



Members of the Chilterns Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are hereby summoned to a board briefing of the full Chilterns Conservation Board on

**7 December 2021 at 10am  
By remote video conferencing**

### **Agenda**

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Notice of Urgent Business
4. Minutes of Previous Meeting (7 September 2021)
5. Matters Arising
6. Chairman's update
7. Board Review
8. Business Plan update
9. Finance and Budget Planning
10. Income Generation
11. Governance Review
12. HS2 engagement & update: presentation by CCB staff
13. Any other business

#### Future Meetings:

<u>Full Board</u>	1 March 2022 14 June 2022 6 September 2022 6 December 2022
<u>Executive Committee</u>	1 February 2022 3 May 2022 2 August 2022 1 November 2022
<u>Planning Committee</u>	12 January 2022 13 April 2022 12 July 2022 11 October 2022



**MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE CONSERVATION BOARD FOR  
THE CHILTERN'S AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

**Held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at Bledlow Ridge Village Hall, Chinnor Road  
HP14 4AJ at 10.00am.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Appointed by Local Authorities**

Cllr David Bartholomew  
Cllr Robert Carington  
Cllr Carl Jackson  
Cllr Steve Jarvis  
Cllr Lynn Lloyd

**Appointing Body**

Oxfordshire County Council  
Buckinghamshire Council  
Buckinghamshire Council  
North Hertfordshire District Council  
South Oxfordshire District Council

**Appointed by the Secretary of State**

Colin Courtney  
Paul Mainds  
John Nicholls  
John Shaw  
Ian Waller

Secretary of State  
Secretary of State- Chairman  
Secretary of State- Deputy-Chairman  
Secretary of State  
Secretary of State

**Elected by Parish Councils**

Cllr John Griffin  
Cllr Charles Hussey  
Cllr Sue Rowland  
Cllr Adrian Watney

Oxfordshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Oxfordshire  
Hertfordshire

**CCB Officers**

Kath Daly  
Elaine King  
Graham Hurst  
Annette Venters

Countryside Officer  
Chief Executive Officer  
Finance Officer (S151 Officer)  
People & Society Officer

**Other**

Tom Beeston  
Deirdre Hansen

CEO Chiltern Society  
Clerk to the Board

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves.

### **21/22.5 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr Andrea Baughan, Buckinghamshire Council, Alison Doggett, Secretary of State appointee, Cllr Paul Duckett, Central Bedfordshire Council, Geeta Ludhra, Secretary of State appointee, Cllr Peter Martin, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Phil McDowell, Dacorum Borough Council, Cllr Richard Newcombe, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Robert Roche, Luton Borough Council, Cllr Phillip Williams Three Rivers District Council and Elizabeth Wilson, Secretary of State appointee.

### **21/22.6 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **21/22.7 Notice of Urgent Business**

None

### **21/22.8 Notes of the previous Board Briefing 23 June 2021.**

The notes were reviewed, and 'Chairman' was added to Members present against Paul Mains. Deputy Chairman was added against John Nicholls.

### **21/22.9 Minutes of the Annual General meeting 21 April 2021 and the Extra Ordinary Meeting 24 June 2021.**

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting 21 April 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

The minutes of the Extra Ordinary Meeting 24 June 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman after 'Chairman' was added to Members present against Paul Mains and Deputy chairman was added against John Nicholls.

### **21/22.10 Chairman's Update**

The Chairman noted that nearly all the Board vacancies have been filled and we should soon have a full house.

1. He had taken part in the Defra quarterly Arm's Length Bodies meeting. This meeting is chaired by the Defra Permanent Secretary. Conflicts of interests were discussed, and he was pleased to report that we are now up to date thanks to help from CCB staff. The next item to look at is conflicts of interest within the staff team. He also updated the meeting on the Governance review the CCB is working on.
2. We have started the new Induction process, led by the CEO.
3. Bridging the gap between board members and staff is being explored.
4. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services at Buckinghamshire Council, Nick Graham, has agreed to take on the role of Monitoring Officer.
5. Share point should be available for Board Members soon allowing easier access to papers. It is presently being tested out.
6. He has spoken with the Chairman of the Cotswolds AONB and has been invited by him to attend their Board meeting in October.

### **21/22.11 Code of Conduct**

The CEO informed members that the Code of Conduct which all members and co-opted members of the CCB are required to follow has been updated in line with current legislation. Approval was sought for the updated version of the Code of Conduct. A typo was found which the clerk will correct. Thanks were made to the Clerk for her assistance with the updated document.

**1. The Board APPROVED the updated Code of Conduct subject to the above correction.**

**21/22.12 Board Member Engagement**

The Chairman introduced the paper that provides an overview of the opportunities for Board Members to engage more with the work of the CCB.

Board Members have statutory responsibilities, must abide by the Nolan principles of public life and their role is to provide scrutiny and leadership to ensure effective and appropriate governance for the CCB.

The Countryside Officer gave some background to the paper presented. The skills audit introduced by the Deputy Chairman has provided a useful insight to the skills and interests that Board Members bring to the organisation. The audit was introduced to not only to enhance what the CCB can do for the Chilterns AONB, but also to add interest and enjoyment to the Board Members. The skills audit summary will be discussed at the next senior leadership team meeting.

The Countryside Officer is keen to hear Board Members' views on being part of the Board. She outlined the proposed steps:

1. Induction
2. The skills audit
3. Board away day
4. Business plan development
5. Terms of Reference.

The CEO noted that this paper is timely due to her and other AONB lead officers currently working with Defra on the Government's response to the Glover Review, plus the CCB team working with Natural England as part of its new designations programme, both of which includes exploring improved governance arrangements. Collectively we can support moves to deliver wider benefits and outcomes for protective landscapes.

Members reflected on their experiences and gave feedback on the proposals.

The timetable for our own review work and input to Defra is tight. A Task and Finish group consisting of Board Members and staff was proposed and agreed. The Deputy Chairman welcomed volunteers.

**1. The Board provide feedback on proposals for increasing Board Member engagement and input and APPROVED the forming of a Task and Finish group to consider issues the governance review should consider.**

**21/22.13. Matters Arising**

None

**21/22.14 Public Question Time**

No public present

**21/22.15 Finance**

The Finance Officer verbally reported on the following:

- i. That he had provided detailed financial management information at the last Executive Committee meeting.

- ii. The Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2020/21, which was signed off at the EOM in June, has not yet been signed by the external auditors. They should have completed their work by 30/09/21.
- iii. The internal auditors have discussed their report with him and brought two points to his attention:
  - a. The Financial Regulations were last reviewed in 2018 we have been asked to review them before the end of the financial year.
  - b. The interest on monies on deposit had not been updated on time due to the change over from Sage to Zero accounting systems. He was asked to update this information.
- iv. The Finance Officer reported that the Mend the Gap £3.75m received in advance is shown in a specific reserve. He noted that the management accounts as presented to the Executive Committee show we are on target.

The CEO commented that the Finance Officer does an excellent job, and that they work closely together. She thanked him for all his work.

#### **1. The Board NOTED the Finance report.**

##### **21/22.16 Income generation**

The CEO gave a verbal report on income. We need to be clear in our Business Plan and budgeting how we fund what we want to do and ensure our income matches our ambitions.

Defra currently provides approximately 80% of our core funding and Local Authorities approximately 20%. Projects are self-funding. We have been told that there is no extra money for protected landscapes from Government. We usually hear about our annual settlement in the April of the year we are working in, and this is a one-year settlement, making budgeting and forecasting extremely challenging.

The Government wants protected landscapes to explore private finance. The Development and Funding Manager has compiled a report setting out the CCB's current funding situation and the opportunities being explored. Report to be circulated.

We have four significant National Lottery Heritage Fund grants. The core staff team of approx. 10 members is funded by our Core funding. While funding for projects is welcome and enables the CCB to deliver more outcomes, for project staff there is continued uncertainty with fixed term contracts, and the CCB risks losing good staff at the end of a contract and is constantly looking for new funding.

Board Members are asked for help in securing more funding.

Members asked question on funding opportunities.

#### **1. The Board NOTED the report.**

##### **21/22.17 Board Review**

The Chief Executive Officer had provided a comprehensive overview of the team's activities and achievement since the last Board briefing in June. Highlighting the following items:

1. Glover Report: The Government is working on a consultation responding to the Glover Report. This is due to be published in the autumn.
2. Boundary extension work and exploring governance: Natural England and the CCB will be conducting a theory of change exercise for the management and governance element of the programme. Work has started and will increase in the next financial year.
3. Farming in Protected Landscapes: The CCB is administering this Defra-funded, three-year programme. The Countryside Officer reported that a new Farming Engagement Officer assigned to the programme will join the CCB in October and there is additional funding for administrative support.  
The scheme supports our work with farmers and other land managers across four themes: Climate, Nature, People and Place. The money is to be directed to the farming community, NGOs and people/groups delivering the key objectives. The funding is front loaded with £50,000 to be spent by February 2022. A priority is to help small farmers and those who may not have been engaged with the CCB or stewardship schemes in the past.  
The Countryside Officer thanked Ian Waller for his help and for stepping up to Chair the independent Panel that assesses applications. She thanked her colleagues who have all helped to get the programme up and running.  
The CEO added her thanks and commented that the team continue to do an amazing job and work very hard, despite the challenges of Covid.
4. HS2: a petition has triggered a parliamentary debate 13 September. This is an opportunity to be heard and support others. The CCB has published a briefing for MPs.

It was acknowledged by members that the team are achieving a huge amount. The CEO was asked to convey the members thanks to all the team.

### **1. The Committee NOTED the report.**

#### **21/22.18 Presentation by Tom Beeston CEO Chiltern Society**

The CEO of the Chiltern Society gave a presentation on its draft Business Plan 2021-2026.

He explained their business plan, vision, values, mission, the (charitable) objectives, their aims, their membership, the volunteer groups that support their work, their growing volunteer base, their major projects, and the various partnership. Most of their projects are delivered in partnership with the CCB, including the Green Recovery Challenge Fund grant.

The Chairman thanked Tom Beeston for attending and presenting.

#### **21/22.19 Urgent business**

None

The Chairman thanked all for attending and thanked the staff for all their work.

The Chairman.....

Date.....

## **Item 7**                      **Board Review (December 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 continued to issue guidance and engage the media in urging people to behave responsibly in the countryside, while at the same time supporting our local businesses in their activities to open again and attract visitors and business during the summer season.

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 implementing 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 – not least being a key element of Natural England's new designations programme and providing insight for the forthcoming government consultation on the Landscapes Review. All these activities will, hopefully, lead to benefits for both the Chilterns and protected landscapes overall.

As ever, the team consistently achieves a great deal in continuing uncertain and changing circumstances. Many in the team are enjoying delivering and planning outdoor activities, including surveys and monitoring, practical habitat restoration work, festivals and community engagement. Small numbers of staff and project teams are also starting to meet outdoors to share ideas and catch up with colleagues away from online platforms.

### **2.0 Over-arching and core work**

#### **Administration and IT**

- The admin team continues to be extremely busy in providing a diverse range of services to support the staff team – both core staff and those working on projects.
- BrightPay, introduced recently, is continuing to work well with improved financial information for payroll. Work is now focussing on expanding its use to store HR documents and improve the way staff leave is tracked, including annual leave requests and approvals.
- Hubspot training has been delayed but remains a priority and underpins our ambitions to undertake more strategic and proactive stakeholder engagement and data management, especially with this being important for our work with Natural England on a boundary extension and exploring new management and governance arrangements.
- Building improvements have been completed to the office by the landlord and we are working on a phased return with the hopes of a more hybrid working approach.
- Covid Risk Assessments continue to be reviewed and updated in line with Government guidance.

#### **2.1 Planning**

- The CCB's Planner has spent much of his time in Q2 (Jul-Sep), and since, engaged with work outside of the core planning sphere, including contributing to the CCB's Governance Review and building up to our work with Natural England on extending the AONB and enhancing external management and governance arrangements, all of which

are reported elsewhere. This has coincided with a serendipitous slowdown in significant strategic planning activity affecting the AONB.

- We have submitted responses since the last Board meeting on the draft [Three Rivers Local Plan](#) and on the [Vision for the Oxford Cambridge Arc](#). You can keep up to date with responses on strategic planning matters on our [website](#).
- South Oxfordshire District Council has applied to the High Court for a review of the appeal decision that granted permission for an extra-care housing village in the AONB at Little Sparrows, Sonning Common. CCB had objected to the proposal, and we have been supporting the council in their subsequent actions. We are awaiting the outcome of this action. This has been reported in the trade press (sadly behind a paywall), including reference to [our letter](#) of complaint to the Planning Inspectorate.
- We have raised objections to a proposed housing allocation in the AONB north of Highlands Farm in the draft Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan. Our earlier response to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan sought to avoid such additional pressures around Henley and this proposal confirms the fears that we had expressed at the local plan examination, but which were dismissed by the Inspector. We hope to work constructively with the Neighbourhood Plan body but have had to raise objections as this allocation for 110 dwellings would unacceptably erode the character of the AONB.
- Learning from recent experiences with planning applications involving excessive outdoor lighting, our Planning Advisor is currently drafting a position statement on lighting in the AONB and we anticipate developing this through a working group of the Policy Committee during 2022.
- Further observations on development management issues include:
  - Between our planning audit 'bookends' of July and October 2021: 5 notices of refusal were also the subject of CCB objections / comments seeking revisions; 2 applications were withdrawn, to which CCB had objected and in one case granted in which CCB had raised objections on layout and design rather than a matter of principle. That application was for residential development on Land to the East of Manor Road to the south of Little Croft Manor Road Goring, P19/S2923/FUL.
  - At the October 2021 Planning Committee meeting 22 new formal representations on planning applications were reported, including 2 appeal representations. These comprise 1 objection, 4-part objection/part comment, 14 comments, 2 appeal representations and one EIA scoping opinion.
  - Our analysis of the trend data still suggests that CCB is exacting some traction in the decision-making process. Notwithstanding the strict national planning policy tests that prohibit major development within the AONB, save for some defined exceptional circumstances, several such major schemes emerge every quarter or so. For this reporting period we have been consulted on a 30-house scheme near Dagnall (Dacorum BC), a 52-house scheme on the AONB boundary at Ivinghoe (Buckinghamshire Aylesbury Vale) and a new substantial dwelling at Cobditch Hill (Watlington) in the open countryside under the 'exceptional architecture/innovation' content of the National Planning Policy Framework. The development pressures within the AONB and within the setting of the AONB continue apace.
  - Some Councils are being very precise, and commendably so, in their refusal of schemes within the AONB. Recent decisions in Buckinghamshire Chilterns Area and in Dacorum and SODC have contained excellent details on the harm that would result to the landscape.

## **2.2 Nature and Landscape**

### Farming in Protected Landscapes

- Gareth Clay was appointed as the Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer on 05 October 2021 and has been responding to existing and incoming enquiries, supporting the panel with applications already in the pipeline, issuing grant offers and liaising with DEFRA. Neil Jackson, Nick Marriner and Harriet Bennett have continued to bring applications forward to panel (see also below).
  - In response to the time pressures on Year 1 of the programme, DEFRA has allowed all protected landscapes to reallocate a proportion of their year 1 funding into Years 2 and/or 3 rather than 'lose' the money if it were unspent at the end of the year. A forecasting exercise was therefore undertaken and £259,675 moved into Years 2/3 of the programme. Of the remaining amount, c. £35,000 is currently unspent or unallocated and we are working hard to try to make sure this is used this financial year.
  - There have now been 4 panel meetings and 14 applications. One of these applications has been assessed internally as it was less than £5000 (this is in accordance with DEFRA guidance). The average grant request is £26,000 although excluding the largest of these grants (£134,000 – central Chilterns Farm Cluster hedgerows project), the average request is £17,000.
  - Nick Marriner and Harriet Bennett developed the central Chilterns Farm Cluster hedgerows project application and are now working with farmers and contractors to implement the work. This will include 5,315m of new hedgerow, gapping up of 329m of existing hedgerow, coppicing of 1,293m of existing hedgerow, laying of 250m of existing hedgerow, 192 new hedgerow trees and installation of 9,597m of stock fencing.
  - The total number of enquiries and applications is over 70. Most applications are focused on biodiversity and climate change although there are also applications that have been approved on the 'People' theme (e.g. care farming). We have also had inquiries about cattle handling facilities, mob grazing, 'NoFence' grazing, listed and traditional buildings, scrub management, pollarding, footpath improvements, deer fencing and interpretation facilities.
  - Machinery items, such as direct drills, are now to be redirected towards the new Farm Investment Fund unless they are bespoke and clearly and significantly heavily tied in to the FiPL themes of Biodiversity, Climate change, People and Place.
  - The range of enquiries and applications has meant that DEFRA has had to work hard to try to clarify eligibility questions for all protected landscapes and this is ongoing. For example, currently NoFence GPS collars cannot be funded until the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) approve its use (on the basis of best welfare practice).
- **Ash Die-back**  
Our previous update highlighted the increasing number of felling licence notifications associated with Ash Die Back. Unfortunately, this trend continues.
  - We have also been contacted by Forest Research and interviewed with regard to both Ash Die Back and, the next big, anticipated threat – Ash Emerald Borer Beetle. This is coming across eastern Europe and has reached the Ukraine. We will continue to liaise closely with both Forest Research and their local Forestry Commission colleagues aiming to raise awareness of management and safety requirements with woodland owners and the wider public.
  - **Dunstable Downs Undergrounding**  
We are delighted to report that work to remove the two parallel lines of electricity cable, supported on steel pylons, crossing the Dunstable Downs is now complete.  
- 7.72km of twin circuit 33kv overhead cable removed

- 23 steel towers dismantled and removed
- 4.5km of underground cable installed

This represents a £2 million investment in the Chilterns AONB by UK Power Networks. The site attracts over 750,000 each year, many of whom are kite flyers who will now be a lot safer. The landscape has been significantly improved and the visual transformation is truly dramatic.

- Plans for a further undergrounding project between Latimer and Chenies in Buckinghamshire are well underway and we hope this will be completed during 2022.

## HS2

### Parliamentary debate

- A Westminster Hall debate on HS2 was held on 13 September after over 150,000 people signed a petition calling on the Government to repeal the HS2 legislation. More detail on the petition, our briefing to MPs and a Hansard transcript of the debate is [here](#).
- Chilterns MPs were well represented in the discussion, and issues of relevance to the Chilterns were also raised by other members. Several calls were made during the debate for the project to be given more formal scrutiny in the Main Chamber, but, responding to the debate, the Minister only committed to meeting with various constituency MPs to consider their concerns.

### Tunnel boring machines, chalk streams and the aquifer

- We have been informed that the first of the two TBMs ('Florence') will reach Chalfont St Peter in late December, connecting to the first vent shaft just after Christmas. Along with Buckinghamshire Council, Chiltern Society and local geological experts, we remain concerned about risks to the chalk aquifer and River Misbourne, particularly when the TBMs mine at shallow depth (approximately 15m) below the Misbourne at Chalfont St Giles and the head of Shardeloes Lake. Our concerns were set out in a joint [position statement](#) with Bucks Council in May 2021 and since then we have continued to work with Bucks Council to push for answers to our questions, better protection for the chalk streams and improved engagement with local communities.

### HS2 Cutting

Preparation for the main cutting running northwards from South Heath towards Wendover is now underway with top soil removal taking place around the north tunnel portal area adjacent to Frith Hill. The main excavation work will start in the new year with hundreds of thousands of tonnes of spoil being transported along a newly constructed internal haul road to be 'temporarily' deposited at Hunt's Green Farm near The Lee.

### Leather Lane

Our challenge to HS2 earlier in the year, about revised plans for the Lane diversion - which would have led to wholesale removal of 50+ mature oak trees - was described as 'appropriate' by the HS2 contractors, EKFB. Following our intervention, with others, EKFB has investigated options and confirmed that a re-design of the diverted lane will save a significant proportion of the trees – we have yet to find out how many.

### Schedule 17 planning approvals

We continue to engage with Natural England, the Independent Design Panel and Buckinghamshire Council over emerging plans including vent shafts, road designs and landscape mitigation. We remain concerned at the plans for the Amersham vent shaft. A briefing note from September 2020 is [here](#). We are expecting Schedule 17 planning applications for the Bowood Lane overbridge, Grim's Ditch Scheduled Monument and Small Dean Viaduct early in the new year.

Along with Buckinghamshire Council, we are pushing for improvements to noise barrier locations and green verge improvements for overbridges.

### **Access improvements**

The Detailed Design Principles highlighted opportunities for access links to the north of the HS2 route and between Wendover and the Nash Lee Road. Current design work by EKFB has identified possibilities of using railway maintenance access strips and creating new paths. We are working to support appropriate new access as part of developing plans.

The CCB's webpages on HS2 are [here](#).

### **Big Chalk Initiative**

- We are supporting the development of the **Big Chalk Initiative** alongside eight other AONBs, and the South Downs National Park. The aims are to work with landowners, farmers, and local communities to build resilience in calcareous landscapes (chalk and limestone) on an unprecedented scale. The current focus is on preparatory work for an EOI for a funding bid to the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Natural England funding has been secured to support this preparatory work. We have made specific contributions around landowner / farmer engagement and support, environmental monitoring and liaison with NHLF.

### ***2.3 People and Society***

The 10<sup>th</sup> Chilterns Walking Festival took place 16-31 October, featuring 65 walks and attracting over 700 participants (we are awaiting final stats from third party events). It involved several new partners and businesses and generated substantial media coverage. Key findings from the participant survey: (**full report here**).

- 74% of respondents visited at least one or more local business – this was a big increase on previous Festivals and reflects our efforts to build this up through the Open for Business programme.
- 40% of respondents came from outside the Chilterns, many from nearby urban areas
- 48% discovered new parts of the Chilterns during the Festival
- 95% rated the festival as good or excellent

We will shortly start planning the May 2022 Walking Festival and will be linking in with our Chalkscapes project to develop community-led walks in the northern Chilterns. This is part of a wider effort to make the festival more inclusive and broaden the profile of participants. In the meantime, we are using the Festival web page to promote the many other on-going walking opportunities in the Chilterns.

- For the first time this autumn, the Walking Festival was combined with a celebration of Chilterns Food & Drink and included several community events delivered by the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project, linking food, farming and the Chilterns landscape.
- Annette has been providing guidance to our Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer on Expressions of Interest relating to People and Place. This includes signposting applicants to alternative sources of funding, and providing support or contacts as relevant, such as the Buckinghamshire Community Boards.
- The new Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows project, funded through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, includes a substantial investment in revitalising the Chess Valley Walk. This is an exciting opportunity to improve the route and visitor experience. Laura Silverstone, the Education & Engagement officer is delivering the work, with Annette supporting this part of the project and providing strategic links to wider

partnerships, projects and additional sources of funding. We hope to launch the revitalised Chess Valley Route early summer 2022.

### **Sustainable Tourism and promoting the rural Economy**

- We have revised the Open for Business project plan to focus on the marketing and promotion of bookable Chilterns countryside experiences and this has been approved by Groundwork, who administers the fund.
- We will be holding a workshop in January 2022 (jointly with the Mend the Gap project) to help businesses develop and market new countryside Experiences, and we are preparing a dedicated page on the new Chilterns AONB website which will give businesses a route to market.
- We will be developing and promoting new experience-based visitor Itineraries and are speaking to Visit Bucks about the opportunity for joint activity linking to the new Buckinghamshire Community Renewal Fund.

### **Other**

- We are seeking Buckinghamshire Community Board funding for revitalising the Chilterns Cycleway. It is a popular leisure route benefitting businesses and communities along the way. However, it is now 12 years old and in urgent need of investment to replace signage, update visitor information and take advantage of new opportunities to develop it further.

## **3 Development & Funding**

- The Green Recovery Challenge Fund project: Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows has begun with the appointment of two new staff by the Chiltern Society: Adrian Porter (Rivers Officer) and Laura Silverstone, (Education and Engagement Officer). This is a 12-month partnership project which will be concluded by October 2022. Read more [here](#)
- The 2022/23 Business Planning process has begun, and we will be working with both the Board and staff team to set priorities and an implementation plan for our future work.
- 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, along with taking a strategic overview, and providing support and advice to other members of the team, on internally generated initiatives to secure funding for projects and other activities.
- Our work 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) was unsuccessful.

## **4 Communications**

- Outstanding Chilterns 2020/21 magazine was published in September and is currently being distributed throughout the region, and beyond, by an agency employed for that purpose. We have increased our distribution investment by extending the area covered, which now includes, Berkhamstead, Hemel Hempstead, North Hampshire and Basingstoke - all in addition to the four counties within the Chilterns.
- We have received some excellent feedback from our readers and are currently brainstorming article ideas for the next edition. Readers can download a version from the [website](#) and also contact us to find their nearest stockist (we have been providing the distributors with venue suggestions who have responded brilliantly, installing new displays in some excellent pubs and cafes across the region including Spire & Spoke in

Watlington). We will be introducing a campaign in the New Year to contact Chilterns-based estate agents to provide to customers.

- Annual Review – the annual review for 2020-2021 is being created by the comms team and will be available soon.
- The communications team continue to share the latest board news, blogs and local and national environmental news and statements. Highlights from since the last update include:
  - an educational piece about how to [forage the fruits of the Chilterns](#)
  - [Landscapes for life week and how to get involved in caring for your protected landscape](#)
  - [Buildings Design Award winners announced](#),
  - Sharing details of the [new project officers appointed to the Wetland Meadow's project](#)
  - Supporting the [Chalk Streams Restoration Group with the publication its Restoration Strategy](#)
  - We have also shared information about [Chilterns based zero waste shops](#)
  - and a piece to follow COP26 around how [our farmer cluster are tackling their carbon footprint](#)
  - You can read more of our latest news updates here: <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/latestNews.html>.
  - All our news items are supported by social media posts, including on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and will be highlighted in our monthly newsletters.
- In October the Comms team assisted Annette and the Chalk Cherries and Chairs team with promotional activities to support the [Walking and Food festival](#). We achieved some great support from local media with radio interviews on Wycombe Sound and news articles in Oxford Mail, Life and Vale magazines, to name but a few.
- Newsletters – we continue to send our monthly e-newsletter with the subscribers continuing to increase steadily (4,000+). Subscribers include a mixture of public, stakeholders, partners, local authorities and parish councils.
- We will be sending a virtual Christmas e-card again this year with a simple message of thanks and good wishes to our stakeholders, partners, volunteers and friends of the CCB. This will be sent week commencing 13<sup>th</sup> December. Vicki is still on the hunt for an exceptional wintry photograph of the landscape to use in the email – please email her if you have a suggestion!
- The new website development project is making excellent progress. Helen Valvona (Communications Assistant) is doing a fantastic job in the backend along with the external copywriter and members of the CCB team who have given up so much time to help create the content. We hope to release the site for review and testing to (willing) staff and Board members in the New Year – we hope this to be early February.
- The communications team continues to work hard to raise the profile of the AONB, CCB and its work, and with the additional support of our two Communications Assistants, we are now able to work on a more strategic content plan for the year ahead. The comms Officer will also be working on a more comprehensive set of branding guidelines and processes.

## 5 **Projects**

### **Chilterns Chalk Streams Project**

#### **Chess Smarter Water Catchment Plan**

- The CCSP is a co-host of the R. Chess Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) initiative, working alongside the River Chess Association and Thames Water. Thames Water's [Smarter Water Catchment initiative](#) aims to deliver improvements at a catchment scale, aimed at restoring the Chess over the next ten years. As part of the initiative, Thames

Water is investing £3m into the delivery of a plan for the Chess catchment over the next five years.

- The Chess SWC plan was launched publicly on 17<sup>th</sup> September at Latimer Park, with the help of Sarah Green MP. Allen Beechey, Project Officer, and our CEO attended the launch. The following day two guided walks were held for stakeholders and members of the public to learn more about the SWC initiative and see example of work carried out to enhance the river.
- The CCSP has continued to work with stakeholders to deliver the year 1 action plan milestones. The steering group has met monthly to facilitate development of the project and several working groups have been established to drive forward action on specific milestones within the plan.
- The CCSP has agreed to lead on the coordination of the Chess SWC and is currently advertising for a full-time programme coordinator role.
- A new Chess Valley Farming Officer role will be advertised in December. The purpose of this role will be to lead delivery of some of the water quality and wildlife corridor related actions within the catchment plan. The role will be hosted by CCB.
- **Prof. Kate Heppell Secondment**  
Kate began her secondment with the CCSP in September. She is leading on the delivery of the year 1 water quality milestones within the Chess catchment plan. Her work to date has involved the collation and analysis of available datasets on water quality in the river. The purpose of this work is to feed into a State of the R. Chess report which will be published in February 2022. The report will set out a baseline condition assessment for the river, a system of metrics by which the health of the river can be assessed over the life of the SWC initiative.
- Kate has developed a water quality monitoring strategy for the river which will enable the replacement of the, now ageing, sensors that were used for the ChessWatch Project. The strategy incorporates a number of new monitoring location and new sensors that will allow a greater range of water quality parameters to be continuously monitored.

### **Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project**

- In July, the Chiltern Society and Chilterns Conservation Board were successful in an application to the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund for a grant of £294,000 to enable delivery of the Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project (CWMP).
- The CWMP Project runs for 12 months from October 2021 and involves the delivery of a suite of nine education, engagement and practical restoration projects.
- In August Adrian Porter and Laura Silverstone were recruited to the project team, Adrian joining as Rivers Officer and Laura as Education and Engagement Officer. Both started in post on 27 September.
- Laura's two main objectives will be to work with the CCSP to develop a schools education programme for delivery across the northern half of the Chilterns in 2022, and to lead the regeneration of the Chess Valley Walk.
- Laura has begun working with Chiltern Society volunteers to map the existing walk infrastructure and identify access issues along the route. She has begun work to redesign the walk logo and branding and has met with stakeholders along the route with a view to set up a task and finish group for the Project.
- Adrian has begun work to develop restoration projects on the Chess, Hamble and Wye. The CCSP is acting as technical advisor on these projects and has introduced Adrian to the relevant landowners and provided advice on project design. On the Wye, Adrian is working with Chiltern Rangers in the development and delivery of a project to restore the Wye Backstream in Loudwater.

### **Riverfly training courses**

- Working in partnership with Herts & Middx. Wildlife trust, the CCSP has delivered four Anglers Riverfly Monitoring Initiative Training courses in 2021, training 35 volunteers to monitor rivers across the Chilterns and Lea catchment areas.

#### **Landowner advice**

- In July, The CCSP provided advice to the Ver Valley Society regarding suitable techniques to repair a section bank along the R. Ver at Gorhambury. The location of the work is particularly sensitive as it is a perched former mill leat which is vulnerable to bank collapse. It also lies immediately downstream of the site that will be the focus of the re-introduction of water voles to Ver. The re-introduction is being carried out by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust and will be completed in August.

#### **Advice and support to Water Companies**

- The CCSP has provided advice and technical input to Affinity Water to support the development of its river restoration plans at Redbournbury Meadows. The scheme aims to restore approximately 2km of the R. Ver between Redbourn and the Gorhambury Estate near St Albans. The Scheme is one of a number of projects being delivered by Affinity Water on chalk streams across the Chilterns and Hertfordshire, funded through the Water Industry National Environment Programme, in support of its abstraction reduction programme.
- The CCSP is in discussions with Affinity Water with regard to leading the delivery of elements of the Redbournbury Meadows Scheme.
- Allen and Elaine also joined the CEO at Affinity Water and other key partners for a walk led by the Ver Valley Society (10 November), which was a useful opportunity to catch up with key contacts and hear more about the specific challenges facing the R. Ver, one of the Chilterns AONB's chalk streams.
- We were also pleased to join the Ver Valley Society on 15 November in St Albans to celebrate them being awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Services.

#### **Education and Engagement Officer**

- Ceri, the CCSP's Education and Engagement Officer, has continued to develop and upload content to the CCSP's new Chalk Streams microsite, which will be launched at the same time as the CCB's new website.
- Ceri has led on efforts to develop a local community river project based around the Ewelme Brook in Oxfordshire. Working with Ewelme and Benson Parish Councils, the Chiltern Society and the Wildlife Trust, a community engagement event was held in September.

#### **Chalk, Cherries & Chairs**

- After two and a half years, at the halfway point, Chalk, Cherries and Chairs has successfully restarted its previously stalled activities and is delivering some considerable successes, some of which, especially in relation to our work on farms, are of national learning significance. The overall scheme has now concluded its post-Covid19 review period, which had stalled some activities. The review included reflected learning from staff team and partnership organisations, the observations of a new project manager and a facilitated working group session.
- An adapted scheme has been recommended to the steering group, with a view to securing their authorisation for detailed adaptation agreements with project funders and revised delivery arrangements with project partners, including new arrangements agreed in principle with Buckinghamshire County Council and Wycombe Museum. The Board should note that the envisaged adaptations will extend the scheme by a cost-neutral six months, utilising the underspend arising from the first two years to fund costs of an

extended period, as adapted. An extension period carries contractual implications for project staffing, details of which will be shared if the details are approved in the iterative process between delivery partners, steering group and scheme funders.

- The key elements of the proposed project adaptation are to utilise the underspend arising from reduced activities during lockdown period principally to additionally fund three types of projects, with adaptations in each ranging from minor adjustment to wholesale reimagination:
  - Some projects are on track in delivering their aims but will need additional time to meet all their final output targets. Projects of this type include Landscape Connections, Rough Around the Edges, Tracking the Impact, People and Mills of the River Wye and the Chilterns Festivals.
  - Projects which were late to start or have taken longer to establish but which, with the proposed adaptations and some additional time, will meet their aims and most of their final targets include Rock Around the Chilterns, Cherry Talk, Celebrating Chilterns Crafts and Skills, Echoed Locations and Coming Alive.
  - Other projects have adapted well or reasonably well to increased online delivery and will meet their aims and adjusted targets, but for which the unit costs for the necessarily adapted forms have been different from those originally envisaged. These projects need to be additionally resourced to be sustained for the duration. Projects of this type include Woodlanders Lives, Understanding the Central Chilterns, Routes to the Past and The Mystery of Grim's Ditch.
- Other projects will either continue as originally planned and conclude on time or will be merged with corresponding resources and targets into one of the three types of adapted project noted above.
- Arrangements are in hand to provide maternity cover for the Communities Officer and to recruit a replacement for the Heritage Officer, subject to authorisation of proposed adaptations.
- Our adapted plans for celebratory festivals continue to succeed, with our food themed events combining with the Chilterns Food Festival in this autumn and plans for three themed festivals in 2022: Chilterns Landscape Art in the Spring, with an exhibition at Wycombe Museum, Chilterns Wildlife in the Summer, and Chilterns Storytelling in the Autumn. We will also launch our first vLog of traditional Cherry Recipes currently being identified by volunteers researching the archives around Flackwell Heath and Seer Green Orchards.
- Our habitat conservation and restoration work has also had a very busy summer. We have implemented the first steps in the 18 whole farm plans developed for landscape scale conservation, as previously reported. This includes 400 acres of grassland survey and site-specific habitat restoration and maintenance working parties on Old Callowdown, Dean House, Promised Land and Hampden Bottom farms. We have also started discussions with two new farms and three new orchards to bring into our fold. We also have harnessed the enthusiasm of more than 200 volunteers to learn and work on habitat conservation projects in habitats as diverse as the River Wye, Chequers Knap, Yoesden, Kingsmead, Lodge Hill, West Wycombe Burial Ground, Coleshill Common and Butlers Hangings.
- Our young volunteer training sessions continue under Chilterns New Shoots programme, which has established a large group of committed new young volunteers. We now hope to appoint our first paid Wildlife and Nature Conservation trainee to the scheme by April 2022.
- We have also reassessed scheme communications strategies and implemented some changes which have increased our month-by-month social media audience by more than 300%, with our engagement rates improving from 1.1 to 2.9 over the period, almost double our target engagement rate of 1.5.

Work with farmers and landowners has continued at pace.

- We applied for 7km of hedge-planting and hedge-renovation across 8 farms in the Central Chilterns Cluster from the Farming in Protected Landscapes fund. We were awarded £134k which we will match-fund with CCC to deliver the work.
- We continued to support the farmer cluster in their Carbon Farm Toolkit work with the Rothschild Foundation. A Cluster meeting was held in November where we had a first look at the soil analyses on farms and discussed options to increase carbon sequestration in soils and decrease carbon emissions.
- Botanical surveys on 69 sites within the cluster were carried out, identifying 27 new priority calcareous grassland or lowland meadow sites. We will ensure these are recategorized by English Nature, to ensure the land managers are eligible for higher tier funding options in future.
- Follow-up meetings regarding Whole Farm Plans have been undertaken with land managers and arrangements for assistance and advice on entering Countryside Stewardship or pursuing other funding options has been provided.
- Three new farms have had advice provided under the 'Additional Projects' budget with a view to securing Countryside Stewardship agreements or sourcing alternative funding.

Working with volunteers we have:

- recruited 112 volunteers to the Tracking the Impact project:
  - Allocated 75% of the Tracking the Impact surveys squares for this spring (birds, butterflies and plants)
  - Completed 3 surveys methodology volunteer training sessions
  - Set up and are delivering in-field species ID training courses (24 sessions in total over spring/summer)

### Beacons of the Past

- Registered Portal users are now over 10000, with steady daily work carried out both in initial recording and reviewer portal quality checking. 8000+ verified records, 16000+ features identified.
- Over 500 priority sites have been 'triaged' by the Landscape Heritage Officer (LHO) (both operatives) and have been 'packaged' (data cleaned and metadata added) by volunteers we have trained. These packets of data will be seamlessly integrated with the four county HER databases.
- A quote from one of the four HERs: *"Buckinghamshire Council Archaeology Service has been a proud supporter of the Beacons of the Past project since its inception, and we applaud the work which has been undertaken to date and the use of Citizen Science to make the project work so well. Of great benefit to the council has been the creation of the new LiDAR dataset, which as well as being used by the BotP team, is used internally by the council staff to inform the HER. In addition to the clear outreach benefits, the analysis of the new LiDAR by the project team has also benefited the council through the identification of new sites. Some of these sites have already been entered into the HER and allocated as Archaeological Notification Areas (areas with a known or high potential for in situ archaeological remains) to help inform our planning colleagues."*
- The project has contributed to the endeavours of community groups such as the South Oxfordshire Archaeology Group, the Thames Valley Orienteering Club and of individual project volunteers who have taken on independent research inspired by the features they have discovered, as well as an MSc student at Oxford University who has written his dissertation on the Chiltern field systems revealed by the Project.
- The project is retaining freelance LHO Ed Peveler to conduct some field checking exercises next month when foliage is reduced (subject to COVID restrictions)
- Wendy continues to add value to the CCB's core work by responding to requests to offer consultations to farmers, forestry, and local authorities on the archaeological resources

and implications of activities in the AONB, as well as consulting on potential FiPL applications and meeting with landowners to advise on the care of non-designated heritage features discovered through the BotP project.

- Teaming up with Chiltern Society & CCSP, Wendy co-delivered a chalk stream archaeology walk in Oct for the Chiltern Society's Heritage Festival.
- Wendy has given 5 online talks to over 300 people in the last three months and is booked to deliver 7 more in the next 12 weeks.
- Capital works planned at the Tier One hillfort sites are now in line with projected Covid restriction changes. Cholesbury Camp has a new management plan in second draft stage, and selected tree work should commence in early 2022. Geophysical survey should also be completed by February 2022. Desborough Castle's management plan is now being briefed, and Seven Ways Plain has seen investigative excavation.
- Excavation at Seven Ways Plain was a success and can be read about [here](#) and summary daily videos seen [here](#).
- Work continues on the Development Phase application for a new chalk streams/archaeology collaborative project scheme (*Not Bourne Yesterday*). This project if successful will provide an important legacy for the BotP dataset and the connections made during the project.

### **Mend the Gap – joint venture between the CCB and North Wessex Downs AONB Enhancement Projects**

- Two Mend the Gap enhancement projects have now been delivered and funds drawn down. These were relatively small-scale schemes but nonetheless it is positive to see programme funds making a difference on the ground.
- Mend the Gap is supporting its first tourism/local economy-related project, through joint-funding of training for local visitor economy businesses to develop experiential tourism offers. The training will take place in January 2022, and it is hoped that this may be a catalyst for the development of further activities which could be supported by the programme.
- Discussions with BBOWT in relation to development of potential projects continue with discussions coalescing around two themes – one relating to working strategically with community-level organisations and another focussed more on BBOWT's sites within the programme area.
- Discussions are underway with Plantlife to explore possibly scoping activities relating to opportunities for conserving and improving management of grassland habitats – chalk grassland and floodplain meadows.
- Jo has been liaising with CCB and North Wessex Downs AONB's FiPL officers, so that approaches from landowners within the MtG programme area can be coordinated across the two programmes.
- Discussions continue with a range other stakeholders and potential partners in relation to development of potential enhancement projects.
- The proposal for mitigation planting at South Stoke on land owned by Oxford Diocese is currently with the Diocese's land agent and we await feedback although the indication is that the Diocese is likely to be supportive.
- Meetings have been held with landowners at the southern end of the programme area whose land was impacted by the electrification. They are open to the possibility of mitigation planting on their sites which are adjacent to one another. Contact is being established with a third landowner, whose land is contiguous with these two sites since it would enable a more extensive and coordinated scheme to be implemented.
- FWAG South East has visited the programme area with Jo to familiarise themselves with the locality and review a number of the sites identified as priorities for mitigation projects.

### Chalkscapes

- Inga Garriock has replaced Jenny Ponsford as full time Development Manager of the Chalkscapes project, having previously worked one day a week on the Community Engagement strand of the development project.
- The University of Bedfordshire Public Health team, led by Prof. Gurch Randhawa, have begun work on their consultancy to produce a vital piece of audience development research with key audiences of harder to reach groups, including BAME and youth communities in urban areas of the North Chilterns. This research is ongoing and is community-led, culminating in an academic research paper by the end of Spring 2022.
- The site and species dossier work produced as part of the conservation work for Chalkscapes has been well-received and will provide a critical foundation in developing our plans for the delivery stage'.
- Event planning is underway for pilots to be conducted in early 2022, including: TOKKO goes Wild (a series of events spanning six weeks where young people will explore the project area to learn skills in orienteering, natural and social history and creative activities to engage with the project principles and natural environment), community art workshops led by the Culture Trust in the heart of Luton; and an event celebrating Wildlife in the Margins with a collaboration between the National Trust and the Luton Creative Network.
- New opportunities and project partners have arisen as part of the community engagement network of Chalkscapes, including a relationship with Action for Conservation which has agreed to produce a series of Ambassador Networks with local school children to empower them to conserve the chalk grasslands on their doorsteps. This model will mirror the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs New Shoots programme and continue to develop from the CCB's learnings.
- Development Officer, Luke Burgess, has begun the formation of a farmer cluster in the North Chilterns area, supporting farmers and creating vital connections to funding opportunities. The first meeting of the cluster is to take place early 2022.

### 6.0 National focus

- Liaising with a range of organisations and individuals, including our partners - both nationally and locally – continues to be a key feature of much of our work. This has included conversations with our local authorities over responding to the Covid-19 emergency, for example the CEO is a member of Buckinghamshire Council's Strategic Partners Board.
- We are also working with the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), AONB Lead Officers, National Parks and others on a range of operational and strategic matters, including responding to the Landscapes Review, Climate Adaptation and Mitigation, Nature Recovery Plans, securing funding and inclusion and diversity.
- Strong links have also been maintained and developed with Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency on a range of matters. We have worked especially closely with Natural England regarding its new designations programme and the announcement on 25 June that they will be exploring an extension to the Chilterns AONB, alongside new management and governance measures to support the improved conservation, understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns landscape.
- Elaine and Matt have held a number of meetings with Natural England to progress the above work, and this is expected to pick up pace in the New Year with a view to key activities starting in the new financial year.

### **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 the Landscapes Review, the Government's Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme, Nature Recovery

Networks, sustainable tourism, the rural economy, HS2 and developing measures to improve the protection of chalk streams.

- Elaine and Allen attended the launch of the National Chalk Streams Restoration Strategy on 15 October, next to the R. Mimram near Welwyn. The catalyst for the strategy was the collaborative work carried out in the Chilterns led by the CCB and the Chiltern Society. Defra minister, Rebecca Pow, opened the launch event, along with the Chairs at the Environment Agency and Natural England and Thames Water's CEO. The event was a good opportunity to catch up with some of our key partners, such as Thames Water, Affinity Water, the Agencies and our partner river groups, and to develop new connections. For example, Elaine is speaking with Ofwat's CEO on 1 December.
- Elaine continues to represent the AONB network with several other AONB colleagues on Defra's Contact Group for AONBs and National Parks, exploring implementation of the Review's recommendations. The group is currently meeting every week in the lead up to the Government publishing a consultation on its proposals to implement the recommendations in the Landscapes Review.
- Elaine and Matt have also met with Defra to advise on specific items, such as planning and governance.
- In advance of Contact Group meetings, Elaine meets weekly with the CEO at the NAAONB and the other three AONB representatives on the Group, to share information, plans comms with the wider AONB network and ensure a consistent and strategic approach to our contributions at Contact Group meetings and in responding to requests for insight and ideas from Defra.
- The Defra Public Appointments team were pleased with the number of BAME applicants they received for Secretary of State appointees to the Chilterns Conservation Board in the last recruitment round. We worked proactively to attract applications from these groups. Elaine and our new board member, Geeta Ludhra, are now sharing our learning and approach with the Defra team with its upcoming recruitment campaign.

## 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), including one on 3 December, at which Elaine will be leading discussions on the Landscapes Review.
- Elaine continues in her role as a member of the NAAONB's Colchester Declaration Steering Group - along with Kath and Claire – with a meeting held on 8 September. 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).
- The CCB's Chair and CEO attended the online NAAONB annual Chairs and Lead Officer conference on 18 November, which covered the role of protected landscapes in climate change adaption and mitigation. Presentations were given by the minister, [Lord Benyon](#), Natural England's Chair, [Tony Juniper](#), [Lord Deben](#) and [George Marshall](#) from Climate

Outreach. An NAAONB post-conference blog summarising conference discussions is also available [here](#).

### **Other**

- The staff team is involved with either chairing or acting as members of external Boards and steering groups. For example, Elaine continues in her role as member of the Buckinghamshire Culture Development Board and the Bucks and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership.
- The [announcement](#) of the Chilterns AONB boundary extension has generated positive interest from residents, community groups, NGOs and local councils, leading to valuable new connections being made and meetings held or planned. This includes Elaine, often with Matt and Kath, too, meeting with senior teams at our local authorities.
- For example, we met the Leader and CEO at South Oxfordshire District Council on 11 November. Elaine and Matt also discussed the role of the Chilterns AONB in a potential New County Deal for Buckinghamshire, with the Corporate Director: Planning Growth and Sustainability at Buckinghamshire Council (23 November) and covered a range of subjects with Bucks Council Cabinet Member Angela Macpherson and Deputy Leader Gareth Williams (8 September).
- Elaine continues to liaise closely with other colleagues in local councils, for example monthly meetings with the Head of Planning, Growth and Sustainability at Bucks Council, and an introductory meeting (with Matt) with the new Service Director, Strategic Transport & Infrastructure at Buckinghamshire Council (19 October), plus a range of NGO partners including the CEO at Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust (1 November) and monthly meetings with the CEO at BBOWT.
- Matt and Elaine also attended the AGM of the South Bucks and Middx NFU, at which Matt gave an update on the planned boundary extension work, and we discussed a range of items following questions from the attendees, including on Environmental Land Management schemes, spatial planning, rewilding and food security.
- We continue to engage with the Chilterns' MPs and in recent weeks Elaine and members of the team have held meetings with Joy Morrissey MP (Beaconsfield), Steve Baker MP (High Wycombe), Bim Afolami MP (Hitchin and Harpenden) and Greg Smith MP (Buckingham).
- CCB's Chair and CEO meet regularly to discuss and plan ongoing work. Meetings, sometimes with other board members, too, have also included focussed discussions on a range of areas including governance, inclusion and diversity, Defra appointments to the board and business planning.
- The Senior Leadership team is developing a Business Plan for 2022/23, taking a longer-term approach that will enable us to plan further ahead in terms of identifying and delivering key priorities, allocating budgets, and developing an HR Strategy to support delivery of the Business Plan. Elaine has brought in experts on business planning and HR to support the work, resulting in some very productive discussions and will lead to a more strategic, resilient and efficient organisation.



legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met. They also state that there are no matters which they wish to draw to the attention of the Board. A copy of their report is attached to this agenda item. As required, we have published the auditor's report and notice of conclusion of the audit on our website.

### **Recommendation**

- 1. To note the CCB financial position at 31 October 2021**
- 2. To note the CCB Budget discussion paper**
- 3. To consider the Audit report**

## Section 3 – External Auditor Report and Certificate 2020/21

In respect of **CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD - OT0011**

### 1 Respective responsibilities of the body and the auditor

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2021; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

Our responsibility is to review Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with guidance issued by the National Audit Office (NAO) on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (see note below). Our work **does not** constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would do.

### 2 External auditor report 2020/21

On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

None

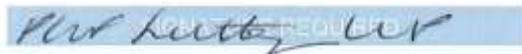
### 3 External auditor certificate 2020/21

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2021.

External Auditor Name

**PKF LITTLEJOHN LLP**

External Auditor Signature



Date

23/09/2021

\* Note: the NAO issued guidance applicable to external auditors' work on limited assurance reviews in Auditor Guidance Note AGN/02. The AGN is available from the NAO website ([www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk))