

**MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE BOARD -
HELD AT COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE, MARSDEN MANOR FARM,
RENDCOMB, CIRENCESTER, GL7 7EU
TUESDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER 2025, 10:00am**

Present

Brendan McCarthy (Chair)
Rebecca Charley (Vice-Chair)
Cheryl Agg (CA)
Sue Crawford (SC)
Amanda Davis (AD)
Graham Hopkins (GH)
Juliet Layton (JL)
Cate Le Grice-Mack (CGM)
Ben Stokes (BS)

Also in Attendance:

Olivia Blackwell (OB)
Maria Carter (MC) minute-taking
Fred Constantine Smith (FCS)
Alana Hopkins (AH)
Magda Glanowska (MG)
John Mills (JM)
Rebecca Waite (RW)
Alice Whitehead (AW)
Helen Komor (observing)
Rebecca Foster (observing)

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Apologies – apologies were received from Paul Crossley. Rosie Pearson was absent.
- Introductions and announcements – everyone introduced themselves and Cheryl Agg (observing) was welcomed as the Board member representing Gloucestershire County Council, replacing Paul Hodginson.
- Declarations of interest – no interests were declared.
- Public questions – None received.

2. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING – 20 May 2025

- Decision - resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 20th May 2025 be approved as a correct record.
- Actions Arising – all actions arising were either completed or in progress.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – 24 June 2025

- The Executive Committee noted the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 24th June 2025. Juliet Layton's apologies were recorded as being provided for the record.

4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Operations

The CEO gave a verbal update on key activity since the previous meeting. The CEO explained the status on the Capital expenditure funding from Defra (CapEx). Although there were challenges with the way in which the funding could be spent, (capital spend), only £70k of the total £570k remained. The CEO thanked MG and Jonathan Rogers in the Finance team for their efforts in co-ordinating the successful allocation of this funding.

The CEO explained how the Engagement team led by James Webb was now fully operational with new member of staff Rebecca Foster having joined early in September as the Grants Coordinator for National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). She joins Helen Komor – Outdoor Learning Officer and Rowan Wynne-Jones as Water Restoration Officer (who successfully applied for the role in August). The latter role includes a blend of operational delivery and research that reflects and builds on Everyone's Evenlode. It will help inform and shape CNL's future work in this area.

The key element to the work of the newly formed engagement team is to leverage external funding to support the work of CNL. The team will manage 'Caring for the Cotswolds' (National Lottery Heritage Fund) £130k over next three years to 2028.

The bid for Landscape Connections (£250k) is about to be submitted. The bid is in partnership with National Trust and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust to recruit a Project Manager for 18 months.

The Engagement team are also working to deliver a Climate themed engagement programme called the 'Great Big Climate Circus' – from Jan 2026 at three locations in the Cotswolds that use music and poetry to engage people.

The CEO explained that the core funding from DEFRA had a limited reach for the organisation's work and that partnership working and fundraising were key for progressing more of the organisation's aspirations. However, she explained that funding is reliant on specific geographical areas. Current work is to develop a draft fundraising strategy, that would be aligned with the Management Plan as well as financial and business planning.

Comments:	
<p>CGM asked where she could find out more as to what the Everyone's Evenlode project had achieved. The Chair said that the project report can be found on the CNL website: Everyones-Evenlode-Impact-report-0925.pdf</p> <p>GH gave a brief update on the roadworks on the A417 project saying that the contractors were three months ahead of schedule and will aim to finish on 26 December. The plan was to reuse the rubble to a borrow pit, and to restore to calcareous grasslands, although concerns were raised about this approach. The green crossing is now in place and the other bridges are nearly complete. The new road has started and still progressing and public tours are being conducted of the works.</p> <p>AD said that Cotswold Way walkers have found it challenging across the roadworks stretch and it would have been helpful to have warning signs displayed or notices given (Cotswolds Way Association).</p>	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the update.	RW will provide feedback to Kier regarding the challenges faced by users of the Cotswold Way.

Priorities for the meeting

The CEO outlined the priorities to discuss including Climate Action, FiPL (including the revised delivery approach), Planning and Infrastructure and business planning. She thanked the CNL team members continuing to deliver on outcomes.

Finance report

MG outlined points from the financial report provided to the Executive Committee. MG said that the general fund, designated funds and restricted reserves were in line with the Board's policies, adopted in February 2025. The year-end forecasted position has improved to £40k net and revenue increased significantly to £2.5m and grants paid increased by £1.68m. The team were still working on allocating the Capital Uplift funding from Defra (£70k from £570k), that had been welcomed.

Comments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BS said that he supported the uplift that Local Authorities had made to the CNL and that it was valuable contribution to the organisation (CNL had recommended 3% rise and LAs had contributed £12k, in addition to this). The Chair also acknowledged LAs contribution and efforts made towards supporting the work of the CNL. JL also recommended that Board member representatives had a role in checking payment from LAs, from which they report. The Chair asked about the variances in the budget and MG explained that at the time of budgeting, there were many unknowns to account for, namely the

<p>Defra Capital uplift, Defra FiPL extension and Access funding. The team had completed reforecasting on Q1 and 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CEO said that the element of uncertainty with respect to some funding streams was challenging especially with regards to staff morale as programmes come to an end. • AD said that the new three year LA planning reviews could help to retain staff and that settlement negotiations could be made over a longer period. • CA said that under the forthcoming Local Government Reform there could be shifting sands and more change. • The CEO said that she was expecting changes and wanted to ensure the CNL was in its best position to be able to respond and adapt. • The finance team members were commended for their work by the Chair. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the update.	None.

5. Climate Action

FC and AW gave a presentation that outlined:

- A progress update on developing the Climate Action Plan
- Feedback on the approach to setting priorities
- Input on addressing the carbon sequestration gap. FC sought guidance on next steps engagement with the Board.

Comments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GH and AD both queried as to whether we were on target and, if not, how we could improve the trajectory. • The CEO referenced the position statements pertaining to relevant sectors and the need to review these. A proposed schedule for reviewing the position statements will be coming to the Executive and Board in the first half of 2026. • GH referred to August's "theory of change" workshop saying it was very effective in highlighting assumptions and our role in the delivery towards reducing carbon. • There was a discussion on the CNL's role as a thought leader in the Cotswolds to reduce carbon emissions and that the organisation can be used to bring LAs together and influence, and potentially hold others to account. However, there was acknowledgement that the CNL couldn't do it all and had no hard levers through which to achieve this. • There were questions around how can the CNL prioritise its influence for key emission categories and annual reductions. • FC said they have mapped the outcomes and activities and developed a draft prioritisation approach. • FC estimated that four of the top five prioritisation sectors are land-use associated. He questioned whether the CNL priorities should focus on the top 10 areas and said more steer from the Board would be welcomed.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With respect to the prioritisation approach, BS said there was value in approaching local authorities as the CNL can't do this alone and should join with others who are already working on this to affect culture change on the ground. AD said there is a sliding scale for each of the priorities, in terms of CNL involvement. Should the CNL play a more strategic role, rather than delivery role? • CGM asked if the CNL and others can share best practice guides e.g. retro-fitting old houses with new forms of insulation and heating. • CA said that borough councils often have good working practice guides readily available – this may help CNL to promote across the protected landscape. • The Chair acknowledged the priorities were a big list and we must deliver lowering carbon emissions in partnership with others. We need to devote time to communications as part of the climate action and work with local authorities and others in delivery where we can influence and drive change. • JL said that collaboration with the local authorities was needed but that Local Government Reform would be the focus for local authorities in the short-medium term. She suggested inviting council staff to collaborate on Climate Action. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
<p>The Executive Committee thanked FC and AW for their work on Climate Action.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Board needed to make decisions on next steps.</p> <p>BS suggested that the Board should agree a proposal based on what we understand now and asked that the Board are kept updated in-between meetings as more develops on the Action Plan.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send Executive members the slides as presented on Climate Action on 23 September. 2. Take a proposal to the next Board meeting to agree the priorities and areas of influence. 3. Keep the Board updated in-between meetings about the development of the Action Plan.

6. Farming in Protected Landscapes

OB outlined her report previously sent to the Executive Committee.

- FiPL was extended by another year to March 2026.
- The last FiPL Panel meeting went well and 31 projects have been approved this year. OB used updated figures from the report saying £947k had been allocated to 31 projects, with £236k of the grant budget remaining.
- OB explained that the FiPL pipeline of applications looked healthy with new applications making up some of the enquiries.
- OB notified the Executive Committee that Caroline Regan, Programme Manager will be leaving the FiPL team at the end of the month and her contribution was acknowledged in the meeting.
- Plans are in place to handle this, with temporary arrangements including the secondment of Jonathan Rogers in the finance team and support from FWAG.

Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Executive Committee members all spoke about how much FiPL had made a positive impact in the Cotswolds and for LAs. GH said how important farming is to our climate plan and that future funding is imperative for it. The Chair emphasised all protected landscapes were actively reporting back to Defra how positive the scheme is and making real change on the ground. A report had been published about the success of the FiPL programme in the Cotswolds and it was available here on the CNL website. The Chair also explained that a FiPL project was supporting the emergent generation to learn and share learning about regenerative agriculture. SL and CGM shared thoughts that communicating the benefits of regenerative agriculture should be wider known. RW expressed how the FiPL conference earlier this year was fantastic and engaged students which was really important. This was supported by Board members. There was a question as to whether there was sufficient public understanding for farming and food production. All were in agreement that the farming community held enormous potential for climate action delivery and nature recovery. CA said she was hearing there are barriers to access funding and wondered if the Board could help to unlock those barriers. RC (Vice-Chair) said that FiPL had effectively unlocked the barriers, because it was relatively easy to apply for and the CNL officers had assisted farmers in best practice, when other schemes were closing. The Chair thanked Oliva and FiPL team for their hard work. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	N/A

7. Planning and Infrastructure Working Group Update

JM gave a comprehensive update on the work of the Planning and Infrastructure Working Group. He said he had also presented at the Planning Inspectorate Conference and that it was a good opportunity to draw attention to the 'seek to further' duty.

Comments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BS wondered if there should be more collaboration to brief Board members on planning matters, so representatives are better briefed on the CNL rationale. The Executive Committee members engaged in a discussion about LA's use of the guidance on the 'seek to further' duty. The Chair asked if CNL could get all the LA planning people together and run a seminar on planning in the Cotswolds National Landscape. Defra had requested a meeting with JM and others in reference to the 'seek to further' duty. This meeting may have been prompted by compensation cases linked to possibly a repeal of the duty.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several comments were made about architecture and tranquillity in the Cotswolds in preserving the beauty to local towns and areas. However architectural elements were in the power of local authority decisions. John was thanked for all his work on national and local planning consultations. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee noted the report.	On seek to further guidance, local authority Executive members should check their local authority has received JM's email.

8. Business Planning

RW provided an update on the recent work undertaken to review the business plan of the CNL, over the past four months. The current business plan runs up to 2026. A virtual business planning team (internally referred to as the 'So What?' group) has been established and meets every fortnight. RW stated that the revised business plan needed to align with the annual work programme and have a clearly defined set of key performance indicators to measure success. The new Business plan would take effect from April 2026. RW suggested submitting the revised business plan to the January Executive and February Board for endorsement.

Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BM reiterated the importance of robust business planning approach to strength CNL's position in the context of local government reform as well as the need to align with the fundraising strategy as it is developed. There was also a discussion around need to align business planning approach with individual team member development. BS questioned the process for how the business plan would be out to the next Executive. RW talked through the "golden thread" of linking the Management Plan, business plan, annual work programme and individual team member objectives. RW also referenced the documents to be submitted to the board for their endorsement including the revised business plan itself, the annual work programme and an updated list of KPIs. GH stated the outlined approach sounds great and that we should consider how performance is reviewed e.g. through scorecards and/or monthly reviews. Progress against deliverables needs to be measured. The CEO elaborated on how the team meet monthly and that this could be an opportunity for reporting. The Chair thanked the CEO for her leadership on this work. 	
Decision:	Actions Arising:
The Executive Committee	RW to bring revised business plan and associated documents to the January Executive for endorsement.

9. Other Business

No other matters to discuss.

10. Date of Next meeting

- The date for the next Board will be 21st October and the next Executive Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 20th January 2026 at the Marsden CNL office.

The Meeting commenced at 10.05am and closed at 1.05pm.
Apologies were given by JL for the trip after the next meeting.