

**MEETING OF THE
COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE BOARD –**

**HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBERS, COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL, TRINITY
ROAD, CIRENCESTER GL7 1PX
TUESDAY 24th February, 10:00am**

Present

Nigel Adcock (NG)
Cheryl Agg (CA)
David Broad (DB)
Martin Brown (MB)
Rebecca Charley (Vice Chair, RC)
Katherine Chesson (KC)
Brendan Costelloe (BC)
Paul Crossley (PC)
Matthew Darby (MD)
Amanda Davis (AD)
Ben Dent (BD)
Ellie Fujioka (EF)
Andrea Graham (ACG)
Andy Graham (AG)
Jon Grantham (JG)
Beverley Hardman (BH)
Liz Hodges (LH)
Graham Hopkins (GH)
Doug Hulyer (DH)
Juliet Layton (JL)
Cate Le Grice Mack (CGM)
Nick Martell-Bundock (NMB)
Brendan McCarthy (Chair, BM)
Hannah McDonnell (HM)
Rosie Pearson (RP)
David Powell (DP)
Liz Reason (LR)
Margaret Reid (MR)
Isabel Ross (IR)
John Swanton (JS)
Sarah Whalley-Hoggins (SWH)
James Williams (JW)

Also in Attendance:

Maria Carter (Minute-taking)
Mark Connelly (MC)
Magda Glanowska (MG)
Jennifer Lanham (Thames Water)
John Mills (JM)
Della Morris (DM)

Becky Jones (RJ)
Poppy Sherborne (NFU Countryside
advisor)
Fred Constantine-Smith (FS)
Simon Smith (SS)
Rebecca Waite (RW, CEO)

Alice Whitehead (AW)
James Webb (JW)

Rowan Wynne-Jones (RWJ)
Lyna Zhang (LZ).

Observing: Sarah West (Head Warden), Paul Ballinger (Protected Landscapes Strategy team, Defra).

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

Apologies – apologies were received from:

Jo Barker, Chris Brant, Martin Horwood, Anisa Saleh, Ray Sanderson and Ben Stokes.

Introductions and announcements – The Chair informed the Board members that the Finance team had a new member of staff, who had started the day before and was present in the meeting. He introduced Lyna Zhang and welcomed her to the CNL team.

The Chair warmly thanked Isabel Ross for her work on the Board since 2021, as this would be her last Board meeting. He said that Isabel had been an active member of the Climate Action Working Group and contributed to the Nature Recovery Plan. Isabel has been a keen contributor to the Board.

Isabel responded by saying that she wanted to contribute to Climate impact in the CNL and that now was a critical moment in the Cotswolds with rapid change to come, she stressed the need for building resilience. She commended the CNL Management Plan citing its relevance and importance for the Cotswolds region. She received a round of applause from the Board.

- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 21 OCTOBER 2025

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board Meeting held on 21 October 2025 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising – all actions arising were either completed or in progress. The CEO provided an update of the actions. She informed the Board members that she was trialling a new system for tracking the actions of the Board and the Executive meetings in one document. Board members could reference the actions from this document in the future.

The CEO updated Board members about relevant actions, from the document outlining:

- B/10/25/2 CNL Board to write to Secretary of State regarding renewal of higher tier Countryside Stewardship (that the scheme was due to end, with no alternative). However, since then, Defra announced an extension to the scheme in November 2025 hence, there wasn't any need to write to the Secretary of State. Speakers had been arranged for the current meeting to address the concerns previously raised about Water Quality and the future challenges and opportunities facing the farming community.

- The CEO said she would ask the Board for the endorsement of the Business Plan approach today.
- John Mills (Planning) had arranged a workshop on housing pressures for Board members and the issue was being discussed in the Planning and Infrastructure Working Group.
- On the action to strengthen engagement with Local Authorities, the CEO had conducted a couple more Local Authority briefings about the work of the CNL team. She offered to meet with more Local Authority representatives to brief about the Cotswolds Conservation Board and the work of the CNL team. Board members could contact her directly to arrange this.

AD reminded Board members and the CNL team that Parish and Town Councils would be challenged through Local Government Reform, and they would come under pressure. She stressed consideration of this and to bear in mind given any communications with these representatives and bodies.

3. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 20 January 2026

- There were no objections to the Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 20 January 2026. The Chair said these notes provided an in-depth record of discussion on some of the issues facing the work of the Board.

Board members responded to the matters arising and some of the papers provided to them for the meeting:

AG said that the FiPL programme had been successful in assisting the rural communities and that the link between the LA funding toward the CNL is very important in the region.

SWH raised a point on the NPPF draft response that was acknowledged and held for the NPPF discussion.

CLGM raised an issue about the importance of local abattoirs for local livestock producers in the Cotswolds. She pointed out that she had referred to the issue many times at the Board but that there didn't seem much power or influence to bring about change. She said that because livestock producers had lost the opportunity to send their animals to local abattoirs, much of the profitability had gone because the farmer cannot sell their own produce directly to the customer.

A discussion arose in which the Chair asked Mark Connelly (MC) to talk about the opportunities with the FiPL funding scheme. Mark said that the FiPL programme could enable funding towards this issue and that the North East Cotswolds Farming Cluster were currently looking at this and he knew that Fir Farm already have a mobile abattoir. Other Board members cited the complex issues associated with running abattoirs (GH) citing veterinary resourcing (LH) legislation, local employment, animal welfare and community concerns and understanding. ACG stated that the food processing sector had been making representation to Government at senior level about the increased demands on the sector. SWH said that an abattoir in the

south of Warwickshire had closed due to the increased burden of legislation and staffing issues. She said the site had now been utilised for housing.

CLGM felt that the Board should have a stronger line about the loss of abattoirs. She felt the wider associations were job losses in local communities and loss of profitability in farming businesses that were critical in the Cotswolds.

The Chair acknowledged that the issue was highly complex and that the CNL has limited powers in this area, largely outside our control.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The CEO referred the Board members to her written report.

In outline she gave her thanks to Alana Hopkins (Communications), James Webb, Rowan Wynne-Jones, Helen Komor and Bec Foster in the Engagement team. She also thanked John Mills and Simon Joyce who had experienced a high amount of local planning responses and consultations.

The CEO said that four local authorities were still outstanding on their responses to the CNL Management Plan. Of those Board members present, they agreed to follow up and chase within their authorities.

The Chair stated this was an action for Local Authorities and for relevant Board members to pursue (Paul Crossley, Jo Barker, Adrian Hardman and Beverley Hardman).

The CEO said that Simon Smith is developing the new Nature Recovery Working Group, with a high number of Board members showing interest in participation. She said that while she didn't want to restrict participation, the Board needed to work within the parameters of the cost allowances for the working groups. She suggested that a group of five to six Board members would be an appropriate number, membership will be discussed at the inaugural meeting.

The CEO said that the FiPL programme will be extended for a further three years to March 2029. This was announced by Emma Reynolds, the Environment Secretary, at the Oxford Farming Conference on 8th January. She reminded Board members about the Regenerative Agriculture Conference on 19 March at RAU.

The CEO said future work involved the Fundraising strategy, Equity, diversity and inclusion and the Board member lifecycle review.

She said that many media outlets had reported a negative narrative about diversity and inclusion within the National Landscapes. She wanted to make sure that all people felt welcomed in the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Comments:	
CLGM asked if there was any way in which the CNL could have a sign from the main road put up to show the way to the CNL main office. She found the entrance point difficult to find from the road. The CEO noted this. BH asked about the Carbon Literacy training and if it had brought any new changes? The CEO said yes and that staff were looking at what they could do to reduce their carbon footprint and for example, using car sharing opportunities more often. She said that now the CNL had their own office facilities they could do more actions to save carbon.	
Action reference:	Actions Arising:
B/02/26/1	Action: Board members to chase LA points of contact for the four outstanding responses regarding endorsement of the CNL Management Plan.

5. WATER QUALITY

Jennifer Lanham, from Thames Water and Rowan Wynne-Jones (CNL team) gave a joint presentation about Water Quality. They referenced the education work within the Everyone's Evenlode programme.

6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING FARMERS IN THE COTSWOLDS

Poppy Sherborne, the Countryside advisor from the NFU spoke to Board members about the challenges and opportunities to farmers in the Cotswolds. She covered four main areas:

- Solutions
- Planning
- Trees
- Sustainable farming

Comments:	
• The Chair thanked Jennifer, Rowan and Poppy for comprehensive presentations and that due to the time pressure on the agenda and the importance of completing the business of the meeting, he put a hold on the questions regarding the presentations in the meeting. He said the presentations would be circulated to Board members and questions can be directed from Board members on either or both of the presentations to Rowan Wynne-Jones, who will liaise with Jennifer Lanham and respond. Mark Connelly will liaise with Poppy Sherborne and respond on her behalf. • The Chair accepted that ideally there should be sufficient time to discuss both presentations and apologised that this was simply not possible on this occasion.	
Action Reference:	Actions Arising:
B/02/26/2	Action: The PowerPoint presentations will be sent onto the Board members. Board members can ask questions

	about the presentations and issues raised through CNL staff.
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7. NATIONAL POLICY PLANNING FRAMEWORK - UPDATE

In December 2025, the Government published its consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The consultation ends on 10 March 2026. John Mills updated the Board on the draft response he had prepared on the NPPF consultation. He said this was a work in progress document. John has previously shared his initial thoughts on the NPPF consultation with the Planning and Infrastructure Working Group (PIWG) and with the Executive Committee.

John explained the extent to which the NPPF policies underpin the planning system. He said that the Government's standard method for calculating housing need has increased the housing need figure for local authorities that overlap with the CNL by an average of 64%. For three of these local authorities the housing need figure has more than doubled. This has resulted in a significant shortfall in housing land supply which, in turn, has made it easier for developers to secure permission for development proposals. It also means that local authorities will be seeking to accommodate far more housing in their Local Plans than has previously been the case. These changes are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the natural beauty of the CNL.

John said the changes that were made to the Government's standard method for calculating housing need in December 2024 far outweigh the implications of any of the changes that are proposed in the draft NPPF. It was agreed at the Executive Committee in January that the standard method of calculating housing should be a focal point for the Cotswolds Conservation Board's response to the NPPF consultation. In addition, the Executive Committee agreed that the Board should write a letter on this issue outlining the impacts to the CNL, to the Secretary of State, MHCLG, and to the Members of Parliament (MPs) whose constituencies overlap with the CNL.

One of the positive changes introduced by the draft NPPF is that it now refers to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of Protected Landscapes, whereas previous iterations referred to 'conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty'. The new wording better reflects the purpose of National Landscape designation.

Another positive change is that the draft NPPF, for the first time, explicitly refers to Protected Landscape Management Plans, in relation to Local Authority plan-making. The draft response recommend that Management Plans should also be explicitly addressed in relation to decision-making.

Key concerns include: the proposed automatic presumption in favour of development (and the removal of the exemptions that related to Protected Landscapes); the removal the change in the wording relating to major development in Protected Landscapes; and the removal of the statement that Protected Landscapes have the highest status of protection.

John said that the response to the consultation will be shared with Cotswold District Council.

He said that the Board's local authority and parish council appointed members had been invited to a meeting on 16 March to discuss the issue of housing pressures in the CNL and its setting.

Comments:	
- BH was concerned that caravan parks had been excluded from the response. She asked JM if this should be included, and raised as a point? She stressed that some caravan sites were the size of a small village. JM agreed to consider this point. - AG asked that could the draft response be shared with LAs. The Chair said that the response would be shared. - JL asked for amendments to be made to the references that were made to Cotswold District in the Board's draft consultation response and in the draft letter to the Secretary of State (as discussed with JM before the meeting). - SWH was concerned that the CNL team did not have adequate resources to deal with the high number of site planning applications being received. - The Chair said that this was a concern and was recognised, but that the staff budget was naturally limited and it was the key responsibility of the CEO to manage the workload accordingly. - The Chair warmly thanked John for his work on this important subject both on behalf of the CNL and the National Landscapes Association, where he has played a significant role. - SWH made the point that she was concerned that the CNL were not in the loop where a hostile site development application was made. She made this point in respect to applications and appeals. She made another point that LAs had a shortage of land supply given the increase in the local authority housing need figures and that the statement about the allocations for the five-year housing supply needed to be more robust.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Board noted the draft response to the NPPF consultation and the draft letter to the Secretary of State.	B/02/26/3 Action: John Mills to further update the draft consultation response and draft letter and share these with the Planning and Infrastructure Working Group for comment. Board members could continue to speak to John regarding the response. John to submit the Board's consultation response by the deadline of 10 March. The letter to the Secretary of State will be submitted after the Board's housing meeting on 16 March.

8. PLANS, STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR BOARD APPROVAL/ADOPTION

Adoption of policies and plans
1. Climate Action Plan
Fred Constantine Smith outlined he wanted the Board members to adopt the Climate Action Plan. • He said the Plan had been endorsed at the Executive meeting in January. This Plan was guided by those actions that the CNL can achieve in partnership with others, working with colleagues in Local Authorities, other bodies, groups and associations. He said the Plan would require a high level of engagement to achieve the outcomes. The Plan had been discussed three times at the Board and four times through the Climate Action Working Group. He expressed his thanks to Doug Hulyer for his support. • LR asked why water is not treated separately? DH suggested this was an adaption issue rather than a mitigation issue. Alice Whitehead explained the difference for clarity. • SWH asked who is responsible for the activities and the costings, together with the KPIs and where is the timeline? SWH stated that she didn't support the plan and asked for further information considering its delivery and costs. • The CEO responded to SWH that she could provide more details for the resourcing of the Plan. She said that the work consisted of the CNL convening and leading actions within the CNL geographical region and they wouldn't be directly responsible for the actions, they were outcomes that could only be delivered in partnership. • The Chair expressed how the Climate Action Plan was aspirational to a certain degree but the officers had held pragmatic discussions with partners based on reality. • DB asked how much is going to be invested in net zero by the CNL? We know the fixed costs for resourcing the plan (staff costs), but what about further costs into the future? • RP said she thought it was value for money in terms of the staffing but asked, how can the Climate team influence the other Climate Action teams in the CNL (Local Authorities)? • AD said the Plan showed efficiency and value for money. She said that the work of the Climate Action WG and staff were valued for producing the Plan and it was realistic. She referenced page 13 of the Plan, 'educating visitors about awareness of sustainable transport options' and referenced the work at Bibury with a focus now shifting to Bourton. • CLGM expressed she was concerned that Climate Action was diminished; she referenced the decline in agricultural area explaining that the CNL is responsible for the landscape that is a farmed environment. She expressed how sustainable agriculture could provide opportunities towards Climate Actions. • NMB asked what can the Board do to mitigate against the Plan not being actioned? FS said that the actions are shared with others in the CNL and that ultimately we need to influence the change. He expressed that he was excited rather than concerned about the realities of delivery.

- JG asked about the actions and what were the priorities in the Plan?
- Fred said that the Plan had identified the priorities and they are already underway. Namely, projects in woodland and soils (testing) were being delivered over a three-year period.
- The Chair also added that all the contributors to the Plan needed to be transparent on resourcing and embedding principles into their processes e.g. - look to work with caterers to produce climate-friendly food.
- The Chair thanked Fred, Alice, Ben, Doug and all the Climate Action Working Group for getting us to this point. He said it has been a learning curve for us all.
- Mark Connelly (Land Management/FiPL, CNL) said that FiPL had supported independent projects that assisted towards land-based actions but that the Emergent Generation programme encouraged future thinking towards this with the Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme (that had been funded by FiPL) looking at specific projects that could be widely adopted in a group of 50 farmers and advisors. He said that the RAAP conference (19 March) was sold out.

	Decision
	Action: The Board adopted the Plan.

2. Revised Business Plan

- The CEO said this work was previously discussed at the Executive and Board (September and October respectively) and endorsed by the Executive in January. Following much work across the CNL team and considering Board and Executive inputs, the CEO sought the endorsement of the revised business planning approach. She said that she was seeking to align the business plan with the annual work programme, together with the priorities of the Management Plan and through personal objectives.
- The CEO said the new approach would allow the Board to see how the CNL team are achieving their goals and objectives.

Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Board endorsed the revised Business Plan approach.	B/02/26/4 Action: The CEO will report back on the Business Plan through the February Board meetings.

3. Adopt the Constitution update

Background

- At the annual Governance review meeting in December 2025, held with the Monitoring Officer and Chair, it was decided to update the Governance policy and include it within the Appendices of the Constitution to mitigate a note made by the Internal Auditor that the policy wording was outdated.
- The CEO said some wording was strengthened around the Board's requirement to review the Constitution and include it as part of the annual governance review meeting.
- These changes have been recommended by the Finance and Governance Committee and are now brought to the Board for approval.

The proposed changes

The CEO, Chair and Monitoring Officer met on 4 December 2025 to review governance, policy and any changes that may be necessary.

The Internal Auditor had noted in the annual report dated 31 March 2025 that there is no requirement to review the Constitution. However, it is specified on pages 20 Item 12.01 that the CEO has a duty to review and monitor the Constitution, with changes made on recommendation of the Finance and Governance Committee to the Board.

Also, on p60 Item 2.42, that the Monitoring Officer is to meet annually with the CEO and Chair, and every three years to review governance documents. Some minor wording modifications are suggested to clarify that the Constitution is part of this annual review:

P20 section 12.01 Duty to monitor and review the Constitution:

After "The Chief Executive Officer will monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure that the aims and principles of the Constitution are given full effect."

add: "This review will be carried out at the annual meeting of the CEO, Chair and Monitoring Officer."

And on p60 section 2.42 (iii) after "Meeting the CEO and Chair annually to review governance process and practice" add "and the Constitution".

Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Board members agreed to accept the recommendations by the CEO to update the Constitution.	B/02/26/5 Action: Incorporate the changes to the Constitution.

4. To adopt the Safeguarding policy

Rebecca Jones, Designated Safeguarding Lead for the organisation asked the Board to adopt the Safeguarding policy. The policy has been reviewed by the Safeguarding team. She added that herself and the CEO had recently undertaken the NSPCC Safeguarding training course and they are now both the official Safeguarding contacts for the organisation.

- RJ said the policy was endorsed by the Finance and Governance Committee. They will need to be reviewed again in 2027.

Comments

- EF asked if the policy included staff who wish to report safeguarding issues.
- RJ reported there is a well-being group for staff but that separate procedures covered staff. She explained that the documents before the Board are primarily for external people to report safeguarding issues, although similar procedures were in place for staff.
- EF was happy to offer advice on sexual harassment and exploitation issues to RJ.
- AD supported EF's point about extending safeguarding procedures to staff and Board members.
- DB said he broadly agreed with the policy but he said that safeguarding need only apply for adults at risk. SC supported his view.
- JS said safeguarding policies should apply to children, young people, adults and staff.

- NA asked about the record of DBS. RJ said they looked at DBS for those volunteers in active service. Board members are typically not included in DBS checks.
- HM supported EF's point.
- AD was concerned that some comments were disparaging towards the importance of this issue, this wasn't a bureaucratic task but something that was upheld by law, she suggested a sibling policy for staff protection was just as valid.
- JS asked that the footers (with revision date) and formatting are aligned throughout the documents. He said that the documents can provide assurance the Board that policies are in place, *but so what?* Is the system being used? He asked that there needed to be a clear understanding by Board members about how the reporting works in real life and that people understand how they can report.
- CLGM made a point about the procedures for Board members under a code of conduct' and that it may need a review given what has been discussed about safeguarding.
- The Chair said that RJ and the Safeguarding team should take on board the comments made and broader considerations should be incorporated in the on-going review of other relevant policies e.g. code of conduct and harassment and bullying policies.

Decision:	Actions Arising:
The safeguarding policy was adopted by the Board.	B/02/26/6 Action: Safeguarding team to consider the points raised by Board members. The Safeguarding policy to be reviewed again in February 2027.

9. FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

To present the Draft Operating Budget for the financial year 2026/27, including the Reserves Policy. DP spoke as Chair of the Finance and Governance Committee; the Committee members had approved the new budget for 2026-27. He said it is incredibly complex and had been looked at a number of times.

A number of assumptions had to be made and those assumptions were tried and tested. He said it was a budget of moving parts and that the Committee will look at it again in May. He thanked Magda and the finance team for their work and said that the budget was based on the business plan, following a structured approach. He commended the draft budget to the Board.

MG highlighted points from the finance report, she said there is a very robust process in place to agree the budget. All budget holders, Chief Executive and the Finance and Governance Committee were involved and that a bottom-up approach was followed and budgets were challenged when necessary. Following the budget preparation, Defra announced the allocation of core funding that was agreed for three years as well as FiPL and Capex. The budget will be revised for these key items.

The Budget includes income and expenditure as consolidated. In the most prudent scenario, the deficit can be fully covered by Reserves (Development Fund). However, a number of mitigating factors were identified including DEFRA Capex uplift for FY26/27 which will cover £20k IT costs, some budgets of salaries and equipment. The 10-year lease for Marsden has been already covered and capitalised from FY25/26 DEFRA Capex allowance.

MG said that the external audit had been concluded in October with a report.

Risk Management Framework and Key Risk Register 2026-27

The CEO outlined her paper and said that risk mitigation had been managed in disparate way previously and this had been collected in one working document. The Finance and Governance Committee would be responsible for looking at the risks now and review them at every meeting.

The Chair noted that there was more substantive record of risks. He asked Board members to provide comments on this by email to the CEO.

There were a number of recommendations from the Finance and Governance Committee: To keep the existing Reserves Policy and review next year.

This Risk Management Framework will be reviewed annually by the Finance and Governance Committee and approved by the Board as a minimum annually (the Board were provided with the current framework).

Comments:
• SWH looked at the line for training and questioned what it consists of and enquired about allocations for each project. • The Chair said that the Board was only responsible for the budget overview. The level of details that she asked to see could be provided separately. • SWH: She said she needed to see the level of detail to see if the CNL were achieving value for money. • JG asked if there any significant risks of this budget, given it is not an unusual position. • DP said the level of funding is not fully known at this stage, those are the main risks. • The Chair agreed with this. It was fully accepted that setting a deficit budget was far from ideal but this, to a large degree, was a timing issue. The revised forecast in May will be carefully scrutinised to ensure we can rebalance the original budget to a more sustainable level. The F&G Committee will also guide the preparation of a three-year financial strategy for CNL to ensure proper focus both on cost control and income development. This is in order to minimise the risks around the future use of reserves.
Decision:
The budget was adopted by the Board.

9. FORWARD PLANNING

AGM next Board meeting in June at the RAU, Cirencester. The CEO outlined the main areas of business.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

MR promoted the Very Easy Walks guide (1 – 3 miles) to the Board and asked them to disseminate to their local networks. It was noted that MR's contribution to the guide had been significant.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next CNL Board meeting will be held on 23rd June 2026. Location Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester.

The Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed 1.25pm.