

**MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE BOARD -**

**HELD AT EDUCATION ROOM, GREYSTONES FARM, GREYSTONES LANE, BOURTON-ON-THE-
WATER, GLOS. GL54 2EN**

TUESDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2023, 10:00am

Present

Brendan McCarthy (Chair)
Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)
Phil Chapman
Sue Crawford

Andy Graham
Graham Hopkins
Cate Le Grice-Mack
Ben Stokes

Also in Attendance

Andy Parsons (AP)
Magda Glanowska (MG)
Mark Connelly (MC)
Scott Brown (SB)
John Mills (JM)

Alana Hopkins (AH)
James Webb (JW)
Rebecca Jones (RJ)
Simon Smith (SS)
Amanda Davis (AD), observing

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies – apologies were received from Paul Crossley and Martin Mitchell.
- Introductions and announcements – The Chair welcomed new Executive Committee members Sue Crawford, Ben Stokes (and Martin Mitchell in his absence). A welcome was also extended to Amanda Davis who attended to observe, in her role as the local Parish Member.
- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 23 MAY 2023

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 23 May 2023 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising – all actions arising were completed.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 27 JUNE 2023

- The Executive Committee noted the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 27 June 2023.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The CEO gave a verbal update on key activity since the previous meeting:

Board Members

- Juliet Layton (Cotswold DC) and Emma Sims (Wychavon DC) have joined the Board since the last Exec meeting in May.
- The Secretary of State (SoS) didn't appoint any Members in this year's recruitment round; therefore the two vacancies will roll over to 2024. SoS Board Members whose term ends in 2024 are:

- Isabel Ross – first term
- Jane Hull – first term
- Nick Bumford – second term
- Cate Le Grice Mack – second term
- David Powell and Margaret Reid have joined the Board as ‘Co-opted’ Members.

Team Members

- There have been no starters or leavers in the period.
- The Support Services Review was completed, but due to a change of circumstances for one employee there are some final amendments to be ironed out.
- We are currently recruiting for a Management Accountant, deadline for applications is 2 October, with interviews taking place on the 9th.
- Olivia Blackwell will be joining the team next month as a Farming in Protected Landscapes Farm Engagement Officer.
- Simon Smith is now retained as an expert advisor for the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership as it develops the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- The Moreton Show was another success, it was a whole team effort with Alana Hopkins co-ordinating the planning and delivery.

National updates

- Defra has started a process to pull together a robust business case in preparation for the next Comprehensive Spending Review in 2024 or 2025. The three key principles:
 - ✓ Ensure operational costs are met
 - ✓ Support and incentivise the delivery of government objectives – Nature / Climate / People / Place
 - ✓ Be evidence based and equitable

We should anticipate a one-year roll-over grant award next year.

- A recent Ministerial Statement (‘package of measures’) – announced that there would be new legislation in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill to enhance management plans and placing a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery.
- The national rebrand to National Landscapes will be launched in November. All AONBs are now onboard.
- The NAAONB Conference in Bath was very successful, with record attendance. Thanks to Magda, John, Alana, Jennifer, Rowan, Lorna and Brendan for attending. Thanks also to Simon, Mark, Nicole, Becky and Mike for organising field trips and walks. The theme was *Invested and Investing In Our Landscapes*.
- Following the appointment of the Protected Landscapes Partnership Manager, there are currently a number of Partnership roles being recruited:
 - Equity Diversity and Inclusion Lead (hosted by Natural England)
 - Nature Recovery Lead (hosted by Natural England)
 - Big Chalk Programme Lead (hosted by the NAAONB)
 - Evidence Co-ordinators x2 (hosted by Natural England)

- Comments – no comments.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the update.
- Actions Arising – keep all Board Members informed as the National Landscapes brand launch happens.

5. OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Head of Finance (HoF) gave a thorough summary of the current financial position, covering Q1. There are no concerns and the first reforecast of the year shows an improved position over budget. Q2 financials and the second reforecast will be the next significant tasks. The external audit is almost finished.

The CEO then updated Members on the newly updated Key Performance Indicators 2023/24 and the Business Plan Framework 2023-26 (progress report).

- Comments – the Chair queried what will happen once FiPL has concluded. This prompted a full discussion about future funding opportunities, options, and how funding restrictions affect our day-to-day work. There was much discussion around the details, uncertainties, and lessons being learned through exploring National Highways Designated Funds. GH suggested that given the uncertainties explored during the discussion, an information paper would be useful for the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) project, which detailed our commitments and principles relating to funding of this nature. The suggestion was that the paper would be drafted for the next Executive Meeting in January, with a view to then presenting the project to the full Board in February 2024. AD queried auditing arrangements, and whether they would need to be different for this programme as it is over 30 years. The CEO confirmed that adequate auditing would be in place and this will be discussed by the Finance and Governance Committee. GH asked how we would measure success achieved by this funding. SS confirmed that the Defra Metric 2 for BNG assessment was being used as a guide for how we measure this work. RC asserted that this is a great opportunity to lead by example. There followed a discussion around whether or not the KPI for engagement with 16-25 year olds remains too high. JW asserted that whilst the target appears out of reach, the quality of the engagement we do achieve is of a very high standard (quality not quantity). All present agreed to keep an eye on the target, and consider adjusting next year if necessary. The Chair summarised by saying overall, the organisation is doing well, and is continuing to grow and develop under the leadership of the CEO. He acknowledged that money can come and go in the form of funding, and that we must pay attention to this – as without roles within the team which are project funded, we could shrink to a core team of around 9–10 employees. He also acknowledged the complexity of 30 year agreements relating to the BNG funding.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – draft an information paper about the BNG Designated Funds project for the next Executive Committee meeting.

6. FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES (FiPL)

The FiPL team gave an update on the current programme status and a look ahead to what's coming up. MC and SB covered the extension of the programme, the increase in funding, the recruitment of a new team member (Olivia Blackwell), the number of projects supported, and an overview of the pipeline (which he described as strong, with a steady flow of enquiries).

- Comments – AG asked about capacity and delivery planning. MC explained that the funding amounts are proportional to the Protected Landscapes they are allocated to. As such, our allocated amount in the Cotswolds allows us to constantly monitor the

staffing resource required to distribute the funding effectively. BS explained that in his Ward, he feels that not enough Councillors are aware of FiPL, and therefore aren't promoting it enough to local residents/farmers. He has talked about FiPL to the council and there is now a working group tasked with getting to know resident farmers. He feels that there's an open door, and that local authorities have a key role to play connecting the FiPL delivery team with farmers and landowners. The Chair stated that he felt that the FiPL approval panel is getting into its stride and finding a confidence with the approval process. He acknowledged two worries: that not enough farmers are aware of the programme, and that the funding may not be distributed in time (before 31 March 2025). CM raised a question over how we diversify programme applicants, and how to make sure all potential applicants are aware of the programme. SB responded by reassuring the Committee that the range of applicants and projects is wide. MC contributed by saying that the minimum grant of £2,500 has been removed – so that smaller family farms, who may only need a small amount of funding may still apply. SB noted that alongside the move to attract smaller farms, Defra is keen to support ambitious and innovative projects. GH asked what success would look like in 2025. He suggested making more of the supported projects summary list. SC seconded this by asking how we educate more people about innovative projects. The Chair said he felt the annual farming forum presents an excellent opportunity to promote the programme to the right audience, and that it offered a good template for other similar events. SB confirmed that the increased budget will allow for communications and legacy work. GH asked if we have a database. MC responded by saying that we have a database of applicants and enquirers (around 500 people), but not of all c.1,600 commercial holdings in the Cotswolds. The application to access the Rural Land Registry may assist with this – and allow for accurate targeting. SC suggested that we ought not to lose the data acquired through the FiPL programme, especially on the innovative projects, and the sizes and details of farms. SS added that there would be potential to map this kind of data against nature recovery work. MC issued a cautionary warning that there must be a balance between attracting a large volume of enquiries and the resource to process them. BS suggested the idea of using an external agency to cold call and build a database of the 1,600 commercial holdings. AP reminded the Committee that FiPL is not the only programme farmers are being approached with at the moment, and that they are also receiving contact from various other organisations – we must be aware that they may feel inundated.

- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – provide a detailed update at the next meeting on grants awarded, strength of pipeline and confidence in spending the full allocation before programme end in March 2025.

7. CLIMATE ACTION

The CEO reminded the Committee of recent activities, including the role of the working group and the appointment of 3Keel. Invitations have been sent out for the first three (in person) workshops. Discussions are underway to recruit a new Climate Action Lead for 2024/25. Ben Dent was acknowledged for his significant input on this work over the past few months.

- Comments – none.

- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

8. PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

JM gave an update on the recent activities, which include two meetings of the working group since the last Exec Committee meeting, and the publication of two new position statements. One of those was the Renewable Energy Position Statement, which at the June 2023 Board meeting was agreed should be regularly reviewed. A change may already need to be made, prompted by the National Planning Policy Framework, and JM will look at how best to implement these. Two new position statements are now being worked on: Planning and Biodiversity, and Minerals and Waste. JM also updated the group on Statutory Consultee status, and what that would entail – especially in terms of robust monitoring. JM is also working with colleagues from other AONBs to develop feedback on the proposed changes to rules regarding Permitted Development Rights, he stated he is not currently in favour of the proposals.

- Comments – JM went on to explain what proportion of planning decisions are made in line with recommendations made by CNL. He explained that often further information is requested from planners, but not always provided. When it is received, advice offered by the CNL Board is often taken to some extent. GH commented that knowing how decisions are reached has great value, and allows us more knowledge to work within the system. CLGM asked if there are any national assessments of housing numbers vs. housing price/affordability, availability, design, etc. JM replied that these issues are frequently discussed. The Chair asked if consideration is being made to the future Chair of the working group, to ensure it continues working efficiently and effectively. JM responded by saying that the current chair (Liz Hodges) is open to passing on the baton, and that he particularly values the input provided by the working group. AD mentioned that she felt CNL's planning advice and support is highly valued in the community with respect to planning issues. BS queried the relationship between the NPPF and climate change, e.g. whether or not there's support for renewable energy schemes in communities. He mentioned that local communities can feel frustrated by local authority rules around renewables and planning. JM responded by explaining that Neighbourhood Development Plans can now identify renewable energy sites, and that the CNL planning team must stay aware of this as it could increase the number of potential sites for renewable energy.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report and agreed that the statutory consultee KPI remains relevant.
- Actions Arising – none.

9. PROJECTS AND FUNDRAISING

JW presented an overview of the paper, including a very positive meeting at Westonbirt Arboretum's Community Shelter, which offered the opportunity to show off a project part funded by Caring for the Cotswolds, and an opportunity for the Working Group to meet Nina Stubbington. Nina, whose role is funded by New to Nature, is proving to be a highly valued member of the team. She is visible, helpful, enthusiastic, and has recently been leading on an exciting social media competition to help the Cotswold Way

Association grow their following. The Everyone's Evenlode team have been working since 2021, and have made a great impression through their professionalism, maturity as a team, proactive approach, and consistent over-delivering. They are also working well with the Evenlode Catchment Partnership. The team was originally funded until the end of March 2025, but more funding has been leveraged from ECP and Thames Water, to fund the team until the end of July 2025 – ensuring there is provision until the end of the academic year. 2025 will be the beginning of the next five year funding cycle for water companies, so will present an opportunity to apply to extend this type of work. This will coincide with Thames Water rolling out their Smarter Water Catchment initiative across 14 catchments. The update on Rural Skills included mention of the recent video produced to showcase the work. Caring for the Cotswolds update reminded everyone that applications are open until the end of September. Applications so far have been of good quality. External funding – JW gave a quick overview of the current external funding being sought, and what they would fund, including the Climate Action Lead role, a Learning Officer role, and exploring ways to extend Nina's contract.

- Comments – CLGM asked if we could do more around the Evenlode catchment re: development. JW responded by saying that isn't our remit for this project. GH asked about the risk assessment around CSR budgets and the increased scrutiny on water companies and associated fines, etc. JW responded by saying that we are aware of these risks, and they are being carefully monitored. SC asked for more detail on why the recent funding application was declined from heritage Lottery. JW replied by saying very little detail is given but the funding pot was very over-subscribed. The positive to come out of the process was the closer working relationship with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – produce a summary to highlight % of funding applications that are successful. This can be completed annually.

10. WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

JW/RJ offered an update on the working group. As the group is very new, there is little to report on at this point. There is a meeting planned for next week, which will mean the next update to the Committee will provide more detail.

- Comments – BS said he was excited by the Cotswolds Community Network, which links voluntary organisations online fortnightly. SC commented that the structure of 'operational, tactical, strategic' should be built in to all working group reports.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – Working Group leads to use the 'operational, tactical, strategic' format for future Executive Committee reports.

11. TRAILS, ACCESS AND VOLUNTEERING

RJ gave an update on key activity and next steps, including around Cotswold Trails and Access Partnership (CTAP). RJ reported that additional funding is probably available from Natural England, for capital improvements to the Trail. RJ has met recently with National Trails UK (NTUK), a newly formed charity. RJ is supporting NTUK to plan a conference in May 2024, based in Cheltenham and targeted at potential investors and advocates of the National Trails. RJ updated the Committee about the Removing Barriers funding. We

successfully passed the audit of the £234k distributed to local projects. The expectation is for a further £254k to arrive in April 2024. RJ is planning an online meeting to encourage partners to promote the renewed funds to potential applicants. The access element of Bathscape is drawing to its natural conclusion in August 2023. Nicole Daw is working on some extra video trail content, and a thank you event is being planned in Bath for all those who have contributed to the access element of the project. Board Members local to Bath will be invited to the event. The annual Cotswold Voluntary Wardens conference was held in June, and was very successful, with around 130 attendees. The event is a very useful event to connect with local organisations. Volunteer numbers continue to increase, and membership is back up to pre-covid levels.

- Comments – The Chair offered congratulations on a project well delivered for Bathscape. BS commented how great it was to chat to the voluntary wardens at the Marshfield summer fete.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

12. MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023-25 and 2025-30

SS offered an update on the rates of endorsement by local authorities of the 2023-25 Management Plan. He encouraged all local authority Board Members to promote the Plan. The graphic design work on a simplified version of the Plan will begin soon. The early planning stages of the Management Plan 2025-30 are underway, ahead of fully developing the Plan throughout 2024. It is anticipated that the Climate Action workshops will offer good opportunities to develop the 2025-30 Plan. There is an awareness that key stakeholders may experience ‘consultation fatigue’ with other important documents shared by other, similar organisations. The ‘State of the Cotswolds’ report remains on the task list.

- Comments – The Chair offered congratulations on the completion of the current Management Plan and its endorsement.
- Decision – the Executive Committee noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none.

13. FORWARD PLANNING

- The agenda for the Board meeting on 17 October 2023 was noted, with a change to the presentations explained by the CEO.

14. OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Tuesday 23 January 2024, 10:00am-1:00pm at Summerfield Room, Robinswood Hill Country Park, Reservoir Road, Gloucester, GL4 6SX

The Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed at 1:05pm.

Chair