

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

**HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBERS, STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL, EBLEY MILL, EBLEY
WHARF, STROUD, GLOS GL5 4UB
TUESDAY 20th MAY 2025, 10:00am**

Present

Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)
Paul Crossley (PC)
Graham Hopkins (GH)

Juliet Layton (JL)
Cate Le Grice-Mack (CGM)
Ben Stokes (BS)

Also in Attendance

Rebecca Waite (RW)
Jonathan Rogers (JR)
Fred Constantine Smith (FCS)
Mark Connelly (MC)
Alana Hopkins (AH)
Olivia Blackwell (OB)

John Mills (JM)
Alice Whitehead (AW)

Doug Hulyer (observing)
Ben Dent (observing)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies – apologies were received from Andy Graham (AG), Brendan McCarthy (Chair), Sue Crawford (SC).
- Introductions and announcements – none.
- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – there were no public questions.

2. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 21 JANUARY 2025

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 21st January 2025 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising – all actions arising were either completed or in progress, the CEO ran through a quick verbal update.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 25 FEBRUARY 2025

- The Executive Committee noted the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 25 February 2025.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Operations / general

The CEO gave a verbal update on key activity since the previous meeting. She expressly thanked the internal 'accommodation team' for their support around finding a new premises, noting the update to follow. She informed the Executive Committee that Defra have confirmed the core grant for 2025/26 – the anticipated flatlined core funding, with the unexpected capital uplift in excess of £500k. The uplift comes with challenges around its spend, but is good news. The National

Landscapes family is currently in discussion with Defra over these challenges. There is also a focus to maintain dialogues with local authorities to continue to build understanding of what the CNL team and organisation does.

Further news is that the fundraising bid to National Heritage Lottery Fund was successful (around £250,000), and that the team is continuing to seek options to continue the work of the Everyone's Evenlode project, though perhaps not in the same three-person team format as currently.

People

Starters/leavers - Scott Brown has left the FiPL team to move on to a new role. Ros Marsden is also leaving this month to move into a new youth outreach role in Stroud. Olivia Blackwell has been promoted into Scott's role, and recruitment is underway to replace her role in the FiPL team by June.

Comments:	
CGM suggested publicising the FiPL extension more/better, having recently attended an event where some attendees still thought it had concluded. MC observed this may be a confusion over the conclusion of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (which has concluded), and FiPL (which has been extended).	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the update.	N/A.

5. FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

JR gave a summary of the 2024-25 Year End results, emphasising the year was a good year, that the finance team is happy, and that the reserves are strong. JR acknowledged that last year's Defra capital uplift helped a great deal to relieve pressure on core. The finance team and the CEO are now working hard to review overheads, and identify ways to make best use of the new Defra capital uplift.

RW gave an overview of the Key Performance Indicators, highlighting that they require review – some are working very well, others a little less so. She also detailed how most of the KPIs which work well have encouraged improvements – both culturally and in terms of external relationships.

Comments:
- BS queried the savings on overheads – JR explained this was thanks to the assistance provided by the Defra capital uplift, which helped with IT costs and equipment. - BS also stated he was struck by KPI6 – and initiated a short discussion around how to continue engaging with young people, especially around the Management Plan; and to target disadvantaged and disengaged children in the Cotswolds. - GH asked if there was a way to draw a 'golden thread' between the Management Plan outcomes and the KPIs.

• RW responded to comments by outlining the work done by the team already to engage children and young people – especially the work by the Everyone's Evenlode team – she also acknowledged more can always be done. MC contributed that FiPL has also supported work to engage children and young people. • RC contributed that 16 – 25 year olds need to feel that they have a say and a stake in the future of the Cotswolds, so KPI6 is very important. • JL mentioned children in temporary accommodation, and asked how we might engage with them.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

FCS briefly ran through the paper, and invited a discussion about climate action within the CNL, setting out the need for an action plan. The paper sought the Executive Committee's feedback on three defined questions.

Comments:	
• A discussion among executive committee members followed, which can be summarised as: The Executive Committee was happy in principle with the three key levers. They noted that it would be important to use data to monitor carbon footprints over time and progress against the goal of net zero. It was also noted that language would be important – so as to bring other communities and organisations along, and work together. It was also pointed out that as CNL, the primary role is to influence and facilitate, not necessarily deliver. There was also a brief discussion over transport – and the complexities around that, and an acknowledgement that CNL could help by lending its voice and support to those working to address the challenge.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	Committee members were invited to contact FCS with further feedback on the three levers identified in the paper, and the questions posed.

7. POTENTIAL BOARD STRUCTURE

RW presented a paper detailing the potential implications of Local Government Reform on the size and structure of the Cotswolds Conservation Board.

Comments:	
• The Executive Committee members complimented the paper. They discussed ways in which CNL Board membership structure and working groups could be	

improved. They also discussed prioritising the roles and responsibilities and tasks outlined in the annexed paper, agreeing that all details were of almost equal priority, and that a number could be initiated before the local government reforms begin.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	Executive Committee members were invited to feedback to the CEO with any further thoughts.

8. NEW PREMISES

RW provided an update on the recent work undertaken to locate new premises for the CNL team, and the proposed next steps. She reiterated her thanks to the internal CNL 'accommodation team' who have supported through the process.

Comments:	
- BS noted that old buildings often require additional maintenance. RW confirmed that the building has been recently refurbished – with a good EPC rating, a new boiler, an efficient heating system etc, and that the condition report being commissioned by CNL from a surveyor before the lease is signed is a way to mitigate against unexpected additional costs. - JL asked where else had been considered, and RW listed a number of the places that were investigated and then the reasons they were declared unsuitable for CNL.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee unanimously endorsed the decision to pursue The Old Threshing Barn at Marsden Estate as the new CNL office location.	N/A

9. FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

MC and OB presented a summary of FiPL Year 4 (2024-25) including an overview of the programme to date and a look forward to Year 5 (2025-26). They highlighted the success of the programme, and drew attention to the minimal unspent amounts returned to Defra (a solid achievement). MC acknowledged Maria Carter for her work on the communications, engagement, and event planning for the programme. OB noted that the pipeline for 2025/26 is strong, with a notable amount of interest in the programme – this is attributed to a number of factors, including the success so far, the closure of SFI payments, and a number of communications sent out by the FiPL team before Scott Brown departed.

Comments:

• The Vice Chair offered congratulations to OB on her promotion, and paid credit to MC and the whole FiPL team for their efficient reallocation of returned funds (when projects occasionally cannot be progressed). • JL complimented the team on the FiPL celebration event from early 2025 held at the RAU. • GH offered congratulations, and asked if it was possible to establish the percentage of farmers in the Cotswolds who have successfully applied for FiPL funding. MC replied that was a challenging number to ascertain, but that instead, the team is able to say that around 180 projects across approximately 1,500 holdings across the CNL had been supported. • JL asked about follow-up actions for successful applicants – MC replied that this had been a planned activity, but that it has had to be de-prioritised with each of the two programme extensions. • BD asked if there were lessons to be learned from unsuccessful applicants. MC replied that the Cotswolds FiPL team operates a 'triage' or filtering system for enquiries – assessing and supporting from the outset. This means that unviable projects are either improved with the team's support, or not progressed (depending on the project). Overall, this guides applicants towards success, and makes the most of the approval panel's time and expertise. • BS asked what message can be sent back to Defra to help perpetuate the funding programme. MC noted that Defra is aware (and supportive) of the success of FiPL at a national scale. The previous government viewed it as a popular programme, and the current government also appears supportive. MC was careful to point out that the continuation of all programmes such as FiPL is dependent on government spending reviews, but that FiPL is viewed as helpful – especially as many supported FiPL projects can help with 30x30 delivery. • The Vice Chair pointed out that the second programme extension demonstrates that voices from protected landscapes heralding the success of FiPL are heard in government.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

10. PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE WORKING GROUP

JM presented an update of recent development as part of the PIWG. He explained that the working group now schedules meetings ahead of the Executive Committee meetings in order to make updates effective. He also gave an overview of the Planning Inspectorate Conference, at which he spoke alongside other colleagues from protected landscapes – with particular reference to the seek to further duty. Feedback from delegates and organisers on JM's presentation has been excellent.

Comments:
• GH championed the work of the planning team. • BS noted that the template for the local plan policy for the Cotswolds National Landscape, shared by JM, is a hugely helpful piece of work. BS mentioned that he felt local authority board members should advocate for the template's use

and invited colleagues to consider how best to encourage CNL board members to advocate in this way. He suggested a simplified or concise version – and idea which was supported by other committee members. • Other committee members congratulated JM on his paper at this meeting, and the recent conference.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

11. FORWARD PLANNING

The Vice Chair ran through the agenda for the Board Meeting to be held on 24th June 2025.

Comments:	
• None	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

12. OTHER BUSINESS

RW informed the Executive Committee of the Secretary of State board member recruitment process, noting that the CNL team had worked hard to promote the vacancies as widely as possible with the aim of supporting diversity within the board membership. She informed the committee members that applications had closed on 19th May 2025, and that interviews would be held in early July.

RW also proposed postponing the Board's annual site visit and strategy day from July to October – and there were no objections to this suggestion

Comments:	
• None.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- The next CNL Executive Committee meeting will be held on 23rd September 2025. Location TBC.

The Meeting commenced at 10:05am and closed at 1.10pm.