

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Cotswolds Conservation Board



www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

Introduction from Martin Lane, Director

The Cotswolds Conservation Board was set up ten years ago to look after the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – one of England’s finest landscapes. A decade on and we now have the opportunity to review just how far we have come and how much we have been able to achieve with our many partners across the region.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Martin Lane".

Martin Lane, Director.

Establishing a Conservation Board in 2004 was a momentous change in the management of protected landscapes. With members of the Board drawn from across the AONB, the interests of the landscape and its communities are represented by a strong, cohesive, well-informed and independent voice. I believe that the AONB is a better place as a result of this.

Through this celebratory brochure we look back over our past achievements. We also need to pause and look forward. The mix of expertise, knowledge, skills and commitment from Board members, staff, volunteers and partner organisations offers a bright future in challenging times for this very special landscape.

Under the Chairmanship of Niel Curwen and Jeff West the Board has delivered a range of innovative projects, secured an AONB scale approach to initiatives, developed a strong evidence base, raised awareness of the economic worth and significance of the AONB and won respect for its opinion and advice – always working for the best interests of the AONB and its communities.



Niel Curwen
Chairman 2004-2009.



Jeff West
Chairman 2009-2014.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board story

On 14th December 2004, the Cotswolds Conservation Board, along with the Chilterns Conservation Board, was launched at a joint event at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire.

The then Minister for Nature Conservation, Ben Bradshaw commented: *“The creation of the Cotswolds and Chilterns Conservation Boards has been achieved through a combination of hard work and commitment by all involved. I believe that these Boards, the first of their kind, will herald a new era in how large AONBs are more effectively managed. With continued commitment and enthusiasm the success of the Boards will be reflected in the care, conservation and protection of these two special areas.”*

The catalyst for the creation of conservation boards was the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. This paved the way for a new type of organisation to care for large Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; previously, the area had been managed by the Cotswolds AONB Partnership. With the benefit of having a new organisation in place, a number of significant achievements and successful initiatives have taken place, as outlined in the subsequent pages.



The Cotswolds and Chilterns Conservation Boards are launched in 2004 at Blenheim Palace.

The role of the Cotswolds Conservation Board is to not only conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB, but also to increase understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities. In so doing it seeks to foster the social and economic well-being of the people living in the AONB. In a sense the Board is the custodian of the countryside, ensuring that future generations have the same opportunities to enjoy this very special place as people do today.

The development of the Conservation Board is modelled on National Park Authorities, but without the function of planning. The Board is made up of 37 members drawn from the 15 local authorities and over 280 parish councils across the Cotswolds plus those appointed by the Secretary of State for Defra. The breadth and depth of experience, knowledge and skills among Board members bring considerable benefits to the management of the AONB and the development of policy, plans and new ideas.

The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – a special place, loved by millions

The Cotswolds was designated as an AONB in 1966, recognising it as one of our finest landscapes and a place to be looked after for future generations.

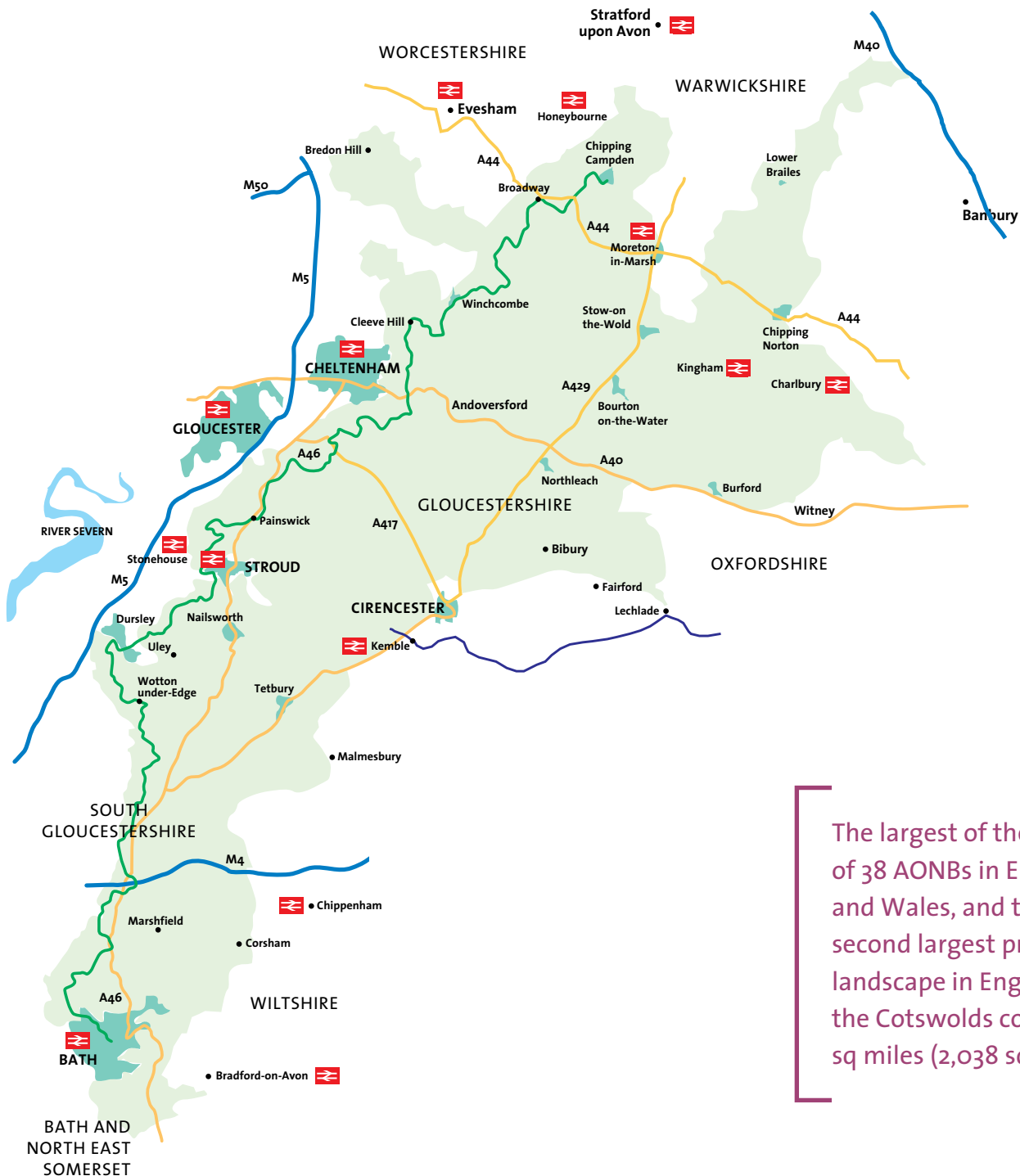
The largest of the family of 38 AONBs in England and Wales, and the second largest protected landscape in England after the Lake District National Park, the Cotswolds covers 790 sq miles (2,038 sq km). It stretches from Warwickshire and Worcestershire in the north, through Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, down to Bath and Wiltshire in the south.

Looking south across the Cotswold edge.



The Cotswold Hills form the central feature of the AONB landscape, rising gently from the broad, green meadows of the upper Thames to crest in a dramatic escarpment above the Severn and Avon Vales. It is quintessential rural England at its best, where the landscape draws a unique warmth and richness from the famous limestone beauty of its buildings and walls.

Among its many special qualities are its ancient woodlands, wildflower grasslands, historic parks and gardens plus dramatic escarpment with expansive views. Combine these with over 4,000 miles of dry stone walls, a rich cultural heritage, numerous historic towns and villages plus an extensive network of footpaths and recreational routes and you have one of the most impressive landscapes in the country.



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Recognising the contribution of people

The Cotswolds is a living, working landscape shaped by man for more than six thousand years. Today it is visited by around 23 million people every year and cared for by the hard work and dedication of the many people who manage the land. Whether they are farmers or volunteers, dry stone wallers or hedgelayers, they each play an important role in ensuring the landscape thrives. The Cotswolds Conservation Board recognises and appreciates the valued contribution of each and every one of those people who devote their time and expertise in looking after the distinctive character of the AONB.



Cotswold farmer Ian Boyd.

Our Farmers

With farmland making up the majority of the Cotswolds countryside, farmers have an important role to play in wildlife conservation; Cotswold farmer Ian Boyd of Whittington Lodge Farm fully embraces this role. On his farm, Ian has been successfully working towards the management of farm habitats for wildlife for more than a decade. Thanks to his efforts the farm now has an abundance of wildflowers and insects that attract birds all year round. Grey Partridge has been successfully reintroduced, Corn Buntings now breed there every summer and there are extensive habitats for Lapwing to breed. The farm has won awards from RSPB, FWAG, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.



Henry Robinson, President of the CLA.

Henry Robinson, President of the CLA, describes himself as “very much a practical and hands-on farmer”. He has managed farmland since 1978, and currently farms 1,000 acres in the Cotswolds AONB on which he grows wheat and oilseed rape. He has worked as an adviser to three local farms and spent 10 years, from 1986-1996, as co-ordinator of a farmers’ buying group for eight farms comprising around 6,000 acres. Henry is committed to conservation and has been a member of agri-environment schemes for more than 12 years, having been in Higher Level Stewardship since early in 2011. He believes in the importance of rural businesses for jobs and growth and fully supports the role that farmers and landowners can play in providing much needed habitat for our wildlife to thrive.

Our Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

Established in 1968, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens form the voluntary arm of the Conservation Board, dedicating thousands of hours every year to looking after the AONB and helping people to explore and enjoy the area. Jean Booth has been an active member of the Wardens for many years and still enjoys the varied conservation tasks of the work parties,



leading guided walks and helping to look after the Cotswold Way National Trail. Whether it’s installing a finger post, fixing a gate or researching a new walk, Jean’s enthusiasm knows no bounds.

Dave Scott has been a Voluntary Warden for over 40 years including 3 years as Head Warden. As well as getting involved with work parties, Dave has also led hundreds of guided walks over the years, always looking to link up to public transport where he can, and created numerous self-guided walks including the Step into the Cotswolds series for which he also helped secure funding and which have proved hugely popular with thousands of walkers.



Jean Booth, Cotswold Voluntary Warden.



Robin Dale judging the 2014 North Cotswolds Hedgelaying Competition.

Our master craftsmen

Dry stone walls are a distinctive part of the Cotswolds landscape yet the skills needed to maintain them have been in decline for many years. The Conservation Board helps to keep these skills alive through its rural skills programme of courses. One of its former students, John Hepworth, has since gone on to become a full time dry stone waller and has returned to the Board as a tutor, imparting his knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to future wallers.

Robin Dale was Chairman of the National Hedgelaying Society and has lived near Moreton-in-Marsh all his life. In his role as Chairman, Robin has supported the Board's rural skills programme from the start and in particular the annual North Cotswolds Hedgelaying Competition which has grown in popularity and now attracts competing hedgelayers from across the country.



John Hepworth, dry stone waller.

Our tourism providers

Every year the Cotswolds AONB welcomes over 23 million visitors, attracted by the wide ranging special qualities of natural beauty, cultural heritage and recreational opportunities. Yet, if tourism isn't carefully managed, the very qualities that make the Cotswolds special today could be lost tomorrow. Owner of award-winning Broadway Manor Cottages, Debbie Williamson, is one of many 'green' tourism business providers and fully appreciates the need to manage tourism in a sustainable way. As well as providing a great place to stay, Debbie ensures that her guests can appreciate the landscape, wildlife and culture as well as easily explore the area whether on foot or by bike.

Every year the Cotswolds AONB welcomes over 23 million visitors, attracted by the wide ranging special qualities of natural beauty...



Debbie Williamson of Broadway Manor Cottages

Working in partnership for a better AONB

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is the overarching body that cares for the AONB as a whole and works in partnership with many organisations to ensure that the AONB is well managed and looked after and that everyone has the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy it. Some of the successful partnership projects from the past ten year include the following:



Ancient woodland in the Cotswolds AONB.

Caring for the Cotswolds

One of the first pioneering landscape-scale projects funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund culminated in 2007. Working with partners, landowners, voluntary wardens and communities, the Caring for the Cotswolds project made significant improvements and advances in the conservation of limestone grassland, dry stone walls, local distinctiveness and interpretation of the AONB.

The Cotswolds Ancient Woodland Project

Working with the Woodland Trust, Natural England, Forestry Commission and numerous woodland owners throughout the AONB, the Cotswolds Ancient Woodland Project aimed to support and promote appropriate management of ancient woodland. The project enabled the restoration of over 1,270ha of plantations to native broadleaf cover including restoring over 90ha of Planted Ancient Woodland Sites.



Paul Griffiths on Edge Common, part of the Caring for the Cotswolds project

...the Cotswolds Ancient Woodland Project... enabled the restoration of over 1,270ha of plantations to native broadleaf cover...

The Cotswolds Ecological Network

The Cotswolds Ecological Network is a forum of over 30 organisations working to deliver nature conservation at a landscape scale across the AONB. It has identified two Nature Improvement Areas which were instrumental in helping to secure the national Save our Magnificent Meadows project with which the Cotswolds Conservation Board is a partner.

The Cotswold Farmland Bird Project

Launched in 2008, the Cotswold Farmland Bird Project aimed to reverse the decline in a number of farmland bird species through the provision of nesting habitat, plus summer and winter food. This very successful project was undertaken in partnership with Natural England, RSPB and numerous farmers and landowners.



Farmland bird, the corn bunting.



The Cotswolds Discoverer

Working with local authorities, transport operators and tourism organisations, the Cotswolds Discoverer integrated bus and rail ticket was launched in 2014, following a successful two-year pilot. This scheme aims to encourage more usage of the public transport network to and around the Cotswolds.



Launching the Cotswolds Discoverer at Moreton Station.



The Cotswolds AONB and other protected landscapes receive the European Charter award at the 2011 Europarc Conference.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

The European Charter recognises those protected landscapes which are delivering tourism in a sustainable way. Thanks to an effective partnership of destination management organisations, tourism businesses and local authorities, the Cotswolds AONB was successful in securing the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism award in 2011.

National Grid Gas Pipeline

Whilst the installation of a large gas pipeline through the AONB by National Grid was initially opposed by the Board, this project brought the two organisations together in a partnership resulting in the reinstatement of nearly 7km of dry stone walls and over £1million of investment in the AONB in addition to the normal mitigation measures expected with such a large scale project.

...the Cotswolds AONB was successful in securing the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism award in 2011.



National Grid and the Conservation Board launch the Dry Stone Walling Grant Fund.



Walks on Wheels

The Walks on Wheels project was launched to mark the 40th anniversary of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens. Working with access groups, highway authorities and many individuals, a series of 15 walking routes across the AONB was developed and specifically designed for people using wheelchairs, power scooters and buggies.



Dry stone wallers help launch the new academy.



Children from Rose Hill Primary School, Oxford enjoy a day out at Old Farm, Dorn.

Dry Stone Walling Academy

A new academy providing professional training in the traditional craft of dry stone walling was launched in 2014. The academy was set up in partnership with the National Dry Stone Walling Association and launched by its Chairman Ray Stockall.

Cotswolds Educational Programme

Recognising the problem of children's increasing lack of interaction with nature and the countryside, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens developed a programme of outdoors learning and activity. In close partnership with a number of schools across the Cotswolds, hundreds of children have enjoyed 'wild days', farm visits, walks, pond dipping, among many other activities.

Ten years timeline Cotswolds Conservation Board

2004

Cotswolds Conservation Board is launched

Niel Curwen becomes the Board's first Chairman

2005

Sustainable Development Fund launched

The Dry Stone Walling Apprenticeship training scheme launched with Stroud College

2006

40th Anniversary of the Cotswolds AONB

Friends of the Cotswolds charity launched

The Board is joint host for the Europarc Conference in Oxford

2007

Cotswolds five-year project celebrates £2.8m investment in the landscape

Funding secured for Cotswolds Green Tourism Project

First Cotswolds Access Conference held

Landscape Strategy and Guidelines published

2008

Cotswold Farmland Bird Project commences

40th Anniversary of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

The Board is invited to lead the management of the Cotswold Way National Trail

Board publishes its first AONB Management Plan

2009

Jeff West appointed Chairman of the Board

The Future of Farming and Forestry in the Cotswolds AONB published

10th edition of Explore the Cotswolds by Public Transport published



2004 – 2014

2010

Cotswolds Dry Stone Walling Grant Scheme launched

Escape to the Cotswolds visitor centre opens

The Board is highly commended in the Landscape Institute Awards

Cotswolds Green Scheme launched

2011

Cotswold Way and Jeju Olle National Trails become world's first Friendship Trails

Cotswolds AONB receives European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

New Rural Skills and 'Escape to the Cotswolds' websites launched

2012

Climate Change Advisory Service launched

Cotswold Way Bath Marker launched

The Board hosts a visit by Tourism & Heritage Minister and VisitEngland Chief Executive

HRH the Princess Royal hosts the 11th Dry Stone Walling Competition at Gatcombe Park Estate

2013

Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2013-18 published

Cotswolds Visitor Giving Scheme launched

Economic Value of the Cotswolds AONB report published

Future of the Old Prison at Northleach secured by the Friends of the Cotswolds

Cotswold Lion Cafe opens

2014

Save our Magnificent Meadows 3-year project commences

Cotswolds Discoverer scheme launched

Cotswold Way Chipping Campden Marker launched



Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Cotswolds Conservation Board

“Here is your country. Cherish these natural wonders, cherish the natural resources, cherish the history and romance as a sacred heritage, for your children and your children’s children. Do not let selfish men or greedy interests skin your country of its beauty, its riches or its romance.”

Theodore Roosevelt



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