

Annual Review

REPORTING ON THE WORK & ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE BOARD DURING 2016/17



England's nationally important landscape

The 2016/17 year marked the 50th anniversary of the designation of the Cotswolds as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This gave us a huge opportunity to increase awareness to an ever increasing and diverse audience of stakeholders of the special qualities of this nationally important landscape: Rich in farming, tourism and nature but hugely important for the UK's economy.

When celebrating the 50th anniversary at the House of Commons in June, the Board and I met with MP's, partners and businesses all with an invested interest and passion for the Cotswolds. From this event a number of pledges were announced to work together in developing initiatives in support of conservation, world class visitor experiences and a prosperous economy. Since this announcement a number of projects have started to be developed to explore these ideas.

Work has started to review the AONB's Management Plan which commenced at the Annual Forum in September. We were fortunate to have the following guest speakers to start the conversation: Deputy Director-General of UNESCO, Getachew Engida, Chair of the Natural Capital Committee, Professor Dieter Helm

CBE and President of the Landscape Institute, Merrick Denton-Thompson OBE. The presentations and discussion reaffirmed the cultural and natural capital values of the AONB and strengthened our ambition for the Cotswolds as a jewel in the country's most special landscapes.

We all know that farming is vital for the Cotswolds and has for many years been strongly influenced by European grant schemes and regulation. The Board is working with farmers to look at the threats and opportunities from Brexit and what farming in the Cotswolds needs post Brexit to produce food, conserve the landscape and biodiversity.

At the start of 2017 an online petition was created by a local resident calling for the Cotswolds AONB to

have National Park status. This is a regular question asked by visitors, local residents, politicians, partner organisations and Board members. Like National Parks, AONB's have the same status and level of protection. It may well be time to explore this idea and look at various models to further recognise and conserve one of England's most visited and loved landscapes.

The Board has been working to deliver real benefits for residents and visitors – and indeed for the country as a whole. In the Annual Review we highlight just some of the areas. I am delighted to present this excellent record with sincere thanks to all those who have helped to deliver these benefits.

Liz Eyre

Chairman

Cotswolds Conservation Board

Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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 third largest protected landscape in England after the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.



The Board's role

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is an independent statutory 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.



Conserving & Enhancing

Projecting the Cotswolds iconic landscape

Cotswolds landscape through the lens

The Board launched a new year-long community project to document and celebrate the rich history of the Cotswolds landscape.

A comprehensive archive of landscape photographs from across the Cotswolds AONB has been gathered from members of the public at roadshow events and online.

The focus is now for the photographs to be reviewed and compared with the images from today to review and to inform future possible changes to the landscape in the next 50 years. In parallel the University of Gloucestershire are to develop scenarios of potential landscape change.



A magnificent achievement for our Wildflower Meadows

Over the last three years Save our Magnificent Meadows in the Cotswolds has been increasing the area of species-rich grassland through advice and guidance as well as using various practical techniques such as brush harvesting and green hay. Botanical surveys have already shown that seeding of meadows using brush-

harvested seed has proved successful with a number of species appearing in the first two years.

Eight workshops for landowners on grassland restoration and management have proved incredibly popular. Landowner Champions have hosted some of these workshops in their meadows which has enabled

the sharing of experiences and best practice. As a result of one of the workshops local landowners immediately formed a meadow support group for three adjoining parishes. Community Champions have been celebrating wildflower meadows in their area through guided walks, talks and photography exhibitions.

Success for Bathscape, Board backed partnership

With active support and participation from the Board, the Bathscape Partnership has been allocated up to £1.8m from the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnerships programme to deliver a programme of activity which brings a co-ordinated approach to the care of the setting of Bath. This includes a round one grant of £176,800 towards the development of a detailed second round application for submission in June 2018.

Activities are proposed under four main themes:

Conserving & Restoring – enabling the landscape to be better managed and in better condition

The Therapeutic Landscape – developing the therapeutic tradition associated with Bath to support health and wellbeing through greater contact with the landscape and natural environment

Access – Improving access to the landscape and natural environment and reducing physical and other barriers

Learning Training & Skills – Improving the understanding and skills of target audiences, volunteers and participants.



Our dedicated team of volunteers

We continue to be overwhelmed by the number of enthusiastic, dedicated and passionate people who volunteer with us at the Cotswolds Conservation Board. Throughout this year our Voluntary Wardens gave more than 48,338 hours of their time. This was spent helping with practical tasks, guided walks, events and education, all with a focus on achieving our AONB Management Plan outcomes.

Over 280 wardens, regularly carry out a wide range of activities which, in 2016/17 was estimated to be worth £322,000.

This allows us to achieve so much more, with benefits not only for the AONB but for the wardens' own physical, mental health and wellbeing.

This year the wardens have set up a new Facebook group to promote and share photos of guided walks and practical tasks carried out.

www.facebook.com/groups/cotswoldwardens

An increase in people being trained in rural skills

The Board has provided rural skills training for over 550 people throughout 2016/17, a new record for the programme.

19 dry-stone wallers gained LANTRA qualifications ranging from Level 1 (Beginner) to Level 2 (Intermediate) through the Dry Stone Walling Academy in Northleach.

New flax and wool weaving training courses were introduced to the programme, giving an even wider range of rural skills courses to choose from.



Enjoying & Appreciating

Valuing & enjoying our natural environment

Caring for the Cotswolds



The Ebrington Arms near Chipping Campden and Cotswolds Guided Tours based in Evenlode are the latest businesses to join the visitor pay back scheme now called Caring for the Cotswolds. Visitors voluntarily support conservation by donating a small amount of money via their bill or fees.

Businesses big or small can become members to generate funds from their visitors. This year over £5,000 has been awarded to the following projects Caring for the Cotswolds – a simple and easy grant giving system:

- **Durham University** – Digital walking guides telling the history of the Bagendon Landscape
- **Bourton-on-the-Water Parish Council** – restoration of the iconic riverbank wall
- **Nailsworth Town Council** – restoration of the historic Glendower Spring head and access improvements at Bunting Hill Steps
- **Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust** – Nest boxes for the Cotswolds Rivers Barn Owl Recovery Project

CARING FOR THE COTSWOLDS

- **Ilmington Parish Council** – commemorative Queen's Coronation kissing Gate & village map restoration
- **Gloucestershire Warwickshire Stream Railway** – restoration of a halt at Hailes Abbey for walkers to get on and off to explore the Cotswold Way and abbey ruins.

Board captures the Cotswold Way for Google

Staff from the Board have been busy capturing the 102 mile Cotswold Way National Trail last summer for Google Trekker to feature on their maps. It's a journey that started in Chipping Campden in August walking with a series of 16 cameras mounted in a green shell, carried like a rucksack. The Trekker sparked some interest by visitors as it approached the centre of Bath, completing the journey. Google Trekker is the next generation of 'street view maps'.

The new trail view map goes live in May on the 10th anniversary of the Cotswold Way becoming a National Trail.



Walking & Exploring Capital

We know that the Cotswolds is well known and loved for walking, cycling and horse riding. Whether it's a walk along one of the 18 long distance paths or using the network of smaller paths, the AONB has over 3,000 miles of public pathways.

In 2016 the Board made a pledge to gain further recognition of the Cotswolds being 'England's Walking and Exploring Capital'. Over the coming year the Board will seek new funding opportunities to further develop this initiative to achieve its ambition.



Cotswolds Discovery Centre & Café

The Board's Cotswolds Discovery Centre in Northleach has welcomed over 44,000 domestic and international visitors. A series of special events have taken place including the annual Sheep & Wool Day on May Day Bank Holiday, attracting over 600 people through the doors, an outdoor theatre production of Wild and the Willows in August, half term educational activities for the kids and art and craft workshops led by the Lechlade Craft Barn.



Celebrating 50 years of the Cotswolds AONB



Chairman celebrates the Cotswolds in 50th anniversary walk



The Board's Chairman Liz Eyre completed walking the 102 mile Cotswold Way National Trail marking the 50th anniversary of the Cotswolds as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Liz began the golden anniversary walk from Bath and completed the walk in ten stages over seven months along the Cotswold escarpment, through picturesque villages and past famous ancient sites, reaching Chipping Campden. She was joined by fellow Board members and staff, walking groups, local residents and the Board's own Cotswold Voluntary Wardens.

Board publishes Cotswolds AONB book

A new book on the landscapes of the Cotswolds, its architecture, customs and culture has been published and is now on sale. It celebrates the 50th anniversary of Britain's largest AONB.

Photographed by Nick Turner, written by Siân Ellis and designed by Nick Darien-Jones, it breaks new boundaries in creative photographic art, writing and design. There has been no other book on the Cotswolds quite like this one.

It's available to buy online at www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk



Cotswolds on Tour

A touring roadshow popping up in towns and villages across the AONB, a first public art exhibition with over 100 works and a photography competition have also taken place, celebrating with residents, visitors and businesses the value of the Cotswolds AONB in its 50th anniversary.

Westminster Reception

The Board was delighted to hold a reception in June at the Palace of Westminster to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

Hosted by Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, the reception featured a range of speakers including Rory Stewart, Minister for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).



Speaking at the reception, Rory Stewart MP spoke about the purpose and importance of designating the Cotswolds as an AONB in the swinging 1960 to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. He went on to say: "The Cotswolds AONB is a memorable landscape and one that will long continue".

Attending the reception were; Alex Chalk MP for Cheltenham, Chris Skidmore MP for Kingswood, Harriett Baldwin MP for West Worcestershire, Ben Howlett MP for Bath, and Nigel Huddleston MP for Mid Worcestershire. Representatives from the House of Lords also attended along with local authority leaders and directors of local businesses.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP for The Cotswolds, who hosted the Westminster reception said: "I was delighted to host the event to help mark the 50th Anniversary of the Cotswolds being designated an AONB. It is a landscape in which we all have a stake; a local and national jewel".

2,000 visitors at Cotswolds Living Landscape Festival

The 17th-century Lodge Park in the Cotswold country estate of Sherborne played host to the Cotswolds Living Landscape Festival in September, organised by the Board in partnership with National Trust.

The festival marked the 50th anniversary with food and drink producers, rural skills displays, arts and crafts stalls and live music. Large crowds gathered to watch this year's Cotswolds Dry Stone Walling Competition and rural skills demonstrations. 2,000 people visited the festival from across the region. The festival is planned to take place biennially, with the next one being in September 2018.

People & Communities

A strong connection between people and the landscape



Work starts in reviewing the AONB's Management Plan

The Board is responsible for the review and production of the AONB wide Management Plan and the current plan spans 2013-18. In September 2016 we commenced the review of the Management Plan with at the Cotswolds AONB Annual Forum. Guest speakers were: Deputy Director-General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Getachew Engida, Chair of the Natural Capital Committee, Professor Dieter Helm CBE and President of the Landscape Institute, Merrick Denton-Thompson OBE.

This included a workshop, the purpose of which was to work out the basic principles of what the attendees wished the new Management Plan to actually say and to understand whether overall we were 'winning' 'losing' or 'drawing' at what we were already trying to achieve.

Following on from this the Board held a series of eight themed workshops to further explore what the Management Plan should contain. Workshops were also held with Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic

England to ensure we engaged with the statutory environmental bodies early in the process. Altogether the Board reached out to over 300 stakeholders in organising these workshops and purposely targeted new stakeholders that hadn't been approached before.

In addition the Board also employed consultants to assess the Natural Capital of the Cotswolds AONB in order to feed into and inform the Management Plan.

£200,000 awarded to rural businesses across the Cotswolds



The Cotswolds LEADER programme has approved grants worth over £200,000 to rural businesses across the Cotswolds since its launch in November 2015, creating 11 new jobs.

Successful beneficiaries across the Cotswolds include farm shops, a wood fuel supplier, a meat curing company and a farm diversifying into holiday accommodation. These are just a few businesses that have recently benefited from the grant funding scheme, which is run by the Board.

The Cotswolds LEADER programme considers grants between £5,000 and £50,000, although it has recently increased the micro enterprise maximum to 100,000. Projects span the following investment themes:

- Micro and Small Enterprises and farm diversification
- Rural Tourism
- Farm Productivity
- Forestry Productivity
- Culture & Heritage
- Rural Services

To find out more and the grant funding programme visit www.cotswoldsleader.org.uk

All on board

As Great Western Railway continues work on electrifying the London to Bristol line, the Board alongside representatives from Natural England, North Wessex Downs and Chilterns AONBs proactively engaged and advised GWR to minimise their impact on the protected landscape.



Over £37,000 awarded to community projects by the Board

In 2016/17, the value of projects supported by Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) was £37,348. SDF aims to provide small grants to organisations, businesses, community groups or individuals to carry out projects which bring environmental, social and economic benefits and helps implement the AONB Management Plan.

These projects ranged from a grant of £3,000 to Stonehouse Town Council for improvements to an area of community woodland to £4,000 for the Wychwood Project's development of Cotswolds verges and green spaces.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust also received £6,637 for the Cotswolds

Rivers Living Landscape project, which aims to reconnect and restore healthy river habitats throughout the Cotswolds.

As well as habitat and conservation projects, SDF grants were also provided for improvements to facilities for local communities. Epwell Parish Council received £2,000 to build a new pavilion and barbeque area for community use, encouraging recreational activities and social benefits for local residents. Gloucestershire NHS Trust used a grant of £1,775 to construct a green gym in the grounds of Cirencester Hospital, encouraging local residents to improve physical fitness and personal wellbeing through gardening and horticulture.



Landscape led solution for the A417

The Board has been working with Highways England and Mott MacDonald to begin to identify potential route corridor options for a landscape led solution for the A417.

All stakeholders have agreed to the following vision for the future scheme: A landscape-led highways improvement scheme that will deliver a safe and resilient free-flowing road whilst conserving and enhancing the special character of the Cotswolds AONB; reconnecting landscape and ecology; bringing about landscape, wildlife and heritage benefits, including enhanced visitors' enjoyment of the area; improving local communities' quality of life; and contributing to the health of the economy and local businesses.

Board Policy and Advice

The Board reviewed and refreshed its Landscape & Strategy Guidelines and continually reviews its suite of Position Statements on planning and land management topics and issues. These documents are regularly used by a wide audience to inform and advise on landscape change, individual planning issues, neighbourhood plans and local plans and strategies.



Going underground

Over 750 metres of low voltage overhead wires have been taken underground in and around the Cotswold Farm Park near Guiting Power by Western Power Distribution at the cost of £56,000. A year on year success story of undergrounding wirescapes across the AONB. Other schemes and funding are being investigated.

Monitoring Section 85 Compliance

There is a legal requirement under Section 85 of the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 for relevant authorities from government departments to Parish Councils to have due regard to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB in their decision making process.

The Board continues to highlight the Section 85 duty in its responses to planning applications. It also makes reference to the duty when responding to Neighbourhood Plans, appeals and other relevant planning consultations. For example during West Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan review the Board has consistently highlighted the Section 85 duty 'to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. Major infrastructure projects such as Highways England's proposed improvements to the A417 provide another opportunity to ensure this duty is considered fully throughout scheme development to completion.

How we made a difference in 2016/17



OUR 50th anniversary engaged OVER 100 local businesses
75 ARTISTS & 20 MPs & Local Authority Leaders

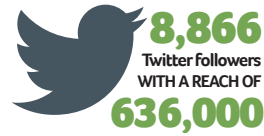


402,994
VISITING OUR WEBSITES
FOR THE 1ST TIME



4,652
Facebook likes

WITH A REACH OF
684,000
reading our posts



8,866
Twitter Followers
WITH A REACH OF
636,000



28,392
unique views of our
video updates
on YouTube & Facebook



1,500 visitors
bought a Cotswolds Discoverer Pass from GWR to explore the area by train & bus



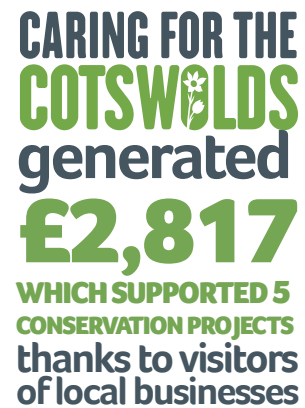
37 our volunteers
monitored
Historic England
sites in the area



71 rural skills courses
dry-stone walling, thatching
& blacksmithing
553
trainees



2,000 visitors
to our
Living Landscape Festival



CARING FOR THE
COTSWOLDS
generated
£2,817
WHICH SUPPORTED 5
CONSERVATION PROJECTS
thanks to visitors
of local businesses



1,535
young people from
21 schools
got connected with nature



4,833
People enjoyed
FREE GUIDED WALKS
by our volunteer wardens



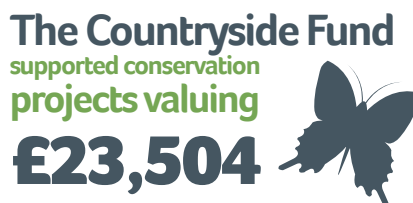
48,338
hours
CONSERVATION WORK BY
voluntary wardens
equated to an estimated value of
£322,000



2,536 hours
of restoration work
by volunteers at
36 sites in
the area
wildflower grassland restoration



Welcomed
44,523
Domestic &
international
VISITORS



The Countryside Fund
supported conservation
projects valuing
£23,504



117,068
DOWNLOADS
SELF-GUIDED WALKS
AND CYCLE ROUTES
FROM OUR WEBSITE



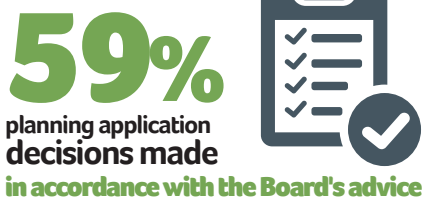
4 Landscape & Strategy
Guidelines and Position
Statements shared online



Cotswolds
LEADER programme
has created
11 new jobs
working with
7 businesses



Sustainable Development Fund
SUPPORTED COMMUNITY
PROJECTS VALUING
£52,181



59%
planning application
decisions made
in accordance with the Board's advice



The Cotswolds Conservation Board secured
£2.1m investment in the area and turned every £1
from a local authority into £250 worth of investment

Our financial year

Unaudited Summary Financial Statement

1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017

	2015/16	2016/17
	£	£
Expenditure	925,854	1,027,670
Project Delivery	723,624	829,690
Corporate Management and Administration	154,703	148,040
Agency Operational Agreement (net)	47,527	49,940
Income	(854,626)	(966,268)
DEFRA Grant	(425,600)	(432,920)
Natural England	(76,143)	(80,269)
Local Authorities & Parish Councils	(140,885)	(138,615)
Rural Payments Agency	(68,781)	(79,445)
Heritage Lottery Funding	(65,925)	(87,307)
Other	(77,292)	(147,712)
Deficit	71,228	61,402
(Surplus)/Deficit after Movement on Reserves	(13,592)	7,860
Balance Sheet		
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets	432,847	417,708
Less: Current Liabilities	(205,151)	(251,414)
Net Current Assets	227,696	166,294
Total Net Assets	227,696	166,294
Financed by		
General Fund Balance	211,106	203,246
Other Reserves	156,775	153,173
Accumulated Deficit on Agency Operational Agreement	(140,185)	(190,125)
Total Reserves	227,696	166,294

Looking forward

In 2017/18 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.

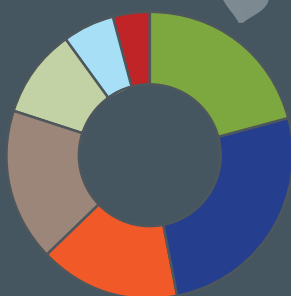
Enhance the Cotswolds position as England's walking and exploring capital.

Growing the rural economy

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

We aim to work with our partners to:

- Review, consult upon and publish AONB Management Plan 2018 – 2023
- Invest to improve the natural capital of the Cotswolds and assess the long term impact of climate change on the landscape of the AONB
- Review past changes and drivers for future landscape changes as part of 'Cotswolds@50'
- Advance a landscape led solution for the A417
- Broaden public participation in countryside programmes and visitor diversity, especially from young people and those in education
- Deliver programmes to enhance skills and apprenticeships
- Publish a new interactive website for the AONB
- Influence and deliver programmes to improve health and wellbeing
- Advance Cotswold Voluntary Warden's 50 anniversary celebrations
- Develop and expand the Cotswolds Discoverer Pass scheme with local operators
- Deliver the Cotswolds LEADER programme for the benefit of the rural economy
- Grow membership of Caring for the Cotswolds – the AONB's visitor giving scheme
- 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
- Advance the Cotswolds as the Walking and Exploring Capital, including the promotion and co-ordination of recreational routes across the Cotswolds
- Launch of a new Building Design Awards scheme
- Advance a Landscape Partnership bid to HLF for the Evenlode
- Advance a vision for the Cotswolds landscape post Brexit and the future delivery of agri-environment support.



Expenditure 2015/16

Recreation & Management	21%
Conservation of Natural Environment	26%
Corporate Management	16%
Promoting Understanding	17%
Cotswold Voluntary Wardens	10%
Forward Planning	6%
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	4%



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