



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

Held by remote video conferencing on Wednesday 24th February 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Paul Duckett
Cllr Steve Jarvis
Cllr Lynn Lloyd
Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr Hugh McCarthy
Cllr Ian Reay
Cllr Philip Williams

Appointing Body

Central Bedfordshire Council
North Hertfordshire District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Hertfordshire County Council- Chairman
Three Rivers District Council

Appointed by the Secretary of State

Colin Courtney
Alison Doggett
Paul Mains
John Nicholls
Ray Payne
John Shaw
Ian Waller
Elizabeth Wilson

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

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr Susan Biggs
Cllr John Griffin
Cllr Charles Hussey

Oxfordshire
Oxfordshire
Buckinghamshire

CCB Officers

Graham Hurst
Elaine King
Donna Webb

Finance Officer
Chief Executive Officer
Administrative Officer

Other:

Deirdre Hansen

Clerk to the Board

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
The Chairman welcomed all present.

The Chairman had informed the Board of the passing of Buckinghamshire Councillor and former Board Member Bill Bendyshe-Brown. He paid tribute to Bill for his generous service to the CCB and the Chilterns. A letter of condolence on behalf of the CCB has been sent to his family.

19/20.42 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr Alison Balfour-Lynn, Hertfordshire Parish Councils, Cllr Andrea Baughan, Buckinghamshire Council, Cllr Charles Mathew, Oxfordshire County Council, Cllr Richard Newcombe Buckinghamshire Council and Cllr Nick Rose, Buckinghamshire Council.

Absent from the meeting: Cllr Philip McDowell Dacorum Borough Council.

19/20.43 Declarations of Interest

Sue Biggs declared a personal interest in the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan.

19/20.44 Minutes of the Board Meeting 4th November 2020.

The minutes of the Board Meeting of 4th November 2020 were approved as a true record after the clerk, Deirdre Hansen, was added as attending the meeting.

19/20.45 Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.

19/20.46 Conclusion of Audit

The Finance Officer reported that the external auditor had completed the review of the Annual Governance and Accounting Return (AGAR). They have issued two audit reports. An interim report advises that the CCB is required to publish its AGAR including a signed audit report. However, due to the Covid-19 restriction the auditors have been unable to complete their report within the due date. A second audit report gives an "except for" opinion which stated that:

- The CCB failed to approve the AGAR in time to publish it before 1 September 2020, the date required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as amended by SI 2020/404 the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (amendment) regulation 2020 and did not disclose this by answering 'No' to section 1, box 1.
- The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission, a transcription error in box1 for the prior year.
- We had not fully addressed the 'except for' matter when qualifying the prior year AGAR. The CCB had considered the prior year 'except for' matter in the meeting February 2020. The external auditors had been supplied with a full copy of the minutes for the year that covered the AGAR. The CCB did present the 2019/20 figures in the AGAR in the format to comply with the external auditors' requirements, but had not restated the 2018/19 figures. These figures had been agreed and are published. The AGAR does not include a Balance Sheet, presenting an incomplete picture of the CCB's financial position. To comply with the AGAR requirements the CCB decided to include Deferred Income within Earmarked Reserves for purpose of the AGAR, which would be acceptable to the auditors. The CCB will continue to publish its own Revenue Account and Balance Sheet which shows Deferred Income as a Liability rather than a Reserve as defined by the Financial Account Standards.

The notice of conclusion of the audit with the auditor's report will be published on the CCB website. The Board noted the External Auditors report. It was noted that the auditors had failed to complete their work on time.

It was also noted that Defra is provided with a detailed financial analysis.

The Finance Officer was thanked for his work.

- 1. The Board APPROVED and ACCEPTED the auditor report**
- 2. The Board APPROVED the publication of the conclusion of the audit and the Auditors report on the website.**

19/20.47 Governance Review.

The Deputy Chairman presented a summary of the current position and an introduction to the next phase of work. The CCB is working to reflect the Glover Report's recommendations on its future governance arrangements.

He indicated some of the possible options for future arrangements for the organisation in future, such as being designated a National Park. The current set up does not allow the Board to discharge its responsibilities and fulfil its public purpose in certain areas. The Glover Review did highlight that the current model does not translate the public support for a national landscape into models that can help support them financially.

Whatever the Governments conclusion, the Deputy Chairman advises the Board to consider the following points:

1. The matter of organisational change embracing agility and flexibility.
2. The matter of Partnerships, which the Board is very good at and the relationship between Government, business and the Board with a common purpose.
3. Leadership, vision and purpose. The Board has this in abundance, but the emphasis should be on outcomes rather than outputs.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Chairman for his extensive work on the Governance Review.

The meeting discussed the points raised and commended the work that has gone into this review.

In late 2019, Defra established a contact group to explore implementation of the Glover Review proposals. The CEO is a member of this group. The CCB's governance review by the Deputy Chairman has been passed on to the group

- 1. The Board NOTED the interim report.**

19/20.48 HR Handbook

The Deputy Chairman provided a summary of the current position.

The first sections are due to be sent to the Advisory Group for comment imminently.

- 1. The Board NOTED the interim report.**

19/20.49 Business Plan 2021-22

The Chief Executive Officer had provided the draft Business Plan and Budget 2021-22 for the CCB.

The Management plan is a five-year plan delivered with the CCB's partners. The Business Plan is connected, but separate from the Management Plan and sets out the CCB's ambitions and planned work for the financial year 2021-22. The Business Plan is key to delivery and reporting on our Defra KPI's and is submitted to Defra as part of the claim for the core grant from Defra.

The Executive Committee approved the draft Business Plan and Budget at its meeting in January.

The meeting discussed the ambitious Business Plan and Budget. The Board asked what they could do to help the CCB in achieving the plans. It was noted that stronger connections with Local authorities and increasing visibility would all be helpful.

1. The Board APPROVED the Business Plan 2021-21

19/20.50 Review of the Risk Register

The Risk Register is reviewed annually and had been reviewed and updated by the Executive Committee 27 January 2021.

The keys risk for the coming year include:

- Impact of the continued Covid-19 pandemic.
- Cashflow management given increased project requirements and the uncertainties over Defra and Local Authority funding.
- Local Government changes in Buckinghamshire.

The meeting reviewed and discussed the Risk Register and agreed some suggested amendments to the wording.

1. The Board REVIEWED and APPROVED the updated Risk Register with some additions.

19/20.51 Board Review including reports from the Executive and the Planning Committees

The Chief Executive Officer had provided a comprehensive overview of the team's ongoing activities and achievements since November 2020. The Coronavirus outbreak began to impact day to day work in early March 2020.

It is noted that the team is doing even more work than they did before lockdown. Collaborate working by the team has led to improved strategic activities, including enhanced communications.

Highlights:

- HS2 is again taking up a lot of time. The Conservation & Landscapes Officer and the Chalk Streams Project Officer are spending a lot of time working on HS2, along with the CEO, holding them and their contractors to account.
- The Chalk Streams Project Officer is looking for more funding from Thames Water to increase capacity in line with an ambitious new business plan,
- The socially distanced walks set up with the Chiltern Society are very successful.
- More collaborative work is being carried out with the Chiltern Society on a range of areas.
- The new website is still under construction.
- The Communications Officer is expanding her team in line with the increased need for stranger comms.
- Work on a national level is progressing, including with Government, NAAONB's and Natural England, including strategic discussions on AONBs' role as part of the back bone of nature recovery.

The Chairman commented that it is impressive that the CCB is getting increased media coverage, including in the national press, and out profile is increasing. A huge amount of work is going on. The work on HS2 done in the background by the CCB needs to be brought to the forefront. He thanks the CEO and all the staff for all the work that is ongoing.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and comment.

1. The Board NOTED the review.

19/20.52 Mend the Gap

A short video introducing the project and explaining what will be done with the money received and what outcomes would like to be achieved was shown. The video gives a good view of the beauty of the AONB.

Members provided feedback.

1. The Board NOTED the update and PROVIDED feedback.

19/20.53 Landscapes Review

The CEO has been working on the Landscape Review.

Government has been due to make an announcement on this, but the date is now not expected until the end of the year.

The CEO has kept engaging with Defra. Defra has been looking at Governance, it was noted however that there is a lack of focus at Defra, that National AONB's are going forward and that funding is a major stumbling block. More is expected with less money.

The Government intends to set up a new overarching body, a National Landscapes Service, as a Statutory Body, to oversee all National Parks. Their functions are not yet known and funding is an issue.

1. The Board NOTED the update.

19/20.54 Any Other Business

1. The Chairman reported that recruitment for a new Secretary of State appointment to the Board has started. The Deputy Chairman leaves the Board on the 31 March. He noted that there is a considerable interest and an element of diversity in the applicants.
2. The AGM will be held 21 April 2021, members were reminded to inform the Chairman by email, if they were interested in the positions of Chairman and Deputy Chairman, as they Chairman will also leave the Board at the elections on 6 May.
3. Members were asked to show their interest in Committee membership preferably prior to the AGM.
4. This is Ray Payne's last meeting. He has served the CCB for more than 10 years as a Secretary of State appointee and the last three years as Deputy Chairman. His achievements over the years have been remarkable. He has led the CCB's opposition on HS2, represented the CCB at the HS2 Select Committee, even proposing an alternative tunnel for the Chilterns to which no fault was found by the Select Committee, but which HS2 refused to use. He has also led the Board governance work and advised the Mend the Gap governance work, worked on the HR handbook and provided supportive and helpful assistance to the Chairman.

Future Meeting Dates

Full Board:

Wednesday 21st April 2021 AGM only

Wednesday 23rd June 2021

Wednesday 20th October 2021

Executive Committee

Wednesday 28th April 2021

Wednesday 15th September 2021

Planning Committee:

Wednesday 3rd March 2021

Wednesday 14th July 2021

Wednesday 17th November 2021.

The Chairman.....date.....