



Welcome from our Chairman

Welcome to our Annual Review, which summarises the work of the Conservation Board during 2012/13. Although a challenging year for many of our partners, with the economy continuing to struggle and the weather hitting both tourism and farming, it once again proved the value of working together across the whole of the Cotswolds landscape.

Last year's figures demonstrate the Board's ability to use our core funding to attract additional investment in the landscape. Every £1 of local authority support levered in £273 of additional funding, enabling us to generate activity worth £2,815,000 across the AONB. Other highlights included attracting nearly half a million pounds of funding for environmental stewardship, and over 200 people acquiring valuable practical skills through our training courses.

Despite the weather, our voluntary wardens carried out more work than ever, managing grassland and woodland, maintaining and improving footpaths and welcoming visitors on over 300 guided walks. Their hard work and dedication have helped to ensure that the Cotswolds continue to be a source of health and well-being for all who live or visit here, and an invaluable asset for our tourism industry.

A major achievement last year was the adoption, following extensive consultation, of a new statutory Management Plan covering the years 2013/18. This will form the basis of the Board's own work over the next five years, and also identifies what our many partners in the public, private and community and voluntary sectors need to do if we are going to build on the successes of the past and ensure that people in the future continue to enjoy the many benefits that a beautiful, productive and well-managed landscape can provide.

I know that many of our partners, wardens, board members and staff will be reading this. I should therefore like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your help and support during the past year, and to say how much I am looking forward to working with you to make the most of the opportunities of the future.

The Revd Jeff West OBE FSA, Chairman

Message from our Patron

Whilst the main aims of the Board are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB and to increase the understanding and appreciation of this very special place, the Board also plays an important role in supporting our local economy.

Last year, we undertook a significant piece of research to help us gain a deeper insight into the economic value of the AONB. This proved to be a very useful study in not only providing us with better knowledge of economic activity within the AONB, but also by illustrating the importance of a high quality environment to so many businesses. The knowledge that such a large part of our local economy and so many jobs are critically dependent on the quality of the AONB landscape provides even greater impetus to our conservation and enhancement work.

The study also reinforces the inextricable links between the landscape and tourism and provides further evidence of the importance of rural areas to economic growth.

We are looking forward to using these findings to pave the way to greater partnership working with our many local enterprise partnerships and the private sector to ensure that the needs of our rural economies are fully understood and appreciated.

The Lord Plumb of Coleshill, DL FRAGS, Patron



Looking back on 2012/13

Highlights

Adopted the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2013/18

Following extensive consultation with partners and stakeholders, the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2013-18 was formally adopted by the Board in March 2013. The new five-year statutory plan sets out our vision for the future management of the AONB. It provides a strategic policy framework and a series of objectives to help guide the work of the Board with its partners on the future conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB, as well as increasing the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.

Delivered value for money

We are always looking at ways in which we can deliver better value for money for our funding partners and use our unique position to lever in additional funds to provide greater investment in the Cotswolds AONB.

Figures from 2012/13 illustrate our ability to provide real value for money for local authorities. Through the added value of the work undertaken by our volunteers, the additional resources 'levered in' by grant schemes such as the Sustainable Development Fund and Dry Stone Walling grant scheme, along with the funds that are attracted to the area through other schemes facilitated by us eg Higher Level Stewardship, we are able to turn every £1 contributed by a local authority into £273 of investment in the AONB.

Assessed the value of the Cotswolds AONB

Last year we commissioned a new report to assess the value of the Cotswolds AONB to the local economy. The report, prepared by Cumulus Consultants Ltd, found that around £337 million of direct and indirect economic activity, measured as gross value added (GVA), and 9,720 jobs are 'critically dependent' on the AONB's high quality environment and landscape. In a survey of 166 businesses, 83% said that being in the AONB has a positive impact on their business, while half of all businesses and 62% of tourism businesses, believe that the AONB location had a positive impact on their turnover. The findings of the report are now being used to engage with Local Enterprise Partnerships and business sector groups to identify ways in which conservation and commercial interests can be brought closer together for mutual benefit.

Advised on climate change

With funding from National Grid, we are continuing to pro-actively support our local businesses and communities in 2013 through our Climate Change Advisory Service which includes work on energy efficiency, carbon auditing, renewable energy, agricultural resource management, and business resilience. Last year the service delivered:

- One-to-one support for over 80 businesses and social enterprises.
- Intensive project planning and carbon auditing for 20 businesses.
- Over 100 solar photovoltaic and other renewable energy schemes consented.
- Over 26 small projects supported focusing on energy efficiency, flood prevention, effective soil and water resource management.
- Small grant demonstration funding programme of between £2,000 and £10,000 to promote climate change mitigation & adaptation.
- Facilitation and presentation at three local renewable energy events.
- £640,000 worth of climate change projects facilitated within the Cotswolds AONB.

Reached new heights with rural skills

Our Rural Skills Programme enjoyed another record-breaking year with the result that a greater number of people were trained in developing a range of traditional crafts and skills. Highlights from last year's programme include:



- 230 people trained.
- 28 courses delivered.
- Six course subjects offered: dry stone walling, hedgelaying, lime mortar, green woodworking, woodland coppicing and blacksmithing.
- Dry stone walling and hedgelaying remain the most popular subjects with 171 people attending these courses alone.
- The annual Dry Stone Walling and Hedgelaying Competitions were held. HRH the Princess Royal presented the awards to the winners of the Cotswolds AONB Dry Stone Walling Competition which took place at her Gatcombe Park Estate.
- Corporate rural skills team building events launched.

Marked the Cotswold Way



A new work of public art was unveiled at Bath Abbey in October 2012 to mark the start/finish of the Cotswold Way National Trail. The unveiling marked the culmination of an initiative between the Board, Bath Abbey and Bath & NE Somerset Council who had worked closely together to provide an attractive and fitting focus marking the start and finish of England's youngest National Trail.

The marker takes the form of a large limestone disc set into the pavement outside the west doors of the Abbey. Hand carved by local artist Iain Cotton the disc features place names along the trail with the iconic acorn symbol at its centre.

Other successes and achievements:

- Working with Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire County Councils, First Great Western, local bus companies and Cotswolds Tourism, we launched the Cotswolds' first integrated bus and rail ticket scheme – **the Cotswolds Discoverer** – in April 2012. Operators were delighted with the initial success of the scheme with the result that they have agreed to continue supporting it into 2013.
- Through the **Cotswolds AONB Sustainable Development Fund**, we awarded £31,000 of funding to support 8 local community schemes worth over £71,000 in total. Projects included: seed saving techniques aimed at preserving heritage fruit and vegetables; helping unemployed people develop new skills; habitat restoration; and the provision of an interactive outdoor classroom for the teaching of wildlife and vegetable growing.
- Following the exciting news that the Friends of the Cotswolds were the preferred bidder to **purchase the Old Prison** from Cotswold District Council, we supported them in a range of community and fundraising events. Huge support was generated among the local community through successful open days, widespread media coverage and fundraising activities.

- We promoted the health benefits of the Cotswolds' natural environment through the launch of the idea of a **'Cotswolds Natural Health Service'** via promotional material placed in hospitals and doctors surgeries.
- We provided a comprehensive **response to the draft Gloucestershire Health & Well Being Strategy** and began to develop good working relationships between us and local health and well-being boards.



- Our **Cotswold Voluntary Wardens** once again proved that despite the challenges of the weather, they were still able to achieve similar or better results than the previous year. Achievements included: 729,826sq metres of grassland worked; 18,370sq metres of woodland coppiced; 1,224 trees planted; 1,134 metres of stone walling built; 101 metres of stream/ditch cleared; 263 steps installed; 94 waymarks/fingerposts installed; and 330 guided walks led.

- Two dry stone wallers trained in the AONB successfully **completed an advanced dry stone walling qualification** thanks to funding we secured from the Ernest Cook Trust. With this funding, we were able to help address the shortfall in advanced walling techniques by establishing a Lantra Level 3 training course, supported by Huntsman's Quarries.

- A project to conserve wildflower-rich grasslands in the Cotswolds was piloted in the Cotswolds AONB as part of the **'Saving our Magnificent Meadows'** project led by Plantlife with funding from Heritage Lottery Fund. The final bid is being submitted to HLF in 2013 and, if successful, will be rolled out through the Cotswolds and eight other areas across the country over the next three years.



- We have been working with the Cotswolds Ecological Networks Forum to identify two **Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)** for the AONB: the Cotswolds Scarp and the Cotswolds Valleys NIA. As part of this work, a NIA factsheet and downloadable map were produced and distributed to all partners.
- We published the **Cotswolds AONB Climate Change Strategy** which is being used to help those living and working in the AONB to make the Cotswolds more resilient to the impacts of climate change.



- Through the **Farming & Woodland Advisory Scheme**, we were able to secure £845,000 worth of agricultural and woodland environmental grants to help farmers and landowners take positive action for improving biodiversity in the countryside.

- We embarked on a campaign to discover what members of the public felt were their **'Seven Wonders of the Cotswolds'**. The final seven were: Westonbirt Arboretum, Rollright Stones, Cotswold limestone, Woodchester Mansion, Cotswold Way National Trail, Cleeve Hill and Stroud Farmers Market. A series of 'wonder walks' are being developed by Voluntary Wardens during 2013.

- Our **offline and online communications activities** continued with 110,000 copies of the Cotswold Lion and 15,000 copies of Explore the Cotswolds by Public Transport produced; over 135,000 visits were made to our suite of websites; and over 2,800 followers signed up to our twitter feed.



- We worked closely with destination management organisations and local authorities to develop a Cotswolds-wide and sustainable approach to the **management and development of tourism**.
- We participated with the **Our Land sustainable tourism initiative** by encouraging over 70 businesses into the scheme, resulting in more than 120 Cotswolds 'products' online. An Our Land networking event was organised at Cirencester and well received by over 30 businesses.

- The **National Grid Wormington to Sapperton Gas Pipeline project**, completed in 2010, was selected as a winner in the CPRE Gloucestershire's Annual Awards. The project was recognised as an exemplar in landscape restoration and partnership working between National Grid and the Board.

- The **'Cotswolds on a Bootlace' Access Seminar** last year attracted wide interest from a range of groups involved with the management, use and promotion of public rights of way. The seminar raised a number of issues including the important role of volunteers and community, the economic value of rights of way and how future funding opportunities can be sought eg through visitor giving schemes.



- The Board's Voluntary Wardens continued to work with schools up and down the AONB as part of the **Cotswolds Education Project**. Working with 40 schools, the wardens helped 1,170 schoolchildren gain a better understanding and awareness of the countryside through a variety of interactive learning activities.

- With funding from Natural England, a study was commissioned to investigate the feasibility of a **new approach to grassland management** in the Cotswolds using a cooperative approach. The results, which found many benefits of collaborative grazing, are being used to develop a pilot scheme in the Cotswolds Scarp Nature Improvement Area.

- Our **Annual Forum** held in March was well attended and focused on the benefits for businesses of being located in the AONB, and provided a summary of the initial findings from the economic value of the Cotswolds AONB study.

- We began work on the development of a **visitor giving scheme for the Cotswolds**, through the development of an outline format for a potential scheme based on best practice elsewhere. The scheme will be launched in 2013.

- We continued to perform well on **major planning application consultations** with 16 major applications responded to and 12 determined in accordance with our views.

- We submitted detailed responses to consultations on **local authority Core Strategy documents** in order to secure appropriate policy protection for the AONB.

- We responded to consultations from the Department for Transport regarding speed limits for HGVs on rural roads, and proposals for reduced street lighting in villages in South Gloucestershire.

Valuing the work of the Cotswolds Conservation Board 2012/13



The Conservation Board delivered **£2,815,000** worth of activity

£640,000 worth of projects were supported by the Climate Change Advisory Service

230 people were trained across

6 different **rural skills**

through **28** courses

Total value of Higher Level Stewardship Schemes facilitated by the Board to date is **£4,485,000**

£70,000 in Woodland and Forestry Grant Schemes were secured for woodland owners.

Cotswold Voluntary Wardens put in over **40,000** hours each year worth **£300,000**

Total value of projects supported through the Sustainable Development Fund was over **£71,000**

£450,000 in Environmental Stewardship schemes were secured for farmers and landowners



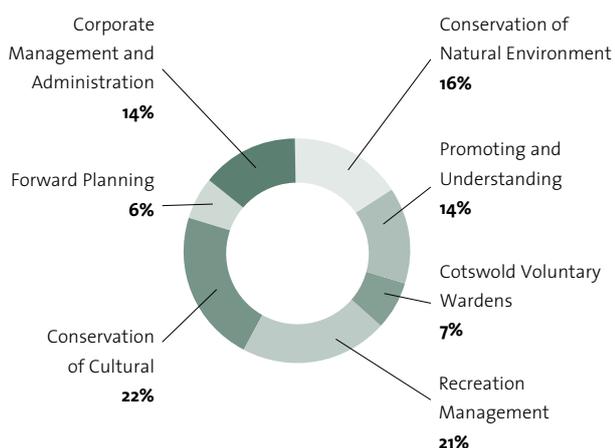
The National Grid **Dry Stone Walling Grant Scheme**, completed in 2012/13, supported 7km of walling and 13¹/₂ years work for wallers worth **£970,000**

Unaudited Summary Financial Statement 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013

	2011/12 £	2012/13 £
Expenditure	995,125	998,713
Project Delivery	871,994	866,041
Corporate Management and Administration	137,010	146,580
Interest Receivable	(13,879)	(13,908)
Income	(1,023,184)	(913,340)
DEFRA	(519,383)	(502,125)
Natural England	(135,804)	(143,804)
Local Authorities	(171,972)	(154,953)
National Grid	(96,000)	0
Other	(100,025)	(112,458)
(Surplus)/Deficit for Year	(28,059)	85,373
(Surplus)/Deficit for the Year after Movement on Reserves	(90,980)	(24,034)
Balance Sheet		
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets	715,328	714,673
	715,328	714,673
Less: Current Liabilities	(109,466)	(194,184)
Total Net Assets	605,862	520,489
Financed by		
General Fund Balance	209,905	233,939
Earmarked Reserves	395,957	286,550
	605,862	520,489

The Board's income fell in 2012/13 by nearly £110,000 as a result of reductions in funding from DEFRA, local authorities and the National Grid. The Board had some success in bringing in additional income by charging for services and by accessing other grants. In the same period, expenditure increased by just £3,600. The Board's earmarked reserves fell as National Grid grant was spent on the dry stone walling programme, while the Board's General Fund increased as a result of efficiency savings. The 2012 /13 Corporate Management & Admin costs include the costs of developing the 2013 – 18 Cotswolds AONB Management Plan, adopted March 2013. A full Statement of Accounts is available on the Board's website.

Expenditure 2012/13



Looking forward to 2013/14

- Working with our partners and stakeholders to implement the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2013-18.
- Launching a new visitor giving scheme for the Cotswolds.
- Working closely with health and well-being boards to promote the physical and mental health benefits of the natural environment.
- Helping to develop a Cotswolds Destination Management Plan in partnership with local authorities and destination management organisations.
- Realising the vision of a vibrant new visitor centre at the Old Prison, Northleach.
- Promoting the benefits for businesses of the AONB location with Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- Working towards the publication of a state of the Cotswolds AONB report.
- Enhancing our online and offline communications activities.
- Promoting the network of recreational routes across the Cotswolds alongside our work on the Cotswold Way National Trail.
- Developing the network of tourism businesses who are putting the landscape at the heart of the visitor experience.
- Identifying alternative streams of income through sponsorship, merchandising and other external sources of funding.
- Assessing and considering the implications of CAP Reform.
- Continuing to expand our rural skills programme including the development of a Cotswold Dry Stone Walling Academy.
- Developing and promoting the Cotswolds Discoverer scheme with transport operators following the successful trial period in 2012.
- Supporting the development of climate change demonstration projects.



**Cotswold Way
NATIONAL TRAIL** 
www.nationaltrail.co.uk/cotswold

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