton Council has increased its contribution for 26/27. All other LAs continue to pay their requested share.

The triennial review of Buckinghamshire Council's pension scheme found it is in surplus, so employer contributions will be reduced for the next three years which will contribute to savings in staff core costs. Indicative funding from Defra for financial years 2027/2028 and 2028/29 project significant deficits but this is a worst case scenario and Officers will seek to ensure a deficit of below £50k each year. Defra funding tends to be advised close to the start of a new financial year, and is a flat cash settlement, highlighting the importance of the new funding strategy.

The potential impact of the current global situation has been accounted for but remains an ongoing situation that will be monitored for impacts on costs, such as energy and fuel prices. Contingencies have been put in place where possible. There is forecasted an



increase in governance costs for Board members allowances, which historically have not all been claimed but will be budgeted for going forward.

Simon Mortimer asked if the Board is comfortable to approve a budget with an accumulating deficit over several years and queried the level of reserves held to know if they would be able to meet the deficit. The Senior Finance Officer advised that there are more than £600k reserves, of which just over half are ringfenced for statutory purposes such as redundancies should the organisation be forced to wind down. Whilst the level of deficit is not one that Officers would want to tolerate, the level of reserves do give comfort. Officers are confident that the projected deficit will reduce over the course of the next two years, and plans are in place to secure income going forward.

Tom Beeston, Chief Officer at the Chiltern Society, offered to write to Local Authorities to stress the importance of the Chilterns National Landscape and the savings they make for LAs carrying out statutory duties on their behalf, which was welcomed by the Chief Executive Officer.

1. **The Board APPROVED the budget envelope for 26/27**
2. **The Board APPROVED the 3% pay increase for all staff effective 1st April 2026**
3. **The Board NOTED the initial projections for 27/28 onwards subject to concerns detailed above**

21.2 Appointment of Statutory Officers

Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer, had provided a paper that was taken as read. Following the retirement of the S151 Officer Graham Hurst, and Buckinghamshire Council employee Jenny Caprio happy to relinquish the role of Monitoring Officer, replacements are needed. Senior Finance Officer, Kathryn Foster, is proposed as S151 Officer and current Deputy Monitoring Officer, Matt Thomson, as Monitoring Officer.

Cllr Rowland queried if, as the Head of Strategy and Planning, Matt Thomson has capacity to take on the role without being overwhelmed. It was confirmed that he is currently carrying out the work, and the appointment of an additional Planning Adviser to the planning team in September last year has created more capacity. It was confirmed that the legalities of an in-house Monitoring Officer have been explored, and whilst there is the potential for a conflict of interest this is standard practice and procedures are in place to ensure transparency, namely a direct line to the Chair is necessary.

1. **The Board APPROVED the appointment of Kathryn Foster, the Senior Finance Officer, as Finance (S151) Officer**
2. **The Board APPROVED the appointment of Matt Thomson, the Head of Strategy and Planning (and current Deputy Monitoring Officer), as the Monitoring Officer**

21.3 Future of Planning Committee

The Chair advised that, following the paper circulated by Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, no decision would be taken at this meeting regarding the future of the Planning Committee. Members were invited to share their views for consideration by the Committee at its meeting in April, with a final proposal to be brought to the June Board meeting. Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, reiterated the



importance of planning to the Chilterns National Landscape. He explained that the proposal to move to a panel was intended to formalise existing practice, rather than to change how the Board operates in relation to planning. As the Board has no statutory planning responsibilities, it does not make formal decisions. The Planning Committee therefore operates largely in an advisory capacity, with actions taken by Officers confirmed retrospectively. He noted that there have been ongoing challenges with quoracy and the statutory requirement for in-person meetings. Officers consider that removing these obligations would provide a more efficient and effective approach, as well as reducing the administrative burden associated with servicing a formal committee.

It was acknowledged that enhanced communication would be required and that this is already in place through the introduction in January of a monthly Planning Update circulated to Board members and the staff team. A standing Planning Item is also now included on Board agendas to ensure that all members are kept fully informed of planning matters. Sue Rowland, Chair of the Planning Committee, emphasised that any changes should deliver clear and tangible benefits, ensure that the planning function is carried out to the highest standard, and strengthen the organisation's responses to planning applications, Local Plan consultations, and related matters.

- 1. The Board DISCUSSED the options for the Planning Committee as detailed above, which will be taken into consideration by the Committee and a further recommendation to be made at the June Board meeting**

Philip Spicer left the meeting at 11.33.

Presentation:

Working with Farmers in the Chilterns National Landscape

Dr Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape

Nick Marriner Nature Recovery Manager

An informative presentation was made to explain the work being carried out by the staff team with regards to Farmer Clusters throughout the Chilterns. This work forms part of efforts to support wildlife and ecosystems on farmland, and provide support for farmers.

25/26.22 Items for Noting/Information

22.1 Planning Function Report

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, provided an update to the Board on the key recent work carried out by the Planning team. Officers are seeing the benefits of appointing an additional Planning Adviser, Victoria Thomson, in September 2025. The team is achieving more and is very busy, including responding to various consultations, such as proposed government reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and a raft of Local Authority draft Local Plans. Monthly planning updates are now being circulated to a wider audience, and Board members were invited to provide feedback on items they would like to see in updates and reports to the Board.

Cllr Greg Smith asked how Buckinghamshire Council had not appropriately considered the Chilterns National Landscape in its draft Local Plan. Matt Thomson advised that they, along with other Local Authorities, had not approached the CCB in the early stages of the draft plans; which is one of the requirements for a LA in the s85 Protected



Landscapes duty. It has been mentioned to remind LAs that they are not meeting the s85 duty by not consulting early.

Jennifer Morgan gave thanks for the planning update as it acted as a reminder that as a resident her voice counts and she was able to make comments to the LA.

1. The Board NOTED the paper and PROVIDED FEEDBACK as noted above

22.2 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The EDI Advisory Group has been revitalised under its new co-Chairs, Baljit Dhillon and Juliet Vickery. The Group is supporting the organisation's EDI programme and helping to embed the EDI Ambition Statement across all activities, including by defining EDI objectives and demonstrating impact through the emerging 2026-30 Business Plan. The co-Chairs noted the breadth of work already under way and the opportunities ahead.

Inclusion is not simply about access; it also unlocks diverse perspectives, knowledge and creativity that can strengthen collective stewardship of the landscape. Communities and cultures bring varied approaches to caring for the environment, and fostering stronger connections enables these shared ideas to benefit the Chilterns.

The Accessibility Hub has recently been launched on the website, and Board members were encouraged to promote it across their networks.

1. The Board NOTED the update

22.3 Statutory Purposes, Duties, Powers and Functions

Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy and Planning, provided a paper detailing the Chilterns National Landscape's current statutory purposes, the importance of the purposes and how they may change in the future. He also outlined the organisation's duties, powers and functions and how they relate to its purposes. Much of this detail is included in the Constitution that was circulated in September 2025 and has been provided for information purposes for Board members.

1. The Board NOTED the update

25/26.23 Minutes and Recommendations of Committees

23.1 Executive Committee Draft minutes (26.02.26)

It was noted that an amendment is needed to minute 7.2, which the Clerk to the Board will action.

1. The Board NOTED the draft Committee minutes

23.2 Planning Committee Draft Minutes (22.01.26)

1. The Board NOTED the draft Committee minutes

25/26.24 Any Urgent Business

Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer, advised that Natural England has formally confirmed that the Management Plan meets the necessary requirements. It outlined five



specific areas where the Plan reflects good practice, comprising: a clear articulation of the legislative framework and statutory purposes; strong communication of the Chilterns' Special Qualities; strong embedding of the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOFs); demonstrating cross-boundary coordination with the four Local Nature Recovery Strategies; and a robust evidence base. She gave credit to Matt Thomson for coordinating the team in developing the new Plan. A report will be tabled for the June Board meeting to include lessons learned from the process.

Natural England also identified outstanding elements (which they know are in progress): a Delivery Plan and a Climate Change Adaption Plan. Kate Heppell will be presenting on the latter at the June Board meeting.

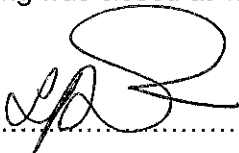
25/26.25 Next Meeting

The next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 25th June 2026, 10am St Leonards Parish Hall, Jenkins Lane, St Leonards, Tring HP23 6NW.

Future meeting dates for 2026:

Planning Committee Meetings	Executive Committee Meetings	Board Meetings
Thursday 30 th April, 10am Chinnor Offices	Thursday 19 th May, 10am Chinnor	Thursday 25 th June, 10am St Leonards Parish Hall, Jenkins Lane, St Leonards, Tring HP23 6NW including AGM
	Thursday 1 st September, 10am Chinnor	Thursday 1 st October Strategy session. (The Gateway, Buckinghamshire Council Offices, Aylesbury)
Thursday 29 th October, 10am Chinnor Offices	Thursday 19 th November, 10am Chinnor	Thursday 10 th December (The Gateway, Buckinghamshire Council Offices, Aylesbury)

The meeting was closed at 12.52.

The Chair 

Date 