



# Making a difference across the Cotswolds

**2017/18 Annual Review of the Cotswolds Conservation Board**

Reporting and celebrating the recent work and achievements of the Board



# 2017/18: The Best Bits

173,255

Visitors to  
Cotswolds Way  
Website



Cotswolds LEADER programme has created 25 new jobs, supported 26 projects, so far the total grant value is at **£723,044**



47,414  
hours



conservation work by voluntary wardens equating to a value of **£316,113**

16,813

Unique video views across YouTube and Facebook



479  
trainees  
attending



**71** rural skills courses, learning 14 different skills



1,547

young people from 72 schools participated with countryside learning activities



4,435  
people enjoyed  
free guided walks  
led by our volunteer wardens



CARING FOR THE  
COTSWOLDS

generated **£3,283**  
thanks to visitors to  
local businesses



7,696

Twitter  
followers  
with  
**3,191**  
likes



welcomed **40,724**  
domestic and  
international  
visitors



The Countryside Fund supported conservation projects valuing

**£18,893**



**3** Landscape Guidelines and Position statements shared online



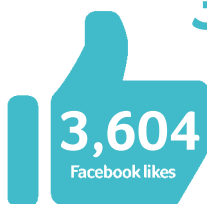
83%

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



3,618

followers on  
Facebook



3,604  
Facebook likes



Sustainable Development Fund supported community projects valuing

**£27,593**



Overall value of projects supported by Cotswolds LEADER was **£1.8 million**



**£2.1 million**  
secured in investment  
in the Cotswolds AONB

Every **£1** from an average single Local Authority turned into **£228** of investment



## Chairman's Welcome

Nick Turner



Those of us with a passion for the Cotswolds are experiencing interesting times. Brexit negotiations and the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan are both national game changers. 2018/19 will inevitably bring forward

new challenges, surprises and new mechanisms to support our aspirations. We trust that the recently launched review of National Parks and AONBs will advance our ambition to explore the case for and against moving from AONB status to National Park, in partnership with all those who also support and cherish our ancient and much-loved landscape. Once lost, our natural capital cannot be reclaimed.

Increasingly, the Board challenges itself to continue to do everything it can to actively conserve and enhance the landscape. With a small staff, dedicated volunteers and Board Members, all concentrating their efforts, we aim to ensure that we make a real difference for the landscape, residents, and visitors alike. How much more we could do with additional capacity.

This review focusses on just a few of the projects and initiatives that have made that difference over the last year. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate with our Cotswold Voluntary Wardens their recent and well-deserved Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, a particularly welcome recognition as they celebrate their 50th anniversary.

### Liz Eyre

*Chairman, Cotswolds Conservation Board*

## Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Cotswolds was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1966 and extended in area in 1990, 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 body established by Parliament in 2004 and has two statutory purposes:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB;
- 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 wellbeing of people living in the AONB.



Nick Turner

# Conserving and Enhancing

## Management Plan Review

The Cotswolds AONB Management Plan sets out the vision, outcomes and policies for the management of the AONB.

The main purposes of the Management Plan are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities. The plan seeks to develop a more consistent approach across the whole of the AONB, such that

these purposes are at the heart of all relevant plans, work programmes and decisions. It encourages partnership working so that, together, we can make the Management Plan's vision and outcomes become a reality.

The first consultation on the draft Management Plan for 2018-2023

took place in mid-2017. The second consultation took place in early 2018. A third and final consultation will take place in summer 2018. It is anticipated that the Management Plan will be adopted by the Cotswolds Conservation Board in September 2018.

## A417 – progressing the 'missing link'

2017/18 saw significant progress on the A417 missing link plans from Highways England.

All parties agreed a joint landscape-led vision for any scheme, but the Board was concerned that the Natural Capital and net environmental gain approach of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan have not been reflected in Highway England's

approach, and that analysis of options and the potential negative impact on the AONB landscape will similarly undermine the Government's Protected Landscape policies.

Five route options were considered through a formal consultation process aiming to establish a landscape led solution for the A417. Route Options 12 and 30 were taken forward for

further consideration. The Board has provided feedback expressing concern that neither of those routes presents the best outcome for the Cotswolds AONB, in line with the agreed objectives, and to request that rejected tunnel options should be reconsidered.

The Board has reminded Highways England and other stakeholders that the agreed vision for the improvements was to provide a safe and resilient free-flowing road, whilst conserving and enhancing the special character of the Cotswolds AONB; to connect landscape and ecology; to encourage landscape, wildlife, and heritage benefits, including enhanced experience of the area; to improve local communities' quality of life; and to contribute to the health of the economy and local businesses. Highways England is currently working to select a route option to proceed with, and will make announcements in November 2018.



## Section 85 Compliance Update

Under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, public bodies must have regard to the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs when performing their functions (the 'duty of regard').

For example, local planning authorities (LPAs) must consider potential impacts on AONBs when making decisions on planning applications and when developing policies and site allocations in their Local Plans. The expectation of the 'duty of regard' is that adverse impacts on AONBs will be avoided or mitigated where possible. Although LPAs in the Cotswolds AONB are not obliged to make decisions or set policies and allocations in line with the advice of the Cotswolds Conservation Board, the extent to which they do so provides a useful indicator of their 'duty of regard'.

### Headline news:

#### Planning Applications:

Of the planning applications that the Cotswolds Conservation Board objected to in 2017/18:

- Local planning authorities considered the potential impacts on the AONB (i.e. demonstrated the 'duty of regard') for 100% of the planning applications.
- Local planning authorities made a decision in line with the Board's recommendations for 83% of the planning applications.

#### Local Plans:

- All of the housing allocations and 'windfall' housing – totalling 502 dwellings – that were proposed for the Cotswolds AONB in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan have been removed.

## Protected Landscapes Review

2017/18 saw a growing debate around the Cotswolds becoming a National Park, with local MPs Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and David Drew both signalling their strong interest in further designation.

The Board began contacting farmers, landowners, national and local interest groups, MPs, and local authorities, within the Cotswolds AONB to explore the case for and against the area becoming a National Park.

In May 2018, environment secretary Michael Gove announced that Julian Glover will lead a review panel to reconsider England's protected landscapes, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

The review will consider the potential for extending existing protected landscapes, or creating new ones. It is likely to consider whether any current AONBs could join the existing list of National Parks. The review will report in 2019 (the 70th Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act). The Cotswolds Conservation Board has welcomed the review announcement, and looks forward to welcoming Julian Glover and his panel to the Cotswolds.

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# Conserving and Enhancing

## Award-Winning Wardens

In 2018, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens were given The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service. This is the highest award given to local volunteer groups across the UK – to recognise outstanding work done in their own communities. It is the MBE for volunteer groups.

Our Head Warden, John Shaw; Volunteer Coordinator, Rebecca Jones; and Warden, Jean Booth all attended The Queen’s Garden Party on 31st May in celebration of all award winners. The Wardens put in over 47,417 hours of work in 2017/18, working with over 70 schools, installing 66 kissing gates, and clearing over 17,000 metres of footpaths and bridleways. This award is a wonderful acknowledgement of their dedication to our beautiful region.

2018 is the 50th anniversary of the Volunteer Wardens in the Cotswolds AONB, and the celebratory theme is education, and reaching the next generation which will care for the Cotswolds. The Wardens have been working in education for over 10 years, and this year the Board has funded a free activities folder with more fantastic opportunities than ever



for schools to access the Cotswolds. In addition, the Board is working with an artist who will create artwork with pupils based on their experiences of the Cotswolds.

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## Farmers’ Forum 2018

The annual Farmers’ Forum, hosted and arranged by Cotswolds Conservation Board, was held in March 2018.

Around 90 guests attended, with Brexit at the top of the agenda. This was a valuable opportunity for farmers and landowners to discuss their concerns and aspirations for post-Brexit farming practice in the UK. Attendees also discussed issues including natural flood management across the Evenlode valley.



Nick Turner

## VIP Visit

In November 2017, Lord Gardiner, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity, visited the Board.

He was introduced to the Cotswolds LEADER programme, the Cotswolds Way National Trail, and the Rural Skills programme (including a ‘show and tell’ about dry stone walling and an introduction to work with young people at Burford School). He participated in discussions about the case for and against the Cotswolds as a National Park, and about a new agri/environmental development scheme worked on between the Board and farmers and landowners for submission to Defra.

## Save our Magnificent Meadows

2017 saw the conclusion of this inspiring three year project, which aimed to nationally increase areas of species-rich grassland.

The project in the Cotswolds AONB was a great success and created some impressive facts and figures: we worked with 261 landowners to restore 580 hectares of grassland, and improve or maintain 98 hectares of grassland. Over 1,000 people joined us for walks through, and talks about, our beautiful meadows. We hosted 14 meadow open

days, and welcomed 1,190 visitors as they learned about the importance of these precious landscapes. And finally, we were grateful for the 4,743 hours of work put in by our enthusiastic volunteers to help take care of, and conduct botanical surveys across, all the meadows.



## Keeping rural skills alive

The Board's rural skills programme has enjoyed a productive and popular year, with 479 people attending 71 courses in 2017/18.

Special, and very popular, highlights in 2017 included a dry stone walling demonstration at Stow Festival and the hedgelaying competition held in November 2017. Both events received glowing and enthusiastic praise from participants and

spectators about the importance of rural skills traditions being kept alive. In early 2018, we ran a hugely successful hedgelaying course at Burford School. Over 20 pupils worked for two days, to lay over 300 metres of hedge. The pupils had really positive feedback, and we aim to build on this to introduce more and more young people to traditional rural crafts at schools across the AONB.





# Ongoing projects

## Cotswold LEADER Programme on path to success

The Cotswolds LEADER programme of rural grants has so far supported 26 projects, approving funding worth £723,044, with a large variety of projects still in the pipeline.

The aim is for all funding to be fully allocated by March 2019 when the programme draws to a close. Supported projects have included improvements to glamping facilities; a craft gin distillery; the creation of a farm shop and the expansion of another; the development of a meat curing business; and investments in equipment for two wood-fuel businesses. Cotswold farmers have also benefited from the grant scheme, which encourages the use of new technology on farms to improve productivity. The farming grants have been diverse, and include a robotic milking system, slurry management machinery, and livestock handling equipment.

LEADER is a capital programme, but at its heart, it is about people. Nothing proves this better than the 25 jobs already created by this programme, some in remote rural locations, with more jobs to be created as further projects are supported.



## Pending... Proposals and Applications

Much of the Board's work 'on the ground' relies on external funding, and partnership working. As such, a range of projects are always operating at various stages. At the time of writing, we are hoping that the following 'pending' projects will all progress through to completion:

### Cotswolds Gateways

Due to start in June 2018, and funded by the Growth Fund, this project will work to create 10 gateways and improve the Cotswolds cycling network. The 'Gateways' are sites in villages and market towns with interpretation which highlight nearby circular walks and cycle routes.

### Bathscape

This stage two Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) partnership proposal is being submitted in June 2018. Focussed on Bath, it will help restore the landscape through direct conservation measures, and reconnect people with it through targeted activities and improved access.

### Magnificent Meadows

Part of a national stage one HLF bid led by Plantlife, if successful this project would engage communities across the Cotswolds in the development of wildflower grasslands in their vicinity.

### Trees Outside Woodlands

Part of a national stage one HLF bid being led by the Woodland Trust as a response to Ash dieback. If successful, the project will help identify, value, celebrate, conserve, and add to important trees in the landscape.

### Early thinking

The Board is also in the early stages of developing HLF proposals for a landscape project in the Evenlode area, and a heritage project based on Cotswolds stone.

# Understanding and Enjoying

## New Tramper route for the Cotswolds

As part of their 50th anniversary celebrations, the Cotswold Wardens have been developing an 8 mile circular route for Trumper style mobility scooters along existing rights of way from Winchcombe, linking the Wardens' Way and Windrush Way.

The Cotswold Voluntary wardens are dedicating hours of their time to upgrading the route, installing radar gates and upgrading bridges along the route. The route will be a welcome addition to the existing self-guided walks available on our website.



## Berghaus Trail Takeover

The outdoor brand, Berghaus, teamed up with leading outdoor navigation app ViewRanger to launch The Trail Takeover in three UK locations, including The Cotswold Way, on Saturday 26 August 2017.

The high profile, free event was designed to encourage more people to try outdoor activities and was an exciting way to highlight the Cotswolds as England's walking and exploring capital.

## Sustainable Development Fund update

The Sustainable Development Fund has recently been updated, with an educational theme and a simplified, more flexible funding process.

The education theme focusses on projects with an educational slant relating to the Cotswolds AONB, especially with reference to landscape, geology, biodiversity, and/or historical environment of the AONB.

Projects aimed at schools, groups with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), or urban communities located around perimeter of Cotswolds AONB are welcomed.



Nick Turner

We are encouraging projects which involve: countryside classroom and outdoor learning initiatives, especially those featuring field trips within the AONB; projects which aim to broaden understanding and knowledge about the region, particularly with a view to encouraging broader access to the countryside; conservation and display of agricultural implements and/or historical artefacts; or events which showcase traditional ways of life associated with the Cotswolds landscape, such as rural crafts or sheep farming. In 2017/18, we awarded £13,215 to projects with an overall total value of £27,593.



## Cotswolds AONB Hare Trail

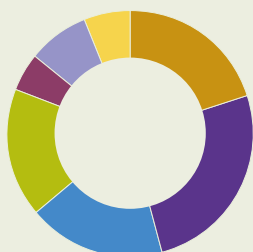
The Cotswolds AONB Hare Trail 2018 is bigger and better than ever.

Over 130 hares, leverets, and springers, placed across the Cotswolds make this the most ambitious trail yet. Any net profits from the auction this year will be donated to two Cotswolds Conservation Board projects – Caring for the Cotswolds and wildflower grassland conservation.

# Financial Statement

Unaudited Summary Financial Statement  
1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018

	2016/17 £	2017/18 £
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>1,027,670</b>	<b>885,929</b>
Project Delivery	829,690	696,991
Corporate Management and Administration	148,040	146,527
Agency Operational Agreement (net)	49,940	42,411
<b>Income</b>	<b>(966,268)</b>	<b>(860,837)</b>
DEFRA Grant	(432,920)	(440,367)
Natural England	(80,269)	(64,177)
Local Authorities & Parish Councils	(138,615)	(139,409)
Rural Payments Agency	(79,445)	(72,368)
Heritage Lottery Funding	(87,307)	(32,701)
Other	(147,712)	(111,815)
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>61,402</b>	<b>25,092</b>
<b>(Surplus)/Deficit after Movement on Reserves</b>	<b>7,860</b>	<b>(25,249)</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>		
Fixed Assets	0	3,000
Current Assets	417,708	277,356
Less; Current Liabilities	(251,414)	(139,154)
Net Current Assets	166,294	138,202
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>166,294</b>	<b>141,202</b>
<b>Financed by</b>		
General Fund Balance	203,246	228,495
Other Reserves	153,173	145,243
Accumulated Deficit on Agency Operational Agreement	(190,125)	(232,536)
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>166,294</b>	<b>141,202</b>



Expenditure 2017/18	
Recreation & Management	20%
Conservation of Natural Environment	26%
Corporate Management	18%
Promoting Understanding	17%
Cotswold Voluntary Wardens	5%
Forward Planning	8%
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	6%

## Looking ahead...

In 2018/19, we will continue to work on projects reflecting the purposes and duty of the Board. These are to **conserve and enhance** the Cotswolds AONB, by protecting and investing in the natural capital of the region; and to promote the **enjoyment and understanding** of the Cotswolds by demonstrating and facilitating the public benefit of the outstanding landscape, and by advancing the Cotswolds as the walking and exploring capital of England. We will also continue to progress projects which reflect our duty to growing the rural economy by celebrating, supporting and investing in the economic value of the Cotswolds AONB.

### In 2018/19, we will aim to work with our partners to:

- Adopt and publish AONB Management Plan 2018 – 2023.
- Pursue a landscape led solution for the A417 Missing Link.
- Broaden public participation in countryside programmes and visitor diversity, especially from young people and those in education.
- Deliver programmes to enhance skills and apprenticeships.
- Influence and deliver programmes to improve health and wellbeing.
- Conclude the Cotswolds LEADER programme for the benefit of the rural economy.
- Celebrate a successful and beneficial Cotswolds AONB Hare Trail.
- Advance the Cotswolds as the Walking and Exploring Capital, including the promotion and co-ordination of recreational routes across the Cotswolds.
- Secure additional external funding to advance new partnership projects such as Glorious Cotswold Grasslands.
- Advance a vision for the Cotswolds landscape post-Brexit and the future delivery of agri-environment support.
- Input to the National Park and AONB Review and explore the merits of advancing a proposal for a Cotswolds National Park.

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