

Welcome from our Chairman

Welcome to our 2013/14 Annual Review which has been another busy year for the Board, its staff, members and voluntary wardens. I am always heartened and immensely proud of the quantity and quality of work undertaken by everyone at the Board, despite our limited resources.

We were delighted to hear that the national Plantlife-led project, of which the Board is a partner, was successful in its £3million bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in February. This conservation project to save our wonderful wildflower grasslands and meadows is the first of its kind for HLF and we are particularly looking forward to seeing it take shape in the Cotswolds AONB over the next three years.

The development of a Destination Management Plan for the Cotswolds, in partnership with local authorities, was a huge step forward for us all in moving towards a more coordinated approach to delivering a sustainable visitor economy across the area. Our continued work with tourism bodies and the industry is proving fruitful with the launch of a visitor giving scheme to help raise valuable funds for important conservation projects and enhance the links between visitors and the natural environment.

We are seeing particularly challenging times with the reduction in funding for agri-environment schemes as part of the CAP reform. This could significantly undermine the investment made over the last 20 years to the development of wildlife and landscape-friendly farming across the AONB. Similarly challenging is the increase in numbers of major planning applications being submitted to us for consultation amidst the background of the National Planning Policy Framework. The adoption of our new 5-year Management Plan last year and its endorsement by many of our local authorities is therefore particularly timely and welcome, as the need for planning authorities to have regard for the protected status of the Cotswolds becomes even more imperative.

Once again our voluntary wardens have surpassed themselves, achieving tremendous results on the ground despite it being one of the wettest winters on record. They are an integral part of the conservation board and my heartfelt thanks goes out to them all.

The Revd Jeff West OBE FSA, Chairman

Message from our Patron

The Lord Plumb of Coleshill, DL FRAGS, Patron

We pride ourselves on taking the wider AONB landscape view, looking further afield beyond the immediate boundaries. Against a background of restrained budgets and stretched resources, this ability to take a broader perspective and bring together partnerships helps us achieve greater benefits for our local communities, economy and the environment.

Our initial success with the development of a LEADER project for the Cotswolds demonstrates the importance of partnership working and highlights how we can achieve much more by working to common goals rather than in our independent silos. Similarly our work with local authorities and businesses on a new plan for tourism in the Cotswolds is helping to pave the way towards achieving sustainable growth across the area and maximising the opportunities for all concerned. And the launch of a new visitor giving scheme reinforces the vital links between businesses, visitors and the environment.

A healthy environment is of course what we strive to achieve, not only from a landscape perspective but for the benefit of those who live, work in and visit the area. We seek to encourage more people to explore and enjoy our wonderful countryside whether for education, health and well-being or simply relaxation. As our landscape faces even greater threats from development and climate change, we must continue to work together to ensure that future generations can have the same opportunities as us to enjoy this very green and pleasant land.

The Lord Plumb of Coleshill, DL FRAGS, Patron



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.

Looking back on 2013/14

Conserving and enhancing: working towards an outstanding landscape

Saving our Magnificent Meadows

The Board was successful in its joint bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to receive funding for the restoration of, and engagement of people in wildflower-rich grasslands in the Cotswolds.

Save Our Magnificent Meadows is the first national biodiversity heritage project funded by the HLF, and the Cotswolds Conservation Board is one of 10 national partners in the Plantlife-led project. The Cotswolds element of the project will focus on the restoration of flower-rich limestone grasslands within the Cotswold Scarp and Cotswold River Valleys Nature Improvement Areas.

Setting of Bath Landscape Partnership

A Stage I project bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnerships Programme was prepared in conjunction with Bath and North East Somerset Council and other key partners. This bid is seeking up to £3 million to conserve and enhance the setting of the World Heritage Site of Bath and ensure everyone in the city can easily access and benefit from its surrounding landscape.

Breaking records in traditional skills

The Cotswolds Rural Skills Programme once again enjoyed record numbers of participants in a growing number of courses offered in traditional crafts and skills, including dry stone walling, hedgelaying, woodland management, blacksmithing, lime mortar and Cotswold tile roofing. Forty courses were provided in total for 343 people, representing a 49% increase over the previous year and setting a new record for the programme. Last year the Board gained status as an approved LANTRA training provider. Attaining LANTRA status enabled the Board to deliver four accredited courses in the maintenance and use of brushcutters in 2013-14. The inaugural course of the Cotswolds Dry-stone Walling Academy was held in March 2014. Located in the paddock of the Old Prison in

Northleach, a total of 5 trainees took part in a LANTRA Level 2 (intermediate) course requiring trainees to build 2.5 metres of dry stone wall. Last year also saw the first corporate team-building course, providing a unique experience for the first corporate team from Ikea to try their hand at dry stone walling. The annual Dry Stone Walling and Hedgelaying Competitions were held with 13 and 31 competitors taking part respectively.

Conserving the landscape by our Voluntary Wardens

The 300+ Cotswold Voluntary Wardens once again donated many thousands of hours to help look after the AONB and its extensive public rights of way network for the benefit and enjoyment of others. Last year, despite it being the wettest winter on record, they achieved near record levels, dedicating over 45,000 hours for the AONB. Just some of their achievements included: 40 flower-rich grassland sites improved; over 31,000 sq metres of woodland coppiced; 312m of streams and ditches cleared; 913m of hedgerow laid; 754 hedge trees/shrubs planted; 798m of walling built; and 3168 miles of paths patrolled.

Undergrounding our overhead wires

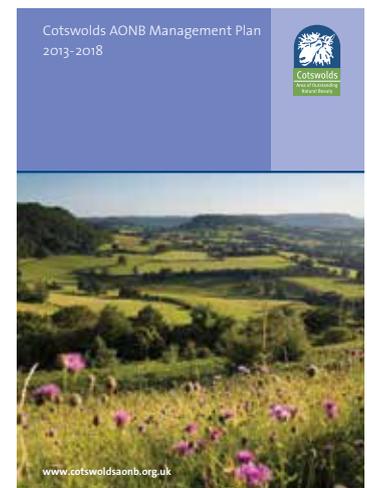
Overhead electricity wires and pylons are an unfortunate blight on many landscapes. Here in the Cotswolds, the Board has been working closely with electricity distributors to bury the worst examples of these wires underground. Last year over 2.5km of cables and 41 poles were removed at Lansdown in Bath whilst at Chedworth 1.5km of power lines and 22 poles were removed and replaced with underground cables. More undergrounding schemes are under consideration as part of an Ofgem-funded initiative in AONBs and National Parks.

Planning and development: helping others to make the right decisions

Providing strategic guidance

In 2013/14 the Board published the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2013-2018. The new 5-year statutory plan sets out the vision for the Cotswolds AONB over the coming years and provides a policy framework to help guide the work of the Board and partner organisations.

Since the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by Government two years ago, the Board has witnessed a gradual expansion of development within the AONB with increasing numbers of major applications being submitted for residential developments.



The Board is concerned 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. Arrangements were made for the Board's Chairman to meet with Nick Boles, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Planning, and Lord de Mauley, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science to discuss these concerns. In this context it is of concern to the Board that only one local planning authority with responsibility for housing development in the AONB (South Gloucestershire) has an adopted Local Plan/Core Strategy. The Board also sought to clarify with Ministers the definition of major development with respect to paragraph 116 of the NPPF.

In 2013/14, the Board submitted detailed comments on 46 planning applications. Of these, 70% of decisions were made in line with the Board's comments.

Formal comments were submitted by the Board on 26 consultations with respect to local authorities core strategies/ local plans, to ensure that the protection of the AONB was fully addressed in such plans. Other documents the Board was consulted on include the Government's Restructuring of English Heritage; Planning Guidance; Draft National Planning Statement plus National Grid's Draft Visual Enhancement Guidelines.

The Board's Annual Forum was held in Moreton-in-Marsh and attended by 90 delegates from a range of organisations, parish councils and local authorities. The theme was *Planning and Development in the AONB* and delegates listened to a range of interesting presentations by speakers from organisations including CPRE, Home Builders Federation and Gloucestershire Rural Communities Council.

Climate change: providing guidance for rural businesses and landowners

With National Grid funding, the Board continued to deliver its Climate Change Advisory Service through practical support and advice offered to local businesses and landowners. In 2013, the Board launched a project demonstration fund to increase awareness of climate change issues and demonstrate best practice. The scheme culminated in March 2014, having delivered the following results over two years:

- 13 whole farm carbon footprint audits providing useful baselines for farms to improve their business and make the transition towards a low carbon economy.



Improving business for farmers.

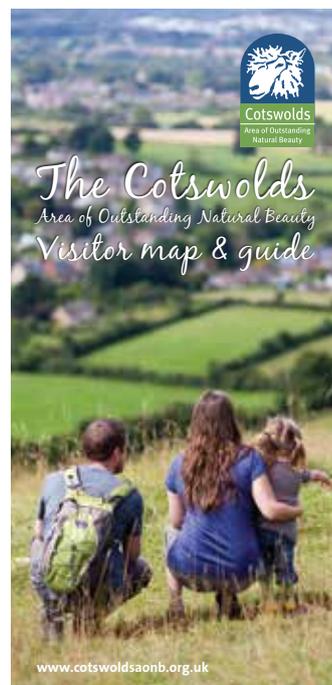
- 20 mitigation projects saving over 500 tonnes of CO₂. These included solar PV and thermal installations, biomass installations and ground source heat pumps.
- Over 70 adaptation schemes including field margin buffer strips, improved farm buildings, GPS precision farming, soil improvement schemes, tree and hedge planting plus rain harvesting installations.
- 6 climate change demonstration projects funded through the new grant scheme, delivering projects worth £272k, resulting in savings of more than 34 tonnes of carbon per annum and £19,000 in annual energy costs.

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

Getting our messages out

The Board provides a range of information in many different formats to help people understand, appreciate and enjoy the Cotswolds AONB. Last year we achieved the following:

- Produced 2 editions of the popular Cotswold Lion newspaper and distributed 110,000 copies across the Cotswolds and beyond with nearly £2.4k worth of advertising revenue generated.
- The Board's suite of websites and social media channels continued to see increasing levels of traffic with over 230,000 visits made – an increase of 41% over the previous year. Our followers on Twitter rose to 3,631.
- Through the distribution of 32 press releases as well as responses to a large number of media enquiries, a great deal of press and media coverage was achieved for the Board and the AONB, including interviews on BBC TV's Countryfile. Cotswold Life magazine continued to feature walks in the AONB and, in January 2014 began its monthly feature spread on the special qualities of the AONB with a focus on Cotswolds limestone and geology, river valleys and the escarpment during the first three months.
- A new publication – *Cotswolds AONB Visitor Map & Guide* – was produced and 25k copies distributed.
- The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens attended 31 shows, fetes, talks and other events, while the Board's exhibition trailer was displayed at four country shows.



Educating our youngsters



Children from Ashton under Hill School, Worcestershire with Voluntary Warden.

Encouraging schoolchildren out of the classroom and into the countryside is the basis on which the voluntary wardens' educational work is built. Last year, the wardens worked with 921 children from 14 schools on activities such as visits to farms, gardens and the organisation of 'wild days'.

Improving access to the countryside

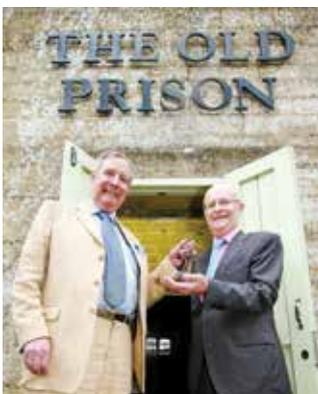
With an extensive network of footpaths and public rights of way, plus a diverse terrain and topography, the Cotswolds is perfect for people of all abilities to explore and enjoy the countryside. Last year the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens delivered a significant number of access improvements including installing and repairing 104 metres of handrails, 145 gates, 260 steps, 40 boardwalks, as well as leading 275 free guided walks which were attended by 4,112 people.



As a result of funding and management changes with National Trails, the Cotswold Way saw the development of a new system of monitoring and maintenance, as well as a new website for the family of National Trails

The Cotswolds Trails and Access Partnership was established to manage the Cotswold Way and coordinate promotion of other long distance paths across the Cotswolds.

Securing the Old Prison



Cllr Barry Dare (left) hands over the keys to the Old Prison to Friends of the Cotswolds Chairman, Simon Randall.

The future of the Old Prison at Northleach was secured by the Friends of the Cotswolds who purchased the Grade II* listed building from Cotswold District Council in July 2013. Since then, there has been an enormous effort to begin the transformation of the site into a vibrant visitor centre and an asset for the local community. The Cotswold Lion Café opened in November proving very popular with local residents, visitors and groups to the

area, and supported by a lively programme of events and activities including music, talks, walks, tours, food and craft fairs.

A Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund was submitted at the end of the year. The total project value is £5million, of which £3.3million is being requested from HLF. The application focuses on renewing the existing galleries, developing new interpretation, creating new exhibitions and running a comprehensive programme of educational activities.

Improving health and well-being

Links with health and well-being boards across the Cotswolds were established through attendance at partnership meetings, the development and distribution of a position statement on health and well-being in the AONB and receiving growing interest in the idea of a Cotswolds Health & Countryside Partnership.

A pilot project to demonstrate the contribution that access to the natural environment can make to tackling health inequalities for those living both within and adjacent to the AONB was developed for consideration by local authority partners.

Living, working and visiting: encouraging a more a sustainable future

Supporting local communities

The Cotswolds AONB Sustainable Development Fund awarded nearly £50,000 of funding to support 12 local community schemes and projects worth over £292,000 in total. Projects included habitat protection, canal restoration, village hall rebuild, arts and education, cycle route development and promotion, a new heating system for a visitor information centre, plus an eco-friendly camping pod scheme providing low-cost accommodation along part of the Cotswold Way.

Supporting sustainable travel

The Cotswolds Discoverer was launched in March 2014 at the start of English Tourism Week, following a successful 2-year pilot for the integrated bus and rail ticketing scheme. The event was well attended and supported by Cotswold MP Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

The fourteenth edition of the Explore the Cotswolds by Public Transport guide was published, providing easy access to bus and rail timetable information across the Cotswolds AONB.



Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP launches the Discoverer with Teresa Ceessay, First Great Western; Jo Burgon, CCB and Andy Pulham, Pulhams Coaches.

Developing sustainable tourism



Launching the Cotswolds Visitor Giving Scheme.

The new Cotswolds Visitor Giving Scheme was launched in July with its first two tourism businesses to sign up – Manor Cottages and Notgrove Holidays. In just six months, over £3,000 had been raised thanks to the generosity of

visitors and the businesses themselves. Two conservation projects were supported through the scheme in January. With a grant of £500, the World Land Trust carried out woodland coppicing work at the Kites Hill nature reserve near Painswick Beacon providing many benefits for a variety of plants, insects and birds. Four new interpretation boards were also installed along the woodland trail as part of the project. With a similar grant the Cotswolds Rivers Trust installed flow deflectors in the River Coln near Bibury to vary the depth in the riverbed providing habitat for invertebrates and fish including the brown trout – an iconic species of the Cotswolds.

The Our Land sustainable tourism initiative continued to grow well in the Cotswolds with 130 businesses signed up to the scheme and over 160 exciting products featured on the

website www.our-land.co.uk. The Cotswolds network of business was supported through a number of events including themed landscape walks and a photography workshop.

The Board worked in close partnership with local authorities and tourism organisations to develop and launch the Cotswolds Destination Management Plan in February. This new plan for the area, developed in full consultation with the industry, is based on achieving sustainable tourism growth of 5% and moving the Cotswolds up from sixth position to third in the VisitEngland list of top performing destinations.

Securing resources for our local economy

The Board's request for preparatory funding to support the development of a new LEADER (Rural Development Programme Funding) group to cover the Cotswolds AONB and Cotswold Water Park was successful and agreed in full at £17,848. The LEADER programme will focus on rural economic growth and employment opportunities.

The Economic Value of the Cotswolds AONB report was published and well-received by local enterprise partnerships and business groups.

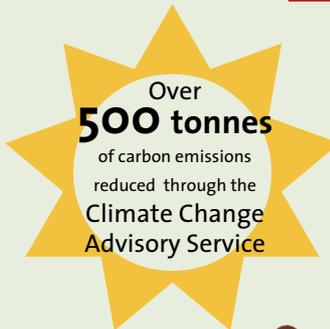
A series of new ideas and approaches was pitched to Defra during a visit to the Cotswolds by Lord de Mauley, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science.

How we made a difference in 2013/14



£292,437 worth of community projects supported through the

Sustainable Development Fund



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



Cotswold Lion Café successfully trading in surplus within 5 months

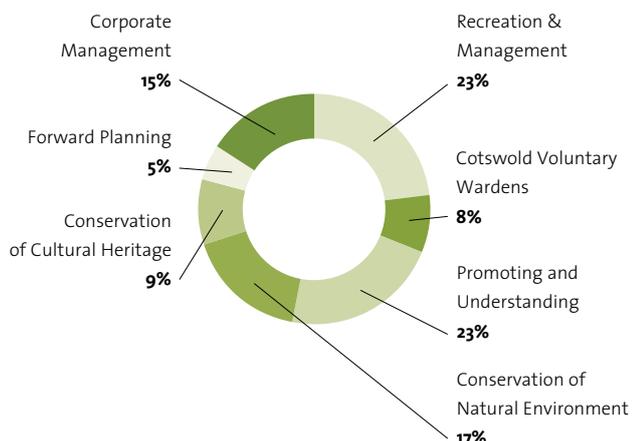


Unaudited Summary Financial Statement 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014

	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
Expenditure	1,012,621	988,816
Project Delivery	866,041	789,489
Corporate Management and Administration	146,580	148,914
Agency Operational Agreement	0	50,413
Income	(927,248)	(883,290)
DEFRA	(502,125)	(460,307)
Natural England	(143,804)	(108,143)
Local Authorities	(154,953)	(152,395)
Other	(126,366)	(162,445)
(Surplus)/Deficit for Year	85,373	105,526
(Surplus)/Deficit for the Year after Movement on Reserves	(24,034)	(14,384)
Balance Sheet		
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets	714,673	559,482
	714,673	559,482
Less: Current Liabilities	(194,184)	(144,519)
Total Net Assets	520,489	414,963
Financed by		
General Fund Balance	233,939	248,324
Earmarked Reserves	286,550	217,052
Accumulated Deficit on Agency Operational Agreement	0	(50,413)
	520,489	414,963

The Board's income fell in 2013/14 by nearly £44,000 as a result of reductions in funding from DEFRA and Natural England. Overall expenditure reduced by £23,800. The Board's earmarked reserves fell as National Grid grant was spent up, while the Board's General Fund increased as a result of efficiency savings. During the year, the Board entered into an Agency Operational Agreement with the Friends of the Cotswolds to operate the café and visitor attractions at The Old Prison, Northleach. Set-up costs of £50,413 will be recovered from future surpluses on the operation. A full Statement of Accounts is available on the Board's website.

Expenditure 2013/14



Looking forward to 2014/15

- Developing the Cotswolds AONB LEADER bid for the benefit of the rural economy.
- Growing the Cotswolds Visitor Giving Scheme and encouraging more tourism businesses to participate.
- Working with local authorities as they produce and publish their core strategies and local plans.
- Implementing the Save our Magnificent Meadows project in the Cotswolds.
- Continuing to develop the Old Prison at Northleach into a vibrant visitor centre. Subject to success at Stage 1, implement the development stage of a £5m HLF bid.
- Launching the Cotswolds Dry Stone Walling Academy.
- Implementing the Setting of Bath Landscape Partnership project, subject to success at Stage 1 of a £4m HLF bid.
- Working with health and well-being boards to promote the benefits and encourage wider use of the Cotswolds natural environment.
- Working with tourism authorities on setting up a new destination management partnership for the Cotswolds.
- Continuing to support local communities through the Sustainable Development Fund.
- Developing a new communications plan for the Board.
- Continuing to develop and expand the Cotswolds Discoverer scheme with local operators.
- Continuing to support our Voluntary Wardens in their work for the AONB.
- Working with electricity distributors to bury more overhead wires underground and assessing the opportunity with National Grid to bury high voltage lines underground.
- Supporting the promotion and co-ordination of recreational routes across the Cotswolds.
- Assessing 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

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