



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

23 September 2020 at 10.00am

By *remote video conferencing

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Declaration of Interest
3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (06.05.20)
4. Matters Arising
5. ~~*Public Question Time~~
6. Finance Report
7. Review of Treasury Management
8. Annual Accounts
9. Board Review
10. Mend the Gap
11. Future establishment of the Board
12. A.O.B

** 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	21 st October 2020
Executive Committee	6 th May 2020
	23 rd September 2020
Planning Committee	20 th November 2019
	4 th March 2020
	15 th July 2020
	18 th November 2020



**MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON
Wednesday 6th May 2020 by remote video conferencing commencing at 10.01 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
Cllr Phil McDowell	Board Member

Deirdre Hansen	Clerk to the Board
----------------	--------------------

The Chairman welcomed all present and introduced Cllr Phil McDowell as the new member for Dacorum Borough Council, to his first meeting of the CCB. Cllr Phil McDowell was invited to introduce himself. Cllr McDowell explained that he has lived in various parts of the Chilterns for most of his life, has degrees in ecology and law, and has a keen interest in the environment.

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

19/20.26 Apologies for absence.

No apologies for absence were received.

It was noted that Cllr Bill Bendyshe Brown had stood down as a member of the CCB.

19/20.27 Declarations of interest

None.

19/20.28 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 15th January 2020 were approved as a true record after the following addition was made:

19/20.21- 'Buckinghamshire Council' was added to the post meeting note in between 2020/21 and funding.

19/20.29 Matters arising

None

19/20.30 Finance Report

The Finance Officer had circulated the financial report to the Committee on the draft financial position to the end of the 2019/20 financial year.

He explained that the office closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the accounts were closed later than usual. He went through the figures and reported that income and expenditure were both higher than budgeted. After contributions to projects, the CCB has made a net surplus of £1094.

The Committee discussed the financial report.

The timetable for both internal and external audit has been changed due to the Covid-19 lockdown. The final date for submission of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) is now 13th November 2020, this means the AGAR can be approved and signed at the October Board meeting. Internal audit arrangements have not been finalised yet.

1. The Committee NOTED the financial results for the year ending 31 March 2020.

19/20.31 Interim Budget 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23

The Finance Officer presented the budget update for 2020/21 with projections for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

It was noted that there is clear visibility of income for 2020/21 as long as the terms and conditions of the DEFRA settlement are met and the Local Authorities honour their commitments.

The Finance Officer brought the financial uncertainty due to Covid-19 to the Members attention.

71% of the CCB's core expenditure is payroll and any inflationary pay rises have been deferred until the true financial consequences of Covid-19 become clear. The precise levels of future pension contributions made by the CCB are also uncertain.

The impact of Covid-19 on Project income and expenditure is difficult to predict due to the impact of current Covid-19 restrictions on the projects.

Going forward to 2021/22 and 2022/23 the financial situation is not clear. The current DEFRA financial settlement is for one year only. The cost of Covid-19 will no doubt put constraints on Government spending and Local Authorities will also face financial constraints.

By keeping a tight control on expenditure, and assuming income will remain broadly the same, the CCB's Budget Equalisation Reserve will be depleted in three years' time. This would not be prudent and would leave the CCB depleted of cash reserves, which are necessary for the

smooth running of the CCB and its projects. Whilst immediate action is not yet necessary, the Finance officer and CEO will continue to monitor the situation.

The Finance Officer and the CEO were thanked for their forward-looking approach.

It was agreed that the Covid-19 situation provides opportunities that can be harnessed.

The Members discussed the budgets and provided feedback.

1. The Committee NOTED the changes made to the 2020/21 Budget and the financial effects based on the assumptions for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

19/20.32 Operational update

The CEO provided the Members with an operational update on the organisation's ongoing work, especially in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chairman and the CEO thanked John Nicholls and Elizabeth Wilson for their assistance with the CCB's planning work.

John Nicholls, the Planning Advisor and the Conservation and Landscape Officer were thanked for their help with the recruitment of the new Principle Planning Officer.

All the staff were thanked for their work and many achievements during these unprecedented times.

The Members discussed the update and provided feedback.

1. The Committee NOTED the paper and PROVIDED feedback.

19/20.33 Long Term Establishment and Governance Policy.

Following the Landscape Review proposals and the Government's current work to explore their implementation, in addition to other factors, the Vice-Chairman brought forward recommendations to take account of the opportunity to start a review of the Board's establishment order, Statutory Instrument 2004 no. 1778, and its Code of Governance (June 2019).

The Statutory Instrument was written in a time and place which is very different nearly 20 years later. The trading environment, thinking and procedures have changed in the intervening years.

DEFRA has also welcomed the CCB plans to review its governance arrangements.

The Members discussed starting a review and it was agreed to set up a discussion group/working party to progress a review. The Chairman, CEO, Vice-Chairman and John Shaw will start this work. Other Members were invited to let the CEO know if they are interested in joining this group.

[Subsequently Paul Mains and John Nicholls also offered to join the Working Party which will now consist of Elaine King, Ian Reay, Ray Payne, John Shaw, Paul Mains and John Nicholls.]

1. The Committee AGREED a review of the Statutory Instrument and the Board’s Code of Governance.

19/20.34 Any Other Business

1. Members commented on the success of the meeting via Zoom and suggested to look at future meetings in this way.
2. The CEO informed Members that the CCB is following Government guidelines on Covid-19, which includes the external messaging Stay at Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives.
3. It was noted that the Chilterns Woodland Project ceased to exist on 31st March 2020.
4. The HR Advisory Group will start work this week.
5. The Coronavirus legislation allows for all meetings to be held remotely. The next Annual Board Meeting is scheduled to be held 17th June 2020. Regulation 4 of this legislation provides for all appointments to continue until the next Annual meeting or such times as the authority may determine.
6. The Chairman and CEO decided to postpone the next Board meeting due to Covid-19. The Chairman suggested that he would email all members asking them for nominations for the Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship and to indicate what committees they would like to join for the following year. He and the Vice-Chairman are prepared to remain in their positions until the Annual Meeting 2021. Any changes to Committees can be confirmed at the next Board Meeting.

Next meeting: Wednesday 23rd September 2020 at 10.00 am location TBC.

The Chairman.....

Date.....

Item 6**Finance Report**

Author: Graham Hurst, Finance Officer

Purpose of Report: To advise members of the Board's financial position at 31 July 2020.

Background

1. The CCB finance report for the four months to 31 July 2020 is attached.
2. Core income was greater than expected, mainly due to external income received.
3. Core expenditure is generally in line with budget.
4. In the four months to July 2020 we made a core surplus of £17,027 when we were expecting to make a small deficit. This is as a result of our increased external income.
5. The overall deficit for the year to 31 March 2021, after contributions to projects, is budgeted at £26,053. Therefore, although we are currently showing a surplus, this is likely to be fully utilised in mitigating project costs during the remainder of the year.
6. Project income and expenditure is irregular regarding certainty and timing. The accounts attached are showing the current cash effect of the projects. This will be revised to the accruals basis as the year progresses and figures become more certain.
7. Overall, the CCB finances are within expectations.

Recommendation

1. To note the CCB financial results for the four month period to July 2020.

Chilterns Conservation Board Finance Report Year to 31 March 2021	Jul-20	
	4 months Budget	4 Months to July 2020
	£	£
Income		
Public Sector		
Defra	149333	149536
Local Authorities	34667	39588
	184000	189124
External income	4933	16167
Core Income	188933	205291
Expenditure		
Employment	135376	129529
Members' Allowances	3167	2782
Premises	11667	10167
Office Costs	5000	2619
IT	4717	4694
Finance	4333	3900
Engagement	1667	3000
Special Projects	1667	0
Planning Consultancy	4000	10000
Monitoring and Evidence	2333	2333
Outstanding Chilterns mag.	2417	2400
Website	1667	2694
Insurance	1633	1633
Travel	1333	1106
Personnel	1033	1365
National AONB	1000	3209
Other costs centres < £3000 budget	6600	6833
Core Expenditure	189609	188264
Core Net income / (expenditure)	-676	17027
Major Projects		
Chalk Streams		
Income	18333	0
Expenditure	20000	28304
Net	-1667	-28304
Chilterns Woodlands contribution	-1667	0
Hillforts Delivery		
Income	92167	0
Expenditure	94342	26754
Net	-2175	-26754
Chalk Cherries Chairs		
Income	141150	96156
Expenditure	141983	72382
Net	-833	23774
HS2		
Income	0	14028
Expenditure	0	656
Net	0	13372
Chiltern Walking / Food Festival/ BLEF		
Income	3888	9799
Expenditure	3888	1080
Net	0	8719
Chalkscapes		
Income	5000	0
Expenditure	6667	0
Net	-1667	0
Mend the Gap		
Income	83333	0
Expenditure	83333	572
Net	0	-572
Project Net income / (expenditure)	-8008	-9766
Total Net Income (Expenditure)	-8684	7260
Grand total income	532805	325274
Grand total expenditure	541489	318014
Grand total net	-8684	7260

Item 7**Treasury Management Review**

Author:	Graham Hurst, Finance Officer
Summary:	The annual review of the Treasury Management strategy.
Purpose of Report:	To advise members of the review of the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020-21.

Background

1. It is deemed good practice to annually review the Treasury Management strategy. The Board previously reviewed this matter in September 2019.
2. The Board's current strategy is to invest surplus funds in deposit accounts of major banking institutions where the risk of losing capital is minimal. The alternative would be to invest directly or indirectly in investment products which may offer a higher interest rate, but the value of the capital invested is also subject to the fluctuations of the market. The Board does not at present deposit money with "secondary" banks.
3. Deposit account rates continue to be low, typically under 1%.
4. The CCB currently has over £4m on deposit of which £3.75m is funding received in advance of the Mend the Gap project.
5. Deposits are currently held by two of the major banks and a major building society.

Recommendation

1. **The CCB continue to maximise interest received from deposit accounts where the risk of losing capital is reduced.**

Item 8**Annual Accounts**

Author:	Graham Hurst, Finance Officer
Summary:	Annual accounts 2019-20.
Purpose of Report:	To advise members of the Board's financial position to the end of the 2019/20 financial year in advance of the Full Board meeting in October 2020.

Background

1. The Annual accounts for 2019/20 are attached for information prior to approval by the Full Board.
2. The Executive was presented with a detailed Revenue account at the May meeting and these Annual accounts are produced in summary form for publication.
3. Total Income amounted to £1,186,214 (2019: £858,534). The increase in income is almost entirely due to project income which increased by almost £300,000.
4. Total Expenditure amounted to £1,183,719 (2019: £867,501). The increase again is almost entirely due to project expenditure.
5. The CCB made a small Surplus for the year of £2,495 (2019: Deficit £8,967).
6. The Balance Sheet shows a large increase in current assets. This is as a result of £3,750,000 funding for Mend the Gap being received in advance. These funds are treated as Deferred income and a corresponding liability is shown under current liabilities reflecting that these funds will be spent over future years as the Mend the Gap project progresses. This is in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice rules for income recognition.
7. The CCB Pension reserve decreased by £153,000 during the year thereby reducing the potential liability of the scheme as calculated by the actuaries. It should be noted that the scheme's triannual valuation at 31 March 2019, and finalised 31 March 2020, showed that the CCB scheme was 105.9% funded.
8. The Triannual valuation and the FRS 102 valuation for the annual accounts are performed using different assumptions. A pension paper was submitted to the Executive Committee January 2020 which provides more detail.
9. The CCB has Restricted reserves of £43,233, Earmarked reserves £420,104, General reserve £100,000 and a Pension deficit reserve of £947,000.

10. In addition to the annual accounts, the CCB is required to complete an Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The AGAR is subject to external audit and contains the internal audit report. The internal audit has been completed and has indicated that there is good assurance of compliance and there are no matters requiring the attention of the Board.
11. The final Internal audit report is awaited and will be presented to the Board. The External audit is delayed until the AGAR is approved by the Full Board. Normally this would have been completed at the June AGM but, with the restrictions brought about by Covid-19, this will be delayed until after the next full Board meeting.

Recommendation

- 1. To note the CCB financial results for the year ended 31 March 2020.**

CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD				
BALANCE SHEET				
As at 31 March 2019			As at 31 March 2020	
£	£		£	£
		CURRENT ASSETS		
1,000		Stocks in hand	1,000	
53,829		Debtors	64,643	
888,013		Bank and cash	4,675,374	
	942,842			4,741,017
		LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		
382,000		Creditors and receipts in advance	4,177,680	
	382,000			4,177,680
	560,842	NET CURRENT ASSETS		563,337
		LONG TERM LIABILITIES		
1,100,000		Defined Benefits Pension Scheme	947,000	
	1,100,000			947,000
	(539,158)	TOTAL ASSETS LESS TOTAL LIABILITIES		(383,663)
		REPRESENTED BY:		
(1,100,000)		Pensions Reserve	(947,000)	
43,642		Reserves - Restricted	43,233	
417,200		Reserves - Earmarked	420,104	
100,000		Reserves - General	100,000	
	(539,158)			(383,663)

CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD						
STATEMENT OF MOVEMENT IN RESERVES						
	Friends of Red Kites	Chalk Streams	Development Reserve	Budget Equalisation Reserve	General Reserve	Pensions Reserve
	£	£	£	£	£	£
As at 31st March 2019	5,859	37,783	293,744	123,456	100,000	(1,100,000)
Transfers		5,000		(5,000)		
Movements in the year		(5,409)		7,904	-	153,000
As at 31st March 2020	5,859	37,374	293,744	126,360	100,000	(947,000)
	Restricted	43,233	Earmarked	420,104		

CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD			
REVENUE ACCOUNT YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020			
	£	£	£
INCOME			
DEFRA	442,015		
Local Authorities	110,860		
Other Income	30,470		
Project Income	602,870		1,186,214
EXPENDITURE			
People and society		360,970	
Landscape and conservation		484,663	
Planning and development		101,591	
Overheads		236,495	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE			1,183,719
SURPLUS FOR YEAR			2,495

Item 9 **Board Review (September 2020)****Author:** Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer**Summary:** This paper provides an overview of the team's activities and achievements since the last meeting in May 2020. It highlights the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak and summarises key activities and achievements.**Purpose of Report:** To update the Executive Committee of the organisation's ongoing work and to invite feedback.**Background**

The Coronavirus outbreak began to impact our day-to-day work in early March. In the early stages, our work largely centred on making key decisions in line with emerging Government guidance. This included arranging for the staff team to work and be connected remotely, liaising with colleagues and partners to pause project work and suspend meetings and other events, and responding to requests for information, eg from Defra, the National Association of AONBs and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The second phase involved still reacting but also planning ahead, with a key focus being to explore how we can best deliver the AONB Management Plan and the Business Plan.

The third phase began not long after the last Executive Board meeting in May, when lockdown restrictions started to be eased and we moved to activities which included providing guidance for visitors to the Chilterns, sign-posting local businesses that were starting to open, developing a suite of socially distanced walks and liaising with partners and others in tackling the more negative consequences of more people using the countryside, including fires and litter. We also started to explore site visits and survey work, which included putting all the necessary measures in place to ensure staff safety and developing the necessary risk assessments.

Despite the continued disruption to day-to-day life, the staff team has achieved a great deal in recent months. This paper highlights some of these achievements and provides a strategic overview of the impact, risks and opportunities of the current situation, while also looking ahead to the post-coronavirus recovery phase.

Recommendation

- 1. To note the paper and provide feedback.**

Item 9**Board Review (September 2020)****1.0 Summary**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the CCB team has worked at home since mid-March. Everyone moved quickly to ensure they could work remotely and the team quickly adapted to a new way of working. Over the past few months, we have ensured clear and timely communications to the team regarding the latest Government advice and the decisions we were making as a result.

While the initial phase involved responding to a fast-moving situation, this evolved into a fairly settled pattern of work, still reacting to new developments, but also exploring the impact on and risks to all areas of work, while also identifying new needs and the opportunities to develop our work in different directions.

As lockdown measures began to ease in May, the team adapted and responded again to the changing situation and the opportunities and challenges this provided. With a second spike anticipated from September onwards, and new restrictions being imposed, we continue to monitor the situation closely, communicate with the team and revise our plans accordingly.

The following update is a summary of the team's activities during the last period and includes how we have responded to and been affected by the impacts of Covid-19.

2.0 Over-arching and core work***Administration, finance and IT (Donna and Lynne)***

- All administration, finance and IT continues to be carried out effectively from home since the office was closed on 17 March
- Lynne continues to explore how we might best use the Hubspot contact management system and is developing a set of operational procedures to help ensure the CCB team uses and manages personal contact data according to GDPR legislation.
- We are continuing to review and improve systems to facilitate working from home as effectively as possible, which includes reviewing telecommunications – looking at various hosted telephone systems to enable working from home or the office.

Chilterns Partnership (Kath)

- The first of two Chilterns Partnership Meetings were held on 8 July involving 15 key partner organisations. Prior to the meeting the senior team held individual discussions with participants to explore some key themes and issues. One key outcome achieved was a prioritised list of Management Plan strategic objectives. Board members and the staff team have also contributed to this prioritisation of objectives, including through a Board zoom call on 17 August.
- The second partnership meeting will take place on 22 September and will focus on creation of the partnership Delivery Plan through a series of Task and Finish groups.
- The first Annual Partnership Forum will be held on 15 October with a panel discussion and Q&A on the theme of Green Recovery in the Chilterns. Panel Members: Marian Spain CEO Natural England; Pauline Walsh CEO, Affinity Water; Dr Prue Addison, Conservation Strategy Director, BBOWT; Jonathan Smales. Executive Chairman, Human Nature, with Howard Davies, CEO NAAONB chairing.

Conservation and Landscape (Neil)

- **Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELM)** – A series of discussions with stakeholders – including farmers, local authorities, Chiltern Society, wildlife trusts, Woodland Trust and the NAAONB – contributed to our ELMs response to Defra in July.
- **Woodland Strategy** – A further response to Defra’s draft England Woodland Strategy was submitted before the 11 September deadline.
- **Hertfordshire Tree Resilience Strategy** – input in conjunction to response to draft Forestry Research Tree Resilience guidelines.
- **Forestry Commission EIAs and Felling Licences** – technical advice and comment concerning a number of FC proposals. Increasingly we are able to highlight the value that the Beacon’s of the Past Lidar survey can bring by identifying hidden archaeological value within woodlands.
Unfortunately, in May we became aware of a case in the Oxfordshire Chilterns where a lapse in procedures allowed a tree planting scheme to proceed on a chalk grassland site which, in time, will lead to a loss of this important habitat and scenic views from a stretch of the Chiltern Way. We are therefore working to improve procedures and partnership working to avoid such conflicts in future.
- **HS2** – we raised strong objections to the removal of 1km of ancient hedgerow beside Bottom House Farm Lane at the beginning of May – prime bird nesting season – and continued closure with poor or non-existent diversions for footpaths east of Great Missenden – providing briefings to the Chilterns Review Group and Bucks Council executives.
We raised concerns over the accentuated designs of the Amersham Vent Shaft – structures becoming more prominent and lighting at night being considered.
We continue to provide technical comment on emerging designs, most recently the Wendover Viaduct, landscape and ecological mitigation.
- **UKPN Electricity infrastructure undergrounding** – concerns were raised over a threatened cut to the undergrounding budget and potential significant delay to the two Chilterns Proposals – Latimer/Chenies and Dunstable Downs. A Letter from the CCB’s Chair and Chief Executive were sent to UKPN directors, OFGEM, the Natural England chair of the steering group, and local MPs (Dame Cheryl Gillan and Andrew Selous) – both of whom were very supportive. UKPN are now committed to progressing our projects once full consents are obtained. OFGEM were also grateful for our input.
- **Rural Forum** – provided support for the adoption of the successful Wycombe Rural Forum within the new unitary authority.
- **Christmas Common Farm Cluster** – aiming to revitalise the group, post the Covid-19 lockdown hiatus, with various projects including field margin enhancement for moths and butterflies with the support of Butterfly Conservation.

People and Society (Annette)

Chilterns Walking Festival

- After careful consideration and consultation with walk leaders and businesses we decided to proceed with the autumn [Chilterns Walking Festival](#) (CWF) which takes place 17 Oct - 1 Nov. There is strong support for the event going ahead, as it is seen as something positive to focus on, bringing health and wellbeing benefits and an opportunity to generate additional footfall for local businesses.
- Much effort has been required to ensure the CWF (and the Chilterns Celebration) can be delivered safely, in line with Government Covid-19 guidelines. We have drawn up CCB Covid-19 guidance which is regularly reviewed. See [here](#) for further information on the measures we have taken to ensure the safety of participants and walk leaders, and to mitigate risks.
- The CWF comprises an exciting programme of 60 walks, some of them delivered by the Beacons of the Past and Chalk, Cherries and Chairs teams. There are lots of new walks,

including artist-led walks in Chesham, Visit Midsomer walks in Amersham and a number of themed walks starting from the Mercure Lambert Hotel in Aston Rowant, our new primary sponsor. The CWF is a great collaborative effort involving multiple partners and volunteers.

Countryside Access

- During lockdown we saw much greater recreational use of the countryside, with many more people exploring the countryside on their doorstep as well as audiences from further afield. This demonstrated the value of the Chilterns countryside as never before, but also created visitor management issues. We played an important role reviewing and disseminating Government guidance and communications regarding countryside access and the Countryside Code.
- To help with visitor management, we developed a series of 23 [social-distance friendly walks](#) away from the honeypot sites, downloadable from the Chilterns AONB website. This was done in partnership with the Chiltern Society. They have been very well received and have achieved extensive media coverage including being up there in the Independent's [7 great summer days out for the family](#).
- We have seen a sharp increase in demand for our most popular promoted routes, especially the Chilterns Cycleway and Chess Valley walk. However it is clear that the signage and interpretation along these routes is now dated and is negatively impacting the visitor experience. Investment in these routes is overdue and we are hoping to secure green recovery funding.

Open for Business project

- This project was on hold right through the summer as many leisure and visitor-focused businesses were closed or only partially re-opened. We have kept in regular contact with businesses and taken soundings to judge the best time to re-start.
- Work on the [Chilterns Pass](#) has now resumed, with Deborah Brookes taking forward the business engagement. We see the Chilterns Pass as a key recovery tool for the sector that has suffered greatly over the last few months, and hope to be able to relaunch in the late autumn.
- The Celebration of Chilterns Food & Drink which was scheduled to take place in October has been postponed till next year.
- The Bucks and Chilterns Tourism Network met on 15 September for the first time since lockdown. This was very well attended and included discussion of 'Extending the Season' aimed at encouraging people to continue to visit restaurants, attractions and other businesses beyond the traditional summer season and into the autumn.

Fostering the economic and social wellbeing of local communities

- The CCB submitted a response to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Hospitality and Tourism's 'Pathways to Recovery' Inquiry. This was a combined response with Visit Buckinghamshire, Buckinghamshire Business First, and the Chilterns Tourism Network. We also worked with other AONBs to produce a response on behalf of the National Association of AONBs. The APPG's [report](#) was published in June and refers to evidence provided in our submission, in addition to making recommendations consistent with those we made.
- We promoted local businesses as they came out of lockdown – highlighting those that were Open for Business, communicating messages about 'Know before you Go', and encouraging people to continue to #shoplocal following a drop in sales once lockdown restrictions were lifted.

- Social media campaigns promoted community shops in the Chilterns, family places to visit over the summer holidays and walking/cycling activities combined with places to eat, drink and local produce.
- A Tourism Recovery Plan was prepared and collaboration continues with the Chilterns Tourism Network and Visit Buckinghamshire to promote an extended season from October 2020 to March 2021.
- Regular communications with businesses, signposting them to information on business grants, sharing and updating them on sector news.

Communications (Claire and Vicki)

Strategic Communications Planning

- The CCB Comms function adapted well to the fast-moving Covid-19 crisis, following the interim strategy and action plan developed in the early weeks of lockdown.
- The Comms Task Force, established in early lockdown and bringing together key people with comms responsibilities across multiple projects in the CCB, is now established and functioning well under Vicki's direction. The group meets regularly and discusses how comms outputs can be maximised across projects and care work.
- The group is also a space to test cross-cutting comms initiatives – including the development of the new CCB website.
- The Comms Planner aims to result in better alignment of project and core comms, enabling greater impact and efficient use of resources. The Planner is in operation and uptake across the team is increasing.
- Our ambition for proactive and impactful CCB communications continues to grow, and we are delighted that Helen Valvona will be providing additional part-time capacity to Vicki from September. Helen is already an established Comms volunteer and will be a real help to the team.
- Work towards the review and recreation of branding guidelines and policies continues - a social media policy has been drafted and will be distributed to the team in coming weeks.

Operational communications (Vicki)

- *Outstanding Chilterns* magazine is in production and working towards a publication date of 27 October. It was agreed to publish at this time in order to support the 'extending the season' campaign promoting the local Chilterns economy into the Autumn.
- The new Chilterns AONB website has made significant progress with the test/development site now live. The team will be working on content creation over the coming weeks and we are working towards a public "go live" date in Nov/Dec. Significant attention has also been given to the new interactive map with all destinations and points being reviewed.
- The Board's Annual Review 2019/20 content has been written and will be sent to the designers for creation in the next. In order to save on cost and paper, this year's edition will be distributed as an online document which will be published on our website and sent as an attachment to all local authorities, partners, MPs and others.
- CCB website, newsletters and associated social media channels continue to be updated regularly with Board and project news and any relevant government advice
- We continue to support our project teams with communications advice and promotion. We have been supporting the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs team with their "Celebration" series of events throughout October, the Chilterns Walking Festival, and the Planning team with web page design and advice
- Media coverage has been good during this period and has included coverage of the Beacons of the Past project team finding a new hillfort, along with some fantastic coverage of our [social distance friendly walks](#) including articles in the [Independent](#), three separate local radio interviews and a range of local media publications. Elaine King

discussed the [Prize to Transform the Future](#) on local radio station Wycombe Sound, and was invited by Mix96 to discuss an Environment Agency press release highlighting the links between access to nature and people's health and wellbeing. Nick Marriner also discussed Red Kites on [BBC Radio Berkshire](#).

Relationships with LA partners (and others) post-Covid (Claire)

- We continue to develop and nurture the relationships developed with Local Authority Teams in the early stages of lockdown.
- Of particular note is our involvement with the Bucks Covid Recovery Strategy work – “3Rs to Recovery”; the CCB is now represented at both operational and strategic level in these discussions (EK sits on Strategic Partner Forum, CR sits on Voluntary and Community Partnership Board). The emerging work from these discussions is exploring how to join up the volunteer offer from the CCB with Local Authority volunteering offers, positioning the CCB as the lead organisation to filter new volunteers into conservation activities with ourselves and partners.
- Part of the work above, currently in progress, is working closely with Local Authority partners to explore how the CCB can work with newly developed Community Boards.
- We continue to work on improving volunteering across the CCB, which includes reviewing the volunteering offer across all projects. The new CCB website will also feature more prominently volunteering and volunteering opportunities.
- Potential volunteers will be able to filter volunteering opportunities for CCB led projects, and will be signposted to partner organisations who offer volunteering opportunities. We will be creating enticing and inspiring ‘volunteer offers’ which really sell the opportunity to get involved with projects – these will feature on the new volunteering web page.
- We have begun to nurture a new relationship with Bucks and MK Local Enterprise Partnership and will be exploring opportunities for the co-creation of funding bids, highlighting the CCB's contribution to supporting the local economy.

Planning (Mike Stubbs, John Nicholls, Elizabeth Wilson & latterly Matt Thomson)

Following the departure of the CCB's Planning Officer on 17 March, Mike and John took oversight of the CCB's planning work, including supporting Elaine in recruiting our new planner, until Matt Thomson joined us from CPRE on 29 June. Other work is set out below.

Development management (mainly Mike):

- By the time of the CCB's July planning committee, we had submitted 33 formal representations on planning applications and no appeal representations, including five objections, 20 comments and four part objection/part comment, one in support together with two pre-application consultations and one scoping content to an environmental impact assessment.
- Since July a further 15 representations, including one appeal, have been worked on. This is all in the context of new ways of working under Covid-19, which councils have responded to admirably, although there have been concerns about whether digital means of engagement are more or less exclusionary than the traditional channels.
- A steady flow of major applications continues and includes a golf driving range (west of Chorleywood), 50 homes near Hughenden, High Wycombe (Glynswood), 63 homes at Clappins Lane, Naphill, a holiday village at Springs Golf Club (North Stoke), 800 homes East of Chorleywood, 52 homes at Springhill Road Goring and 20 homes east of Manor Road, Goring. A new innovation building at Johnson Matthey site, Sonning Common, involves a major redevelopment of the site. All of these are within the AONB.
- A noticeable amount of applications in the setting of the AONB, including scoping studies as future proposals are developed, include Aylesbury A413 Wendover Road new link road (required due to HS2), Princes Risborough relief road (scoping), 3,000 homes at Chalgrove airfield, a marina complex at Cholsey, 103 dwellings at Tralee farm, Holmer

Green and 45 homes at Little Kimble. A recent scoping at land north of Barton-Le-Clay is considering 3,850 homes and employment uses within the setting.

- Some new trends emerging in smaller applications, include school upgrades involving floodlights (Chiltern Hills Academy and St Clement Dane school), holiday yurt and glamping applications (in SODC) and sports floodlighting (Berkhamsted Hockey Club and Henley tennis club) as well as several enforcement cases (Lodge Lane, Little Chalfont and Litmore Shaw, Ibstone).
- Detailed proposals (“schedule 17 applications”) for the construction of HS2 have begun to come in, including a consultation on the controversial design of the vent shaft headhouse at Amersham, as well as details of other elements including the viaducts south of Wendover. Many of the issues are about landscape design and nature conservation impacts, so Matt and Mike have been supporting Neil Jackson in responding to these proposals.

Local and neighbourhood plans (Mike and Matt)

- Mike has been scoping and developing a Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit project as part of the wider Chalk, Cherries & Chairs landscape partnership programme, along with an interactive map of development pressures in and around the AONB. He has been engaging with the Lewknor Neighbourhood Plan (S Oxon) and the Burnham Beeches SAC Mitigation supplementary planning document (Bucks, Chilterns & S Bucks area).
- Matt represented CCB at the examination into the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, utilising evidence prepared by Mike. The SOLP examination inspector has issued his interim findings, which support the spatial strategy directing development to strategic sites mainly around Oxford and in the “Science Vale” area; this is generally positive for the AONB, but there remain concerns about blanket 15% growth targets in Henley and villages in the AONB without evidence that development can be accommodated without harm.

Strategic transport planning (John, Elizabeth and Matt)

- Prior to Matt’s arrival, the chair and vice-chair of the Planning Committee made progress on several transport issues (which, appropriately enough, are like buses, with several arriving at once).
- Progressed joint work with the Chiltern Society on a set of Chiltern-wide transport policies, which we are asking the five Highway Authorities to build into their planning. A test run with Bucks officers went well. As we could not hold the planned meeting, an email was sent to the highway authorities to initiate this important discussion. As only one replied, a reminder is being sent and contacts are being mobilised (including with Reading Borough Council, further to our comments on their draft transport strategy – see below).
- England’s Economic Heartlands have consulted on the scoping of the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal of their transport strategy. We felt there were some major inadequacies in this, so submitted a substantial response, which inspired the Cotswolds Conservation Board to follow suit. Ahead of Matt’s arrival, the chair of planning committee attended the EEH “Influencers’ Group”. EEH are now consulting on the strategy itself and the principle of becoming a strategic transport authority.
- The equivalent body in the South East, Transport for the South-East also have their strategy out to consultation. Our AONB straddles the boundary between these two regions and forms the boundary between them. While this is important, we do not have the capacity to cover both, so colleagues at the South Downs National Park are keeping us informed, enabling us to add our voice to collected responses from the south-east’s protected landscapes.
- The Planning Committee considered Reading’s draft transport strategy, which includes some big ideas, including road proposals close to – and potentially within – the AONB, plus the third Thames crossing. We commended the strategy for its focus on sustainable

and active travel, but expressed concern about direct and indirect impacts on the AONB of road proposals north of the Thames. Recognising the influence of Reading, with part of its boundary contiguous with the AONB, we will be inviting them to engage with our Chilterns-wide transport planning project.

National issues (Matt)

- Mike responded to the Department for Transport consultation on legalising sky-typing and sky-writing, but disappointingly the legislation is now in effect with no consideration of the beauty and tranquillity of skies above our protected landscapes.
- Government has continued to tweak planning regulations, particularly permitted development rights, partly to enable certain activities (such as pubs and restaurants) to operate under Covid-19 restrictions, such as easing controls over outdoor seating and increasing the number of days that outdoor events can operate. Many of these adjustments are temporary, but most apply in AONBs and may result in harm such as disturbance or littering. There are also new rights allowing for the upwards extension of some residential buildings to provide additional homes/accommodation – so far these have been excluded in AONBs.
- In addition, Government has published for consultation its long-term plans for the reform of the planning system, moving to a more “rules-based” or “zoning and coding” approach, based on European and American models. Alongside this consultation is a further set of proposals for short-term reforms to existing regulations and policies aimed at speeding up processes and, in many cases, taking steps towards the longer-term thinking. Matt has been invited to coordinate a response for the NAAONB and we will provide further details to the Board in due course, because it is rather complex.

3.0 Projects

Chalk, Cherries & Chairs (Kath, Harriet, Lizzie, Nick and Sam)

- Following the initial lockdown, the team moved as much activity as possible online and at the same time developed alternative activity and ways of delivering outcomes.
- Most outdoor work and survey resumed in June, and planning is underway for the October ‘Chilterns Celebration’ which it is hoped will include some small scale, socially distanced outdoor walks and other events.
- Kath has continued to cover the role of Project Manager since Agnes’ departure, along with support from Claire and Wendy. We have recently reviewed this arrangement and are planning to move forward with a recruitment process for a Project Manager in the coming weeks.
- Key Achievements / Issues

Wildlife Theme

- 65 volunteer wildlife surveys carried out (out of 85 planned)
- 14 online zoom volunteer [training workshops](#) held – 355 attendances
- Active WhatsApp group for survey volunteers (65 people)
- Evaluation survey sent to volunteers
- Need to widen engagement with new audiences and young conservation volunteers
- 24 October online event - ‘Outstanding in their field’ - Citizen Science conference (joint with Beacons of the Past and Chilterns Chalk Streams Project). Keynote speaker is Chris Packham. Sign up [here](#).

Heritage Theme

- New Heritage working group established and up and running
- River Wye Project planning underway
- Volunteer engagement process streamlined and new adverts for heritage volunteers – 12 new sign ups in a month

- Volunteers continuing to be active, for example Woodlanders' Lives project has found more take up during lock down
- Two guided walks and online talks planned for the Chilterns Celebration
- Research on linear earthworks being planned with Ridgeway Trust and Offas Dyke Trust.

Comms and Engagement Theme

- Taster session day held with Chiltern Rangers and 30 young people aged 13-19
- Revised Chilterns Celebration planned for the month of October, offering a programme of events and promoting existing project and partner activity
- Created 350 signs highlighting the work of Chilterns farmers in looking after the countryside. Signs delivered to farmer cluster members in September to use along public footpaths.
- A tweet on the signs by Drew Bennellick, Head of Land and Nature at the National Lottery Heritage Fund is [here](#).
- Updated website and interactive map in progress.

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (Allen & Ceri)

- Ceri, our Chalks Streams Education and Engagement Officer, began her period of maternity leave on 14 May. The CCSP's Project Officer has picked up a number of education & engagement projects that were either delayed by lockdown or incomplete.
- One such project was the publication of an educational book to accompany the CCSP's [Trout in the Classroom Project](#). The book was funded through the Catchment-based Approach's Water Resources Communications and Education Fund.
- The project commissioned filming for two chalk stream films and an animation on how chalk streams work in March. Following a delay due to lockdown, filming took place in August and the animation was completed this month. First edits of the films were also received in September. The films and animation were commissioned for the CCSP's Chalk Streams education website which is being developed alongside the new CCB website.
- Riverfly monitoring started again in August, after lockdown, and most river groups are now actively monitoring again.
- The monitoring programme for the Water in a Dry Landscape was interrupted by lockdown with the spring survey being cancelled. The Summer sampling round did take place, albeit with a lower number of volunteers, resulting in the CCSP Project Officer surveying the remaining unallocated sites.
- The CCSP was able to work Chiltern Rangers' staff to start a restoration project on the R. Wye at the West Wycombe Estate in June. Work included weir removal, tree work (carried out in March) and channel narrowing. It was originally planned for the project to be delivered by volunteers but will now be delivered by Chiltern Rangers staff.
- Working with Queen Mary University of London and the River Chess Association, the Project secure £38,000 for the continuation of the successful [ChessWatch](#) monitoring programme.
- The CCSP also partnered QMUL, CEH Wallingford and University College London in a £250K bid to the UK Research Institute grant fund for a citizen science project focussing on developing monitoring techniques for assessing the health of winterbournes in the Chilterns. The outcome of the application is expected in November.
- The Project Officer has continued to work on development and fundraising to support delivery of the ambitious new CCSP Business Plan, which includes an expansion of the staff team
- The CCSP has partnered with Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust on an Education and Engagement Project and has secured funding from Affinity Water for the next five years. Talks with partners are ongoing regarding funding of other elements of the business plan.

- The Project has been working with local groups and the water companies to progress plans for new abstraction reductions. Thames Water has announced its intention to close a pumping station in the upper Chess catchment in 2024. Affinity Water is planning to announce significant, voluntary reductions in abstraction later this month at a number of of its sites.
- The Project Officer and the CCB's CEO continue to engage with key organisations and individuals involved with chalk streams, including MPs, Defra, Environment Agency, Water Companies and Ofwat. This includes contributing to the work of the Chilterns River Action Group, convened by the Chiltern Society, and working with ARUP on a project exploring how best to restore chalk streams to a healthy state.
- Elaine King was also invited to give a presentation to Affinity Water's board meeting in September.

Beacons of the Past (Wendy and Ed)

- The project has met one of its key deliverables, against all expectation, [by identifying a new hillfort](#).
- Project delivery timetables are being brought in line with the significant delays to capital works and volunteer engagement brought about by Covid-19 restrictions and impacts.
- The [LiDAR portal](#) continues to be available online, with over 3300 registered users and an average of around 20 different people logging in every day to help find and map archaeological sites.
- Over 10,000 archaeological features have been recorded by our 'Citizen Scientists' and over 1000 already worked on through the Reviewers Portal (higher level trained volunteers who validate entries for inclusion in the official Historic Environment Records)
- In response to lockdown, workshops and training are still being delivered online. Ed's workshops have now involved 185 participants since May 2020.
- *Beacons of the Past* is participating (inasmuch as shifting guidelines allow) in the Chilterns Walking Festival with two walks planned.
- Nearly all of the bespoke artwork for display panels is complete and invitation to tender is going out to display panel suppliers in the next month.
- *Beacons of the Past* is co-hosting the *Chilterns Champions: Outstanding in their fields* Citizen Science conference, with the project manager chairing the heritage theme. This is a collaboration between three of the CCB's projects: *Beacons of the Past*; the *Chalk, Cherries & Chairs* Landscape Partnership; and the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project. Chris Packham will give the keynote address. Register [here](#).
- A series of [video lectures](#) have also been prepared for those who missed Ed's workshops.
- A decision is pending from the Monument Management Scheme grants committee at Historic England which, if successful, (and we are optimistic) will provide £27k in additional funding to support the preservation and research into some of our Chiltern hillforts.

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

- Key governance documents (Terms of Reference & Memorandum of Agreement) have been revised and updated in line with feedback from project partners and are ready for signing by the relevant parties.
- Criteria for Mend the Gap enhancement projects have been developed in consultation with the project partners and including seeking feedback from the wider CCB and North Wessex Downs AONB teams. This has been a valuable piece of work which has helped to clarify the objectives of the scheme. The criteria will provide a framework for consideration of potential projects and schemes and are also a useful tool for conveying the aims of the scheme to stakeholders and the local community.

- The communications plan has been finalised (this is a live document which will need to be reviewed and updated as appropriate during the lifecycle of the programme). The programme also now has its own logo.
- A number of potential projects have emerged through discussions with stakeholders and interested parties. These include access-related projects linked with the Thames Path and Ridgeway Path, a possible foot passenger ferry link between Moulsholme and South Stoke and a land manager engagement project across the two AONBs within the programme area.
- Jo continues to speak with organisations and individuals within the programme area to explore potential links with and opportunities for Mend the Gap.
- In light of Covid-19 and changes to ways of working, Jo has also been able to give some input to wider CCB work, including advising on procurement and fundraising, and collating data from across the CCB team to feed into the NAAONB's KPI reporting.

Chalkscapes (Claire)

- In March this year, the CCB secured development funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for its new Landscape Partnership. Working with conservation organisations and community groups across Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, this ambitious community, wildlife and heritage initiative will focus on the precious chalk landscape and communities of the North Chilterns.
- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, initiating the project was put on hold, but we are now recruiting for a [Chalkscapes Development Manager](#), with a closing date of 2 October. Help to publicise the advertisement would be most welcome.

4.0 National focus (Elaine and Team)

Liaising with a range of organisations and individuals, including our partner organisations, has been important during this period. This has included conversations with our local authorities over responding to the Covid-19 emergency, liaising with Defra, Natural England and others regarding implementation of the Landscapes Review, published in September 2019, and working with the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), AONB Lead Officers, National Parks and others on a range of operational and strategic matters.

Defra

- The CCB staff team continues to communicate and share information with Defra, particularly since the CCB team hosted a visit by five officials from the Landscapes team on 11 March
- Engagement has included regular updates from the team, sharing the e-newsletter and responding to specific questions linked to the Glover Review, such as our views on specific elements of the Glover Review
- We have discussed with Defra and others the role of protected landscapes in rebuilding the rural economy and supporting people's health and wellbeing
- Information was provided to MHCLG and Defra on our governance arrangements, which informed thinking on new legislation: The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

NAAONB

- Worked closely with Lead Officers of other AONBs and the National Association of AONBs on a range of strategic and operational matters, plus providing peer support
- Contributed to NAAONB survey of impacts of Covid19 on AONBs (results sent to Defra)
- Elaine continues in her role as a member of the Colchester Declaration Steering Group. 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 has included 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 also led the development of a proposal as part of the Colchester Declaration, work. The Urban Hinterland Cluster (Kent, High Weald and Surrey Hills AONBs) seeks employ a young, black environmental influencer to spearhead a campaign to engage with the environment young, black people aged 16 - 24 in central London.
- Similarly, Kath is working closely with eight other AONBs, and the South Downs National Park, in the development of the 'Big Chalk' cluster, which aims to work with landowners, farmers and local communities to build resilience in calcareous landscapes (chalk and limestone) on an unprecedented scale – the initiative will run from the south coast to the midlands.
- We are also working with NAAONB and another group of Lead Officers to develop a major funding bid for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF). We developed a proposal to fund an Engagement Officer as part of this NAAONB bid, which will be submitted to the GRCF this month.
- Proposals were provided to Defra, Natural England and others in June with ideas for projects (including one in the Chilterns) that could be delivered under the Tier 3 Environmental Land Management Scheme.
- Elaine is a member of Defra's Contact Group for AONBs and National Parks implementing recommendations in the Landscapes Review. Meetings are convened every 4-6 weeks and involve information sharing and providing advice and ideas.
- The CCB contributing to NAAONB response to DEFRA's Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) consultation, while also developing a CCB response (Harriet and others in CCB team)
- Continued work on joint initiatives and engagement with South East and East protected Landscapes (SEEPL) with most recent meeting on 17 April.

Other

- Elaine did a socially-distanced walk with Marian Spain, CEO at Natural England, on 2 June.
- Elaine and Claire have also held virtual meetings with local councils, including Herts CC and Bucks Council to discuss Covid-19 emergency planning and recovery.
- Buckinghamshire is one of five pilots for a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy, announced by the Secretary of State in July. Elaine and Kath are liaising with Buckinghamshire Council and Natural England over delivering this work.
- The pilots were launched in one of our farmer clusters. Ian Waller, chair of the central Chilterns Farmer Cluster, hosted Defra, Natural England's Chief Executive, Marian Spain, and its Chair, Tony Juniper on his farm to explain the conservation work he is doing and how this relates to the new LNRS initiative. Defra published a [tweet](#) and [blog](#) on the LNRSs and the visit to the Chilterns.
- Elaine is a member of the [Buckinghamshire Culture](#) Development Board. Buckinghamshire Culture is a partnership that aims to build the quality of cultural opportunities in the county, strengthening the cultural sector, growing the creative industries and promoting a sustainable, inclusive approach to culture-led development. Set up in early 2020, the Development Board is working to shape and steer the development of the partnership.
-