



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON Wednesday 3rd June 2015 at the offices of the Board , The Lodge, 90 Station Road, Chinnor OX39 4HA commencing at 10.30AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.30PM

Present:

Dr Heather Barrett-Mold.	Board member
Cllr. John Griffin	Board Member
Cllr Marion Mustoe	Board Member
Cllr. David Nimmo-Smith	Board Member
Ray Payne	Board Member
Cllr. Ian Reay	Board Member, Chairman of the meeting
Cllr Jeremy Ryman	Board Member
Helen Tuffs	Board Member
Cllr Alan Walters	Board Member
Kath Daly	CCB Acting Chief Officer
Chris Smith	CCB Finance Officer

In attendance
Deirdre Hansen Clerk to the Board

14/15-44 Item 1- Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Julia Wells.

14/15-45. Item 2- Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

14/15-46. Item 3- Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 26th February 2015 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman after a second 'P' was added to approve in 14/15.42 third recommendation p101.

14/15-47. Item 4- Matters Arising from the minutes 26th February 2015.

The Acting Chief Officer informed the meeting that:

1. The annual business plan as referred to in 14/15.38 had been finalised and sent to DEFRA.
2. The HS2 Select Committee would be appointed today 3rd June.
3. HS2 Tunnel hearings are expected w/c 13/7/15.
4. Bettina Kirkham has been appointed expert witness by Buckinghamshire County Council for the HS2 Select committee hearings. She is a landscape expert.
5. Ray Payne and the Acting Chief Officer had met with the Chiltern Society and CRAG to discuss the other two tunnel options.

Ray Payne reported that the Chilterns Conservation Board on the HS2 Select committee hearings is ~~linked listed~~ with the same status as other statutory bodies. ~~and is listed to be heard~~

14/15-48. Item 5- Public Question time

No members of the public were present.

14/15-49. Item 6- Finance Report (provisional outturn 2014-15)

The Finance Officer advised the Committee of the Board's provisional financial results for 2014-15 subject to any final adjustments.

An overall deficit of £16,515 is indicated. This compares to an original expected deficit of £29,756 and a projected deficit in January 2015 of £4,568.

1. Operating Activity showed 1.4% higher than forecast, however this is covered by income from DEFRA, local authorities and other sources resulting in a £10,392 surplus.
2. The Work Programme expenditure of £52,158 is a reduction of £6,862 against target. Although £2,400 more was spent against the January forecast. The reason for the underspend is a reduced expenditure on special projects.
3. The net deficit on the Work Programme was £26,907.
4. On Major Projects income exceeded expenditure. This will be carried forward to meet 2015-16 expenditure.
5. Events realised a net income of £13,397, £1,877 more than target.
6. Special Projects expenditure was £9,889 compared to a target of £20,000, which was later revised to £7,500.
7. Other income and merchandising contributed £8,407 and £3,446 respectively, both below target.
8. The net result will be to draw down £16,515 from the Development Reserve leaving £545,553 to carry forward to 2015-16.
9. The formal accounts will be presented to the Board in June and will be subject to audit by the Audit Commission.
10. The Medium-term financial forecast will need to be adjusted in light of the year-end position as at 31 March 2015 and the work of the Review Working Group on funding Board activity.

Members discussed the detailed presented financial position and the current position of the reserves.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the likely financial outcome and that the formal accounts will be presented to the Board in June.**
- 2. The Committee NOTED that an updated Medium Term Financial Plan will be presented to a future meeting.**

14/15-50. Item 7- Amendment to Financial Regulations

The Finance Officer informed the Committee that the retirement of the Planning Officer necessitated an amendment to the Financial Regulations.

The Board's Financial Regulations provide that the post of Planning Officer may authorise the supply of goods and services up to £1,000 under a single signature and up to £5,000 as a co-signatory with the Administrative Officer.

With the appointment of a part time replacement for the former Planning Officer it is thought that this responsibility should be exercised by a full-time member of staff. The next most senior post is that of Countryside Officer. It was proposed that this post replaces that of Planning Officer in the Financial Regulations.

- 1. The Committee AGREED that the post of Countryside Officer replaced that of Planning Officer in the Financial Regulations.**

14/15-51. Item 8. Internal Audit Report 2014-15

The Finance Officer reported that the Board's internal auditor, Hertfordshire Shared Internal Audit Service had recently carried out their annual review and had submitted their report. All members had received a copy.

The internal auditor had focussed on the internal controls linked to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Annual Return submitted to the external auditor and concluded that Substantial Assurance on effective management can be provided.

Two medium recommendations were identified to do with petty cash payments and payment authorisation, both are proposed to be accepted and a "point of good practice" regarding the asset register was identified.

Both recommendations were accepted.

- 1. The Committee NOTED and AGREED the report of the internal auditors.**

14/15-52 item 9. Management Review

The Acting Chief Officer provided a report on the conclusions from the work of the Review Sub-group to date and draft recommendations for the Board meeting in June. The report on the

Review is structured around four main objectives, which were agreed December 2014. The Review's purpose is to ensure that the Board fulfils its statutory purposes effectively over the next 5 years and beyond.

1. The Review working group has met on four occasions to date.
2. A series of conclusions have been reached even though further work is needed in order to complete the review.
3. It is proposed that further work on the review is put on hold until the newly appointed Chief Officer takes up the post.
4. On the basis of the conclusions so far, the draft recommendations, as summarised under the relevant objectives below were discussed extensively and recommendations were made to the Board.
5. The Finance Officer showed the Committee an initial draft suggestion for financial modelling, that could be developed for future use.

Objective 1: to identify the necessary capacity, skills, resources and processes needed to identify and achieve the Board's priorities over the next 5 years and consider how these might be addressed if there is a short fall or mismatch.

- a. The Board's business plan needs to be revised to include clear medium/long term strategic priorities.
- b. Clear criteria are needed for assessment of new project ideas.
- c. Staff time is a limited and valuable resource and should be treated as such within the business planning.
- d. The annual cycles of Board events, activities and ways of doing things have become somewhat 'fossilised'. This need to be addressed. Events should have a clear purpose.
- e. Staff training and development should link clearly to Board priorities and be treated as a priority within the organisation. Better use could be made of opportunities through the NAAONB.
- f. There is a shortfall in capacity within the staff team for development of new projects and initiatives.
- g. Having a constant 'pipeline' of new project ideas is crucial given the need to broaden the funding base.
- h. Over the short/medium term staff efforts to generate new income needs better co-ordination and alignment with strategic priorities.
- i. Greater capacity to lead income generation and project development is needed.
- j. Strategic capacity, skills and roles need to be matched to the Board's strategic priorities, once these have been agreed.

Objective 2: to map and review the Board's relationships with key partners in order to enhance the strength and vitality of those partnerships where they exist at present and forge new alliances with those who can help to deliver the aims and objectives of the AONB Management plan.

This piece of work is not yet completed. A limited amount of mapping has been done, but more needs to come from this section.

- a. Improved working relationships and collaboration with the Chiltern Society is a high priority for the Board and work is underway and should continue on this.

- b. The scope for joint “Chilterns” branding should be explored.
- c. Other relationships need strengthening/ developing.
- d. The Board should work to strengthen its engagement with non-traditional audiences.

Objective 3: to review the source and application of funds, and consider options for maintaining and broadening the Board’s funding base.

The next public funding round is expected to show public sector expenditure to drop considerably. Given the positive views of AONB’s and their considered good track record in the delivery of wide ranging conservation models, there are clear opportunities for the Board to take initiative and demonstrate the Board’s value.

- a. A critical challenge for the Board is whether, against this backdrop, it will be able to maintain or increase achievements in fulfilling the Board’s statutory purpose.
- b. The Board must begin to plan for a range of funding scenarios, to include a reduction in Government finding from the currents levels.
- c. This work must begin sooner rather than later in order to be able to react to the DEFRA funding settlement from 2016 onwards.
- d. There are various possible sources of income, which should be explored further.
- e. Fewer, but more ambitious projects may have a greater impact.
- f. The Board’s reserves must not be overlooked as an additional income stream.
- g. A clear strategy for the management of reserves must be in place.
- h. The establishment of an associated charity or a Community Interest Company (CICs) is worthy of further exploration.
- i. Exploring joint approaches to funding and application of funds for benefit of the area with the Chiltern Society could be advantageous.
- j. Developing a funding model and strategy which enables the Board to sustain its effectiveness over a period of ongoing reductions in Government funding is one of the greatest challenges ahead.
- k. The Board should use the LUC funding report findings and the experience of other AONB’s as a starting point for identifying the best options to include a medium-long term funding strategy. Board members expertise should be drawn in as appropriate and other help bought in if required.
- l. In order to develop its medium-long term funding strategy the Board first needs to define what it requires funds to do. This brings the Board full circle to the need to define strategic priorities and identify the sorts of projects/initiatives required to achieve those priorities.

Objective 4: to ensure that the Board complies with the principles of good governance and to consider how any shortfall might be addressed.

- a. There is a required need to ensure all Board members understand the importance of their role in the governance of the organisation, and how they can contribute.
- b. There is a need to have clearer policies around how greater use can be made of Board Member networks, expertise and contacts.
- c. The requirement for Board member induction, training and support needs to be reviewed.

d. The effectiveness of the current frequency and approach to meetings of the Board, its Committees and task groups needs to be review.

1. **The Committee considered and provided feedback on the conclusions of the review to date.**

2. **The Committee considered the draft recommendations for the June meeting of the Board which are as follows:**

That the Board should:

1. **Put in place a new approach to business planning which ensures that medium –long term strategic priorities are agreed and a strategy is put in place for how they are to be achieved.**
2. **Increase capacity to develop and manage projects- from initial ideas to a portfolio of project proposals. This is expected to require investment from reserves as well as potential role change for some existing staff.**
3. **Ensure that appropriate staff support/training/development opportunities are in place to underpin delivery against the Board’s strategic priorities.**
4. **Seek stakeholder views on the Board’s future priorities and direction through a variety of approaches including a stakeholder survey.**
5. **Plan how to strengthen relations with key stakeholders and non-traditional audiences.**
6. **Explore with the Chiltern Society the scope for improved joint working to include a shared Chilterns identity and for joint approaches to funds and initiatives for the benefit of the Chilterns area.**
7. **Undertake financial modelling based on a range of assumptions regarding the reduction in Government funding over the next 5 years.**
8. **Seek to develop a funding model which enables the Board to sustain at least current levels of effectiveness in delivering against its statutory purposes over the next 5 years.**
9. **Put in place a clear strategy for management and use of reserves.**
10. **Ensure all Board members understand and are able to effectively contribute to their role in the governance of the organisation.**
11. **Review the Board’s current committee and task group structure and the frequency and effectiveness of meetings. Identify any changes necessary to ensure effective operation of the Board in line with its establishment order, and any changes required to standing orders.**

3. **The Committee AGREED that further work to complete the review should wait until the new Chief Officer is in post., ~~but not delayed.~~**

4. **The Committee AGREED that the Working group would recommend timings for the implementation of the recommendations.**

14/15-53. Item 10- Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund- Potential Board involvement.

The Acting Chief Officer reported that from 2016 Countryside Stewardship will be the new national agri-environment/woodland grant scheme. As part of the scheme a Facilitation Fund has been established to support development of landscape scale initiatives.

1. The Board has been encouraged by Natural England to submit an application to the fund for a scheme in the Hambleden Valley. This would build on the work of the Chiltern Farm Advice Project, a joint initiative with the Environment Agency, led by the Board, which encourages land management which benefits soil and water quality. This project has engaged with farmers in the Hambleden Valley near Henley and comes to an end this year.
2. The Facilitation fund aims to bring together a number of farmers to receive training and support to improve the local environment at a landscape scale. A group of farms in the Hambleden Valley have already signed up to the application. There is scope for more to join.
3. Board Member and farmer, Ian Waller, is fully supportive of this application. If successful the Facilitation Fund will enable the Board to have a greater involvement with the farming community and increase available expertise to offer practical and relevant advice on farming and wildlife issues.
4. Through training and support the Board would be able to encourage farmers to keep and improve habitats that have developed over recent decades and in this way the Board would be working towards the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the AONB.
5. The fund will run for a 5 year period and a facilitator with four holding would receive £500 per holding and up to £10,000 for the cost of delivering the cooperation, a total of £12,000. It is anticipated that the work would equate to 2-3 days staff time per month. There are a number of administrative and practical requirements that would have to be met.
6. Due to the tight time scale an application was submitted by the deadline 12th May with the proviso that Board approval was still required. A decision is expected by the end of June.

The Committee discussed the scheme and the potential advantages and risks of being associated with the Facilitation Fund scheme.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the progress with Facilitation Fund application.**
- 2. The Committee AUTHORISED the acceptance of a Facilitator Fund agreement should the bid be approved subject to the Executive Committee approving the risks to the Board associated with the agreement.**
- 3. The Committee APPROVED allocation of officer time to support the facilitator role.**

14/15-54. Item 11 Other business

1. Ray Payne reported that he had been approached by the Chiltern Society for a cooperative enterprise during a German Architectural visit, who will be examining the relationship between architecture and chalk landscape (geology and buildings). The Conservation Board was asked if it would wish to be involved.
The Committee agreed that this was a start in the process of co-operation with the Chiltern Society and the opportunity was welcomed.
2. The Chief Officer reported that 9 new Board Members would be required. Wendy Jordan, the Member from Three Rivers had lost her seat at the election and would be replaced by Heather Kenison. David Taylor, the Member for Luton Borough Council, is now the Mayor for Luton and will be replaced by Jackie Burnet.
3. This meeting was the last meeting that Marion Mustoe and Jeremy Ryman would be attending. The Chairman thanked them for their attendance and contributions over the years.

14/15-55. Next meeting: Thursday 10th September 2015 at 10.30 am at the offices of the Board in Chinnor.

Future meeting dates: Wednesday 9th December 2015

The meeting closed at 12.30

The Chairman.....

Date.....