



Communications Strategy & Outline Delivery Plan 2020-2023

‘Engage, involve, influence’

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1.0 Introduction

The Cotswolds National Landscape has a bright new look and an exciting new name. It sits in a reenergized position, and from there, has the potential to engage with new audiences, exciting and beneficial projects, and partner organisations who can support its work. In spite of the turbulence caused by the coronavirus pandemic throughout 2020, this is an exciting time – and there are many engagement and fundraising possibilities ahead of us.

Communication, education, and engagement are essential to bring our work to a wider audience, and to raise awareness and understanding of the Cotswolds as an internationally important and protected landscape.

This Communications Strategy and Outline Delivery Plan builds on, and updates, the previous communications strategies from the Board. It also takes into account the Business Plan Framework 2020 – 2023.

Communication is a shared responsibility for all our employees, Board members, and voluntary wardens, and our reputation is determined by all aspects of communication – from the way we answer the phone and write emails; deliver events, activities, and projects; through to the publications we produce and how we are portrayed in the media. Embracing effective communication helps us to improve our relationships with our key audiences: local residents, partner organisations, local authorities, government departments and agencies, businesses, and visitors – and it helps us to build and maintain confidence in the Cotswolds National Landscape. Our work with partners is essential to us achieving our aims, but rather than tell or instruct those organisations, we invite creative and innovative collaborations.

In a wider context, continued pressures on public sector budgets have resulted in a greater need for us to raise our profile with new audiences and prove our worth to the public and private sector, as well as to residents and visitors. The coronavirus epidemic in 2020 has wreaked havoc on the UK economy, whilst at the same time as introducing a large number of audiences to the countryside. There is an opportunity to begin to engage with those audiences who are just starting to discover the countryside, and welcome them. There will now be a reinvigorated effort from all protected landscapes to engage with these new audiences and encourage them to forge long lasting relationships with the landscapes they are now discovering. The challenge may be how to do this effectively with budgets under such continued (and new covid-19 related) pressures. We need to address this by approaching fundraising in new and innovative ways which maximize the potential support we can gain from audiences. We need to play on the connection individual people and communities have with the landscape; and we need to create long-lasting, effective corporate partnerships to do this.

A continuing dialogue around the government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment produced the Protected Landscapes review, led by Julian Glover, which was published in September 2019. The report made many positive and ambitious proposals, including that all AONBs rename themselves as national landscapes, and that the Cotswolds be among those national landscapes considered for national park status.

1.1 Our purposes

The Board was 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.

The purpose and objectives of the Communications Strategy:

- To promote awareness, understanding, and enjoyment of the Cotswolds National Landscape, its special qualities, and its designation as a protected Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- To maintain a positive profile for the Cotswolds National Landscape, and engage with audiences
- To promote and develop a better understanding of the work and role of the Cotswolds National Landscape team
- Where possible, to reflect the Key Issues and the Ambitions of the Cotswolds Conservation Board, as set out in the Management Plan 2018 – 2023, and foster support for them
- To be realistic and practical in terms of employees resource and budgets

1.2 Our principles of good communication

We will endeavour to produce engaging communications that follow the principles of plain English. Communications should be accessible to all members of the community, easy to understand, and clearly identifiable as belonging to or being about the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Key messages about the Cotswolds National Landscape and the Board

The following lists detail facts and figures about the Cotswolds National Landscape and the Cotswolds Conservation Board. They are useful to refer to as background for our key message and secondary messages – which can be found in the 2020 Cotswolds National Landscape Brand Guidelines. The messages found in the guidelines provide a consistent foundation which can be edited or expanded to suit a particular audience or requirement. By using them, Board members and the employee team speak as one.

The Cotswolds National Landscape is:

- A member of the AONB family, the protected landscapes family (AONBs and National Parks), and the third largest protected landscape in England
- A designated AONB in recognition of its high quality and diverse landscape
- Part of an international family of protected areas, and internationally recognised as an important landscape.
- The Cotswolds is worthy of consideration as a new National Park (Glover report, September 2019)

- Home to a variety of internationally important habitats and wildlife
- A place where the local rural economy and tourism rely in part on the natural beauty of the landscape
- A walking and exploring treasure trove, and home to two of England's National Trails (the Cotswold Way and the start of the Thames Trail), seven other long distance routes, and over 3,000 miles of walking, cycling and riding routes (Ambition 1).

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is:

- An independent statutory organisation established by parliament to look after the Cotswolds AONB
- The only organisation to look at the Cotswolds National Landscape as a whole and to speak as one voice
- Working in partnership to conserve and enhance the landscape's natural beauty
- Working to increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the landscape
- Inviting domestic communities to explore and enjoy the countryside
- Aiming to foster the social and economic well-being of its local communities
- Committed to helping deliver innovative projects
- Working to help people understand the protected landscape designation better
- Working to encourage communities and businesses here to celebrate being within a nationally recognised landscape (Ambition 3)
- Committed to its ambition of promoting the case for the Cotswolds being designated as England's next National Park (Ambition 4)
- Encouraging its policies and governance to be widely adopted/used and positioning itself as an authoritative and trusted voice of the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Our communications should:

- Identify the Cotswolds as a National Landscape – in line with Glover Review
- Speak to a diverse audience and be easily accessible
- Convey or relate our key and core messaging, and reflect our values
- Where possible, promote/ signpost to the website as a key source of information about the Board and the Cotswolds National Landscape
- Refer to our statutory purposes of conserving and enhancing, and increasing understanding and enjoyment of the Cotswolds landscape
- Have a clear, consistent, and easily identified purpose and call to action
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- Be consistent, at a high standard, and in line with the new Cotswolds National Landscape brand guidelines
- Balance the audiences' needs and understanding with the Board's purposes, ambitions, and budget
- Use appropriate channels to reach the desired targeted audiences
- Be honest and open
- Be committed to confidentiality where required

The delivery of the Communications Strategy will be led by the Communications Officer working with colleagues, Board members and volunteers.

1.3 Our identity

We hope to uphold an effective, confident, and attractive identity that enables awareness, appreciation, and familiarity. All information, regardless of format, should be consistent with and enhance the identity. All such information should be up to date, accurate and subject to regular review.

Following recommendations in the Landscapes Review, published by Julian Glover in 2019, a refreshed logo and new name were adopted at the Board Meeting in June 2020. The new logo and name – Cotswolds National Landscape – replace the previous CCB and AONB logos.

1.4 Communication tools

The Board uses a variety of approaches to engage, involve, and influence its audiences. They include:

Communications

- Cotswold Lion magazine
- Press and media
- Enewsletters
- Social media
- Website
- Partnership working
- Limited print runs (project specific)

Board publications and responses

- Annual Review
- Management Plan
- Position statements
- Landscape character assessments
- Landscape Strategy and Guidelines
- Consultation responses (e.g. Planning, Land Management, responses to large external projects e.g A417 missing link)
- Use of Section 85, Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, duty to have regard to the purposes of AONB designation (where relevant authorities have a duty to have regard to the purposes of AONB designation when carrying out their responsibilities / activities)

Engagement activities

- Visits: by Defra / agency visits / Glover review panel
- Forums (e.g. Annual, Farming, and Access)
- Select committees
- Special events (e.g Stargazing with Will Gater to promote Dark Skies, National Meadows Day)
- Attending seminars and conferences
- Cotswold Voluntary Wardens activities (walks etc) and events (conference)
- Special events

Fundraising activities

With the arrival of a new Partnerships and Fundraising Officer, we will be increasing our fundraising activity. As outlined earlier in this document, there will be balance points to be sought between asking for donations from individuals (particularly while the UK is in a recession), and from organisations who act as partners or sponsors. We are in a position to invite individuals and corporate funders to own a sense of participation through their support of us.

- Caring for the Cotswolds –business and individual support
- Donation boxes in strategic locations
- Paypal
- Warden fundraising (via walks, Cotswold Way, summer shows)
- Special events (e.g Cotswolds Kingfisher Trail 2021)
- Corporate sponsorship for individual projects
- Advertising income from the Cotswold Lion
- Seeking funding from trusts and foundations, other funding sources (e.g Heritage Lottery etc)

1.5 Our audiences

Our activities and projects are many and varied – and so are our audiences. Our key stakeholders are people or organisations that are involved with, have an interest in, or are affected by the Board and its activities. They include:

Priority audiences influencers:	Political and media influencers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers and landowners • Funders • Government departments and agencies (e.g. Defra, DCMS, Natural England) • Local authorities (county, unitary, district, borough, town, and parish councils) • MPs, MEPs, and local authority leaders and members • Developers • Partner organisations (e.g. Wildlife Trusts, Forestry Commission, National Trust, Natural England, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), National Farmers' Union (NFU), CPRE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign for National Parks • DEFRA Select Committee • Environmental bloggers • Green Alliance • Highways England • National Association of AONBs and other AONBs • National Park • National Parks England • National Parks and AONBs Review 2018 Advisory Group • Local and national media
External audiences	Internal audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and national media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses (e.g. visitor attractions) • Residents in the AONB, and residents living in urban neighbouring areas (e.g. Cheltenham, Gloucester, Bristol, Oxford, Stratford, Banbury etc) • Visitors (domestic and international), walkers, cyclists, horse riders • Suppliers and contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees, including contractors and work placements • Cotswold Voluntary Wardens • Volunteers
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1.6 External communication

We use a variety of communication methods and channels to target individual audiences. To ensure successful communication, we should undertake regular reviews of all delivery methods, refining and strengthening these where appropriate. We are committed to confidentiality where required.

1.7 Internal communication

Colleagues, Board members, and volunteers (Wardens) are all ambassadors playing a crucial role in building our reputation. The way we behave and communicate has a huge impact. Good *internal* communication is important in helping us achieve our objectives.

The employee team consists of 14 people. Around 350 active voluntary wardens contribute a significant number of hours of practical conservation and promotional work across the Cotswolds. There are 37 members of the Board, 15 of whom are appointed by local authorities, 14 by Secretary of State and eight nominated by parish councils. Board members bring a diverse portfolio of experience, and a range of strengths and interests that help the Board carry out its duties. Employees, Board members, and volunteers are all representatives of the National Landscape therefore good internal communication is essential so that we all:

- Feel valued, supported, and motivated
- Are proud to act as ‘ambassadors’ for the National Landscape
- Are informed about our activities, policies, and plans
- Are able to clearly communicate to external audiences what the Board is and what it does
- Create a ‘can do’ culture and build a committed and high performing organisation focused on achieving the Board’s objectives;
- Learn and are inspired: colleagues and volunteers are a vital source of information and ideas.

All employees, Board members, and volunteers receive regular e-newsletters, copies of the Cotswold Lion magazine and other relevant publications. Copies of all press releases are available on the Board’s website. Regular Board, Executive and Sub-Committee meetings take place between members and appropriate officers. A monthly meeting takes place with the chief executive and line reports. The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have regular meetings with volunteers across the AONB. A WhatsApp group has been set up for board members.

1.8 Measuring success

We are ambitious, and it is important to keep the business plan framework outputs and outcome in mind day to day. As stated in the Business Plan, we want to:

- **Welcome more diverse domestic audiences who don't normally visit the countryside** – *meeting output 4: promoting and broadening access opportunities; and output 1: great people, inspiring others*
- **Deliver a successful Glorious Cotswolds Grasslands project, a succession plan for what follows, and associated communications work around the project; continue to work towards a landscape led solution for the A417; continue to work to mitigate the effects of Ash Dieback** – *meeting output 3: Delivering for landscapes and nature*
- **Increase our partnership working and engagement with businesses** – *meeting output 5: value-added partnerships that benefit the AONB*
- **Increase our understanding of audience data: what are our audience demographics? What do they understand about the AONB designation? How are they engaging with the AONB and the work of the Board?** – *meeting output 2: continuous improvement leading to effective working*
- **Evaluate outcomes of how our messages and position statements are influencing our audiences (e.g. landowners, farmers, local authorities, developers, planners)** – *meeting output 2: continuous improvement leading to effective working*

1.9 Monitoring and evaluation

Communications activity should be monitored and evaluated to gauge the effectiveness of the Board's communications and ensure overall aims and objectives are being achieved.

This should be carried out by using the following tools:

- Website analytics: visits, dwell time, bounce rates, self-guided walk and cycle route downloads, position statement downloads
- Recording social media followers every quarter
- Recording attendance at events (forums, consultations etc)
- Recording media coverage, including the amount of take-up of news releases issued
- Monitoring comments, complaints, and compliments received by the Board
- A new internal survey among members, volunteers, and officers should be carried out to determine any gaps in existing internal communications and identify areas for improvement
- Appointing a marketing research agency to run a survey among internal and external audiences every 2-3 years
- Appointing a marketing research agency to run a residents, visitors, and landowners online survey, which is carried out every 5 years.

1.10 Photography & video

All images/film that are owned by the Board and which are used by external organisations must be credited as 'courtesy of Cotswolds National Landscape'.

When commissioning photographers/videographers it is important to ensure that we will own the rights to use the resulting images/film and that the agreement is reached on how to credit them and their use. This information should be kept with the photographs/film.

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