

### Chairman's introduction

**I am delighted to bring you details of our work and achievements from 2011/12 which, despite the harsh economic challenges facing the Cotswolds AONB and the Board, has been yet another year of which we can be very proud.**

The strategic context for the Board's work is provided by the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan which in turn links to our three-year Business Plan. Once again, the past year has been an extremely busy one where the Board has made much progress in a number of areas.

The dry-stone walling grant scheme, launched with National Grid, has enabled over 7km of Cotswold walls to be rebuilt or reinstated across the AONB, helping to restore some of our landscape's special features.

Our work on climate change progressed further with the appointment of a new climate change adviser to work with farms and rural businesses on ways to adapt to and help mitigate the impacts of climate change in the Cotswolds.

We were delighted to be awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. This prestigious award illustrates the commitment that we, our partners and the wider tourism industry have towards managing and delivering sustainable tourism in the Cotswolds.

The promotion of the AONB was greatly enhanced with the launch of two new websites, one focusing on our rural skills programme: [www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk), and the other on how to escape to and enjoy the Cotswolds to the full: [www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk](http://www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk). In addition, a new guide to the family of named routes that criss-cross the Cotswolds was published, reflecting why the area should be the 'walking capital' of the country. We are also pleased to have become a national pilot for Natural England as they explore the future funding and management arrangements for National Trails.

Once again, our voluntary wardens have done the Cotswolds proud by dedicating over 46,000 hours to conservation and promotion work across the AONB – another record year.

The following pages illustrate many other highlights from the year and demonstrate how the Board is delivering real value for money through effective schemes and working in partnership at the local level for the benefit of the AONB and all those who live, work and visit this very special place.

Jeff West, Chairman

### Message from our Patron

**The Cotswolds is undoubtedly a beautiful place, cherished by the many people who live, work and visit the area. Yet, like protected landscapes across the country, it is an area which faces many new challenges and pressures which, if ignored, can threaten the natural beauty and unique qualities that make this such a special and much-loved place.**

The Board's unique position of looking at the area as a whole is reflected throughout our work and offers many benefits to local communities, visitors and funders. By looking at the bigger AONB picture, the Board is well-placed to understand and communicate the wider environmental, social and economic benefits of such landscapes as well as grasp new opportunities and tackle new challenges as they arise.

Once again, I am proud of the work of everyone at the Board – staff, voluntary wardens and members – who have all helped to make 2011/12 another successful year. From its strategic planning and guidance through to the practical work undertaken on the ground, the Board and its many partners have helped to make a real difference to the landscape and communities of the Cotswolds AONB.

**The Lord Plumb of Coleshill, DL FRAGS, Patron**



# Looking back on 2011/12— a year to be proud of

## Highlights

- Through the **National Grid Dry-stone Walling Grant Scheme**, we provided funding for 75 dry-stone walling improvement projects, totalling nearly 7km of reinstated or rebuilt walls across the AONB. The average grant covered 45% of total costs, with match funding provided by landowners. The scheme has resulted in over £1million of investment in walling throughout the Cotswolds, leading to more than nine years' worth of work for local wallers.



2011/12 was a **record breaking year for the rural skills programme**. We provided training for 170 people in 19 courses across 10 different subjects - more than ever before. New courses such as Blacksmithing and Lime Mortar proved popular and the programme helped to support the Cotswolds rural skills industry by investing over £5,000 in local craftsmen and women tutors. A new website, [www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk) was launched providing comprehensive details of courses and competitions, and enabling easy online booking, the purchase of gift vouchers for courses, plus the ability for other providers to upload their own course details.

- A brand new website aimed at helping more people explore and enjoy the Cotswolds was launched. The new site, [www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk](http://www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk), is designed to provide a range of information on outdoor activities and places to visit, and allow other organisations to upload and promote their own events in the Cotswolds.
- In October and November, we attracted 28 hedgelayers and 20 dry-stone wallers to our **Annual Hedgelaying and Dry-stone Walling Competitions** along with hundreds of spectators who turned out to watch and support the participants.
- The first Cotswolds Deer Forum took place in January and was attended by over 30 woodland and local landowners. The aim of the forum was to raise awareness of the impacts of deer and what is needed to be done to reduce their impact.



Our Cotswold Voluntary Wardens once again broke records, dedicating nearly **47,000 voluntary hours** towards the aims of the Board. Around 67% of these hours were spent undertaking valuable conservation and enhancement work on the ground. A few examples of the type and amount of work carried out last year include:

- 18 grassland sites improved
  - 1,086 trees planted
  - 1,096 metres of dry-stone walls built
  - 111 kissing gates installed
  - 413 steps in banks constructed
  - 18 bridges constructed
  - 22,950m of paths and bridleways cleared
- The Cotswolds AONB **achieved the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas**. Presented at the annual EUROPARC Conference in Germany, the Charter is awarded to protected areas that can demonstrate they are supporting sustainable tourism that contributes to local economic development while conserving the area's natural and cultural resources.
  - We hosted a **new workshop on health and the natural environment** with the Local Government Group in September to increase our knowledge and understanding of how the natural environment can contribute to improved health and wellbeing of communities and individuals.
  - We continued to perform well on major planning application consultations with 15 out of 19 of our responses agreed and acted upon.
  - In line with the Board's guidance on renewable energy, there is now over 14MW of renewable energy generating capacity approved or constructed in the Cotswolds AONB.
  - The Board's Planning Officer provided expert evidence at two major planning appeals on behalf of Cotswold District Council.
  - We attracted **over 5,000 people on to 294 guided walks**, led by our wardens across the AONB. This represents a 16% increase over the previous year.

- A **new off-road mobility ‘tramper’ scheme** was launched at Crickley Hill Country Park in April 2011 to help people with limited mobility reach more areas of the countryside and enjoy the beauty of the Cotswold Way National Trail.
- We worked with Natural England, farmers and landowners to develop and submit **3 Higher Level Stewardship and 11 English Woodland Grant Scheme** applications, covering over 1,000 Ha and worth more than £93,000.
- We **appointed a climate change officer** in January 2012 for a new 2-year post funded through the National Grid Gas Pipeline Project. The new officer is working with farmers, landowners and rural businesses to develop, promote and implement viable climate change adaptation and mitigation best practice.
- Through our Sustainable Development Fund we gave **over £40,000 of financial support to nine schemes** at locations throughout the AONB, worth over £170,000 and ranging from education projects and sustainable woodland development, to renewable energy and habitat conservation.
- Our Annual Forum held in March, entitled ‘Ecological networks – joining forces for nature’ attracted over 70 delegates. The keynote speaker was Professor Sir John Lawton, author of Making Space for Nature.



Simon Smith

Thirty pupils from Rose Hill Primary School in Oxford enjoyed a day of fun and learning out of the classroom and in the Cotswolds countryside, as part of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens’ educational programme for the AONB. The pupils, aged nine and ten years, visited the Old Farm in Dorn, Moreton-in-Marsh, to learn about and experience first-hand life on a traditional farm and find out where much of their food comes from. In 2011/12 our voluntary wardens worked with 30 schools to enable over 1,000 children to take part in and enjoy countryside-based educational activities.

- In partnership with the Friends of the Cotswolds, the Board submitted a tender to Cotswold District Council to purchase the grade II\* listed Old Prison at Northleach and develop a vibrant visitor centre including the Rural Life Collection housed there.



The Cotswold Way teamed up with South Korea’s Jeju Olle National Trail to become one of the world’s first ‘friendship trails’ to promote understanding and walking. This saw the creation of a new circular route along the Cotswold Way around Stinchcombe Hill signed with special markers promoting the South Korea links and launched in April 2011 (pictured). Similarly, a section of Jeju Olle now features the familiar oak signposts seen along the Cotswold Way.

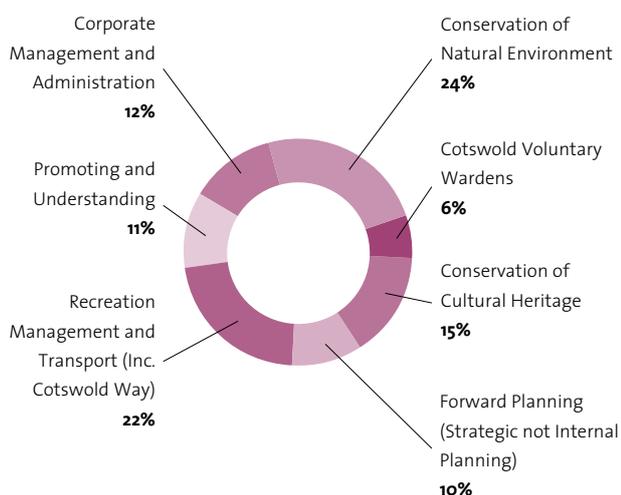
- We were delighted to be invited by VisitEngland to organise and **host a visit to the Cotswolds by Tourism & Heritage Minister** John Penrose MP and VisitEngland Chief Executive James Berresford to meet with industry representatives and explore the potential for developing a Cotswold-wide approach to tourism management.
- The Cotswold Way: A three year framework was published to guide the management and development of the Cotswold Way until 2014.
- A new guide to the family of long-distance named routes across the Cotswolds was published.
- The **Cotswolds AONB secured a pilot for Natural England** to explore the future funding and management arrangements for National Trails.
- The review process for the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2008/13 began with a number of well-attended thematic workshops held with stakeholders from across the AONB.
- **Our online activity increased significantly** with a total 65,000 unique visits to our 3 websites, plus over 97,000 visits to the Cotswold Way website. Over 10,000 AONB walking and cycle routes were downloaded during the year.
- We published and distributed 110,000 copies of the Cotswold Lion newspaper, and opened it up to advertisers for the first time, **attracting £1,000 worth of revenue** for the Spring/Summer 2012 edition.
- We saw the development of the Cotswolds Ecological Network Partnership and two Nature Improvement Areas for the Cotswolds based on the scarp and river valleys, supported by the success at stage 1 of the ‘Magnificent Meadows’ Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

## Unaudited Summary Financial Statement 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012

	2010/11 Restated*	2011/12
	£	£
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>1,078,807</b>	<b>995,125</b>
Project Delivery	949,718	871,994
Corporate Management and Administration	136,233	137,010
Interest Receivable	(7,144)	(13,879)
<b>Income</b>	<b>(1,403,995)</b>	<b>(1,023,184)</b>
DEFRA	0	(519,383)
Natural England	(747,548)	(135,804)
Local Authorities	(176,487)	(171,972)
National Grid	(400,000)	(96,000)
Other	(79,960)	(100,025)
<b>Surplus for Year</b>	<b>(325,188)</b>	<b>(28,059)</b>
<b>Surplus for the Year after Movement on Reserves</b>	<b>(4,492)</b>	<b>(90,980)</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>		
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets	752,873	715,328
	752,873	715,328
Less: Current Liabilities	(175,070)	(109,466)
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>577,803</b>	<b>605,862</b>
<b>Financed by</b>		
General Fund Balance	118,925	209,905
Earmarked Reserves	458,878	395,957
	<b>577,803</b>	<b>605,862</b>

\*Restated to take account of changes arising from the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 removing the requirement to apply annual valuations to the pension fund. A valuation is carried out every three years.

## Expenditure 2011/12



## Looking forward to 2012/13

Some of our key priorities for the year ahead include:

- Completing and publishing the Board's Climate Change Strategy.
- Broadening the range of rural skills courses delivered and developing the market for corporate courses.
- Realising opportunities to undertake landscape scale habitat restoration and recreation projects.
- Developing a new 5-year management plan to run from March 2013 and revising the Board's business planning accordingly.
- Working with Natural England and local authorities to look at ways the Board can use its in-house expertise to help deliver other services on their behalf.
- Delivering the Sustainable Tourism Strategy in partnership with key stakeholders.
- Developing ideas to help deliver the health and well-being benefits of the AONB to a wider audience.
- Developing a better Cotswolds specific evidence base. Working towards the publication of a state of the Cotswolds report.
- Identifying ways to turn the concepts behind ecosystem services into real action on the ground.
- Developing merchandise, trademark licensing and online sales.
- Identifying ways to reduce the Board's operating costs.
- Developing a bid for a new Leader programme for the Cotswolds AONB.
- Delivering a new National Trail pilot in collaboration with Natural England.
- Researching and delivering enhanced communications activities.
- Realising the vision of a new vibrant visitor centre at the heart of the Cotswolds.



**Cotswold Way  
NATIONAL TRAIL**



[www.nationaltrail.co.uk/cotswold](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/cotswold)

### Cotswolds Conservation Board

Fosse Way, Northleach, Gloucestershire GL54 3JH  
Tel: 01451 862000  
Email: [info@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](mailto:info@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)