

Cotswolds Conservation Board Annual Review

Reporting on the work and achievements of the Board
during 2014/15



Welcome from our Chairman

There can be no doubt that our Cotswold residents, visitors, businesses and partners understand and value our special landscape. Enough studies have been done to show the value for money that is directly related to our landscape, which is benefiting those living, working, achieving and enjoying in this nationally important area. We are all custodians of something very precious.

This year 2014/15 marked the first ten years of the Board. The Board has tested the Conservation Board concept, proved its value over that time and is well placed for the future. We have much to celebrate, not least the work of our partners the farmers and landowners in their management of this wonderful landscape.

The roles we have played over the last year have been varied. The signals of our success covered in our 2014/15 Annual Review are clear:

Supporting business and the local economy we have:

- led new and old partners in the development of a LEADER programme for the wider Cotswolds, securing £2m for jobs and growth,
- helped establish a new private sector led Cotswolds Destination Management Organisation,
- enhanced our skills courses and expanded our dry stone walling academy.

Supporting biodiversity and landscape we:

- were one of a series of delivery partners for the national Magnificent Meadows project,
- expanded our Visitor Giving Programme: green shoots are providing contributions to support our conserving and managing role,
- supported the Bathscape Landscape Partnership Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid, activities for Cotswold Grassland week and the Stroud Festival of Nature,
- improved awareness and understanding of the essence of the Cotswolds through our own Escape destination at Northleach and its website presence.



Liz Eyre, Chairman

Supporting residents we:

- together with private sector partners, co-ordinated and facilitated the Cotswolds Discoverer bus and rail ticketing initiative,
- started to build the links between health and wellbeing and the availability of our natural environment,
- supported our wealth of trails,
- gave grant aid to community and rural projects.

We are not without challenges:

- the National Planning Policy Framework has had a more limited impact on the protection of the AONB than we would have wished and we work to achieve a better balance,
- recent additional funding challenges keep us focussed on working smarter, a flexible innovative Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) wide approach to all we do.

All this is only possible due to the significant work of staff, my fellow Board members, partner organisations, volunteers and of course the wardens: our great ambassadors.

Next year 2016 will see us mark the 50th anniversary of the designation of the AONB. This has an associated exciting programme of celebratory events. Engage with us, join us, work with us. I look forward to meeting you all at one of our events.

Liz Eyre

Chair, Cotswolds Conservation Board

An outstanding area

The Cotswolds was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1966 in recognition of its rich, diverse and high-quality landscape. Covering 2,038 sq km, it is the largest member of the family of 46 AONBs in the UK and the second largest protected landscape in England after the Lake District National Park.



The Cotswolds Conservation Board is an independent statutory body established in 2004 to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB and increase the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Cotswolds Conservation Board

The Board celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2014 with a special review publication highlighting how far we have come and how much we have been able to achieve with our many partners across the region.

You can download the publication from the Boards website at www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

Looking back on 2014/15

Conserving & enhancing: working towards an outstanding landscape



Saving our Magnificent Meadows

Save Our Magnificent Meadows is the first national biodiversity heritage project funded by the HLF, and the Board is one of 10 national partners in the Plantlife-led project.

The Cotswolds element of the project focuses on the restoration of flower-rich limestone grasslands within the Cotswold Scarp and Cotswold River Valleys Nature Improvement Areas. Over 480 hours of restoration work has been carried out by volunteers since the launch of the project. Botanical training for volunteers has been set up in preparation for the survey season, as well as two landowner workshops. Donor and receptor sites have been lined up for seed harvesting this Summer. Meetings with local conservation organisations, voluntary groups and farmers are increasing awareness and all seem positive and keen to work with the project. Numerous walks, talks and open days during Cotswold Grassland Week in June have helped to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of our species-rich grassland.



Conserving the landscape and enhancing its access by our Voluntary Wardens

Over 300 Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have clocked up a total of 45,639 hours in their work to conserve, enhance and increase understanding and enjoyment of the Cotswolds AONB.

330 active wardens, who form the voluntary arm of the Cotswolds Conservation Board, regularly carry out a wide range of activities which, in 2014/15, was estimated to be worth at least £304,260. Much of the wardens' time was spent

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Cotswolds Conservation Board

www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

on undertaking a variety of practical conservation and enhancement work, whilst organising and leading guided walks, attending events and working with school groups continued to remain an integral part of their work.

Voluntary Wardens' conservation activities during 2014/15 included:

- over 31,000 sq m of woodland was coppiced and 109,000 sq m cleared at 25 woodlands sites,
- 1,800 metres of fencing erected,
- 1,028 hedge trees/shrubs planted,
- 65 stiles repaired, improved or installed,
- over 800 metres of streams and ditches cleared,
- 700 metres of dry stone walls repaired or rebuilt.

Rural Skills – Building on its success

Since 2005, the Rural Skills programme has steadily grown year-on-year by providing an increasing number and variety of informal and accredited courses. In 2014 the Board launched the Cotswolds Dry-stone Walling Academy, designed to provide accredited training opportunities for new and existing wallers in the AONB. This much needed facility will help to ensure that the skill of dry-stone walling is maintained in the Cotswolds for many years to come.

2014/15 was a year of significant note for the Board's Rural Skills training programme. The key outcomes from this period are detailed below:

- 50 courses delivered during the year, a 25% increase on the previous year's high of 40,
- 10 different types of skills training provided, including dry-stone walling, hedgelaying, Cotswold tile roofing, lime mortar, woodland coppicing, blacksmithing, brushcutting, thatching, flaxing and charcoal making,
- dry-stone walling and hedgelaying remain the programmes most popular events with 256 people attending these alone,
- the Board provided rural skills training for 413 people in 2014/15, a 20% increase on the previous year's high of 343 and a new record for the programme. The number of people receiving training through the rural skills programme has increased by 325% in the past 4 years,
- the programme continued to move towards operating at a surplus throughout 2014/15. However, capital expenditure on the dry-stone walling academy and a new charcoal kiln contributed to the programme returning a loss for this period,
- 14 dry-stone wallers gained their LANTRA Level 1 or 2 qualifications through the dry-stone walling academy,
- 18 professional rural skills trades people were employed to deliver instruction for courses.

Roadside Verge Seminars

The appropriate management of roadside verges is important for biodiversity, landscape, the historic environment and for the setting of towns and villages.

A total of 90 representatives of Parish Councils and interested groups attended two seminars organised by the Board in Adlestrop and Doynton. Presentations were given by wildlife trusts, highway authorities and Board staff looking at the importance of roadside verges, best management practice and how Parish Councils and other interested groups can become involved. From the seminars a set of answers to Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and will shortly be on the Board's website along with best practice guidance for managing road side verges.

Understanding and enjoying: encouraging others to explore and appreciate the landscape

Roaring success for the Cotswold Lion

Since the Cotswold Lion Café reopened in November 2013 there has been all manner of events, and festivities. We have seen a steady increase in trade to the café and the Escape to the Cotswolds Visitor Centre. The café has played host to performances including folk singer Johnny Coppin, classical musicians The Atesh String Quartet, pianist Michael Bochmann and Glastonbury regulars Thrill Collins. We have held several successful markets and fairs including our first Christmas Food and Craft Fair which we will be repeating again this year. Numerous historical tours, talks and walks held by members of the local Historical Society have also taken place.



Jessica Hughes, Cafe Manager



The café has also hosted pop-up dinners from a local private chef, The Little Pickle, which were a sellout success and are set to be a regular event with different chefs from around the Cotswolds AONB.

The Old Prison is evolving all the time and in just 18 months has developed, changed and improved greatly which we can measure through customer feedback and sales. There is a lot of expectation and potential for what we can achieve next; the best is yet to come!

Cotswolds visitors keep on giving

A total of £8,626 has been raised thanks to the generosity of visitors and businesses through the Visitor Giving scheme. Joining the scheme along with Manor Cottages and Notgrove Holidays is Adam Henson's Cotswold Farm Park.

A call for projects opened during the summer, offering grants for activities that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB, and improves the public's understanding of what makes the area special.



New marker for the Cotswold Way

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of many dedicated individuals and organisations in Chipping Campden, a new hand-carved stone marker has been installed at the Cotswold Way's northern end in front of the Market Hall.

The Chipping Campden marker echoes a similar one launched at the Cotswold Way's southern end in Bath in 2012, creating a resonance between the northern and southern extents of the trail. The marker was created by stone carver and artist Iain Cotton and takes the form of an impressive limestone disc carved with the names of places and historic sites along the Cotswold Way.



Three years of Discoverer

The Cotswold Discoverer travel pass entered its third year. 1,500 one and three day tickets were sold by the partners in the scheme. We were pleased to welcome Stagecoach into the partnership and thereby extend the area which the travel pass covers. First Great Western continue to be very helpful and supportive in funding promotion and monitoring the performance of the scheme. We have been pleased that the collaboration between bus and train operators supported by the local authority public transport teams and tourism interests has been maintained and strengthened.

A new video is being created over the summer to promote Cotswold Discoverer. The video will highlight travelling into the AONB by train and then using the range of bus services to visit destinations.

Old Prison – Heritage Lottery Fund bid

Friends of the Cotswolds will be submitting a new revised bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in the autumn to transform the Old Prison site. A bid was submitted last summer, however it was unsuccessful. HFL were able to give guidance to submit a new revised bid and encouraged the Board to resubmit.

The application focuses on renewing the existing galleries, developing new interpretation, creating new exhibitions and relocating the Conservation Board's offices into a new purpose built building overlooking the Old Prison.

Promoting landscape-friendly local produce

In 2014 the board piloted Cotswold Choice the new 'environmental quality' brand aimed at promoting landscape-friendly local produce and products in the Cotswolds. With generous assistance from the Stroud District Council's Food Grants 2014, the Cotswolds Choice scheme is being piloted initially in the Stroud area, and the aim is then to roll the scheme out across the whole of the Cotswolds.



New tourism partnership across the Cotswolds

Following the withdrawal of GFirst's support for tourism delivery, the Board took a lead role with Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council in the publication of a Destination Management Strategy and then the formation of a new tourism partnership working for the first time across the entire Cotswolds. The year saw the foundations put in place to establish a new industry led private, not for profit company with sustainability at its heart.

Greentraveller online guide of the Cotswolds

The board has teamed up with Greentraveller.co.uk the online consumer travel guide. The new guide for the Cotswolds features a wide number of eco-friendly places to stay and holidays that can be conveniently reached by bike, public transport or train.

Plans for the AONB's 50th anniversary

Plans are already well underway for the AONB's 50th anniversary which takes place during 2016. The Cotswolds was designated an AONB in 1966 in recognition of its rich, diverse and high quality landscape. To mark the special occasion a new book will be published about the AONB featuring stunning landscape images. The book is being published in spring 2016.

An anniversary logo, events, walks and a special edition of the Cotswold Lion are currently being developed ready for the new year.



Cotswolds Photography Competition

Keen amateur photographers of all ages are being offered the opportunity to capture what they feel best sums up the beauty and uniqueness of the Cotswolds AONB in a brand new competition created by the board in partnership with Cotswolds Tourism.

The two winning photographs will be featured in the Cotswold Lion Spring/Summer 2016 publication as well as The Cotswolds 2016 Visitor. The images will also be promoted through websites and social media channels during the AONB's 50th anniversary.

Living, working and visiting: encouraging a more sustainable future

The Cotswolds LEADER Programme – New Investment in the Local Rural Economy

The Board has received an allocation offer of 2.49 million Euros (equating to £1.99m) for the delivery of a new Cotswolds LEADER Programme covering significant parts of rural Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, and Gloucestershire.

This European funded grant programme in the Cotswolds is scheduled to be 'Open for Business' for applications starting in the Autumn of 2015 until 2020. A Local Action Group (LAG) – Executive has been established, and an Advisory Network is being further developed to actively support engagement and delivery of the programme with a broad range of organisations and communities.



Cotswold LEADER Executive Group

LEADER funding is focussed on supporting farmers, foresters, and small rural businesses, enabling them to realise sustainable productivity and growth potential, including further strengthening their competitiveness and position in the market. The programme is forecast to create 98 new permanent jobs, and will support transformational change within the Cotswolds rural economy. It will further support sustainable innovative investment in tourism, rural services, culture and heritage, as well as securing a range of additional wider benefits such as: community-led development, improved productivity, and resource management.

Review of options for A417 Missing Link

A number of studies have taken place to try to address congestion, air quality and safety issues which arise on this section of road, notably at the Cowley roundabout, the 'Air Balloon' roundabout and Crickley Hill. The Executive Committee originally received two presentations regarding route options at the meeting in September 2014 from the Highways Agency and Gloucestershire County Council. In October a site visit was arranged for the Board to view specific sections of the route which was also attended by representatives of the Highways Agency, Gloucestershire County Council and their contractors Amey and WSP.

Following presentations and a follow up site visit the Board agreed the following criteria against which any consideration of options should be judged:

- any scheme should bring about substantial benefits for the Cotswolds landscape and environment as well as people's enjoyment of the area;
- any scheme must have substantially more benefits than negative impacts for the Cotswolds AONB;
- any solution involving a new road must ensure that the scheme is designed to meet the character of the landscape, not the other way round.

Accordingly, a scheme which met such criteria would both respect the purpose of designation of the AONB, and secure compliance by the relevant public bodies with their duty set out in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

In December 2014 the Department of Transport (DfT) announced a series of investments which would make up the 2015 – 21 Roads Programme. In regard to the A417 Missing Link the Department announced that there would be a careful examination of options to develop "...a solution that can match

both the economic importance of the route to the economy of Gloucestershire and the sensitive environmental conditions around the site of the road itself”.

The Board looks forward to working with Highways England to find the right solution for the AONB based upon the above criteria.

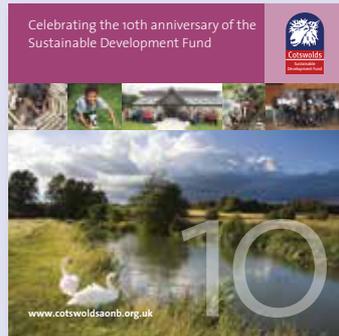
10 years of the Sustainable Development Fund

The Cotswolds AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) awarded over £30,000 of funding to support 8 local community schemes and projects.

Projects included:

Cirencester based charity the ‘Churn Project’ for the delivery of a blacksmithing apprenticeship scheme for unemployed and low skilled workers. Also benefiting from the fund was Stroud Brewery for an educational project designed to inform customers and visitors to the AONB about the process of beer making, the importance of sourcing local ingredients and the need to pursue sustainable practices.

Last year the SDF celebrated its 10th year in operation. To commemorate this milestone the Board produced a brochure which summarised the impact of the Fund over this period and highlighted some of the notable projects which the SDF has supported over the past decade. As well as celebrating the past achievements of the SDF the brochure was also designed to serve as tool for raising the Fund’s profile and attracting private sector investment.



Planning and development: helping other to make the right decisions

New report on the ‘State of the Cotswolds’

The Board has published a report on the state of the Cotswolds. The report highlights changes in farming practices to the condition of rivers and wildlife sites, and from tranquility to house prices and travel. The report brings together all the data that supports the monitoring indicators within the AONB Management Plan and more. This is the first time that all this information has been brought together and looked at from a Cotswolds AONB perspective. Copies of the report can be downloaded from the board’s website.

Section 85 Compliance & Planning and Development

There have been continued pressures for new housing sites, particularly in relation to Local Planning Authorities without adopted Local Plans and a proven 5 year housing supply. The Board maintains it concerns that the balance between the provision of housing and the conservation and enhancement of the Cotswolds landscape has become too heavily weighted in favour of the former, which potentially may lead to non-compliance with Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 (Section 85 of the CRoW Act places a statutory duty on authorities to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB).

Examples of ensuring Section 85 compliance is being secured include Local Authorities that have adopted the Management Plan; reference to Section 85 duties by the Board in its 18 responses to DCLG consultations, Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and Local Transport Plans; continued responses by the Board to Highways Authorities & Other Statutory Undertakers consultations; continued reference to Section 85 duties in 50 responses to planning applications, of these nearly 70% were in accordance with the Board’s comments; responses to relevant planning appeals and attendance at Public Inquiries; continual monitoring of appeal decisions locally and nationally and reporting outcomes to the Living and Working Sub Committee; through meetings with Officers, Councillors and Parish Councillors, pre-application advice, and co-operation with neighbouring AONBs with shared Local Authorities; sharing consultation responses and monitoring figures with Natural England and DEFRA. The Board is also considering future options to highlight possible breaches of Section 85 to Board level and to consider appropriate action.

Undergrounding overhead wires

Although the Cotswolds AONB were unsuccessful in being shortlisted for the National Grid Undergrounding/Mitigation of Existing Pylons scheme, a fund of £24 million is still being set aside for other mitigation projects. It is hoped that as this scheme moves forward in the next year there may be opportunities to apply for this fund as more details of the project are published.

In terms of other High Voltage and Low Voltage undergrounding projects, the Cotswolds are covered by SSE and Western Power Distribution (Distribution Network Operators). The funding of undergrounding projects is subject to funding periods through Ofgem. The scheme has just entered a new funding period 2015-2023 (RIIO-ED1). This has essentially brought to an end any outstanding projects that have been promoted though have yet to be undertaken.

The priority therefore looking forward into the next year is to identify new sites for undergrounding projects, to accordingly consider whether they fulfil the well established selection criteria and if so submit them to the DNO’s.

How we made a difference in 2014/15



438,920
visits to
Board websites

668

Facebook followers



4,398

twitter followers

£3.4m
worth of investment
in the AONB secured
by the Board



£174,500 worth of community
projects supported through the
Sustainable Development Fund

£7,500
generated through the
Cotswolds Visitor
Giving Scheme

£2m Investment
in the local economy
secured by
LEADER

1,004 schoolchildren
and 16 schools
participating in countryside learning

5,638 people enjoyed free
guided walks, 136,887
downloads
of walks & cycle routes



70% planning application decisions
made in accordance with the Board's advice



413 people trained in rural skills, 50 rural skills courses

45,639 hours of work carried out by
the Cotswolds Voluntary Wardens
£300,000 Estimated value of this work

save our
magnificent
meadows

programme launched investing

£320,000 in the restoration and
celebration of wildflower grasslands

22

Save our Magnificent Meadows
advisory site visits

484

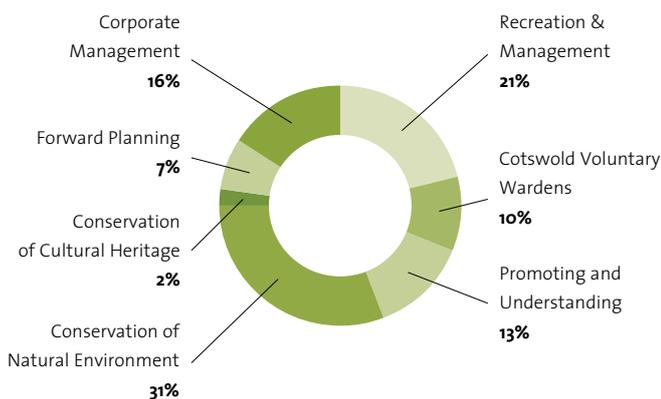
Save our Magnificent Meadows
volunteer hours



Audited Summary Financial Statement 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

	2013/14	2014/15
	£	£
Expenditure	988,816	989,952
Project Delivery	789,489	794,064
Corporate Management and Administration	148,914	153,643
Agency Operational Agreement (net)	50,413	42,245
Income	(883,290)	(873,914)
DEFRA grant	(460,307)	(425,600)
Natural England	(108,143)	(90,614)
Local Authorities	(152,395)	(143,441)
Other	(162,445)	(214,259)
(Surplus)/Deficit for Year	105,526	116,038
(Surplus)/Deficit for the Year after Movement on Reserves	(14,384)	50,810
Balance Sheet		
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets	559,482	459,141
	<u>559,482</u>	<u>459,141</u>
Less: Current Liabilities	(144,519)	(160,217)
Total Net Assets	414,963	298,924
Financed by		
General Fund Balance	248,324	197,513
Earmarked Reserves	217,052	194,069
Accumulated Deficit on Agency Operational Agreement	(50,413)	(92,658)
	<u>414,963</u>	<u>298,924</u>

Expenditure 2014/15



In 2015/16 we aim to:

- progress review of the Cotswold Trails and Access Partnership,
- advance a national centre for health and well-being in the Cotswolds,
- review past changes and drivers for the future landscapes changes with 'Cotswolds@50',
- celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cotswolds AONB,
- develop the Cotswolds AONB LEADER bid for the benefit of the rural economy,
- grow the Cotswolds Visitor Giving Scheme and encouraging more tourism businesses to participate,
- work with local authorities as they produce and publish their core strategies and local plans,
- continue to develop the Old Prison at Northleach into a vibrant visitor centre. Submit a successful stage 1 bid to HFL for £5m,
- implement the Setting of Bath Landscape Partnership project, subject to success at Stage 1 of a £4m HLF bid,
- work with health and well-being boards to promote the benefits and encourage wider use of the Cotswolds natural environment,
- work with private and public sector partners to establish the new destination management partnership for the Cotswolds,
- continue to support local communities through the Sustainable Development Fund,
- continue to develop and expand the Cotswolds Discoverer scheme with local operators,
- continue to support our Voluntary Wardens in their work for the AONB,
- work with electricity distributors to bury more overhead wires underground and assess the opportunity with National Grid to mitigate the impact of high voltage lines underground,
- support the promotion and co-ordination of recreational routes across the Cotswolds,
- and to assess the long term impact of climate change on the landscape of the AONB.



Cotswold Way
NATIONAL TRAIL

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/cotswold

Cotswolds Conservation Board

Fosse Way, Northleach, Gloucestershire GL54 3JH

Tel: 01451 862000

Email: info@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk