

# Update



## The newsletter from the Cotswolds Conservation Board Winter Update 2008/9



## Highlights

### Leading lights

- The Chief Executive of Natural England, Helen Phillips and the leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron both made visits to the board in the autumn

### Hosting the trail team

- The board has accepted Natural England's invitation to host the Cotswold Way National Trail team for a further two years.

### Rural skills contests

- The board's annual drystone walling and hedgelaying competitions took place in the autumn with a total of 54 people taking part.

## Conserving and enhancing

### Drystone walling & Hedgelaying competitions

The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Open Drystone Walling Competition and the North Cotswolds Hedgelaying Competition both took place in the autumn.

The walling contest was on the Highgrove Estate at Prestons Folly, Broadfield Farm near Tetbury on Sunday 5th October and was run by the board in partnership with the Cotswold branch of the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain. The North

Cotswolds Hedgelaying Competition took place on Saturday 15th November at Foss Cross, courtesy of Calmsden Farms.

In all, 54 competitors entered the two competitions and competed in classes designed to cater for a range of abilities.

This time, the drystone walling competition encompassed the Dry Stone Walling Association's

Anniversary Walling Championship, which was held to celebrate the organisation's 40th Anniversary. The event saw national finalists competing for awards that have been donated by the patron of the association, His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales.

Information about competition winners is available online at: [www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)

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## Walling courses

Two drystone walling courses took place in October with 12 people taking part on each course. The courses were held in Tetbury and Huntsmans Quarry near Naunton. In all this year, 140 people have taken part in 12 two-day walling courses at locations across the AONB, for a fee of £55 each.

## Hosting the Cotswold Way National Trail

Natural England's formal request for the board to continue to host the Cotswold Way National Trail management team at its offices in Northleach until 2011 has been accepted. This means that the current arrangement, where the board agreed to host the team for an initial term of one year from April 2008, has been extended by a further two years. The board has agreed to this continuing arrangement on the basis that Natural England provides the national trail team with 100% grant funding. The Executive Committee is due to confirm the board's response to Natural England's consultation on the review of the management of National Trails at a meeting in January 2009. The board's hosting arrangements will be reviewed in light of the outcome of the review. The Cotswold Way National Trail Officer is James Blockley who can be contacted on 01451 862034 [james.blockley@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](mailto:james.blockley@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)

## Position statements

Three new position statements have been adopted by the board on biodiversity planning, roadside verge management and deer management. All board position statements can be accessed online at [www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)

## New three-year business plan

The board is in the first year of developing a new three-year business plan, which spans from 2009-2012 and will involve a bid, at the end of January, to Natural England for a sum to cover the full three-year period. Natural England will then respond with a grant offer for 2009-10 with indicative offers for the following two years. The board will continue to receive annual contributions from its other funding partners, the 17 local authorities within the AONB. The board also intends to submit bids for projects to a range of key grant funds.

## Management Plan

Six local authorities have endorsed the board's new management plan 2008-2013. Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, Wychavon District Council, Warwickshire County Council and Stratford-On-Avon District Council have all formally acknowledged their support for the plan.

## Wormington to Sapperton pipeline

In 2007 the board objected to a proposal by National Grid to build a gas pipeline through over 40 km of the AONB between Wormington (near Evesham) and Sapperton (near Cirencester), on the grounds that alternative routes outside the AONB had not been thoroughly assessed. Subsequently National Grid undertook such an assessment, and concluded that it was feasible to construct a route predominantly to the west of the AONB, requiring a much shorter length

of the pipeline (20kms) to be constructed in the AONB.

National Grid is to submit an application to the government for approval of the first route that they proposed and that the board objected to. The board and Natural England have submitted informal comments to National Grid suggesting that the alternative (westerly) route is less harmful to the environment and will be making a formal response to the proposal when it is submitted early this year.

## Undergrounding of electricity cables

Central Networks has announced that it is to proceed with a scheme proposed by the board and the parish council to underground unsightly overhead cables at Ashton under Hill. Central Networks will be funding the scheme's estimated cost of £270,000 through a financial mechanism set up specifically to allow electricity distributors to underground wires in AONBs and National Parks. It is hoped that further rounds of funding will be announced soon.

## Cotswold Geopark

A meeting was held in September to assess the level of support in the AONB for the proposed Cotswold Hills Geopark. Comments were received from a range of partner organisations and it was established that there is clear support for a Cotswolds Geopark and a willingness to take part.

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## Planning success

When the board was established in 2004, it resolved that it would only submit substantive comments on major planning applications or those which raised significant issues for similar proposals elsewhere in the AONB.

The board has recently made representations on three such applications submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council. The proposals were: to build 44 houses on a site just within the AONB, to erect 12 mobile homes in the AONB and to demolish an existing

house and construct a replacement dwelling.

In all three cases the decision by the council to refuse the applications because of, amongst other issues, the impact of the proposal on the AONB, was upheld by independent inspectors.

## Funding bids

The board has submitted initial 'expressions of interest' for funding towards a combined package of five new projects. The board is working in partnership with Gloucestershire First, Painswick Gateway and the Gloucestershire Development Agency

to secure the funding through South West Tourism, for money from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The five suggested projects are; a geology trail along the Cotswold Way National Trail, an extension of the board's existing Visitor Payback Scheme (Step into the Cotswolds), the establishment of a European Charter on Sustainable Tourism for the AONB, Taste of the Cotswolds (a project focusing on local produce) and a new 'Gateway' (visitor) Centre at Painswick. We will find out in January whether we can progress a fuller bid, which would be submitted in April.

## Understanding and enjoying

### Explore the Cotswolds by public transport

Updated versions of the board's Explore the Cotswolds by public transport timetable booklets have been published and distributed to tourist information centres across the AONB. In all, 20,000 copies of timetables with updated bus and rail information have been produced by the board.

### Forum for Partners

The board's six-monthly Forum for Partners was held on Thursday 6th November at Egypt Mill in Nailsworth with 30 people taking part.

### New board booklet

A new booklet has been produced that explains the role and functions of the Cotswolds Conservation Board. Copies are available online and on request by calling **01451 862000**.

### New website

A new website for the AONB is due to go live in January 2009. Please take a look at [www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk) and let us know your thoughts by emailing: [info@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](mailto:info@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk).

## People and communities

### Natural England visit

Helen Phillips, the Chief Executive of Natural England visited the AONB on the 20th November 2008 to find out more about the work of the board. She spent the day being briefed about the

AONB and found out about a range of subjects including the Cotswold Way National Trail and the new Farmland Birds project. The overall response to the day was extremely positive.



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## MP's visit

The leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron MP, made a visit on Friday 24th October to an AONB conservation training site at Milton Downs Farm near Burford in West Oxfordshire, where he was shown how the board is working to encourage drystone walling skills.

He had the opportunity to meet young drystone walling students who are training on a course called 'Walling No Barrier', run by the board in partnership with Abingdon and Witney College. Eleven students have just started on a new course that will run until March 2009.

The courses are sponsored by the Cotswolds Conservation Board through a Leader + grant fund awarded by West Oxfordshire District Council.

## Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

Between September and December the board approved five SDF grants totalling over £10,000. They were:

- Planting of new hedges (following traditional hedgelines) by a community project - South Cotswold District of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.
- The development of appropriately landscaped amenity areas for residents and visitors - Rollright Parish Council
- The development of appropriately landscaped amenity areas for residents and visitors - Wotton-under-Edge Parish Council
- Soil tests prior to landscaping a play and amenity area - Bledington Parish Council
- A grant towards Claverton Pumping Station Heritage Project - The Kennet & Avon Canal Trust

Just under £3,900 is still available for projects that can be completed before the end of March 2009.

## Changes to the board

The Cotswolds Conservation Board held its Annual General Meeting on 11 December where board members voted on the new composition of the board for the coming year. Please visit the board members page of our website to see the new arrangements

[www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)

## Reduction in number of board members

The department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) has issued another consultation on the impact of local government reorganisation in Wiltshire on the structure of the board. From April 2009 Wiltshire becomes a unitary authority and North Wiltshire and West Wiltshire District Councils will cease to exist. The original consultation in August/September envisaged that board numbers would reduce from 40 to 37 to reflect a reduction in the number of both local authority and Secretary of State appointees. The latest consultation released in November proposes that board numbers remain unchanged, with the new Wiltshire Council inheriting the three board appointments made by the former Wiltshire authorities within the Cotswolds. The board has responded to this latest consultation by stating that the appointments process should continue to follow the approach of the board's Establishment Order i.e. One appointee from each local authority.

All responses can be viewed on the board's website at [www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)

(Sub - Committee news can now be found on the website)

**Director**  
Martin Lane

**Office Manager**  
Margaret Fletcher

**Administrative Officer**  
Claire Rossiter

**Land Management Officer**  
Mark Connelly

**Volunteer Co-ordinator**  
Rebecca Jones

**Planning Officer**  
Malcolm Watt

**Information & Interpretation Officer**  
Claire Cunningham

**Project Development/Business Planning Officer**  
John Mills

**Sustainable Development Fund Officer**  
Anne Powell

**Farmland Birds Officer**  
Neil Harris

**Cotswold Way National Trail Officer**  
James Blockley

**Assistant Cotswold Way National Trail Officer**  
Don Field

Supported by over 340 voluntary wardens

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