

CEO's Update for Executive: 19th May 2026

Team and Board Members Update

- **John Mills** has left CNL and commenced his new role at Natural England on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. The recruitment preparations are underway to fill the vacancy.
- **Lyna Zhang** joined in February, taking over from Caroline Regan, as Finance and Programme Manager and splits her time between Finance & Corporate Services and FiPL.
- Following our successful landscape connections NHLF development grant application, we have now appointed the Project Manager, **Ben Spencer**. Ben is hosted by the National Trust on behalf of CNL and alongside GWT as the third partner. The project is called Common Connections.
- We've now had confirmation from Defra's Public Appointments team that we can appoint two of the candidates from the 2025 recruitment round for 2026. From June we will be joined by two new Secretary of State Board members.
- This leaves three new vacancies arising following the June AGM. Defra will soon be commencing the 2026 recruitment campaign.

Communications and Engagement

- Alana is continuing to implement plans for CNL at 60 including events in July and August, the official launch of the Field and Folk film and media coverage including BBC's CountryFile and monthly articles in the Cotswold Life.
- Simon Smith and I attended the launch of the Gloucestershire LNRS. It was good to see many Board members in attendance including host, Cllr Martin Horwood.
- I've been involved in small steering group resetting the structure, scope and governance of the Gloucestershire LNP now the LNRS has been published. There will be a wider partnership event on 16th June to explore further.
- I presented to group of travel operators as part of the steering group for the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership.
- Maria and I are involved in reframing the structure of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) alongside consultants appointed by Cotswold Tourism team; I continue to chair the regular LVEP Management Board meetings.
- I was invited to speak at one of Natural England's regional staff events on 1st April. This was well received and further strengthened CNL's relationship with NE.
- Liz Reason invited me to speak at the Charlbury Town Council AGM in early May and the evening was full of discussion with lots of good questions posed.
- At the end of April, the CNL co-hosted the first of Dame Fiona Reynolds' walks as High Sheriff of Gloucestershire. The day was a massive success with a morning walk, afternoon walk and tea, cake talks and questions in Rendcomb village hall at the end of the afternoon. I'm now joining Fiona's support team and will join remaining monthly walks when I can. I wanted to personally thank Nick Mann and Chris Ing, Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, for their support on the day.

Planning & Infrastructure - Ofgem Visual Impact Provision (VIP) Project Decision

On 1st April Ofgem, the UK energy regulator, announced they would be consulting on withdrawing support for the National Grid's Cotswolds Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project. The proposals sought to remove a 7km section of overhead electricity line and 16 pylons between Postlip Mill, near Winchcombe, and Dowdeswell Wood, east

of Cheltenham, replacing it with underground cables. In the press release OFGEM said their priority was "protecting consumers from unnecessary costs", and rejecting the proposals was in the "best interest" of consumers. Ofgem launched a 28-day consultation which closed on 29th April. A final decision is expected in the summer. This will be disappointing news to many as this work has been in development for several years. Thanks to Mark for his work in drafting CNL's response to the consultation and to Simon Joyce for his inputs on this.

Management Plan

In terms of endorsement of the Management Plan, the following table outlines progress with the same four local authorities yet to endorse.

Local Authority	Endorsed	Date Endorsed	Notes
Bath & North East Somerset	No		Update required.
Cheltenham	Yes	16/04/2025	Decision taken by Leader.
Cherwell	Yes	06/01/2026	Endorsed by Executive.
Cotswold	Yes	08/05/2025	Endorsed by Cabinet.
Gloucestershire	Yes	23/10/2025	Decision taken by cabinet member.
Oxfordshire	Yes	15/04/2025	Letter from Paul Fermer, Director of Environment
South Gloucestershire	Yes	17/-0/2025	Formally recognised by the Council.
Stratford	Yes	02/06/2025	Endorsed by Cabinet.
Stroud	Yes	12/06/2025	Endorsed by Environment Committee.
Tewkesbury	Yes	14/05/2025	Voted through unanimously at full council.
Warwickshire	No		Update required.
West Oxfordshire	Yes	23/04/2025	Endorsed by Executive.
Wiltshire	Yes	15/06/2025	Endorsed at cabinet meeting.
Worcestershire	No		Update required.
Wychavon	No		Isabel Roberts, Planning Policy Manager will discuss endorsement with director. Update required.

Nature Recovery

The Nature Recovery Working Group has now been established with the inaugural meeting taking place on 16th April. It was very well attended by Board members as well as Bruce Winney from the National Landscapes Association.

Finance and Corporate Services

Our Defra funding settlement for 2026-27 has been confirmed. In addition to the "core" funding (also known as resource or RDEL) that covers our usual staffing and running costs, the funding from Defra also comprises other funding streams including:

- Core capital funding (also referred to as CDEL or CapEx) – this can be spent on capital items only so tangible or intangible assets
- FiPL funding – as per previous years
- Access funding (previously known as Access for All or Removing Barriers) – we are told this will be the final year.
- Wildlife Rich Habitat funding – this is a brand-new funding stream with a focus on creating new wildlife-rich habitat rather than maintaining or enhancing the condition of existing habitat. We bid for this and were successful.

- New RDEL uplift – to be discussed at this week’s F&G (21st May) but a substantial element of this will be used to offset forecast deficit budget for 2026-2027 and to supplement existing contracts and planned activities.

We have now had confirmation of the 2026/27 National Trail budget for the Cotswold Way (from NE) but this continues to be insufficient so I am continuing to apply pressure to NE and Defra on this.

Work has been continuing in the following areas:

- GDPR
- Health and safety
- Safeguarding
- Audit and review of all policies
- Business planning approach and review of KPIs
- Equity, diversity and inclusion - linking this to the Access and Inclusion Working Group
- Medium Term Financial Strategy (incorporating fundraising strategy) – a workshop was held with David Powell in April with an outline structure being presented to F&G on 21st May.

Farming in Protected landscapes (FiPL)

- Following the January announcement by Defra that FiPL will be extended for a further three years to March 2029, we have now completed the recruitment process for a **Farming Engagement Officer** post, a vacancy that’s been carried since Scott Brown’s April 2025 departure, with the successful candidate due to start by mid-June.
- The Regenerative Agriculture conference took place at the Royal Agricultural University on 19th March. The conference formed part of the Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme, funded by FiPL, and followed on from last year’s extremely successful event.
- The FiPL panel is due to meet next on 20th May.

Trip to Prague, March

- Thanks to a heads-up from Jo Burgon (who some of you will know) who previously sat on the Board, I applied for the CNL to join a scheme led by EuroParc to support the development of a framework to assess Management Effectiveness in European Protected Areas called LIFE-PAME.
- I’m pleased to say the application was successful.
- In March I attended the introductory seminars in Prague, along with 46 other European protected areas.
- The framework, once developed and implemented, will build on datasets that already exist globally and nationally.
- Ultimately it will ensure that robust data can be collected and assimilated across Europe to better measure the effectiveness of protected areas while supporting staff in delivering better outcomes for biodiversity.