

Annual Review

REPORTING ON THE WORK & ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE BOARD DURING 2015/16



Welcome

2016 marks the 50th Anniversary of the designation of the Cotswolds as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This brings us an opportunity to celebrate with residents, visitors, businesses and partners the value of our very special and nationally important landscape.

I invite you to join the Cotswolds Conservation Board in helping to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the AONB throughout the year.

In 2015/16 we continued to work with a wide range of partners and achieved considerable progress on our two aims; conserve and enhance and to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the natural beauty of the AONB. I am always encouraged and proud of the quantity and quality of the work undertaken by everyone involved, despite the limited resources.

The various activities and key achievements within these areas are highlighted throughout this Annual Review.

As we embark on the next 50 years can I ask you to consider pledging your support for a variety of developing initiatives in support of the conservation, enhancement, understanding and enjoyment of the Cotswolds AONB.

Together we can...

- Recognise the quality of the AONB landscape and secure the Cotswolds as a dark sky reserve.
- Make the Cotswolds the best landscape for the visitor to explore by public transport.
- Make the Cotswolds the walking and exploring capital of England.
- Build the Visitor Giving scheme and grow the level of support and range of activity that it can invest in.
- Make the very best use of the Cotswolds as a Natural Health Service.
- Develop the rural skills programme and support young people to advance their skills by offering a range of traineeships and apprenticeships, to help keep the Cotswolds special.
- Develop the Cotswolds Choice brand to support local producers and businesses that in turn support high quality landscape management.
- Help farmers and landowners retain and create wildflower rich grasslands and at the same time use their flood management potential.
- Develop our understanding of the full range of benefits that the Cotswolds AONB provides to society and business.

My sincere thanks to everyone who works with the Conservation Board to care for this wonderful landscape.

Liz Eyre

Chairman of the Cotswolds Conservation Board

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary

The Cotswolds was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1966 in recognition of its rich, diverse and high-quality landscape. Covering 2,038 sq km, it is the largest member of the family of the AONBs in England and Wales and the second largest protected landscape in England after the Lake District National Park.



Our role

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is an independent body established by Parliament in 2004 and has two statutory purposes:

- a) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and
- b) to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.

In fulfilling these roles, the Board has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of people living in the AONB.



'Cotswold Views' taken Peter Llewellyn from Painswick, overall winner of the Cotswolds Photography Competition 2015.

Conserving & Enhancing

Projecting the Cotswolds iconic landscape

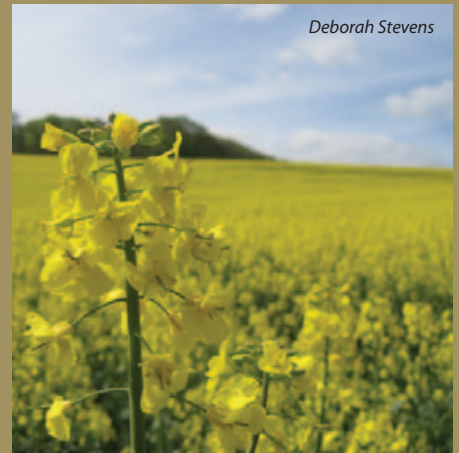
Supporting planners & decision makers within the Cotswold landscape

Developed from the Landscape Character Assessment, the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (LS&G) provides an overview of the forces for change that are influencing the landscape, and outlines a series of landscape strategies and guidelines to help direct change in a positive and sustainable way. In very general terms, the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines is a tool to aid the planning, design and management of the AONB's diverse landscapes.

The last set of LS&G were adopted in 2008 and needed updating to include forces for

change not identified in 2008 such as solar farms and flood management, to revise existing strategies and to improve the clarity and presentation of the documents as well as to ensure they are climate change proofed.

The LS&G is a key document used by a range of stakeholders including parish councils, local authorities, the Forestry Commission as well as Board staff to inform, for example, responses to consultations, consideration of planning applications and woodland creation proposals.



Deborah Stevens



Seed sieving with BBC Countryfile's Ellie Harrison. Photo by Daniel Greenwood

Our contribution to England's biodiversity

Save Our Magnificent Meadows is the first national biodiversity heritage project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Board is one of ten national partners in the Plantlife co-ordinated project now in its second year.

Cotswold Grassland Week in 2015 was a huge success with various open days, walks and talks occurring across the Cotswolds. Wildflower seed harvested in the summer was broadcast across nearly 35ha on eleven different sites. New donor and receptor sites have been lined up for this coming summer. 10 habitat and species training courses have already occurred in summer 2016, ranging from wildflower ID and botanical survey methodology to bumblebee ID and scything. The project has also organised seven very popular workshops for landowners and horse owners.

Save our Magnificent Meadows

1,029 hours of restoration work by volunteers

44 advisory site visits

£320,000 investment in the restoration and celebration of wildflower grasslands

Supporting rural skills

The Board offers an annual programme of training and events to support and promote traditional rural skills.

2015-16 represented a year of consolidation for the Board's Rural Skills training programme. After a rapid expansion of courses over the past five years, the activity in the core programme was maintained, in order to allow for a focus on new elements of rural skills development. The key outcomes were:

57 rural skills courses
eg. dry-stone walling, thatching & blacksmithing

430 trainees

- 57 courses delivered during the year, a 14% increase on the previous year's high of 50.
- 11 different types of skills training provided, including; dry-stone walling, hedgelaying, wool weaving, scything, horse logging, lime mortar, woodland coppicing, blacksmithing, brushcutting, thatching and flaxing.
- Dry-stone walling and hedgelaying remain the programmes most popular events with 237 people attending these alone.
- The Board provided rural skills training for 430 people in 2015-16, a 4% increase on the previous year's high of 413 and a new record for the programme.
- The programme delivered 2 educational events for The Cotswold School, Bourton-on-the-Water and Queen Margaret Primary School, Tewkesbury.
- 12 dry-stone wallers gained LANTRA qualifications ranging from Level 1 (Initial) to Level 3 (Advanced) through the Dry-stone Walling Academy.
- 20 professional rural skills trades people were employed to deliver instruction for courses.
- 97% of surveyed trainees agreed that Cotswolds Rural Skills courses met their expectations.

Our dedicated voluntary wardens

As ever, the number of people keen to volunteer with the Board is fantastic.

This year the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens clocked up a total of 45,739 hours in their work to conserve, enhance and increase understanding and enjoyment of the Cotswolds AONB.

300 wardens, who form the voluntary arm of the Conservation Board, regularly carry out a wide range of activities which, in 2015/16 was estimated to be worth over £300,000.

Much of the voluntary wardens' time was spent undertaking a variety of practical conservation and enhancement work, organising and leading guided walks, monitoring historic sites and working with school groups.



Voluntary wardens' conservation activities included:

- Over 82,000 sq m of woodland cleared & 19,680 sq m was coppiced at 338 woodland sites
- Over 750 trees and hedge shrubs planted
- 63 grassland sites improved in area of 258,558 sq m
- Over 400 metres of streams and ditches cleared
- 4,000 miles of paths patrolled by the Parish Wardens
- 26,500 meters of bridleway cleared
- 345 children engaged in school projects
- Over 330 guided walks led

Engaging with farmers

The Board held its annual Farming Forum at the Royal Agricultural University in March. The Forum explored how farming might change over the next 25 years and what this means for farming businesses, communities and the Cotswold landscape.

Guest speakers included: Cotswolds farmer Henry Robinson who looked at land management today and how government agendas impact and Dr. Diane Mitchell, NFU's Chief Environment Adviser led discussion on how farming might look like in the Cotswolds in 25 years' time.

The AONB is a living working landscape with over 87% of the area farmed – of which 49% is crops and fallow and 42% grass and 9% farm woodland and other.



Enjoying & Appreciating

Valuing & enjoying our natural environment



Giving something back

An additional £3,413 has been raised thanks to the generosity of visitors and businesses through the Cotswolds Visitor Giving scheme.

Joining the visitor pay-back scheme in 2015/16 along with Adam Henson's Farm Park and Manor Cottages are:

- Cotswold Running Ltd
- Go Cotswolds (guided tours)
- Extreme Energy
- Cotswold Electric Bike Tours
- And our own Cotswold Lion Café

In 2016 we look forward to welcoming the Dormy House Hotel & Spa and the Farncombe Estate to the scheme.

In 2015/16 conservation projects being funded by the scheme included: the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust for the Sherston River Improvement Project (SHRIMP) and the reconstruction of a railway halt near Hailes Abbey, to provide for walkers, cyclists and visitors without cars to visit the National Trust owned historic ruins.

Cotswolds Visitor Giving scheme generated an additional
£3,413

Helping people to explore the AONB

At the start of the year the Board continued to take a lead role along with Cotswold and West Oxfordshire district councils in the development of a Cotswolds Destination Management Organisation (DMO), building on the Destination Management Strategy launched in 2014/15. Cotswolds Tourism launched a new logo and website in the spring and are working on a new look visitor's guide.

The Board, working in partnership with Great Western Railway and Greentraveller launched a new online video campaign to promote the integrated rail and bus Cotswolds Discoverer one day pass.

Watch the video at www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk/discoverer



Creating a visitor experience



The Board's visitor centre in Northleach re-launched in March with a new name and logo as the Cotswolds Discovery Centre at the Old Prison. As well as a new logo the centre also launched a new events programme and reopened of the Blacksmith's forge.

The Board working with the Friends of the Cotswolds learnt in January that the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the Discovery Centre had been unsuccessful. The bid, submitted in October 2015, was for significant enhancements to the centre, including an all-weather gallery to better display the important agricultural collection.

A new partnership board has since been established and will be breaking the larger proposal into smaller bite sized pieces and exploring new funding opportunities and grants.

In July 2015, His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales paid a visit to the Discovery Centre which included an opportunity to see a Cotswold dry-stone walling demonstration and observe blacksmith and thatching rural skills courses in action.

In 2015/16 over is 44,740 people visited the Cotswolds Discovery Centre, an increase of 27% on the previous year.



The Prince of Wales at the Cotswolds Discovery Centre with Cotswold Lion breeder Steve Parke

Challenging the Cotswold Way

The National Trail continues to be managed to a high standard in the face of challenging financial circumstances, with thanks in particular to the resourcefulness of the four Highway Authorities and Voluntary Wardens.

In mid March, Liz Eyre, the Board's Chairman commenced a 10 stage sponsored walk along the Cotswolds Way from Bath to Chipping Campden as part of the AONBs 50th anniversary. The final stage is planned for early October. As we approached 2016/17 the grant support from Natural England looked extremely vulnerable. It would make sense for Defra and Natural England to consider merging the grant settlement for National Trails and our Protected Landscapes, given their high levels of coincidence.



Walking for health

The Board has begun work in piloting a scheme to work directly with GP surgeries to provide prescriptive short walks (local to the surgeries) that the GP will be able to print off and give to patients.

We are hoping these walks will have benefits for patients' general health, help in preventing illnesses as well as aiding recovery after periods of ill health.

Outstanding week

The Board took part in the first 'Outstanding Week' in September. The week-long event was organised by the National Association of AONBs to promote a programme of events to help people enjoy and be inspired by the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It complements the National Parks Week equivalent held in July.

People & Communities

A strong connection between people and the landscape

Supporting rural businesses



A programme to boost jobs and growth for rural businesses and communities in the Cotswolds with nearly £2m of funding opened for business.

The Cotswolds LEADER programme opened for applications from November 2015 and will provide grants to small businesses, farmers, foresters and communities for projects that create jobs and grow the rural economy. The LEADER area centres on the AONB, but also expands west to the banks of the River Severn, south to incorporate the main part of the Cotswold Water Park and east to take in a larger section of West Oxfordshire.

LEADER is a method of delivering rural development through a local community led approach. It is a European Union initiative and forms part of the Rural Development Programme for England.

Its priorities in the Cotswolds are to:

- support micro and small businesses and farm diversification
- boost rural tourism
- increase farm productivity
- increase forestry productivity
- provide cultural and heritage activities
- provide rural services

The Board recruited 6 new members of the Local Action Group Executive through open competition, new appointees from the private, public and charity sectors working with the Board's appointees on the Executive to guide the programme and determine applications.

Progress has been good, with 12 outline applications invited to submit full applications and the first full grant award made in early 2016/17.

Supporting our vibrant communities

The Sustainable Development Fund aims to provide small grants to organisations, businesses, community groups or individuals to carry out projects which bring environmental, social and economic benefits to the AONB.

In 2015/16 the value of projects supported by SDF was £453,199.

Key projects included: a grant of £7,500 to the Cirencester based New Brewery Arts Centre for their Community Room at the Barrel Store, Cotswolds YHA. This project focused on the conversion of an existing building into a low budget accommodation facility for visitor to the Cotswolds.

Another successful project was the grant of £4,000 awarded to Free Ranger Creativity for a project designed to provide Forest School facilities for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The project also undertook a feasibility study looking into the relationships between landowners and the providers of public services in the South Cotswold area, the purpose of which was to see if there is the potential to unlock more woodlands for educational services.

Free Ranger Creativity project



Planning for the future

In 2015/16 the Board responded to 91 planning applications the vast majority of which were for major development above 1 ha in area or of 10 dwellings and above. Although some 20% of these responses are still pending a decision, of those decisions reached within the year, 75% were in accordance with the Board's original recommendation.

In respect of appeal decisions, where the Board have directly submitted evidence to appeals some 10 appeals have been dismissed in accordance with the Board's recommendations and three have been allowed. Given the scale of the AONB and

number of planning applications the Board continues to concentrate on those schemes likely to result in the greatest harm or result in an undesirable precedent.

The Board responds to a wide variety of planning policy documents and a growing area of involvement is in Neighbourhood Plans. Over the last year the Board has been consulted on and responded to 11 Neighbourhood Plans. In locations within the AONB and its setting where some Local Planning Authorities do not have Adopted Local Plans in place and where there have been 5 year housing supply issues, there have been particular development pressures.

Other work has included securing landscape enhancement through the undergrounding of electricity lines in open landscapes through well-established schemes with SSE and Western Power Distribution. At present three schemes are pending delivery in the next financial period of funding. The process of producing and amending Position Statements continues including Position Statements being prepared on Setting and Neighbourhood Plans.

Protecting our historic environment

The year culminated in the submission of the Bathscape Landscape Partnerships bid for the setting of Bath, to the Heritage Lottery Fund on behalf of the Partnership by Bath and North East Somerset Council.

Representing a total investment of £2,500,000 the programme combines habitat and landscape management with community engagement to address the linked issues of a landscape in decline and a community disconnected from its landscape. If successful the development stage starts in October 2016 and again if successful the delivery stage starts in October 2018.

Last year our volunteers monitored 13 Historic England sites in the area

A417 Missing Link update

The Board hosted site visits in the April and November for Department of Transport (DfT) and Highways Agency / Highways England staff to explore the issues and discuss a range of options for consideration as part of future consultancy work to be led by Highways England. The Board has recommended that:

- Any scheme should bring about substantial benefits for the Cotswolds landscape and environment as well as people's enjoyment of the area;
- Any scheme must have substantially more benefits than negative impacts for the Cotswolds AONB;
- Any solution involving a new road must ensure that the scheme is designed to meet the character of the landscape, not the other way round.

Strategic Management

Section 85 of Countryside & Rights of Way Act monitoring

There is a legal requirement under Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 for relevant authorities down to Parish Council level to have due regard to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB in their decision making process.

The monitoring of Section 85 compliance forms a broad spectrum from monitoring and commenting on planning applications and other infrastructure projects; planning appeals; consultation and responses to Environmental Impact Assessments; commenting on a wide variety of policy documents from Neighbourhood Plans up to Central Government consultations.

The Board is also involved in a panel of protected landscapes and Natural England in respect of the Great Western Railway Electrification project between Corsham and Bath and between Alderton and Chipping Sodbury. Work that has arisen specifically due to the need to discharge Section 85 duties.

The Board continues to make responses to planning applications, appeals, Neighbourhood Plans and other Planning Consultations highlighting the Section 85 duty from the CRoW Act 2000 that provides the legal basis for all relevant authorities from public bodies down to Parish Council level: "to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty."

For example in respect of the Oddington Road, Stow-on-the-Wold appeal decision (2015) the Secretary of State in agreeing to dismiss the appeal for 146 dwellings in the AONB, acknowledged that he: "has also had regard to Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which requires decisions on development proposals to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs."

England's finest landscapes contribute more than £20bn

Covering a quarter of England, National Parks and AONBs are our most beautiful and cherished landscapes, with iconic archaeological and historical sites and valuable wildlife habitats. Yet they provide so much more to society than a beautiful view.

England's finest landscapes contribute more than £20bn each year to our economy – similar to that of Birmingham, according to a report published in June last year.



This compares with the economic study of the Cotswolds AONB in 2013 which found that the total economic activity across the area was valued at £2 billion GVA, with the economic contribution of the AONB landscape valued at £337 million GVA and 9,700 jobs critically dependent on the quality of the AONB.

The publication 'So much more than the view...' from England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks, highlighted the wide range of benefits these iconic areas provide to society.

Board News

A dynamic and successful Conservation Board

An engaging Board

In April 2015 we welcomed Hedley Ringrose, Diane Crone and Ann Holland as new Secretary of State appointees. They replaced Jeff West, Adrian Phillips and Richard Lloyd.

In September Cotswold District Council appointed Sue Jepson, replacing Carole Topple, who had retired as a Councillor. In February we welcomed Penny Williamson as a new parish appointee and in March 2016 we welcomed Peter Jones as a new Secretary of State appointee.

Our work and aspirations for National Park's 8 Point Plan

Much of the Board's work chimes with the 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks, published by Defra in March 2016. The Conservation Board's would equally benefit from engagement with and support from departments across government. It would be useful if any review or rolling forward of the 8 Point Plan by Defra incorporated the Conservation Boards and considered further reference to the wider AONB family.

Photo by Steve Dore



How we made a difference in 2015/16



57 rural skills courses
eg. dry-stone walling, thatching & blacksmithing

430 trainees

Sustainable Development Fund
SUPPORTED COMMUNITY PROJECTS VALUING **£453,500**

1,278

visitors bought a Cotswolds Discoverer Pass from GWR to explore the area by train & bus

345 YOUNG PEOPLE FROM **18** SCHOOLS PARTICIPATED IN COUNTRYSIDE LEARNING

513,795 unique visits to the AONB websites

1,853 Facebook likes
WITH A REACH OF **97,068**

5,633 Twitter followers
WITH A REACH OF **471,200**

7,617 unique views on our YouTube Channel

OVER **800** ADULTS & CHILDREN
Visited The Cotswold Sheep & wool day

4,607 People enjoyed FREE GUIDED WALKS by our volunteer wardens

Last year our volunteers monitored **13** Historic England sites in the area

45,739 hours CONSERVATION WORK BY voluntary wardens equated to an estimated value of **£305,000**

Save our Magnificent Meadows
1,029 hours of restoration work by volunteers
44 advisory site visits
£320,000 investment in the restoration and celebration of wildflower grasslands

134,795 DOWNLOADS SELF-GUIDED WALKS AND CYCLE ROUTES FROM OUR WEBSITE

£2m LEADER programme launched to invest in local economy to the value of **£5m** on projects delivered

75% planning application decisions made in accordance with the Board's advice

The Cotswolds Conservation Board **SECURED £1.7m** investment in the area and turned every **£1** from a local authority into **£185** worth of investment

Cotswolds Visitor Giving scheme generated an additional **£3,413**

Received **44,740** Domestic & international visitors in 2015-2016

COTSWOLDS DISCOVERY CENTRE at THE OLD PRISON

Our financial year

Unaudited Summary Financial Statement

1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016

	2014/15	2015/16
	£	£
Expenditure	989,952	925,854
Project Delivery	794,064	723,624
Corporate Management and Administration	153,643	154,703
Agency Operational Agreement (net)	42,245	47,527
Income	(873,914)	(854,626)
DEFRA Grant	(425,600)	(425,600)
Natural England	(90,614)	(76,143)
Local Authorities & Parish Councils	(143,441)	(140,885)
Rural Payments Agency	(18,647)	(68,781)
Heritage Lottery Funding	(50,059)	(65,925)
Other	(145,553)	(77,292)
Deficit/(Surplus)	116,038	71,228
Deficit/(Surplus) after Movement on Reserves	50,810	(13,592)
Balance Sheet		
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets	459,141	432,847
Less: Current Liabilities	(160,217)	(205,151)
Net Current Assets	298,924	227,696
Financed by		
General Fund Balance	197,513	211,106
Other Reserves	194,069	156,775
Accumulated Deficit on Agency Operational Agreement	(92,658)	(140,185)
	298,924	227,696



Expenditure 2015/16

Recreation & Management	22%
Conservation of Natural Environment	21%
Corporate Management	18%
Promoting and Understanding	13%
Cotswold Voluntary Wardens	13%
Forward Planning	11%
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	2%

Looking forward...

In 2016/17 our developmental priorities are:

Conserving and Enhancing

Protecting and investing in the natural capital of the Cotswolds.

Enjoying and Understanding

Demonstrating and facilitating the public benefit of the natural capital of the Cotswolds.

Growing the rural economy

Celebrating, supporting and investing in the economic value of the Cotswolds AONB.

We aim to work with partners to:

- Invest to improve the natural capital of the Cotswolds,
- Broaden public participation in countryside programmes and visitor diversity, especially from young people and those in education,
- Influence and deliver programmes to enhance skills, create jobs and apprenticeships and invest in businesses,
- Influence and deliver programmes to improve health and wellbeing,
- Commence the review of the current AONB Management Plan in preparation for the drafting of the 2018 – 2023 plan,
- Continue to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the AONB, with the Cotswolds Living Landscape Festival, roadshows and events,
- Review past changes and drivers for future landscape changes as part of 'Cotswolds@50',
- Continue to develop and expand the Cotswolds Discoverer Pass scheme with local operators and apply for funding to invest and grow the scheme,
- Deliver the Cotswolds LEADER programme for the benefit of the rural economy,
- Continue growing the Cotswolds Visitor Giving scheme and encouraging more tourism businesses to participate,
- Work with local authorities as they produce and publish their core strategies and local plans,
- Continue to develop the Cotswolds Discovery Centre as a vibrant visitor centre,
- Work with electricity distributors to bury more overhead wires underground and assess the opportunity with National Grid to mitigate the impact of high voltage lines underground,
- Support the promotion and co-ordination of recreational routes across the Cotswolds,
- and to assess the long term impact of climate change on the landscape of the AONB.



www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk
www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk
www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk



Cotswold Way
NATIONAL TRAIL

Landscapes for life
.org.uk

COTSWOLDS
One of the
AONB Family