

CEO's Update for Board: 24th February 2026

Communications

- I've been really proud of the work Alana has been doing that resulted in a lot of communication and publicity over the Christmas and New Year period.
- James, Bec (Foster) and Alana were interviewed by BBC Radio Gloucestershire to talk about the Caring for the Cotswolds scheme and CNL at 60 respectively.
- Alana has also successfully secured monthly articles celebrating the CN at 60 in this year's Cotswold Life along with many other plans including the launch of the Field and Folk film in the summer.

Projects and Fundraising

- In July 2025, the Caring for the Cotswolds scheme received a significant boost with a £250,000 grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).
- The NLHF grant supports a dedicated Grants Coordinator (Bec Foster) to manage the scheme over the next three years, until July 2028.
- In that time, the scheme will distribute £130,000 in small community grants, as well as providing opportunities for young people to join a youth panel, and take part in paid placements.
- The deadline for applications for Caring for the Cotswolds was 18th January.
- Furthermore, NLHF will be investing £150 million into 20 projects during their current strategy period up to 2033.
- In December, we found out that that our application to NLHF was successful. To develop this project, CNL partnered with National Trust and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. A development grant of £206,000 was approved (with a total project value of £221,000).
- A development grant will allow us to employ a Project Manager for 18 months who will plan, cost and develop the delivery phase application. This will include critical feasibility work that will inform and evidence the larger bid
- We have an outline of the delivery phase, which will connect high quality habitat along a 37km section of the Cotswold escarpment from Cleeve Common in the north to Selsley Common in the south. It will also involve and connect the people that live and work in the area. If successful, the delivery phase will constitute a multimillion pound project lasting for five plus years.
- The recruitment for the Project Manager went live in January 2026 and interviews for shortlisted candidates will be taking place shortly.
- I want to register my admiration for James and his team (Helen, Rowan and Bec) for all they've achieved since their creation last summer. Not least I want to thank James for his continuing vision and leadership of this newly formed Engagement Team. He has been instrumental in driving CNL's fundraising and grant application successes whether Caring for the Cotswolds, the Great Big Climate Circus or Landscape Connections.

Planning & Infrastructure

- John and Simon Joyce have been exceptional busy of late and I wanted to formally register my appreciation for the sheer amount of work, particularly regarding local development plans, they've undertaken all while maintaining a high standard that regularly elicits positive feedback from members of the PIWG, stakeholders and other National Landscapes.

- I was particularly proud of John and Simon’s partnership approach with the Chilterns National Landscape on responding to MHCLGs consultation on Reforms to the Statutory Consultee System.
- John has been instrumental in responding to the current NPPF consultation both on behalf of the Cotswolds and nationally. John will be covering this work in his item during February’s Board.
- John has also successfully secured approval for a £370,000 project to remove 1.6km of overhead electricity cables and 18 cable poles on Bredon Hill, north-east of Kemerton. The overhead cables would be replaced with 2.3km of underground cables. This will significantly enhance visual amenity in this locality.

Management Plan

Simon has been busy sending out the Management Plan now that we have received the designed version. In terms of endorsement the following table outlines progress with only four local authorities yet to endorse.

| Local Authority | Endorsed | Date Endorsed | Notes |
|----------------------------|----------|---------------|---|
| Bath & North East Somerset | No | | Relevant Board member progressing. |
| Cheltenham | Yes | 16/04/2025 | Decision taken by Leader. |
| Cherwell | Yes | 06/01/2026 | Endorsed by Executive. |
| Cotswold | Yes | 08/05/2025 | Endorsed by Cabinet. |
| Gloucestershire | Yes | 23/10/2025 | Decision taken by cabinet member. |
| Oxfordshire | Yes | 15/04/2025 | Letter from Paul Fermer, Director of Environment |
| South Gloucestershire | Yes | 17/-0/2025 | Formally recognised by the Council. |
| Stratford | Yes | 02/06/2025 | Endorsed by Cabinet. |
| Stroud | Yes | 12/06/2025 | Endorsed by Environment Committee. |
| Tewkesbury | Yes | 14/05/2025 | Voted through unanimously at full council. |
| Warwickshire | No | | Relevant Board member progressing. |
| West Oxfordshire | Yes | 23/04/2025 | Endorsed by Executive. |
| Wiltshire | Yes | 15/06/2025 | Endorsed at cabinet meeting. |
| Worcestershire | No | | Relevant Board member progressing. |
| Wychavon | No | | Isabel Roberts, Planning Policy Manager will discuss endorsement with director. Relevant Board member progressing. |

Nature Recovery

Simon Smith has been establishing the Nature Recovery Working Group. We have had over ten requests from Board members to join this and will need to determine smaller number of members via the June AGM. Thanks to all those who have shown interest.

Corporate Services and Operations

Work has been continuing on the following areas:

- GDPR work
- Health and safety
- Audit and review of all policies
- All staff now trained to Fire Warden level
- All staff have successfully achieved their carbon literacy certification
- Business planning approach

Work is commencing shortly in the following areas:

- Fundraising strategy
- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Board member lifecycle review

Farming in Protected landscapes (FiPL)

- I'm really pleased to confirm FiPL 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.
- The overall (national) funding allocation will be £30m per year. The allocation for 2026/27 is confirmed with allocations for the following two years to be confirmed.
- The priority for the FiPL team over the next three months will be to maximise the allocation and spend of this year's grant money. At the end of December 2025 circa £100k remained to be allocated to projects that must be completed by the end of March 2026. The team is confident this can be achieved. The project pipeline remains healthy with numerous projects in development with an e-newsletter circulated to around 500 farmers, land managers and advisers encouraging further proposals.
- The FiPL panel did not meet as planned on 27th January as all applications were under the financial threshold.
- The Regenerative Agriculture conference will be taking place at the Royal Agricultural University on 19th March. The conference forms part of the Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme, funded by FiPL, and follows on from last year's extremely successful event.

| Actions Arising from October 2025 Board | | |
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| Reference | Description | Progress |
| B/10/25/1 | CEO to consider relevant speakers at next Board to address the enforcement action of those bodies that hold water companies to account. | Done. Rowan (CNL's Water Restoration Officer) and Jennifer Lanham (Previous of CNL but now at Thames Water) will be presenting to February Board. |
| B/10/25/2 | CNL Board to write to SoS to state importance of renewal of higher tier countryside stewardship with 5-year options for nature recovery and to ask to continue them to be renewed. | At the end of November 2025, Defra announced an extension to CS Higher Tier agreements that have 5-year actions due to expire at the end of the year. Matt was one of 140 agreement holders offered an extension and has accepted. Meanwhile the |

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| | | existing agreement has ended. There is no longer the need for the CNL Board to write to the Secretary of State. |
| B/10/25/3 | Ask for a national speaker on farming challenges and in particular how the Board can help encourage landowners transitioning agricultural land into land for nature recovery. | The CEO has now held introductory meetings with Diane Mitchell, Poppy Sherbourne and Jacks Weaver at NFU. Poppy will be speaking at the February Board. |
| B/10/25/4 | Simon Smith to provide slides for circulation to Board members. | Done. |
| B/10/25/5 | To take on feedback from Board members, providing the final draft of the Climate Action Plan in January's Executive Committee. | Done. |
| B/10/25/6 | Sarah West to keep Board updated on the work and initiatives of the voluntary wardens. | Ongoing. |
| B/10/25/7 | CEO to provide final draft of Business Plan for endorsement in February. | Endorsed by January 2026 Executive, to be adopted at February 2026 Board. |
| B/10/25/8 | John Mills to arrange Board member engagement on housing pressures potentially via the Planning & Infrastructure Working Group. | Currently being actioned. Further to JM's email to Board members, this was discussed at the Planning and Infrastructure Working Group on 12 th January and 20 th January Executive. Meeting scheduled 16 th March. |
| B/10/25/9 | CEO to consider how to continue strengthening engagement with LAs. | Ongoing. |