

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

**HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBERS, COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL, TRINITY ROAD, CIRENCESTER
GL7 1PX**

TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2025

Present:

Brendan McCarthy (Chair)
Nigel Adcock
Chris Brant
David Broad
Martin Brown
Katherine Chesson
Brendan Costelloe
Paul Crossley
Amanda Davis
Matt Darby
Ben Dent
Ellie Fujioka
Paul Hodgkinson

Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)
Graham Hopkins
Martin Horwood (arrived 11.30am)
Doug Hulyer
Juliet Layton
Cate Le Grice-Mack
Rosie Pearson
David Powell
Liz Reason
Margaret Reid
Isabel Ross
Ben Stokes
John Swanton

Also in Attendance:

Rebecca Waite (Chief Executive) RW
Magda Glanowska (Head of Finance) MG
Simon Smith (Nature Recovery Lead) SS
Alana Hopkins (Communications Lead) AH
John Mills (Planning Lead) JM
James Webb (Partnerships Lead) JW
Mark Connelly (Land Management Lead) MC
Becky Jones (Access and Volunteer Lead) RJ
Fred Constantine Smith (Climate Action Lead) FCS
Alice Whitehead (Climate Action Coordinator) AW
Jennifer Lanham (Everyone's Evenlode Community Outreach officer), observing
Mike Cripps (Cotswolds Voluntary Wardens, Head Warden), observing

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- **Apologies** - apologies were received from Liz Hodges, Andrea Graham, Sarah Whalley-Hoggins, Emma Sims, Ray Sanderson, Jo Barker, Martin Smith. Board members not present: Alastair Adams, Sue Crawford, Andy Graham.
- **Introductions and announcements** – the Chair formally introduced Rebecca Waite, the new Chief Executive and commemorated this as her first Board meeting in post. He also noted the absence and/or apologies of several Board members, and reminded everyone of the importance of attendance. He notified Board members of Defra's decision to replace Secretary of State appointed Board members after two terms rather than allowing a third term. The Chair noted this was disappointing as many Board members have more to give over a longer tenure. This change means the CNL Board will be recruiting five SoS appointed Board members in 2025.

DB commented he thought recruitment and appointments should begin earlier, to avoid gaps in Board membership. The Chair confirmed that it is expected that the Board follows the process set out by Defra.

BD asked whether or not SOS Board members coming the end of their term could re-apply to the same role. It was assumed this would not be permitted. The Chair pointed out that the planned local authority elections in May would also prompt some churn of Board membership and membership in working groups.

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

2. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 22 OCTOBER 2024

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board Meeting held on 22 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions arising from the meeting – an update on actions was provided verbally.

3. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 21 JANUARY 2025

The Board noted the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2025.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

RW gave a comprehensive update on organisational matters and recent key activities. These included:

Defra funding. There has been no word on confirmation from Defra as yet about funding for the next financial year, beginning 1 April 2025. Although this makes forward planning challenging, the team is doing its best to do so nevertheless. There has also been no official word about the possibility of an extension of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme funding, but an announcement is expected very soon (possibly today).

People/team. Lorna Baggett left the team in December 2024, after a successful time in post within the Glorious Cotswolds Grasslands team. Thanks were given at the time for her excellent work while she was with us. We have recruited a new team member, Cerian, to start in the next few days in the GCG team. Nina Stubbington is set to leave at the end of March 2025, and RW acknowledged her hard work in the two years she has been with us and thanked her.

Two Secretary of State Board members are concluding their terms, and we will soon be recruiting to replace them along with the three vacancies carried forward from last year. RW will be meeting Defra's Public Appointments team shortly when she will query the rationale behind the decision from Defra to conclude SOS appointed Board membership after two completed terms.

Accommodation. RW stated the importance of having a more permanent base, where the team can gather in its entirety. New accommodation is being sought, with an internal accommodation team considering options.

GDPR. RW thanked RJ for her work in appointing a GDPR consultancy, and arranging interviews with all relevant team members to provide a review of GDPR compliance.

Now she is in post, RW outlined her priorities as:

1. Resilience – financially and in terms of the team and its flexibility
 2. Strategy – challenging with the current funding formular, but something shed like to continue to develop
 3. Accommodation – important for team morale
 4. Website
 5. Project planning and risk management
- Comments – none.
 - Decision – n/a
 - Actions Arising – n/a

5. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

RW gave an update on the Key Performance Indicators relating to Q3 2024/25. She ran through new and updated KPIs, explaining the rationale behind any changes. She noted that although the new health and safety KPI replaces the Board attendance KPI, the importance of board member attendance should remain a focus for all Board members. She noted that although the FIPL KPI looks behind schedule on paper, in actuality, it is exactly as expected (and very healthy). She summarised by saying that all KPIs look healthy and are where they were predicted/ expected to be.

- Comments –
MR questioned the measurement of near misses/good spots, and what we would expect 100% to look like. A short discussion followed.
LR asked where climate action KPIs were recorded, and whether Board members could see a summary of progress.
AD suggested incorporating a summary of climate action work into team and Board member inductions.
- Decision – n/a
- Actions Arising –
RJ: Consider a better way to record/measure near misses/good spots and consider what success in this KPI would look like.
FCS: produce summary of climate action progress for Board members to discuss and review at the Board meeting in June.

6. FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

DP and MG gave an update on the following items:

a) Receive the minutes of the previous meetings and provide a verbal update on the key discussion areas.

MG and DP rolled recent activity into the update on the Operating Budget.

b) Operating Budget 2025/26 (for adoption)

MG gave a thorough explanation of the operating budget, explaining the rationale behind each section. She explained that it was a very prudent budget, based in the current uncertainty around funding. She explained that the Finance and Governance Committee had provided ample support in its preparation, and that it was based on the figures available at Reforecast 2. She thanked local authorities for their contributions. She noted that as a deliberately prudent budget, it can only improve – she is expecting it to be revised at the first

reforecasting opportunity – and that by this time, big changes would be expected in the form of confirmation of an extension for FiPL, and confirmation on funding applications to National Lottery Heritage Fund. She also noted the importance of the Development Fund, which was designed to provide some reassurance in times like this when funding is less certain.

DP contributed as Chair of the Finance and Governance Committee that the committee feel the budget is very complex due to the current uncertainties, and that has determined the prudent form it has taken. The committee is confident as the budget stands, and would recommend adoption, with the side note that good news could be in the wings, and the budget may improve. He noted the Reserves Policy has been maintained, and reiterated the importance of the Development Fund. He paid credit to MG and JR for the collaborative work done across the CNL core team to produce the budget.

The Chair also thanked local authority Board members for their work in encouraging contributions from the local authorities.

- Comments

PH echoed the point made about local authority reorganisation, and the uncertainties that is currently causing. He noted that this planned change offers risks and opportunities – but with the likely result of fewer councils and fewer councillors. RW replied by saying a paper was being prepared to detail anticipated changes and their effects for the Board meeting in June 2025.

RP asked when we would hear about decisions on the opportunities, especially those sitting with the National Lottery Heritage Fund. (answer given in JW paper later in meeting).

- Decision – The Board adopted the 2025/26 Operating Budget.
- Actions Arising – none

c) Annual Review of the Risk Management Framework, including the Key Risk Register (for adoption)

RW ran through the paper, highlighting that there were few changes, beyond minor updates for names and phrasing. She also noted that the Risk Register is a live document that is updated frequently.

- Comments

BD noted that work completed by Working Groups feed into the risk register, and that accountability sits more broadly than the Chief Executive and Head of Finance.

- Decision – The Board adopted the Risk Management Framework.
- Actions Arising – none

d) External audit – receive the external auditor's report

MG ran through an update detailing the external audit.

- Comments – none
- Decision – The Board noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none

e) Virements and New Contracts - standing item.

MG ran through the paper, providing further detail where needed.

- Comments – none
- Decision – The Board noted the report.
- Actions Arising – none

7. PRESENTATIONS ON KEY AREAS OF WORK

- a) **GRANT FUNDED PROJECTS** (presentation) JW gave a presentation to update the Board on the current and pipeline opportunities for grant funded projects. He highlighted successful projects supported by Caring for the Cotswolds, ran through current live funding applications and related timings regarding decisions. He also detailed how the Caring for the Cotswolds funding scheme has been improved over the last two years. JW went on to explain more about the Landscape Connections bid, offering details on the planned projects and the process to apply for funding for the Development Phase. He highlighted the greatest benefit so far – which is the close working relationship with the funding application partners, National trust and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. He concluded by quickly outlining the other opportunities he / the team is working on for 2025/26 – including paying tribute to Anna Field who submitted an excellent funding bid to Wessex Water.

- Comments –

The Chair asked where donations from Wardens' guided walks are directed. MC and RJ answered that this money goes into the Wardens' Countryside Fund, and how these funds (around £8000 per year, approximately) are spent is currently under review.

- Decision – The Board noted the presentation.
- Actions Arising – none

- b) **NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK** (presentation) JM offered a comprehensive paper and related presentation to update the Board on revisions to the NPPF.

- Comments –

The Chair invited comments from Board members, particularly around the subject of housing need. This prompted a lively debate, with a number of Board members expressing concerns about how the Government's targets around housing need would affect protected landscapes, and the Cotswolds National Landscape. There was discussion around the need to balance housing need with existing infrastructure (roads, motorway access, water and sewage matters, public transport, schools etc). There was also discussion around the amount of housing that has been approved but not built – and whether or not that would be counted in targets, or whether targets would be additional to approved but as-yet unbuilt housing. The members discussed the impact that local authority changes may have – with the redrawing of boundaries, and whether that would affect housing need and its impact on the Cotswolds National Landscape. The members discussed greybelt, greenfield, and greenbelt sites. They discussed how housing need was being approached by different local authorities and the importance of neighbouring authorities working together. They discussed the benefits of maintaining communities, and the consideration of increasing existing settlements (infrastructures permitting), rather than creating new settlements. They also discussed how an increase in housing would affect views into and out from the Cotswolds National Landscape. Board members asked how the CNL planning team would manage should the workload in relation to this topic increase – JM assured them he felt the working processes within the planning team were robust enough to cope. Board members also discussed renewable energy in addition to the debate around housing.

JM noted all the helpful contributions from Board members, and reminded everyone of local authorities now being required to demonstrate their commitment to the 'seek to further' duty. He also assured them that he is in dialogue with the National Planning Inspectorate about the NPPF.

- Decision – The Board noted the presentation.

- Actions Arising
 - A small number of Board members suggested that a clearly written, succinct, and robustly phrased position statement on housing need and the NPPF from the CNL Board could help board members in local authorities, and planners.
 - Link to the CNL Renewable Energy Position Statement (requested by The Chair) : <https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Renewable-Energy-June-2023.pdf> - it was suggested that JM review this again, ahead of the June 2025 Board meeting.

8. FOR DECISION

- a. Management Plan 2025-30 (for adoption)

SS ran through the paper and the main changes since the last opportunity Board members had to review it.
- Comments –

The Chair reminded local authority members of the importance of promoting the Plan for prompt adoption by local authorities. BD queried the detail of the pathway to net zero with respect to tree planting, which SS acknowledged as a key challenge over the lifespan of the Management Plan.
- Decision – The Board adopted the Management Plan 2025-30.
- Actions Arising –
 - Upload PDF version of Management Plan to CNL website now it is adopted (AH).
 - Work on summary version of plan (SS/AH)
 - Work on 'designed' / functional version of the Plan (SS/AH)
 - Ensure local authority Board members are copied in to emails from SS to promote the Plan (to allow them to chase up within their local authorities).
- b. Dark Skies - Technical Lighting Design (for adoption)

MC ran introduced the paper, and briefly detailed plan for the promotion of the Guidance once it is designed (CNL branded) and published.
- Comments –

Board members were complimentary about the Dark Skies Guidance, and the future usefulness of it for a range of audiences.

MH suggested local authorities should be including details from the guidance in their planning policies.

RP said she had observed county councils welcoming it, but town councils pushing back a little. AD said the opposite – her local parish council was very enthusiastic about the guidance and finds it very useful.
- Decision – The Board adopted the Dark Skies – Technical Lighting Design Guidance.
- Actions Arising – none

9. FORWARD PLANNING

10. OTHER BUSINESS

- JS thanked and congratulated the CNL team members for their efforts, which he described as 'excellent'.
- CLGM stated the Herschel Museum of Astronomy is now open in Bath and worth visiting.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 24 June 2025, 10:00am-12:30pm, at Council Chambers, Cotswold District Council, Trinity Road, Cirencester.

The Board Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed at 1.02pm. CHAIR

ENDS

DRAFT