



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2007, IN CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD OFFICES, THE LODGE, CHINNOR, COMMENCING AT 10.35 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.36 PM.**

**Present:**

Cllr Rhys Goodwin	Board Member
Sir John Johnson	Board Member
Kevin Mayne	Board Member
Cllr Marion Mustoe	Board Member
Cllr Richard Pushman	Board Member
Steve Rodrick	CCB Chief Officer
Cllr Bill Storey	Board Member
Cllr Alan Walters	Board Member
Mike Woods	Buckinghamshire County Council

**In Attendance:**

Maureen Keyworth	BCC and Clerk to the Board
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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Richard Brown, John Griffin, Shirley Judges and Chris Smith.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2007 were agreed as a correct record.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

**Item 4 Matters Arising**

Boris Johnson attended the official 'switching on' of the solar panels on 23 November. His visit was a great success, with good media coverage. Mr Johnson commented that he wished to add his support to the Board regarding the need to increase funding provided to the AONB.

Members agreed on the need for a meeting with the Chiltern MPs, with regard to funding, possibly in Spring 2008.

**Item 6 Audit Commission Return for 2006-07**

The Audit Commission raised two minor points on the Annual Return: the need to alter the amount of insurance cover and how assets should be treated in the future. These will be finalised by the next Annual Return.

**Item 12 Annual Forum**

SR reported on the success of the Annual Forum. 160 places had been booked, of which 143 attended, with 52 organisations being represented.

## **5. FINANCE REPORT 2007-08**

Members received the report of the Finance Officer, the purpose of which was to advise members of the Board's financial position to the end of October and likely position at the end of the financial year.

SR reported that savings made had been transferred into the Project Support Budget.

It was noted that further work on profiling was needed.

KM asked that a column be added showing variance on projected outturn. MW suggested it would also be useful to have an overall summary of the various departments. This was also agreed.

### **The Committee:**

- 1. Noted the current financial position.**
- 2. Approved the virement of £ 18,470 from various core budgets to Project Support.**

## **6. DRAFT BUDGET 2008-09**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer and Finance Officer, the purpose of which was to advise the Committee to approve both draft budgets, in order to assist with financial and operational planning for 2008-09. A final budget will be produced following an award of grant from Natural England. The Committee noted that the National Parks had received a letter from Jonathan Shaw for a grant award of 4.2%.

Up to the current time, Natural England have not given notification of a grant award and, therefore, two separate budgets have been prepared.

Budget A is based on several assumptions as laid out in the Report, including Natural England and the Local Authorities providing an inflation only increase of 2%.

Budget B indicates a cut in core funding of 1.4%, but reflects an overall decline by 19.8%. The position is set out on the assumption of no grant aid to support budgets.

### **Members Allowances:**

The figure for members allowances was frozen for three years from 2005. It is suggested that the allowance be increased in line with inflation (RPI), from £600 to £640. The car allowance will be increased as well. The mileage rate will remain the same, at 40p per mile, unless the Chancellor increases it in the March Budget.

Depending on what Natural England Offer, there will need to be a release of reserves.

The Committee agreed on the need to safeguard the Chalk Streams Project and this should be a priority in the budget. However, overall there will be cuts. The Sustainable Development Fund may be one area where cuts will be made. If there is no funding for projects, the SDF Panel will be disbanded.

SR commented that there could be ill-feeling among AONBs if their grant is not increased by the same as offered to the National Parks.

An invitation has been sent to the Minister, who is coming in March. David Coleman a senior officer from Defra arrives on 17 January 2008.

MW commented that getting funding direct from Defra and not through Natural England would be more beneficial to AONBs and that AONBs should lobby this point. Sir John explained that this had been raised with Defra but they did not wish to change the current arrangements.

SR explained that the worse case budget would require a release of up to £30,000 from reserves. KM suggested a threshold for reserves of, say, £60,000 over three years. It was agreed to prepare a treasury management strategy for consideration at the next Board meeting, to guide the use of reserves over a longer period. The Board would be asked to authorise release of up to £30,000 from reserves for 2008/09 only.

SR reported a positive meeting had been held with Natural England and the Environment Agency with regard to Chalk Streams. The EA was positive and would consider allocating additional resources if they had them available.

#### **RESOLVED:**

##### **The Committee AGREED**

- 1. to provisionally approve both budgets. A final budget will be prepared in the light of the grant aid offered by Natural England.**
- 2. to request a grant increase from Natural England and the local authorities of at least 2% to cover the Board's inflationary rise in costs.**
- 3. that staff Car Allowances are increased to cover inflation since April 2006.**
- 4. that members allowances are adjusted to cover inflation increases from January 2005.**
- 5. To review the role and members' allowances of the SDF panel in the light of Natural England's grant.**
- 6. to recommend that the Board creates a Reserves Policy which includes in principle the use of reserves to create a project support budget.**
- 7. To recommend to the Board that, subject to a successful bid for the LEADER programme, the Board encourages and assists directly applications to the LEADER fund for projects previously supported by the SDF.**
- 8. To offer space for commercial advertising or sponsorship on the Board's web site. This to cover all existing policies on advertising sponsorship.**
- 9. To request Natural England and local authorities to agree to a rolling three year funding agreement with effect from 2009.**

*11.30am. Sir John Johnson left the meeting. Cllr Bill Storey in the Chair.*

#### **7. WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to advise the Committee of progress to date.

The Committee noted that no progress had been made with regard to the Land Management fund due to grant aid cuts for 2007-08. Time constraints had hindered progress of the 'Making of the Chilterns Landscape' project.

The Chief Officer informed the Committee that new tables were being ordered for the meeting room at a cost of £1,500. These were being provided from a local furniture maker. The problem regarding damp at the back of the building had also been resolved.

**The Committee NOTED the Report.**

## **8. APPOINTMENT OF HR ADVISER**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to advise the Committee on the appointment of Sally Charman as HR Adviser to the Conservation Board.

The members of the Committee introduced themselves and welcomed Sally to the meeting.

**The Committee NOTED the appointment of Sally Charman as HR adviser to the Conservation Board.**

## **9. HR STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer and HR Adviser to the Board, the purpose of which was to:

1. Approve the draft statement on the HR Strategic direction of the Board
2. To advise the Committee to adopt the Health & Safety Policy with immediate effect.

The Committee agreed that the Health & Safety Statement was a priority. In answer to a question, it was noted that Values and behaviour were already in place and were incorporated in the strategic direction and that Diversity was covered in the Equality process.

Members agreed that the words 'fit for purpose' should be removed from the first paragraph of the HR Strategic Approach.

## **RESOLVED**

**The Committee AGREED to**

1. **approve the draft HR Strategic Direction statement.**
2. **investigate achievement of Investor in People status and to report to a future meeting of the Committee.**
3. **adopt the Health and Safety Policy with immediate effect**
4. **keep the policy under review and to make a report to the Board no less than biannually.**

## **10. PROGRESS REPORT ON ACHIEVING CARBON NEUTRALITY**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer and Planning Officer and noted the following:

- The Low Energy Scheme had been launched by Boris Johnson.

- The uptake on low energy bulbs for use in Parish Council buildings was good. The cost of providing them was less than anticipated. In the future, bulbs could also be supplied to other public buildings such as village halls and churches.
- The electricity contract runs out in 2009 and a green contract will be taken up.
- There will be another tree planting day on 16 January 2008 at Common Wood, near Penn.
- The Board could achieve carbon neutrality by 31 March 2008.

**The Committee NOTED progress and the anticipated achievement of carbon neutrality in 2008.**

## **11. WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS**

Members received the Report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to seek approval to create a budget for this programme.

The Committee was reminded of the resolution at the last Board meeting to form a sub group to consider ways to work more closely with parish councils. The Report contains the recommendations from the sub group.

Grants would be given to those Parish Councils who applied, on a one off basis. A condition could be written in that Parish Councils could not apply each year and that the project should, in some way, promote the work of the AONB. Guidance will be given on this. A precept exclusion was also suggested.

Grants of 100% for bids of £250 and under will be offered. For any bid over £250, matched funding will need to be provided. Up to £10,000 p.a. has been set aside for this project and has been built into the budget.

### **RESOLVED**

**Subject to confirmation of the final budget, the Committee AGREED to approve allocation of £10,000 in 2008-09 for the programme; £2,500 from the core budget and £7,500 to be released from the general reserve.**

## **12. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE SUBMISSION OF A BID FOR THE CHILTERNES TO LEADER PROGRAMME**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to seek confirmation of the Board's willingness to employ the project development officer for the Chilternes LEADER programme.

The Committee noted that the draft has been sent to SEEDA for comment. The final bid has to be submitted by 18 January 2008. Business Link is the accountable body but a Project Development Officer will need to be appointed. The Board has agreed to provide the Project Development Officer, which should not incur any liability other than the fact that financing will be in arrears. However, concern was expressed that there could be other costs, such as redundancy. The Chief Officer is to make sure all costs would be covered.

**The Committee confirmed the decision to employ the Chilternes LEADER Project Development Officer, subject to all costs being met by the LEADER programme.**

## **13. PROGRESS ON REVIEWING THE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Members received the report of the Chief officer, the purpose of which was to advise the Committee of progress.

The Board will need to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the impact of the contents of the revised Management Plan on the Special areas of Conservation. It was suggested that the next stage would be to set up two sub-groups to meet in February/March 2008, to look the policies and take an overview with regard to the Board's statutory purposes of Conserving and Enhancing Natural Beauty, and Promoting Understanding and Enjoyment of the area's special qualities.

**The Committee NOTED progress and the issuing of the SEA Scoping Report for public consultation.**

**The Committee AGREED to set up two sub groups of the Board to oversee the policy review.**

#### **14. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on Wednesday 27 February 2008 at 10.30am

Dates of future meetings are **(Please note changes in dates):**

22 May

16 September

10 December

**CHAIRMAN**