



**The
Chilterns
CONSERVATION BOARD**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD HELD ON WEDNESDAY 26 JANUARY 2011 IN VILLAGE HALL, RUSSELLS WATER, NR HENLEY-ON-THAMES, RG9 6ER, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.50 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Member

Appointing Body

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Geoff Andrews	South Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Roger Emmett	Wycombe District Council
Cllr Marion Mustoe	Central Bedfordshire Council
Cllr Brian Norman	Three Rivers District Council
Cllr Richard Pushman	Buckinghamshire County Council
Cllr Ian Reay	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr Chris Richards	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Cllr Jeremy Ryman	Chiltern District Council
Cllr David Nimmo Smith	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Bill Storey	Hertfordshire County Council

Appointed by Secretary of State

Mike Fox	Secretary of State
Bettina Kirkham	Secretary of State
John Willson	Secretary of State

Elected by Parish Councils

Cllr Mary Goldsmith	Bedfordshire
Cllr John Griffin	Oxfordshire
Cllr Margaret Jarrett	Hertfordshire
Cllr Barbara Wallis	Buckinghamshire

Officers

Maureen Keyworth	BCC and Clerk to the Board
John Morris	Director, The Chiltern Woodlands Project
Steve Rodrick	CCB Chief Officer
Cathy Rose	CCB Activities and Learning Officer
Chris Smith	CCB Finance Officer
Colin White	CCB Planning Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Helen Tuffs, Cllr Alan Walters, Cllr Julia Wells, Kevin Mayne, Dr Simon Mortimer and Dr Heather Barrett-Mold.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2010 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments.

Item 9 – Report on Major Developments – HS2

First line insert full title for Mr Hammond as follows: 'The Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP....'

Item 13 Date of next meeting

The date for the June meeting to be amended from 22 June to 15 June.

4. MATTERS ARISING

None.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public were present.

6. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to report discussions and resolutions of the Executive committee at its meeting on 8 December 2010.

The following was noted:

- Mike Fox was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee
- The finance Report from April to October 2010 has currently identified a small surplus which will help offset the planned deficit.
- A 21.5% cash cut by DEFRA was planned over the next four years. This may change when a further review is undertaken in 2012.
- The Committee looked at the possibility of setting up a 'Caring for the Chilterns' fund to permit voluntary and discrete donations, similar to 'Friends of the Red Kite' but with a broader remit. A proposal will be presented to the Executive Committee later in the year.

The Board NOTED the decisions made under delegated authority.

7. REPORT OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members received the report of the Planning Officer, the purpose of which was to bring to the attention of the Board the items considered by the Planning Committee and decisions taken under delegated powers.

The following was noted:

- Barbara Wallis was elected Chairman of the Planning Committee.
- Discussions will be held with Local Authorities about how S106 funds can be drawn down to the AONB. Other AONBs will also be contacted to see if they

are operating similar systems.

- The Committee was investigating whether developer pre application fees could bear more of the costs.
- The Local Growth White Paper was discussed. There are likely to be several consultation exercises in relation to this Paper.
- The Planning Conference received good feedback. The next conference will be held on 5 October and renewable energy will be the theme. With regard to renewable energy a member asked whether hydro power could be taken into consideration. It was noted that through the SDF, contributions had been made to the group in Goring. There were also several places along the Thames where hydro power could be used but the costs were prohibitive.
- The next Planning Forum will be held on 10 May at Wycombe District Council.
- With regard to Development Plan Responses, the Planning Committee continued to oppose the Wycombe Stadium plans. A sub-group has been set up to attend site visits.
- The Committee has raised concerns with Chiltern District Council regarding the core strategy and the District Council is making further changes.
- A request was made for more pressure to be applied to afford some protection for orchards in relation to planning applications.

Members discussed in detail the plans for a new stadium, possibly at Booker Air Park just outside High Wycombe. The meeting was reminded that Wycombe District Council had identified this as its preferred site but no firm decisions had been made and there would be further consultation with the communities likely to be affected. The main concerns from residents in Lane End relate to the possibility of further development and increased traffic, together with a fear of being subsumed into High Wycombe. The site is surrounded by the AONB and any development would be highly visible for several miles around.

A member considered this was such an important project, it should have been debated by the full District Council. It was agreed to continue to monitor this issue.

The Board NOTED the report from the Planning Committee.

8. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL FORECAST 2011-2015

Members received the report of the Chief Officer and Finance Officer, the purpose of which was to inform the Board of the potential impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review and to suggest ways in which a sustainable and balanced budget can be achieved by 2014-2015.

The budget over the next four year period assumes the following:

- A cost of living pay freeze and no discretionary increments would be awarded.
- A fee will no longer be payable to the Ordnance Survey for maps from 1 April.
- Whilst some reserves will be used during the four year period, a sustainable budget needs to be put in place by 2014-15 which does not require use of reserves.

A Budget Realignment Plan will be presented to the Executive Committee at its next meeting, setting out tasks and a timetable for implementation. It will then be presented to the Board.

Discussions have been held with staff on making savings and increasing income and these suggestions will be included in the budget for 2012.

Members discussed staffing costs. The Chief Officer stated that the post of office manager has already been made redundant and several staff are part time. Discussions had taken place with regard to a bonus scheme if staff can generate a greater increase in income than planned and staff were agreeable to this. In answer to a member's question about whether the staff have a spokesperson, the Chief Officer stated the numbers were too small to have an association but monthly discussions are held with staff.

A member asked whether the Board had considered setting up a 'Friends of the AONB Group'. It was noted that the Chiltern Society performs this function, providing a core of volunteers to carry out the work of the AONB. There may be further scope for more financial links, but there is a need to ensure the work of the Board does not encroach on the work already being done by local societies and other volunteer groups.

Some members asked for Members Allowances to be reviewed, it was agreed that this would be discussed at the next Executive Committee with a view to presenting a paper to the Board for discussion at its March meeting.

RESOLVED:

The Board

- 1. NOTED the implications of the financial modelling**
- 2. NOTED that a detailed business plan will be drawn up that will guide decision making for the four year period and presented to the next meeting of the Executive Committee**
- 3. NOTED that a detailed budget for 2011-12 will be presented to the Board on 23 March for approval**
- 4. AGREED that the Executive Committee should discuss the options for members allowance with a view to presenting a report to the Board at its March meeting.**

9. GRANT APPLICATION TO NATURAL ENGLAND/DEFRA

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to seek confirmation from the Board that it wishes to apply for £503,845 and also approves the outline Business Plan submitted in support of the application.

The Board noted that the funding would be received from Defra, but as yet Natural England does not have a mechanism in place for processing the payments. It was also not yet clear what scrutiny or monitoring process Defra will apply. The deadline for receipt of applications for funding has been moved to 24 January.

NE is aware that the current Business Plan was in draft format and needed endorsement from the Board. The Work Programme was similar to the previous one but some of the figures needed to be adjusted.

The issue of whether the Board could reclaim VAT was raised. It was noted that the Chief Officer had raised this matter recently with DEFRA which said that as it would require parliamentary legalisation to change the current process, there was little

prospect of change in the short to medium term. The Chief Officer agreed to look at where VAT is incurred and investigate whether anything could be done to reduce it.

Members commented on the Business Plan and Work Programme and, subject to suggested amendments, the following was agreed:

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Board AGREED to apply for the maximum grand aid of £503,845.**
- 2. The Board APPROVED the supporting Business Plan, subject to any amendments to the proposed work programme.**

10. REPORT ON HS2

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to advise members of the progress on opposing HS2 and to re-affirm the Board's opposition to HS2 when public consultation begins in February 2011.

The Chief Officer informed members he had attended a meeting with HSW on 25 January and the notes of the meeting were circulated and are attached to the minutes (appendix 1)

In discussion, the following was noted:

- Because the road shows will not be held in the Chilterns until after the local elections, it was suggested members may wish to visit one of the earlier events in the London Boroughs. However, it was uncertain whether each event would cover the whole line or be more localised, particularly with regard to visualisations. It was agreed it would be difficult for the public to take a balanced view unless all the information on the proposed route is available to them at each event.
- With regard to information sharing, whilst it has been stated that the documents will be available on line or possibly on a CD, it would be unreasonable to expect the public to print them off. This issue will be taken up with MPs.
- A detailed Appraisal of Sustainability will be available but it will relate to the whole line and may not contain much local detail. The Chief Officer stated it was important that information is made available in relation to the Chilterns and suggested that all the information be collated and a summary leaflet be produced.
- It is proposed that deeper cuttings will now be made which will create more spoil. It was not clear how this spoil would be disposed of, i.e. at Pitstone and Chinnor quarries. Again, there was no information on how the spoil would be transported.
- Concern was expressed that the consultation will not contain information in relation to construction of the line and it may be down to the Conservation Board to provide this information.
- With regard to noise impact, it was noted that the average measure over a day will be used, but since the stock that will use the line has not been built, it is based on current rail transport. This will need to be pursued. There is a noise machine that will reproduce the sound of the trains and it is planned that this will be taken to Parliament Square as well as along the proposed route. The contours of the landscape also affect noise levels, with those on higher levels being most affected.

- Although there have been statements to the effect that the line will not be used for freight, there have also been contradictory statements indicating that the costs and benefits will be investigated. The Chief Officer asked that the public be made aware of this. This will add to the impact of noise and light pollution on most areas.
- The Chief Officer stated that there may be gaps in the information which will be made available and it was the job of the Board and other partners to ensure any missing information is requested.
- Government had agreed that no new runway would be built in the South East because of environmental issues and questions should be asked as to why HS2 was being treated differently.
- Parliament is likely to vote in favour of this project and therefore there is a need to ensure there are plans in place to influence the process. There is also a need to ensure that all parties are working together and there is contact between the various working groups.

RESOLVED

The Board AGREED

- 1. To maintain a policy of opposition on the grounds that the national benefits have not been proven.**
- 2. To make a full response to the public consultation on this basis.**
- 3. In the event that approval may be given for HS2, to develop a programme of mitigation and associated works.**
- 4. To develop a proposal for an HS2 supported Environmental and Community Fund**

11. REPORT ON 'THE BIG SOCIETY' AND LOCALISM BILL

Members received a presentation from Cathy Rose on The Big Society and what it means to the Conservation Board, and Colin White on the Localism Bill.

Cathy Rose stated the Big Society is about empowering communities to be able to make local decisions and providing them with the relevant tools to do this. The Board is already engaged in this work through:

- Encouraging volunteers and signposting them to local areas by placing information on the website.
- Engaging with local groups by providing funding for approximately 150 projects through the Sustainable Development Fund. It is possible that this support could be extended to provision of training and guidance.
- Support for local businesses through showcasing food and craft producers.
- Public management of countryside resources.
- Establishing a broad base for charitable giving through the possible establishment of 'Caring for the Chilterns'.

Colin White reported on issues highlighted in the Localism Bill.

Members discussed the Community Infrastructure Levy, which can be used for maintaining green spaces and could benefit the AONB. A member expressed

concern that unless projects can be earmarked, the money obtained from the CIL could disappear into larger projects. Concern was also expressed that many organisations will be bidding for money from the same sources.

Neighbourhood Development Plans were discussed. These will form part of the Local Authority Development Plan. Although it was suggested that the Board could be more involved in supporting Parish Councils with Village Design Statements, it was suggested that these and the Parish Plans may be replaced entirely by the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

With regard to further resources, it was suggested that the Board should investigate whether there are any resources available to support the production of its Building Design Guide.

Local Authorities will be required to maintain a list of public or private assets of community value put forward for consideration by communities. It was noted there will be a requirement to list pieces of land on a register of community assets. It was not clear from the Bill what kind of protection this afforded and it was suggested that if pieces of land were not on the list they may possibly be used for development.

The Board considered the potential effects on the AONB and Board of the Government's proposals for 'The Big Society' and advised on specific issues and areas of activity which will require the Board's involvement.

12. REPORT ON THE SPECIAL TREES AND WOODS PROJECT

Members received the report which sought to inform members that the project has now ended and to record its achievements. John Morris extended his thanks to Liz Manley and Rachael Sanderson for their work on this project. He also stated that volunteer time on the project was an important part of the matched funding requirement by the HLF.

The presentation covered the project aims, how the work was undertaken and what has been achieved. The Financial Report is also available on the website.

The Chief Officer thanked John for his work on managing the project. He reminded members that the work was not over as one of the HLF conditions is to maintain the archive and the Conservation Board has given an undertaking to look after it. He stated that the cultural and social significance will be lost if the records are not maintained.

Members noted that a book on 'Special Trees and Woods in the Chilterns' has been produced, also by volunteers.

The Board

- 1. NOTED the achievements of the Chilterns Special Trees and woods Project**
- 2. NOTED that the Board is responsible for maintaining the project's archives and web pages.**
- 3. Congratulated the Woodlands Project, its staff and all the volunteers on their success.**

13. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Conservation Board, will be held on Wednesday 23 March 2011 at 10.00am at Three Rivers District Council.

Dates of future meetings:

15 June (please note change of date)
19 October including the AGM

CHAIRMAN