

CLIMATE ACTION WORKING GROUP

Summary: To review the progress of the Climate Action Working Group, and associated activity.

Recommendation: That the Executive Committee notes the report.

Report by: Fred Constantine Smith, Climate Action Lead and Alice Whitehead, Climate Action Coordinator

MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

- Ben Dent (Chair)
- Rosie Pearson
- Martin Brown
- Graham Hopkins
- Liz Reason
- Nick Martell-Bundock

RECORD OF MEETINGS

- 3rd of June (in person) – Mark Connelly (MC) provided a presentation on CNL's process for responding to woodland creation proposals, and the Working Group agreed an approach for monitoring consultations going forward.
- 13th of October (in person)

1. Climate Mitigation Action Plan

Farming and Forestry Study

As part of the Action Plan, the CNL has instructed Cumulus to commence work on this project following a tender process. This research seeks to understand how farming and land management in CNL has been re-shaped by the phase-out of the Common Agricultural Policy, whilst also investigating the marked rise in regenerative agriculture. The inception meeting was held on the 2nd of September.

Objectives:

- To update the 2014 farming and forestry study, and identify significant changes and trends since;
- To include a review of land prices, commodity prices and cost of inputs;
- To assess the current uptake of regenerative agriculture in the Cotswolds National Landscape and its impact on reducing agricultural emissions;
- To forecast likely trends for the coming decade (to 2035);
- To propose policies and actions to promote and guide change in farming and forestry in line with the purposes of National Landscape designation, and align these with the Management Plan and the purposes of National Landscape designation.

Farm Carbon Assessment and Baseline Dataset

As part of the Action Plan, the CNL has commissioned Trinity AgTech to commence work on the project Farm Carbon Assessment and Baseline Dataset following a tender process. This research seeks to understand how agricultural emissions vary according to different farm systems common to the landscape. In particular, it will seek to understand the impact of low-carbon and regenerative practices. To do this, the project is funding 12 targeted farm carbon assessments, to produce a ground-truthed dataset. The CNL team will use the resulting dataset to guide decision-making on reducing farm emissions. The inception meeting will be held on the 1st of October.

Objectives:

- Set out a defined analytical methodology for assessing farm carbon emissions.
- Produce a dataset on individual farms and collectively across four farm system categories, reflecting the range of common systems in the CNL, and three farm size categories. Comparing like-for-like in terms of system and size will produce a comparable dataset with more meaningful findings.
- Set out emissions-reduction scenarios for individual farms and grouped farm systems.

Transport Workshop

The CNL are running a transport workshop in collaboration with Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership (GCRP) in late October. Young people aged 16-21 have been invited to take part in a workshop exploring the opportunities and barriers for young people using sustainable travel options in the CNL.

Objectives:

- Increase use and engagement with low-carbon transport options.
- To collaborate with local stakeholders and National Parks and Landscapes to increase our role in and understanding of low carbon travel within the CNL.

2. Climate Adaptation Plan

The Climate Action Team have completed a first draft of the climate risk assessment and adaptation plan. Multiple meetings have been held with the Chilterns National Landscape regarding their own work on climate adaptation and the potential to collaborate on both approach and application of the work.

NEXT STEPS

Climate Mitigation Action Plan

- Draft reports are expected on the 18th of December (Farming and Forestry Study) and the 15th of January (FCA and Baseline Dataset). With final reports due in February.
- The consultants will be invited to present their initial findings to the Exec Committee and relevant Working Groups. With the Climate Action team outlining how this work will be applied in the following year.

Transport Workshop

- Review findings with Working Group, and align activities with the Management Plan.

Climate Adaptation Plan

- Expect a completed final version of the risk assessment and adaptation plan by the end of the year.

KEY POINTS FROM LAST WORKING GROUP MEETING

Key points from the presentation

- The CNL responds to woodland creation proposals due to regulation or in consultation with partner organisations, this is primarily through the lens of landscape character and the special qualities of the landscape, while also considering impacts on the historic and natural environment.
- The number of woodland creation proposals is relatively low, averaging around 10 per year since 2022.
- The main barrier appears to be the limited flexibility of the current woodland creation grant schemes (EWCO and Countryside Stewardship) within a protected landscape context.

Key points from the discussion

- Without changes to the current grant schemes, woodland creation is unlikely to increase significantly, making tree planting targets difficult to achieve.
 - Key concerns included management payments, planting density requirements and restrictions on the area that can be planted.
- Updating CNL guidance on woodland creation could improve how landscape sensitivity is communicated to stakeholders and make guidance easier to access.
 - In the longer term, this could include an updated guide to tree planting and woodland creation, as well as guidance on agroforestry within the landscape. Though the CNL LCA and LSG documents need to be updated before this can happen.
 - Therefore, in the short term, the Climate Action Team could work with MC to produce a short (1–2 page) woodland creation guide drawing on existing guidance.
 - A similar short guide could be produced for woodland sensitivity mapping, clearly setting out its purpose, relationship to LNRS and other mapping products, and signposting users to relevant CNL guidance.
- Improving engagement and mutual understanding with stakeholders involved in woodland creation (landowners, agents, consultancies and National Forest organisations) could increase both the number of proposals and their alignment with landscape character.

Potential actions and next steps

- Explore opportunities to work with the NLA, PLP and other stakeholders to raise concerns regarding woodland creation grant schemes with the Forestry Commission and Defra.
- It was agreed that MC will share woodland creation proposals with CAWG going forward.
 - Initially, this will be to improve awareness and understanding of proposals and the decision making process, although there may be scope for additional input in the future.
- Climate Action team will consult with NLA and other stakeholders to explore how we can improve our monitoring of woodland creation within the CNL.

October 2026 Meeting

- Discuss the two CapEx funded Climate Mitigation projects, their purpose and how the findings can best be applied to deliver climate action in the following year.
- Review the draft Adaptation Plan and assess how this can most effectively be used to support and deliver climate resilience in the CNL.

DECISIONS REQUIRED

- None

SUPPORTING PAPERS

- None

October 2026