

Climate Action

Summary: A strategic discussion of climate action within the CNL, setting out the need for an action plan.

Recommendation: That the Executive Committee considers the questions posed at the close of the paper.

Report by: Fred Constantine Smith, Climate Action Lead and Alice Whitehead, Climate Action Coordinator

BOARD MEMBERS REPRESENTED ON THE GROUP

- Ben Dent
- Rosie Pearson
- Martin Brown
- Graham Hopkins
- Isabel Ross
- Katherine Chesson

RECORD OF MEETINGS

Working Group meetings this FY:

- 8th April - Reviewing climate action priorities for the next 18 months.
- 11th March, 2nd April - Individual meetings with Working Group Chair.

Background

Climate action is a priority for CNL. Faced with growing political uncertainty, the case for meaningful action has never been greater. The CNL has an opportunity to lead the way in creating a net zero and climate-resilient landscape, in turn developing pathways for other landscapes to follow. This paper sets out a strategic discussion of climate action within the CNL, reviewing our commitments and current progress towards net zero, before setting out the need for an action plan and posing questions for the board.

Why is the CNL seeking to reach Net Zero?

To consider the steps ahead, it is important first to understand what we have already committed to. A full list of national and organisational commitments is listed under appendix A.

The Board endorsed a formal commitment to identify a scenario that enables us to endorse a path to net zero emissions (or better) by 2050 (or sooner). It also sets out a pathway based on three key steps:

1. Establish an evidence base to assess CNL's current emissions, and evaluate the potential mitigation impacts of practical land use changes and other solutions.
2. Model different combinations of those solutions to determine the optimum mix for reducing emissions and increasing carbon capture, while conserving and enhancing the CNL's natural beauty and supporting the social and economic vitality of its communities.
3. Work with partners to encourage adoption of the identified solutions as they develop their own responses to the climate emergency.

Challenges

The most challenging element of the SWC pathway was its proposal for 21,000 ha of new woodland and 1,500 km of new hedgerows by 2050. The scale of this proposal highlights the importance of woodland creation as a mitigation measure. The 3Keel report highlighted the need to address SWC's proposal with landscape sensitivity in CNL, and any resultant shortfall in the pathway to net zero. In response, the CNL acted by commissioning a woodland opportunity map exercise.

This mapping has identified areas with potential for woodland creation while respecting the sensitivity and character of the Cotswolds landscape. It offers a practical tool to guide decision-making and engagement. The next steps will include:

- Refining guidance on woodland creation, focused on landscape character and sensitivity.
- Developing an engagement strategy involving internal teams and external stakeholders - including Forestry Commission, landowners, and forestry companies - through targeted workshops and outreach.

Another output of the opportunity mapping has been the creation of a new woodland target, one that better reflects the nature of the Cotswold's landscape. Data on unconstrained land and landscape sensitivity were combined to propose a target of 9,365 ha, less than half the area proposed in the SWC report. The target will remain under review and be open to change subject to new data or information. Nonetheless, this creates a clear shortfall in potential mitigation and presents a strategic challenge.

Opportunities

The CNL has already begun to address this gap in land-use mitigation by developing an understanding of the role that regenerative agriculture, wildflower-rich grasslands, and wetlands could play. These land uses offer significant benefits through both carbon sequestration and emissions reduction.

In order to make up the shortfall between the SWC proposed pathway and a woodland target that is compatible with CNL's purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty, further work could focus on the following:

1. Sequestration Potential

- Assess the carbon sequestration potential of common soil types in the Cotswolds to identify high-potential areas for land use and land management change.
 - A desk-based review of existing data has already produced a preliminary carbon baseline for each soil type by land use.
 - The next step is to develop a sampling strategy to ground-truth this data across a representative range of soil and vegetation types.

2. Emissions Reduction through Regenerative Agriculture

- Fund a series of farm carbon assessments across typical Cotswolds farm systems to compare emissions from conventional and regenerative practices.
- Undertake a land use review to map the proportions of different farming systems across the landscape.
- Combine these datasets to model the potential climate benefit of increased uptake of regenerative practices across the CNL.

Next Steps

The CNL should now focus on creating a focused Action Plan. This should draw and build upon the recommendations in the 3Keel report, listed in Appendix B, whilst addressing the shortfall in mitigation identified by the SWC analysis. The Plan must focus on areas where the CNL has the greatest capacity to influence outcomes, while identifying clear, deliverable interventions. An example of this for the Land Use Strategy can be seen in Appendix C.

The CNL has guidelines and strong stakeholder relationships. Any action plan should identify interventions that reflect these strengths whilst maximising our levers of influence. The plan could be focused on three key levers of influence:

1. Guidance
 - Current guidance often contains relevant information, but doesn't communicate through a climate lens, this can be resolved by clearly linking it to climate outcomes.
 - Relevant advice should support regenerative agriculture, woodland maintenance and creation, low-carbon development, and community-scale renewable energy.

2. Engagement

- Use the woodland opportunity map to engage directly with landowners and land managers in priority areas.
- Build on strong existing relationships through events, workshops and one-to-one engagement.
- Connect stakeholders with the right advice, case studies, schemes and funding opportunities.

3. Projects

- Focus on delivering measurable outcomes on the ground.
- Measure the climate impact of existing schemes, such as Farming in Protected Landscapes, Glorious Cotswold Grasslands, and the Regen Ag Accelerator Programme, whilst building more climate focus into future projects.
- Target funding schemes we operate or influence, including future iterations of FiPL, National Lottery Heritage Fund bids, Caring for the Cotswolds, and potentially the Western Forest.

Questions to the Executive Committee

This paper seeks the Board's feedback on the following questions:

1. Do you agree that the three levers presented in this paper represent CNL's main areas of influence?
2. Is the target for climate action in the Cotswolds clear, and do you believe we have the means to achieve it?
3. What are the essential elements for inclusion in the table (Appendix C) to consider it the basis of a full Action Plan? E.g.
 - A clearly defined outcome for each action
 - Clear timeline of deliverables
 - Identified delivery responsibilities
 - Established metrics for measuring progress
 - A hierarchy of priority actions

Supporting documents

- **Appendix A - National, and CNL Level Climate Commitments**
- **Appendix B - Key Actions from 3Keel Report and Progress to Date**
- **Appendix C – Action Plan using the Land Use Strategy as an example**

Appendix A – National, and CNL Level Climate Commitments

National commitments

- **2008 – UK Climate Change Act**
Introduced a legally binding framework to reduce carbon emissions, committing to reach net zero by 2050.
- **2019 – Landscapes Review**
Called for National Landscapes to be “*at the forefront of our national response to climate change,*” arguing that, with a quarter of England’s land covered by these landscapes, their contribution is essential to national net zero targets.
- **2019 – The Colchester Declaration**
Adopted by all AONBs, the Declaration recognised climate change as “the biggest threat to humanity and one of the greatest threats to biodiversity.” The Declaration pledges, “To ensure all AONB management plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero.”

CNL commitments and action to date

- Climate change considerations began to be integrated into CNL policy from 2009.
- A dedicated Climate Change Strategy was developed in 2012 and renewed in 2022.
- 2021 - CNL commits “To identify a scenario which allows us to endorse a path to Net Zero emissions (or better) by 2050 (or sooner).”
- 2023
 - Small World Consulting report *A greenhouse gas emissions assessment and target scenario for the Cotswolds National Landscape.*
 - CNL publishes *Creating a Pathway to a Climate-Friendly Cotswolds* as a non-technical guide to the SWC report.
 - 3Keel convene 6 workshops on SWC Report.
- 2024
 - Board endorses the 3Keel report *Climate Action Engagement Strategy Review - Achieving consensus on a pathway to Net Zero by 2050 and resulting Action Plan.*
 - LUC commissioned to produce a woodland opportunity map.

Appendix B - Key Actions from 3Keel Report and Progress to Date

Themes	Actions (2024 - 2030)	Progress to date	Monitoring Approach	Guidance	Engagement	Projects
Land Use and Management	Commission a tree and hedgerow opportunity mapping exercise, followed by a call to action.	Opportunity Mapping completed May 2025, with a revised target of 9,375 ha reflecting the sensitivity of the landscape. Next steps are to refine guidance and develop a strategy to deliver woodland creation in opportunity areas.	Annual EWCO figures, 5 year review of woodland cover figures.	✓	✓	✓
	Increase support and knowledge sharing about regenerative farming principles and practices.	CNL ran Regen Ag Accelerator Programme through 2024-25. Programme being continued in 2025/26 with second cohort being recruited and existing cohort continuing. Next steps, design a project to investigate climate impact of regen ag in the Cotswolds.	No. of participants in regen ag programme, Uptake of regen ag practices through FIPL.		✓	
	Integrate more the role of soil carbon to land management.	Completed an initial desk-based study of the relationship between soil and land use in the Cotswolds, creating an approximation of soil carbon storage in the landscape. Next steps, present this data spatially to create an opportunity map and promote land use change in opportunity areas.	No. of FIPL farm carbon assessments supported.			✓

	Continued use of FiPL grants.	FIPL continues to deliver a high volume of high integrity projects, improving land use and management in the CNL. Next steps, to carry out a review of FIPL projects with a specific climate lens.	No. of climate related FIPL projects completed.			✓
	Create a land use strategy.	Completed woodland and hedgerow opportunity mapping, progressing soil carbon opportunity mapping and building understanding of regenerative agricultures climate impact in the Cotswolds. Next steps are to follow development of national land use framework, whilst aggregating land use data for the CNL.	Completion of a land use strategy.	✓		✓
Food and drink	Knowledge and education on supply chains and waste.	CNL team have attended events but no other progress to date. Next steps would be to engage with local stakeholders to understand on going work in this area.			✓	
	Research on high carbon footprint.	Initiated research into a carbon menu project within the CNL. Next steps would be to engage with local stakeholders, such as the LVEP, to get feedback on the potential of a pilot project.	Completion of a carbon menu pilot.		✓	✓

	Empower customer and connect farmers to improve local supply chains.	CNL team have attended events but no other progress to date. Next steps would be to engage with local stakeholders to understand on going work in this area.			✓	
Energy	Reducing home emissions via practical actions.	Completed an initial desk-based study on local EPC scores across the CNL. Next steps would be to get an understanding of uptake of community/domestic level renewables and energy efficiency measures.	Collection of data on renewables and energy efficiency measures.	✓	✓	
	Provision of information and awareness of changes to local and Government Schemes.	CNL team have kept track of national level changes and held regular meetings with the planning team to discuss these. Next steps are to consider if changes are needed to CNLs guidance in light of national changes.		✓		
	Planning – consider being adaptable to help reduce energy emissions.	CNL team have engaged with planning team and local stakeholders but no other progress to date. Next steps, to work with planning team to refine guidance on energy efficiency measures.		✓		

Transport	Joined up vision on transport, CNL to be part of discussions.	CNL team have attended events and engaged with local stakeholders but no other progress to date. Next steps are to engage with GCRP and OxCRP panel, whilst organising a stakeholder workshop with the intention of working towards an action group.	No. of stakeholders engaged, organisation of a workshop.		✓	
	Build upon the CNL transport workshop to create wider action group.	As above.	Creation of an action group.		✓	
	Development of community transport hub across CNL.	CNL team have attended events but no other progress to date.				✓

Additional work relevant to reaching Net Zero within the CNL included on the last exec paper:

- Carbon footprint of organisation.
- Bespoke carbon literacy training for CNL staff and wider network.

Appendix C – Action Plan using the Land Use Strategy as an example

Land Use Strategy		
Actions	CNL Role (lead, co-lead, support, follow)	Output/Impact
<p>Assess the potential for woodland creation through a woodland and hedgerow opportunity map for the Cotswolds.</p>	<p>Lead: Deliver woodland mapping project. Refine guidance on woodland creation, focused on landscape character and sensitivity.</p> <p>Co-lead: Engagement strategy involving internal teams and external stakeholders - including Forestry Commission, landowners, and forestry companies - through targeted workshops and outreach.</p>	<p>Land Use Strategy for CNLs pathway to Net Zero:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantified role for each element of land use (agriculture, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Model different combinations of those solutions to determine the optimum mix for reducing emissions and increasing carbon capture, while conserving and enhancing the CNL’s natural beauty and supporting the social and economic vitality of its communities. • Spatial prioritisation of opportunity areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Target areas for change. ○ Engage stakeholders in these areas. • Engagement strategy for stakeholders and partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work with partners to encourage adoption of the identified solutions in their own responses to the climate emergency.
<p>Assess the carbon sequestration potential of common soil types and land uses in the Cotswolds including grasslands and wetlands.</p>	<p>Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk based review of existing data to produce a carbon baseline of each soil type across a spectrum of land uses. • Ground truth this by delivering a sampling strategy across a representative range of soil and vegetation types. <p>Support: Feed this information into the LNP and local Nature Recovery Strategy.</p>	
<p>Assess the potential climate impact of Regenerative Agriculture</p>	<p>Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund a series of farm carbon assessments across typical Cotswolds farm systems to compare emissions from conventional and regenerative practices. • Undertake a land use review to map the proportions of different farming systems across the landscape. • Combine this with soils dataset to model the potential climate benefit of increased uptake of regenerative practices across the CNL. <p>Support: increase support and knowledge sharing about regenerative farming principles and practices.</p>	