



Members of the Chilterns Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are hereby summoned to a meeting of the Chilterns Conservation Board Executive Committee on

28th April 2021 at 10.00am

By *remote video conferencing

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Notice of AOB
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Chairman's update
5. Minutes of Previous Meeting (27.01.21)
6. Matters Arising
7. Finance Report
8. Interim Budgets 2021-22 and 2022-23
9. Board Review
10. Staff handbook
11. Governance Review – next steps
12. Board Membership and Committees
13. Mend the Gap
14. Landscapes Review
15. AOB

** In accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*

Future Meetings:

Full Board	23 rd June 2021
	20 th October 2021
Executive Committee	15 th September 2021
Planning Committee	14 th July 2021
	17 th November 2021



MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON Wednesday 27th January 2021 by remote video conferencing commencing at 10.02 am

Present:

Alison Doggett	Board Member
Cllr John Griffin	Board Member
Cllr Charles Hussey	Board Member
Cllr Lynn Lloyd	Board Member
John Nicholls	Board Member
Paul Mains	Board Member
Prof. Ray Payne	Board Member
Cllr Ian Reay	Board Member, Chairman

In attendance:

Graham Hurst	CCB Finance Officer
Dr Elaine King	CCB Chief Executive Officer

Deirdre Hansen	Clerk to the Board
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This meeting is being held remotely in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 no. 392

19/20.45 Apologies for absence.

No apologies were received

19/20.46 Declarations of interest

None.

19/20.47 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd September 2020 were approved as a true record.

19/20.48 Matters arising

- Re item 19/20.39 Covid grant from South Oxfordshire District Council received in the first lockdown, the Finance Officer confirmed that the CCB had been entitled to receive this grant.
- The outstanding monies from HS2 have now been received.

19/20.49 Finance Report

The Finance Officer had circulated the financial report to the Committee on the financial position to the end of November 2020.

There is a net surplus of £16,528 and it is expected that the CCB will make an overall surplus for the financial year 2020/21. The surplus can mainly be explained by a £10,000 Covid grant from South Oxfordshire District Council, £5,200 additional funding from DEFRA received via the National Association of AONBs and £6,000 from HS2 for staff time on the AONB Review Group.

Core expenditure is underspent, mainly due to no staff salary increases awarded this year and office, travel and meeting costs lower due to Covid restrictions and staff working from home.

The net surplus will be fully utilised against the budgeted deficit for 2021/22.

The Committee discussed the financial report.

- 1. The Committee NOTED the financial results for the four months to November 2020.**

19/20.50 Draft Budget 2021-22

The Finance Officer presented a draft budget for 2021/22.

Core income is budgeted at a similar level to 2020/21 at £564,800. The new one-year agreement with DEFRA makes predicting income more uncertain. Local Authority funding is also predicted at a similar level to 2020/21.

Core expenditure is budgeted at £582,160. All possible savings will be made, but the pension contributions that have to be paid are set to increase. This payment is outside the CCB's control. Any salary increases will affect the increased pension contributions.

Projects in general break even, subject to CCB contributions.

The budget deficit will be met from the 2020/21 surplus and reserves, should no additional funding be received.

The Committee discussed at length the draft budget.

- 1. The Committee CONSIDERED the draft budget and RECOMMENDED its adoption to the Board.**

19/20.51 Long Term Establishment and Governance Policy.

The Deputy Chairman had tabled a summary of the current position and indicated some arrangements which may be suitable for future consideration.

The Phase 2 issues paper summarising the Phase 1 report is now with Government.

The Committee discussed what Phase 3 might look like. The CEO will gather more information on various options. It was noted that we are waiting on a Government announcement on its response to the Glover Review.

The Deputy Chairman's comprehensive work in compiling this report was acknowledged and he was thanked for all his efforts.

1. The Committee NOTED the interim report.

19/20.52 HR Policy

The Deputy Chairman gave a report on the progress of the work to develop a revised and contemporary HR policy for the CCB. It will soon be sent to the HR Advisory Committee and the CEO. Once the Advisory Committee has made its contributions, it will come to the Executive Committee for recommendation to the Board.

The HR Advisor was commended for her assistance and advice during the process.

The Deputy Chairman was thanked for all his work on the revised HR Policy.

1. The Committee NOTED the interim report.

19/20.53 Business Plan

The Chief Executive Officer had issued the Draft Business Plan 2021-22 linked to the draft budget for 2021-22 to the Committee for discussion and recommendation to the Board.

The Business Plan sets out the CCB's ambitions and planned work for the financial year 2021-22. The whole team have contributed to the Business Plan. The Business Plan will be submitted to DEFRA as part of the CCB's core grant claim and is instrumental in delivering and reporting on our DEFRA KPIs.

2021 is a crucially important year for the CCB and protected landscapes. Some major milestones include the Government's new Agricultural Transition Plan and the Environment Bill (which should become law this year). The Government is also due to respond to the Landscapes Review this year. All these as well as other external developments provide opportunities for the CCB.

The Business Plan largely captures the CCB's core work and how the projects support its delivery. Future Board Reviews will link more closely to reporting on delivery of objectives in the Business Plan.

The Committee discussed this ambitious plan and expressed confidence that the team can deliver it. Some suggestions were proposed, which the CEO will aim to work into the Plan.

It was noted that this is a one-year plan and that the aim is to develop a longer-term Business Planning framework to enable the CCB to set longer term organisational priorities, and secure the necessary funding, for delivery of the five-year Management Plan.

1. The Committee APPROVED the Business Plan 2021-22 for recommendation to the Board.

19/20.54 Review of the Risk Register

The CEO presented the updated Risk Register.

The Committee discussed the Risk Register and decided that the following should be added:

1. The impacts of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic
2. Cashflow management
3. Local Government changes
4. A general risk relating to Local Authority funding.

Paul Mainds will assist in the redrafting of the Risk Register, but asked for some assistance.

1. The Committee REVIEWED the Risk Register and MADE recommendations.

19/20.55 Board Review

The Chief Executive Officer had provided a comprehensive overview of the team's activities and achievement over recent months, much of which had already been discussed in above agenda items.

The report highlighted some of the achievement of the team despite the continued disruption of the pandemic. It also gives a strategic overview of the opportunities and risks of the current conditions, whilst looking ahead to the post-pandemic recovery period.

The Committee stated that it was an impressive amount of work and the team had done well in raising the profile of the CCB even in these difficult times. A lot of joined up working across the team has gone into all that has been achieved in this very difficult year.

1. The Committee NOTED the Board Review and provided feedback.

19/20.56 Mend the Gap

The CEO updated members on the developments with the Mend the Gap programme. The Project Manager is in place and recruitment for the Project Officer has started. A number of project ideas are coming forward and being developed.

The Committee provided feedback.

1. The Committee NOTED the update and provided feedback.

19/20.57 Landscapes Review

The CEO gave a brief update on the Landscapes Review. A full response from the Government is expected at the end of the year.

The CEO continues to have ongoing discussions on the Landscape Review proposals with Defra, other AONBs and National Parks, Natural England, the Chilterns AONB's MPs, local authorities and others.

1. The Committee NOTED the update.

19/20.58 Any Other Business

1. The Chairman mentioned that Ray Payne’s term of office as Secretary of State Member of the Board comes to an end in March. The post has been advertised and the selection process will take place in April. A decision will be reached by the end of April.
2. The CEO would like to involve Ray Payne in elements of future CCB work.
3. The Chairman will stand down at the AGM in April. He will email members about his intention and ask for nominations as well as nominations for Deputy Chairman.
4. There is also a vacancy for an Oxfordshire Parish Council member to the Board. This post has been advertised and the election process is being followed.

Next meeting: 28th April 2021.

The Chairman.....

Date.....

Item 7**Finance Report**

Author: Graham Hurst, Finance Officer

Summary: Draft accounts for year to 31 March 2021

Purpose of Report: To update Executive members on the CCB finances.

1. Draft accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021 are presented below. The figures are subject to change as year-end positions are finalised.
2. Core income is £591,166, which is higher than was budgeted and the Executive has previously been advised of the reasons for this: £10,000 Covid Grant from SODC, £5200 and additional funding via NAAONB and £6000 fee income.
3. Core expenditure is £585,991 against a budget of £568,828. The budgeted figure considered savings and deferral of expenditure should they be necessary in responding to the Covid pandemic. Income had been higher than budgeted, so not all savings were necessary. In addition, previously deferred expenditure was committed, resulting in higher expenditure than originally considered at the outbreak of the pandemic.
4. The CCB made a small core surplus of £5,175 which contributes towards the CCB commitments to projects.
5. Project income and expenditure has been affected by the restrictions put in place to combat Covid, however no additional liability is expected to occur to the CCB over and above the contributions already agreed. The accounts show the annualised contributions that the CCB has committed to.

Recommendations

1. **To note the current financial results for the financial year.**

Chilterns Conservation Board Finance Report Year to 31 March 2021	2020/21	
	Annual Budget 2020/21	Year to 31 March 2021
	£	
Income		
Public Sector		
Defra	448000	455404
Local Authorities	104000	111309
External income	552000	566713
SODC grant		10000
Investment income	1000	1000
Fee Income	800	650
Events, sales etc net	13000	12803
	14800	24453
Core Income	566800	591166
Expenditure		
Employment	406128	405791
Planning Consultancy	12000	19500
Travel	4000	1951
Web site	5000	5580
Communications,Printing / Distribution	4500	6550
Annual Report	1050	1200
Monitoring and Evidence	7000	7000
Subscriptions	1200	3029
Meetings and Partnerships	3000	2950
Planning Committee	900	350
Training	3000	3100
Premises	35000	35244
Office Costs	15000	14950
IT	14150	13163
Finance	13000	16380
Personnel	3100	6816
Monitoring / Clerk	1150	1150
Insurance	4900	4950
Engagement budget	5000	5000
Members' Allowances	9500	9500
National AONB	3000	3200
Outstanding Chilterns mag.	7250	7987
Other costs	5000	5650
Farm projects (landowners)	5000	5000
Core Expenditure	568828	585991
Core Net income / (expenditure)	-2028	5175
Major Projects		
Chalk Streams		
Net	3400	-5000
Hillforts Beacons of the Past		
Net	-6525	-6550
Chalk Cherries Chairs		
Net	-2500	-2500
HS2 / HS2 Additional Projects		
Net	0	-1000
ChilItern Walking /Food Festival /BLEF		
Net	0	0
North Chilterns		
Net	-5000	-5000
National Rail		
Net	0	0
Project Net income / (expenditure)	-15625	-20050
Total Net Income (Expenditure)	-17653	-14875

Chilterns Conservation Board	
Annual Budget 2021/22	
Income	£
Public Sector	
Defra	448000
Local Authorities	111000
	559000
External income	15000
Core Income	574000
Expenditure	
Employment	410750
Planning Consultancy	15000
Travel	3500
Web site	5000
Communications,Printing / Distribution	4500
Annual Report	1050
Monitoring and Evidence	7000
Subscriptions	3000
Meetings and Partnerships	3000
Planning Committee	750
Training	3000
Premises	35000
Office Costs	14000
IT	12000
Finance	13000
Personnel	3100
Monitoring / Clerk	1150
Insurance	4900
Engagement budget	5000
Members' Allowances	8500
National AONB	3210
Outstanding Chilterns mag.	7500
Other costs	5000
Farm projects (landowners)	5000
Core Expenditure	573910
Core Net income / (expenditure)	90
Major Projects	
Chalk Streams	
Net	-5000
Hillforts Beacons of the Past	
Net	-5000
Chalk Cherries Chairs	
Net	-5000
HS2 Additional Projects	
Net	-1000
Chilterns Walking / Food Festival /BLEF	
Net	0
Chalkscapes	
Net	-5000
Mend the Gap	
Net	0
Project Net income / (expenditure)	-21000
Total Net Income (Expenditure)	-20910

Item 9 Board Review (April 2021)

1.0 Summary

The CCB team has continued to work effectively at home since mid-March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As lockdown measures ease, we are exploring a phased return to the office, once various renovation works have been completed by the landlord.

During this period of reporting, we have dealt with the impacts of increased use of the countryside by the public during lockdown. While more people enjoying the Chilterns is to be welcomed, we – as with other protected landscapes – have needed to issue guidance and engage the media in urging people to behave responsibly.

A key part of the team's focus is to work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including NGOs, businesses, MPs and government agencies – both locally and nationally. We are collaborating with other AONBs and National Parks on a range of subjects - including the Glover Review, sustainable tourism, land management and planning reform - in large part through the National Association of AONBs. We are also contributing our time and expertise to a number of government-led initiatives and consultations which will, hopefully, lead to benefits for both the Chilterns and protected landscapes overall.

As ever, the team adapts to what remains an uncertain and fast-moving situation and - where possible - plan ahead and horizon scan for upcoming challenges and opportunities. With lockdown measures easing and the weather improving, many in the team are also looking forward to delivering outdoor activities, including surveys and monitoring, practical habitat restoration work, festivals and community engagement.

2.0 Over-arching and core work

2.1 Planning

Planning applications

- 28 formal representations were reported to the March 2021 Planning Committee, nine of which involved objections. Between the November and March, four applications to which CCB had objected were refused, and a further five withdrawn; only two applications were approved against CCB advice, one of which was contrary to the council officer's recommendation.
- It is reassuring to see CCB's responses given due weight in balancing planning considerations. We also note increasing references to the Management Plan in officer reports and decisions, whether as a material consideration or a formal supplementary planning document (Dacorum is a commendable example of the latter).
- Some important appeals on which we have submitted additional representations include:
 - Little Sparrows, Sonning Common (133 dwellings, including 73 "assisted living" units dwellings) by public inquiry, opening on 27 April
 - the former Bledlow Ridge Household Waste Centre (to reopen as a community interest-run waste transfer centre), by written representations running April/May 2021
- Key recent decision: Buckinghamshire Council has refused permission for 50 dwellings at Glynswood, Hughenden, High Wycombe, inside the AONB, but allocated in the Wycombe Local Plan for up to 50 units. This has raised a (welcome) debate over the definition of "major development" within AONBs: the local plan examination inspector had concluded the proposal would not be "major development", but the officer's report on the recent planning application accepted that if a scheme was of an inappropriate

design, then it might trip the definition and fall within the “major development” category. This potential confusion reinforces the point that greater clarity is required on this aspect of policy, and we are considering further work on a position statement (see also NPPF consultation below).

Strategic matters

- A comprehensive response to the draft **Dacorum Local Plan** has been submitted, expressing concern that the council was choosing to meet and exceed its housing needs figure, despite the borough benefiting from AONB and Green Belt protection. The plan’s spatial strategy would result in development eroding the protected buffer between the Chilterns AONB and the built-up areas of Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring.
- The draft plan highlights the perceived preference for housing growth at any cost over the achievement of other objectives of the NPPF. The housing requirement needed reconsidering, as did the scale and location of development in the setting of the AONB.
- A response was submitted to MHCLG’s linked consultations on **changes to the NPPF and the new national model design code**, both largely in response to the ‘Building Better, Building Beautiful’ report. Our response will be posted on the planning pages of our website. Three key points:
 - Current NPPF para 172 was proposed to be amended to enhance the distinction between plan-making and development management, and provide greater clarity on the approach to be taken in the setting of protected landscapes, both welcome in principle. The result appeared to be greater protection for the setting than for the landscape itself, and a missed opportunity for further clarity around the “major development” issue.
 - There appears to be a (possibly unintended) move towards accepting development that meets design or beauty criteria even if it is the wrong development or in the wrong place; we have sought clarity on this point.
 - There is a lack of clarity concerning how the new national design guide and design codes are intended to be applied. The underlying rhetoric (expressed in last year’s White Paper) was that *in areas identified as “growth” or “renewal” areas* any development that met design guide or code would automatically be approved, but that a more discretionary approach would continue to apply in protected areas, such as AONBs. This is not clearly expressed in the revised NPPF or model code.
- Finally, we have supported the Chiltern Society in launching the **Chilterns Building Design Awards 2021** on 13 April. Nominations may be submitted through the Chiltern Society website until 31 July, and Awards will be granted in three categories (for ‘Green’, ‘Modern’ and ‘Traditional’ buildings or structures). The Awards will be presented in September.
- For more information on our planning work, see the news and updates section at the bottom of the CCB [planning and development web page](#).

2.2 Nature and Landscape

- **Farming and the Environment Webinars** – Our programme of six webinars ran from 3 February to 10 March and were very well-received with some very positive feedback. Details are [here](#) and videos on YouTube [here](#)). Board member and Chair of the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster, Ian Waller, hosted the sessions. Total attendance numbered 1,165, while videos have been watched over 1,200 times – a great way of engaging with farmers in our existing farm clusters and reaching out to new contacts across the Chilterns and further afield. The webinars represented a real team effort with Nick leading the back-room crew, supported by Neil and with invaluable assistance from Jo Potkin.

- **Electricity Infrastructure Undergrounding, Dunstable Downs** – UK Power Networks has confirmed that the proposals to create a new underground route across the Dunstable Downs will commence this summer, with the metal pylons that dominate the skyline due for removal in October. We are grateful for local ecologists, Graham Bellamy and Dr Wilf Powell, highlighting concerns over a particular section of the undergrounding route and suggesting an alternative which the UKPN engineers were able to accommodate.
- **Tree and Woodland Planting** – In response to the climate emergency, a growing number of tree planting initiatives are being set up, including an Oxfordshire initiative - led by the Lord Lieutenant - to double tree cover within the county. At almost 24%, the Chilterns AONB has considerably higher tree cover than the UK as a whole (13%) but more tree planting is possible. However, along with other AONBs, we are stressing the importance of ‘the right tree in the right place’, avoiding damage to other important habitats (including chalk grassland) and highlighting other forms of carbon capture including hedgerows, ponds, pasture and even arable soils.
- **Agricultural Transition Plan** - We continue to monitor progress with and prepare for the introduction of the government’s evolving Environmental Land Management Schemes proposals. This includes awaiting details of the **Farming in Protected Landscapes** Defra-led scheme. We are developing scenarios looking at how – once more detail is available - we integrate the programme with our existing landowner engagement work and landscape scale projects.
- **Big Chalk** - Kath is working closely with eight other AONBs, and the South Downs National Park, in the development of the ‘Big Chalk’ initiative, which aims to work with landowners, farmers and local communities to build resilience in calcareous landscapes (chalk and limestone) on an unprecedented scale.
- **Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan** – part of the National Association of AONBs’ Colchester Declaration commitment is for every AONB to create a Nature Recovery Plan. Kath is leading this work for CCB and has begun to scope out an approach which can integrate with our land management engagement work, as well as the Buckinghamshire Council-led pilot Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

2.3 HS2

- This has been a particularly busy period working with partners in our efforts to reduce the negative impact that HS2 is having on the Chilterns landscape, its wildlife, historic features and communities. Key recurrent themes include HS2 and its contractors’ lack of transparency, their failure to uphold claims to work to the highest environmental standards, poor community engagement and failure to be a ‘good neighbour’.
- In all our activities, we are liaising with a range of stakeholders including Buckinghamshire Council, Natural England, the Police, national and local NGOs (including the Chiltern Society, Woodland Trust and the RSPB), councillors and representatives of local community groups.
- **Bucks HS2 Environment Group** – Elaine, Neil and Vicki attend regular meetings of the HS2 Environment Group, set up by Bucks Council to coordinate work on the growing number of concerns related to early HS2 works throughout the county and much of it in the AONB.
- **Leather Lane** - At the beginning of March, The Lee and Great Missenden Parish Councils alerted us to the imminent felling of up to 50 trees, clearing the way for the construction route beside the HS2 trace. With Bucks Council, we challenged HS2’s main works contractors, EKFB, that engineering plans would result in the removal of significant numbers of mature trees – contrary to the Detailed Design Principles agreed with HS2. As a result, EKFB has reviewed its planned works and confirmed tree removal will be reduced – we are still pressing for the absolute minimum number of trees to be felled. (News item [here](#))

- **Jones' Hill Wood** – Ongoing concerns over the poor quality of HS2 survey data and mitigation proposals for rare bats led to the CCB publishing a news item [here](#).
- **Additional Projects** – We continue to work with partners and farmers to identify projects that will provide landscape, wildlife and recreational improvements in the HS2 corridor. A proposal to upgrade the towpath of the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal will be taken to the AONB Review Group at its next meeting on 28 April.
- **Recreational Links** – Neil met with Bucks Council and Sustrans to discuss development of the complimentary HS2 North and Wendover Links and the Misbourne Greenway Cycle route.
- We remain committed to working with and supporting local people to do the best we can to protect communities, wildlife and the Chilterns landscape. Further information can be found on our [HS2](#) webpage.

2.4 People and Society

- **[The 8th Chilterns Walking Festival](#)** will take place 22 May to 6 June, a popular event in the Chilterns calendar featuring over 75 walks and involving over 50 organisations and volunteer walk leaders. The Festivals provide the opportunity for new businesses and walk leaders to showcase themselves and gain visibility, and we are involving several new start-ups in the spring Festival.
- Our focus this year is to link with local businesses, to expand provision of family-friendly events and to make the programme more diverse and inclusive. We are adding new walks all the time and hope to include some farm walks to increase public understanding of the farmed landscape, especially in the light of visitor management issues during lockdown. We are also looking to expand the number of events in the northern Chilterns and will be linking in with Chalkscapes to plan some pilot events for the October Festival.
- **Countryside Access and Visitor Management** - We have continued to disseminate government guidance regarding Covid-19 and countryside visits in line with the phased roadmap out of lockdown. This included promoting the new Countryside Code and 'respect the countryside' campaigns, collaborating with the NAAONB, farmers, the countryside sector and partners such as the NFU, CLA and Kennel Club to ensure a joined-up approach.
- Our most recent campaign focused on Dogs in the Countryside to tie in with lambing. We have tried to ease pressure at overcrowded honeypot sites by promoting our series of Social Distance Friendly walks and walks from market towns. These campaigns and initiatives have achieved extensive press coverage and the multi-partner collaborative approach has been very effective. We would like to build on this successful partnership work going forward.
- Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to build on the increased interest and engagement with the Chilterns countryside during lockdown, especially amongst new urban audiences. The challenge will be to manage visitors and visitor pressure effectively, something we will be focusing on through the Chilterns Partnership.
- **Sustainable Tourism** - We have been reviewing options and models for an expanded sustainable tourism remit in the Chilterns, especially given increased visitors and the proposals in the Glover Review. We have also provided advice and strategic input to a number of tourism related reviews and discussions:
 - As a key partner to Visit Buckinghamshire, we contributed our views to a consultancy commissioned to review tourism across Buckinghamshire and to identify opportunities to grow its contribution. This is in the context of planning a post-Covid recovery and a DCMS review of Destination Management Organisations (see below).
 - DCMS is carrying out an independent review to examine and assess the role, structure and performance of Destination Management Organisations. We were instrumental in convening a group of eight AONBs which are preparing a response to be submitted through the NAAONB on behalf of the AONB network (deadline 28 April).

- Following the CCB flagging the role of AONBs in sustainable tourism, we have held discussions with Defra and, later this month, Elaine and Annette are meeting the Rural Economy lead in Defra's Environment Strategy Directorate to share our thoughts and ideas on the opportunities for rural tourism recovery.
- **Promoting the rural economy** – Work has resumed with the Open for Business project, though the Chilterns Pass is still on hold and the April Food & Drink Festival is postponed for now. We have promoted #ShopLocal, focusing on local food and drink producers during lockdown and are now broadening this to include non-essential businesses and visitor attractions as they [re-open](#).
- Information about visiting the Chilterns has been updated and distributed in line with the changing [Covid-19 situation](#) and we have maintained regular communications with businesses - signposting them to information on business grants and providing information and updates on sector news.

3.0 Communications

- The collaborative #TaketheLead campaign was very successful. With CLA South East, NFU South East and the Kennel Club we conducted an awareness campaign highlighting the importance of keeping dogs on leads. This is especially important with the increase in new dog owners and people less familiar with talking dogs in the countryside pre-Covid. News item [here](#). The campaign achieved some good media interest including a number of radio interviews and articles in the Henley Standard, Bucks Free Press, various parish council newsletters/website. We were also supported by partner organisations such as the Chiltern Society.
- We collaborated with Natural England, DEFRA, the National Association of AONBs and other AONBs on the launch of the new Countryside Code. This included social media posts, a press release and [news article](#).
- Our Comms Officer has been attending regular meetings with the comms and transport teams from Bucks Council to share information and address concerns regarding HS2. This has led to issuing a [joint press release](#) highlighting our concerns about trees being felled at Leather Lane.
- The new website development project continues. Development work has finished, the new interactive map is in the final testing stages and the comms team will now start to create the new pages on the new site. A recently-appointed copywriter has begun copywriting and editing content.
- The comms team has helped Annette (People & Society Officer) to promote businesses and the local economy as covid restrictions begin to ease. We published a Mother's Day [blog](#), highlighting some of the best Chilterns local producers, as well as another [blog](#) highlighting walks and activities to help people stay safe as lockdown eases.
- To support our increasing comms work, funding for a second part time Communications Assistant has been allocated (making the Comms Assistant post up to the equivalent of one full time person). This is great news for the comms team who, with the help of this resource, will be able to deliver more planned content, more social media coverage and be able to provide more support other areas of the business, helping us to increase engagement and awareness, and raise the profile of the Chilterns AONB and the CCB.
- The comms team is currently compiling ideas for articles for the next edition of Outstanding Chilterns magazine and are looking for a wider variety of contributors – if board members have proposals for an interesting item relating to the Chilterns please email vpearce@chilternsaonb.org
- The comms team has been supporting Matt Thompson and the Chiltern Society with promotion of the next [Building Design Awards](#). Architects, developers, planners and the public are encouraged to apply or nominate successful sustainable buildings or structures from the past three years:

4.0 Development & Funding

- The development stage of Chalkscapes runs until late 2022, at which point we will submit a full application for funding to the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The development work is now in its fifth month.
- Development of the new CCB website continues, and extra capacity being secured recently to help support the Communications Officer in the final stages.
- The CCB comms team has been very busy as usual, with particular focus during this period on supporting the farmer cluster engagement work and media work on HS2.
- The Development and Funding Manager continues to ensure the CCB is represented at a national level with the development of collaborative projects with other AONBs and National Parks through the National Association of AONBs.
- We are currently working collaboratively with The Conservation Volunteers, Surrey Hills AONB, Kent Downs AONB and High Weald AONB on the development of a 'Rail to Trail' project proposal to be submitted to the second tranche of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF). The outcome of this application should be known by the summer.

5.0 Projects

Chalk, Cherries & Chairs

- Our Landscape Partnership is entering a significant review period, with the Steering Committee reflecting in a facilitated workshop next week on the lessons learned from the project's inception period, the impact of coronavirus restrictions and, where relevant, the online successes of the last twelve months.
- In light of this work, we aim to adapt the project and secure any quickly agreed changes with HLF in late Spring or early summer but major revisions will need to be held over until the mid-term project evaluation.
- Activities continue, including the farmer engagement and associated nature conservation work. A scaled-down Spring Festival took place at the start of April, taking advantage of the outdoor rule-of-six as lockdown restrictions eased, including guided walks on Grim's Ditch and wet participation events on the River Wye, as well as online cultural heritage and nature events.
- Looking to broaden the partnership's audience, 'New Shoots' a tailored programme of enhanced skills training for young conservationists is in late development.

Wildlife and Landscape headlines:

- 27,000 saplings planted this spring, mainly in hedgerows but also in a woodland creation project. All are strategically located and species have been carefully selected to maximise likelihood of survival and positive impact on wildlife habitat.
- 17 whole-farm environmental plans completed by 4 consultancies working cooperatively to ensure cross-farm-boundary planning. Vital preparation for entry into Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Land Management. Also aiming to use these to enter some farms into Biodiversity Net Gain agreements with developers.
- Started work on 4 new strategically located important grassland/scrub sites to assist with planning, fencing and accessing long-term funding for management.
- Case study on farm cluster printed and circulated, with encouraging high-level feedback from Defra & Natural England.
- Helping launch 'Wilder Road Verges' in Buckinghamshire.
- Conservation grazing facilitated on two SSSIs and a LNR to provide a sustainable and valuable habitat management tool. Fencing, water supply and corral building completed at Lodge Hill, underway at Butlers Hangings and timetabled for Sands

Bank. Cows have arrived on site at Lodge Hill and have been arranged to arrive in the autumn for the other sites.

Tracking the Impact headlines:

- 118/150 surveys squares allocated to volunteers 79% coverage:
 - 48/50 Breeding Bird Survey
 - 33/50 Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey
 - 37/50 National Plant Monitoring Scheme
- 87 volunteers trained in survey methodology by National Lead Officers over three training courses
- Six training courses planned for 90 (oversubscribed) volunteers over 32 online and infield sessions this summer on bird, butterfly and plant species ID
- Active volunteer WhatsApp group with 83 members
- Invited to sit on national JNCC working group to help shape national funded policy pilot project looking at local roll out of national recording schemes as example of best practice.

Comms and Engagement Theme

- Developed new youth engagement programme 'New Shoots' in partnership with BBOWT, Chiltern Rangers, National Trust and Chiltern Society
- Working with Bucks New Uni students on sonic postcards of the Chilterns
- New heritage trail in Amersham developed and delivered, in partnership with the Rothschild Foundation and Amersham Museum
- Commissioned local teenage singer to create a song of the Chilterns, complete with a music video to engage a new audience with Echoed Locations
- Challenges include: online events no longer appealing in the same way - need to focus on smaller scale in person events as people are very keen for them now!
- We also need to create more volunteering collateral and home in on what 'Chilterns Champions' means, and make up ground for having missed almost a year of volunteer recruitment.

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

- **Project expansion** - Further to securing additional funding, for example from Affinity Water, proposals to expand of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project have been finalised in this period, with recruitment of staff commencing soon.
- **R. Chess Smarter Water Catchment** - The main focus of activity for the Project Officer in this period has been working with Thames Water and partners on the development of the [Chess Smarter Water Catchment \(SWC\) Plan](#). Thames Water is piloting this initiative to trial a new way of more intensive catchment management to improve the health of rivers in the company's catchment area.
- The pilot is due to run between 2020 and 2026 (timescale adjusted due to impacts of Covid-19 pandemic) and involves three river catchments: the R. Evenlode, R. Crane and R. Chess. The CCSP and the River Chess Association are the joint hosts of the Chess SWC.
- Main progress since February has included:
 - Stakeholder workshop held on 25 Feb to identify catchment issues and priorities
 - Steering Group set up 8 March and Catchment Plan finalised on 31 March. The Catchment Plan sets out the key issues affecting the health of the catchment and the actions and milestones required to address them over the next five years (the whole project lifespan covers 10 years with the first five years funded).
 - Now that the plan has been approved, more detailed, costed annual action plans will be developed.

- **Sewage pollution** –The wet winter has led to high groundwater levels and surface water flooding across the Chilterns in the first few months of the year. High groundwater levels have led to sewage pollution in several rivers across the Chilterns as a result of groundwater ingress into the sewer network. The worst affected rivers have been the R. Chess, R. Bulbourne and R. Misbourne.
- **R. Chess** – High rainfall led to periodic discharges of partially treated sewage into the Chess throughout the winter. However rising groundwater led to a continuous discharge of sewage between 26 January and 13 March. Throughout the remainder of March discharges continued on a daily basis, finally coming to an end on 1 April.
- Thames Water carried out some repairs to the sewer network in Chesham, in March, to reduce the amount of groundwater infiltrating into the network. It seems likely that completion of this work has directly led to the earlier than expected cessation of sewage discharge in the Chess.
- In February, the CCSP provided advice and support to Latimer Park Flyfishers to help them repair a river bank to stop contaminated water from entering the lakes at Latimer.
- **R. Misbourne** - In February, the Project was alerted by a local resident that the sewage transfer main (carries sewage between Amersham and Maple Lodge STW) was surcharging and that Thames Water had begun pumping raw sewage from their sewer balancing tanks at Amersham into the R Misbourne.
- The impact has been significant with large volumes of sewage detritus depositing in the channel as far downstream as Chalfont St. Giles and the contamination of riparian land at a number of locations downstream of the balancing tanks.
- The CCSP alerted Thames Water to the poor state of repair of many of the inspection manholes along the transfer main and the fact that several were either completely inundated, or surrounded by and accepting, flood water. Thames Water are currently investigating.
- The Project Officer has advised Thames Water that the transfer main is also surcharging upstream of the balancing tanks. Thames Water has yet to confirm when they are likely to cease over pumping operations.
- **R. Bulbourne** – Berkhamsted STW has been discharging partially treated effluent into the Grand Union Canal since December 2020. The R. Bulbourne flows into and out of the Grand Union Canal below the STW outfall and is being adversely affected by the pollution.
- **Hughenden Brook** - Some minor impacts from sewage overflows were also seen on the Hughenden Brook but with groundwater levels peaking in March, a much more significant sewage surcharging event has been avoided.
- **Trout in the Classroom** - With the return of schools in the New Year, the Project, working with the River Chess Association, has set up trout tanks at four schools (3 in the Chess valley and 1 in High Wycombe near the Wye) and will be running the project into the summer term. All schools are now making use of the CCSP's new book on the life cycle of Trout, which was produced last year.
- **River habitat enhancement** – Work on the second phase of the enhancement of the R. Wye back stream at Wye Dene in High Wycombe was completed in March. The Project, was developed and delivered in partnership with Chiltern Rangers with the CCSP providing technical support in designing and securing the necessary consents for the Project.
- **Project support** – The CCSP provided £2,000 to support the Ver Valley Society to enable them to complete the revision and reprint of the Ver Valley Walks leaflet packs. The pack includes nine walks – one linear walk and eight circular walks. The leaflets will be available in April.
- **ChessWatch** – A series of ArcView [Storymaps](#) were launched in March to help raise awareness of the importance of the river and the issues impacting its health. The maps also include an interactive water quality dashboard that shows data being collected by

the ChessWatch data sondes, which have been monitoring the river for the past 18 months.

- In March a new, Proteus, data sonde was deployed in the R. Chess. This sonde measures a number of additional water quality parameters (including Biochemical Oxygen Demand) and provides real-time data feedback. The data will be used to monitor the impact of sewage discharges and provide a baseline data set that can be used to monitor the impacts of management interventions delivered through the Smarter Water Catchment initiative.

Beacons of the Past

- Beacons of the Past appeared on international CGTN Europe in March (see video [here](#))
- Registered Portal users are now up to 7646, with steady daily work carried out both in initial recording and reviewer portal quality checking
- A magnetometry survey of Ivinghoe Beacon, covering over 4ha, indicate that the planned erosion mitigation works will not interfere with any archaeological deposits and can now proceed. This will make a huge difference to the long term protection of the monument and its fragile chalk grassland.
- Our treasured Landscape Heritage Officer is leaving the project; Dr Ed Peveler has accepted permanent work with Berkshire Archaeology and leaves us at the end of May. We have recruited and had a good response to the advert. After interviewing three candidates, we have made an offer of employment and the new LHO will take up his duties when Ed departs.
- The new post is part time and with the savings in staff expenditures, the NLHF has agreed to allow us to extend the project from Oct 2021 end date to September 2022. This will allow us to carry out more work and make up for lost time on activities that had been thwarted by COVID.
- Both Ed and Wendy have been requested to offer consultations to farmers, forestry, and local authorities on the archaeological resources and implications of activities in the AONB. We have had several comments from partners suggesting a desire to be able to count on this kind of expert heritage advice from the CCB going forward, so thought should be given about how to deliver that after the end of the Project.
- A series of meetings were held with each of the HERs in the four counties of the AONB, in which the major discoveries of each area from the LiDAR were reported, as well as their context in the wider landscape. Whilst there are thousands of features revealed (and more to come), a *triage* system allows us to suggest where to dedicate time and resources to maximum benefit. Over 250 sites were identified for top line attention from the HERs and the meetings were highly successful with regard to planning for the continued data legacy.
- A successful meeting of the BotP Steering Group was held in March, and works planned at the Tier One hillfort sites have been re-planned in line with projected Covid restriction changes. However, we are also planning contingencies in case of third waves, and will not be conducting any large public events until Oct at the earliest.

Mend the Gap – joint venture between the CCB and North Wessex Downs AONB

- We were unsuccessful in recruiting a Mitigation Projects Officer, so don't yet have additional capacity in place to push forward the mitigation projects. We are now developing a brief to bring this capacity on board either as a consultancy or partnership opportunity.
- In the meantime, the Programme Manager has been focussing effort on moving the potential mitigation projects in the South Stoke area forward. These are of particular interest and concern to the Railway Action Group. Subject to landowner and tenant farmer approval, we are hopeful that we may be able to bring these schemes to fruition in time for this winter's planting season.
- Work to develop species lists for mitigation tree planting and hedgerow restoration will be complete by the end of May. This is being undertaken by a highly experienced consultant

(ex Forestry Commission) and will form the basis for discussion with landowners and for subsequent detailed design of each scheme. The work will also seek to identify a means of establishing a legacy by incorporating one or more specific species or characteristics within every scheme so that, together, they create a suite of identifiable Mend the Gap projects.

- Whilst there are enhancement projects in development, the pipeline of potential projects is not as strong as we would have hoped for at this stage. External organisations that might usually have been expected to come forward early with projects have been knocked by the impact of Covid, and consequently focussed more on survival than on project development. We will be revisiting contacts made over the past year to pick up on discussions about potential projects which have subsequently not come forward and to look at proactively developing some of these. We will also continue to encourage colleagues within both AONBs to put forward potential projects for Mend the Gap funding,
- One year into the Mend the Gap programme, the Programme Manager put forward a review paper for discussion by the Steering Group. A number of recommendations will be taken forward and it was agreed that others would not be progressed, although there is opportunity for review at a later date.
- MtG is looking to establish small working/task/finish groups to focus on the enhancement projects areas of interest (heritage; landscape; biodiversity; access, recreation, understanding; sustainable tourism and local economy). We will also be undertaking some gap analysis/baselining work which will identify areas of greatest need and opportunity in relation to future enhancement projects.

Chalkscapes

- Chalkscapes Development Officer, Luke Burgess joined us on 13 April, working four days per week managing the Wildchalk brief, and some of the Routeways and waysides and work as well as the volunteering elements of the project. Luke is an ecologist and his technical expertise will be a welcome addition to both the project and the organisation overall.
- The Wildchalk tender has been awarded to Plantlife and BCN Wildlife Trust. An inception meeting was held on 14th April and partners are excited to commence work on the project. Species dossier work is expected to be delivered by the end of July and Conservation Area plans by the end of December.
- We are now commissioning a series of [consultancy contracts](#) around both conservation and community engagement. The deadline for tender submissions is 7th May. Work should begin in early June and run until early summer 2022.
- We are exploring opportunities to build on learning from Chalk, Cherries and Chairs, for example to scale up farmer cluster approaches and wildlife monitoring and survey framework.
- The Chalkscapes team held a meeting with the Lottery on 10th March. The Lottery were pragmatic about current circumstances and have recognised there may need to be some changes in how we deliver work. We are meeting again on 18th May at Dunstable Downs to agree what information and documentation is to be submitted for the stage 2 bid.
- Chalkscapes Advisory group meeting met for the first time since being granted permission to start and Jenny came into post. Despite the challenges of the past year, members all remained enthusiastic about the project.
- Terms of reference have been developed for the Chalkscapes Advisory group and 2 working groups which we are currently in the process of setting up. The working groups will meet more regularly and focus on delivering work needed to develop the bid. An 'elevator pitch' has been drafted to help promotion of the Chalkscapes project which will be shared with project partners.
- Planning and timing of pilot activity remains a risk as this is heavily dependent on easing of lockdown measures. Uncertainty makes planning activities challenging.

- Accessing target audience remains a challenge. Many community groups are not currently meeting, and staffing changes mean we have lost some contacts to those groups. It remains to be seen how confident and willing people will be to meet and take part in any activities.
- Input from project partners will have to be managed carefully. Some organisations have gone through significant change and some still have staff on furlough as a result of Covid.
- Sourcing match funding will be an ongoing challenge for the Chalkscapes. Although we are in the early stages of development securing funding can be a very long process. Plans for expansion of Luton Airport have been paired back meaning less funds will be available for community and conservation projects. Suggestions as where opportunities for match funding may be available are very welcome.
- Board members with links to Local Authorities, Parish Councils, community groups or health service contacts in the North Chilterns area (Hertfordshire, Luton, Central Bedfordshire), are invited to get in touch with Jenny Ponsford jponsford@chilternsaonb.org and Claire Readey creadey@chilternsaonb.org

6.0 National focus

- Liaising with a range of organisations and individuals, including our partners - both nationally and locally - has been important during this period. This has included conversations with our local authorities over responding to the Covid-19 emergency and working with the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), AONB Lead Officers, National Parks and others on a range of operational and strategic matters. Strong links have also been maintained and developed with Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

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Defra

- The CCB staff team continues to communicate and share information on our work with Defra. We are liaising with Defra, Natural England and others on implementing the Landscapes Review, commenting on design of the government's Agricultural Transition Plan, developing Nature Recovery Networks and developing measures to improve the protection of chalk streams.
- The CCB is also a key partner on Defra's Buckinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Pilot. Kath sits on the Pilot Area Team and is providing direct support for that work, which includes input on stakeholder engagement, workshop facilitation and assisting with analysis of workshop findings.
- Elaine continues to represent the AONB network with a number of other AONB colleagues on Defra's Contact Group for AONBs and National Parks, exploring implementation of the Review's recommendations.

NAAONB

- Members of the team continue to work closely with Lead Officers and their teams in other AONBs and the National Association of AONBs on a range of strategic and operational matters, including comms, nature recovery, visitor management and farming. This includes regular meetings with the South East and East Protected Landscapes group (SEEPL).
- Elaine continues in her role as a member of the Colchester Declaration Steering Group - which met in March - along with Kath and Claire. The Declaration was agreed by all AONBs in July 2019 and aims to increase the scale and pace of conservation activity in AONBs, along with increasing our engagement with people and local communities.

- Work includes developing an ambitious plan for nature recovery across all AONBs in England and has resulted in securing Natural England funding for a national Nature Recovery Officer to work across all AONBs in England.
- Claire is leading the development of a proposal as part of the Colchester Declaration, work. The Urban Hinterland Cluster (Kent, High Weald and Surrey Hills AONBs) seeks to engage with young, black people aged 16 - 24 in central London.
- Elaine meets with other AONB Lead Officers and National Parks to discuss collaborative working on Nature Recovery Networks and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilots (of which Buckinghamshire is one).

Other

- [The Landscapes for Everyone](#) national conference was held online on 13 October. The proceedings are now available online ([morning](#) and [afternoon](#) sessions). Elaine chaired the morning session, which included a keynote speech from Julian Glover and a series of expert presentations. Elaine has more recently been invited to chair a session at the follow-on conference, [Farming with Nature](#) on 25/26 May.

Others, such as broadening the programme area out beyond the current 6km-wide strip or moving towards a model traditional grant scheme approached were discussed in detail but not taken forward at this time.

Freedom of Information/EIR Request

A formal request under FOI/EIR was received from a resident living within the programme area. The response is being compiled and will be sent out later this week

Recommendation

1. To note the update and provide feedback.