

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

**HELD AT SUMMERFIELD ROOM, ROBINSWOOD HILL COUNTRY PARK,
RESERVOIR ROAD, GLOUCESTER, GL4 6SX**

TUESDAY 21st JANUARY 2025, 10:00am

Present

Brendan McCarthy (BM), Chair
Rebecca Charley (RC), Vice-Chair
Sue Crawford (SC)
Amanda Davis (AD), substitute for
Martin Mitchell

Andy Graham (AG), left at 12.05pm
Graham Hopkins (GH)
Juliet Layton (JL)
Cate Le Grice-Mack (CGM)
Ben Stokes (BS)

Also in Attendance

Rebecca Waite (RW), CEO
Magda Glanowska (MG)
Simon Smith (SS)
Mark Connelly (MC)
Alana Hopkins (AH)

Rebecca Jones (RJ)
Simon Joyce (SJ)
Fred Constantine Smith (FCS)
James Webb (JW)
Alice Whitehead (AW)
Doug Hulyer (DH), observer

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies – Paul Crossley & Martin Mitchell (substituted by Amanda Davis).
- Introductions and announcements – introduction were made for the benefit of Rebecca Waite as new CEO.
- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – there had been no public questions submitted.

2. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 17 SEPTEMBER 2024

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 17 September 2024 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising – *all actions arising were either completed or in progress, the CEO provided an update.*

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 22 OCTOBER 2024

- *The Executive Committee noted the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 22 October 2024.*
- Action – *all actions arising were either completed or in progress, the CEO provided an update.*

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

RW began by thanking James Webb for taking on the interim CEO role for the period between Andy Parsons leaving and RW taking up the role on 4th December. RW then gave a progress update on key activities since the previous meeting:

People

Starters / leavers – RW arrived in post in December. Lorna Baggett left the team (GCG) in December, recruitment ran throughout December and an offer has been accepted by the selected interviewee.

CNL Team - RW reported that she has now had 1-2-1 meetings with all CNL team members, and several external organisations. She is planning meetings with Executive and wider Board members shortly.

RW stated that her initial priority would be to maintain the status quo – as she has observed the team working well and is impressed in her time in post so far. She has said that as time passes, she is keen to see how even more cross-team working and longer-term strategic planning can be achieved – as the work of the individual teams so often overlaps. She is keen to build organisational resilience with this approach.

Board Members – Recruitment process (led by Defra) for three new SOS Board members has now begun, the CEO and Chair are working on this.

Property Matters

- Office space
 - Following conversations with GWT, Greystones is no longer a viable option for continued office space. A small CNL "Accommodation Team" is working with the CEO on options for alternative office space around the central belt of the National Landscape. The Cotswold business Centre lease concludes on 31/3/25.
- Barn storage
 - Notice has been given on Northfield barn, and the CEO and Accommodation Team are looking for alternative barn storage options.

Operations

There has been no indication so far from Defra as to whether the Capex Uplift funding or Removing Barriers: Access for All funding will be repeated in the 2025-26 financial year.

RW extended her thanks to RJ for having arranged the GDPR review and consultation.

Comments:	
BS mentioned the fluid lines of communication between Board members and the previous CEO and said that he would like to see this approach continued, emphasising that RW should see Board members as a source of support.	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the update.	RW offered to engage with Defra and the National Landscapes Association to ascertain potential impacts of Local Government Reform on the Board size and structure. (Paper to June Board.)

5. FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

MG gave a summary of the Q3 financial position 2024/25. She is now working on the 2025-26 Budget – which will be presented to the Finance and Governance Committee on 11th February to go to the full Board for adoption on 25th February. The retracted National Highways funds have been removed from reforecasting and budget. The two unconfirmed elements of the budget are the possibility (or not) of continued Farming in Protected Landscapes funding; and the success (or not) of the major bid to National Heritage Lottery Fund. The balance sheet is good and the organisations is on target for reserves. The Capex Uplift from Defra is predicted to be spent in full.

MG gave an overview of the Key Performance Indicators Q3 2024/25, all of which are tracking well.

Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GH – brought up good spots/ near misses from the KPIs, offering support with this as he views it as an important metric – and one which can help future proof health and safety. RJ owns this KPI and said she is working with the wardens to develop it and encourage them to report more and better. AG – asked about Local Authority contributions – HoF replied that most are agreed, and any outstanding are being reminded. The Chair expressed thanks to MG, JR, CR for their work on the KPIs and budget. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

6. MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-30

SS offered an opportunity to review and discuss version 3 of the draft Plan, before it is submitted to the Board for adoption. He commended colleagues and technical area leads for their work and contributions. Three consultation rounds have now been completed. He confirmed that the timings for production of the Management Plan are on track. BM summarised the discussion and commended SS on the work so far.

Comments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG queried if including transport in 'development and infrastructure' means it gets hidden. SS replied that infrastructure includes transport, and that text will be added to make this clear, SC noted that some details could be highlighted more in the design process to attract more attention. She also noted the importance of educating through the Management Plan about the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape. She noted that explanations of certain terms (e.g nature recovery) would be helpful to a broader audience – e.g those who aren't familiar with the distinctions between biodiversity and nature recovery. She felt that lakes were rarely mentioned, though rivers often are. She observed that adding

<p>Burford, Oxford and Banbury to the map in the context of housing development could be helpful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CGM felt the importance of farming in the Cotswolds should be emphasised more in the Management Plan – especially in the face of pressures of increased housing development. <p>There followed discussions around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of working with farmers and landowners to help promote biodiversity, nature recovery, soil health, climate action and more. The challenge of balancing economics and education with the many complex pressure on the protected landscape. There was an acknowledgement that the Management Plan is a useful tool to help local authorities and farmers to meet targets around environmental work. Describing the Board's key priorities for an 'endorsement letter' which is sent with the Management Plan (& the Chair's foreword to the Plan) when it is shared with local authorities. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	SS to note the feedback and to co-ordinate drafting of Chair's letter of endorsement.

7. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

SJ provided an updated on the National Planning Policy Framework on behalf of JM. He ran through the main points from the paper prepared, including highlighting the expectation around increased housing provision, renewable energy, and the new 'grey belt' categorisation. There was also a note around how lower housing figures can be set through local authorities – and this is an area of focus for JM and SJ.

Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SJ and JM were congratulated on their thorough paper, for JM's participation in the consultation process for the Framework, and for the role he played in responding to the consultation with the National Landscape Association. It has been particularly helpful in respect of local authority Local Plans. The discussion explored the complexities of competing pressures on the Cotswolds National Landscape with contributions from most Executive Committee members. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

8. PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SJ noted the paper which gave a comprehensive update, and took it as read by Executive Committee members.

Comments:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

9. WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

RJ provided an update on recent work in this area. Removing Barriers: Access for All funding is on track to be spent in full, and a report for Defra will be compiled covering the three years of funding provided. Nina Stubbington, who has been managing Removing Barriers, will be leaving the team for a new role at the end of March. RJ praised the work done by Nina and expressed thanks. RJ offered an update on the progress of the Wellbeing and Inclusion working group, including considerations around mental health and improving ethnic diversity.

Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AD commended the CNL team for a recent access-focused event organised and held at the National Star College which she viewed as very helpful, informative, and successfully run by the team. • BS mentioned that inviting Board members to visits and events arranged to showcase access (or other) projects funded through CNL is very helpful and more invitations to attend would be welcomed. He also said that the Wellbeing and Inclusion working group is working hard to capture data around inequalities – particularly through the NHS. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	The Improving Ethnic Diversity Report will be shared with Executive Committee members for their reference.

10. PROJECTS AND FUNDRAISING

JW provided a thorough report on key activities and updates, including a review of the current National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid in partnership with National Trust and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. This bid was submitted recently – the working relationship with NT and GWT has been strengthened through this application work.

JW ran through the rest of the Projects and Fundraising paper. He informed the Executive Committee that John Bartram has stepped down as Chair of the Cotswold Way Association, replaced by Martyn Hall.

Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

11. FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

MC presented an update on recent activity for Farming in Protected Landscapes. The programme is nearing conclusion, with a formal update about the future activity expected from Defra soon. The FiPL team is currently juggling all 65 existing projects, and any underspend whilst chasing up claims and reporting back to Defra. The Local Assessment Panel has been recalled for a meeting to consider the allocation of around £60k available since another project returned the funds. The Panel meeting will be competitive, with applications exceeding the available amount – so it is expected the underspend will be allocated in full. A recent farm visit to the first funded project for FiPL in the Cotswolds went very well. A celebratory conference event is scheduled for 5th Feb at the Royal Agricultural University and is at capacity with bookings already. The team has been working to promote FiPL on social media, using Defra's suggested hashtag #FiPLFriday, and this has gone well – Defra has picked up on the frequency and participation in this comms activity from the Cotswolds. Defra has previously informed National Landscapes that the 'advice and guidance' function of the programme would be continued until March 2027, and the admin until September 2026.

Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

12. CLIMATE ACTION

FCS presented an update on recent work from the Climate Action team. He highlighted the Climate Action team's priorities for the next year, and offered an insight into the effectiveness of the working group.

He talked through the intention for the Risk Assessment and Climate Adaptation plan, highlighting the emphasis on the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape, and the timeline for production.

FCS then updated the committee on the woodland opportunity mapping project, stating that a draft report was expected in February, before describing AW's work on the CNL's carbon footprint, carbon literacy and carbon menu.

He updated the Committee about the work AW is doing on the carbon footprint methodology for CNL.

Comments:
There were discussions around:

- Carbon literacy training, and how helpful it will be for the team, and a wider audience.
- The perceived gap between farmers and landowners/managers, local authorities, and those knowledgeable around climate action.

FCS responded to the discussion by acknowledging the points raised and cautioning that there should be realistic expectations about how much power CNL has to affect farming beyond providing guidance and grants – which in turn prompted Committee members to acknowledge that for farmers and land managers, economics play a major role in decision making.

MC drew attention to the variety of climate-friendly practices currently being embraced by farmers in the Cotswolds, emphasising the current openness to regenerative and nature-friendly practices.

Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

13. FORWARD PLANNING

- Draft agenda for the Board meeting on 25 February 2025.

14. OTHER BUSINESS

A discussion was had around the likely changes to local government, prompted by the current UK Government's promise of local authority reform. Whilst there is little certainty about how this will change things, there was much discussion about how this reform could affect the shape of the CNL Board in the future, and the opportunities which could accompany this (closer links/ working relationships with local authorities, change in number of Board members on full CNL Board etc). Exec Committee members discussed the role of parish and town councils within this reform, the number of Board members, the role of the Board as a whole, strengths and weaknesses, and the historic reference of the proportion of Board members being defined by the CROW Act. The CEO mentioned that this would likely be a topic to cover in her meetings with individual Executive Committee members.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Tuesday 20th May 2025, location TBC.

The Meeting commenced at 10:00am and closed at 1.10pm.