

Chilterns Conservation Board Annual Review 2022/23



Welcome from our chairman

Welcome to the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) annual review 2022/23, reporting on our work to conserve and enhance the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

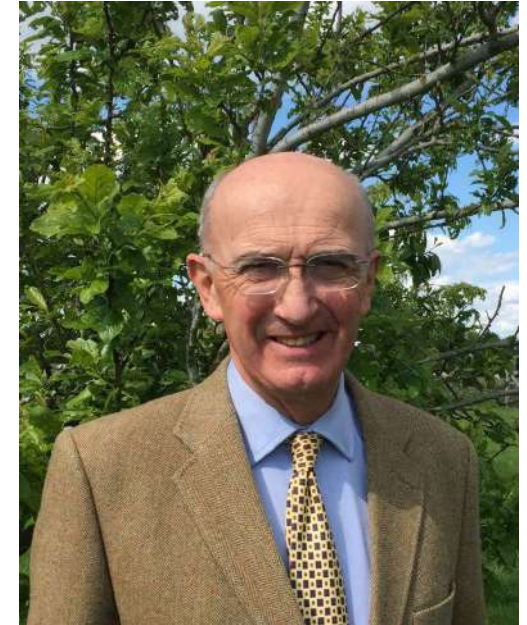
The Chilterns AONB continues to face many challenges, particularly from increased development pressures but also the continued construction of HS2, the increasing pressure on our precious chalk streams as well as the wider effects of pollution, habitat loss and invasive species. Though there are opportunities, not least the growing awareness of the value of our protected landscapes and the wider concerns around climate change and nature recovery. It is with this in mind that I am delighted to have initiated a project to develop a 25-year forward vision for our vulnerable landscape. I want this to be a key reference for the future and to ensure that the Board retains its leadership in the debate. We are now working with partners towards developing both the vision and future governance arrangements to benefit the Chilterns AONB.

I also want to thank the staff for their continued hard work and dedication. Over the past year the Board has faced some challenging times, from dealing with the aftereffects of Covid-19 to exiting staff members and the challenges that brings. The whole team has taken this in its stride and continues to go above and beyond to deliver for the Chilterns landscape. It is also important for me to welcome the new people, at all levels, who have joined the CCB family and to thank them for the big impact they are already having on our work.

I would also like to celebrate the fantastic progress being made on our flagship projects. You will see throughout this review the impressive volume of work now being delivered. From the £100,000 committed to enhancement projects in Reading and Didcot through the Mend the Gap programme, to the fantastic Tracking the Impact volunteers who picked up the prestigious Marsh Award for Local Ornithology as part of the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership.

I will close by saying that this will be my last update as chairman, as I will be stepping down in June 2023, although I will remain on the Board.

The Board and staff team will continue to work hard to care for our special landscape so that we can continue to enjoy and appreciate it now and for generations to come.



A handwritten signature in black ink, likely of Paul Mainds BEM, written in a cursive style.

Paul Mainds BEM,
Chairman

A note from our CEO

Thank you for taking the time to read our annual review. As I have read through this report, it's been amazing to see the great achievements and progress that has been made – all within a year. We know the work we're doing, but to see it documented in this report has made me pause and reflect on the outstanding work that has been achieved this year – I say it often, but I truly am grateful for our staff team and Board members, without whom none of this would have been possible.

Some of the highlights from this year include the revamped Chess Valley Walk – the Chilterns' most popular walking trail, which now has a new set of information boards, way markers and improved footpaths. We were also delighted to help deliver government funding that will improve access to businesses and attractions across the Chilterns. From disabled toilets to off-road transport, there have been many wonderful improvements that will benefit all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

We were also pleased to continue working with Chilterns farmers and landowners on delivering the government's Farming in Protected Landscapes initiative, which will create more habitats for nature to thrive, protect more species, and create more spaces for people to access and enjoy the countryside.

As reported in last year's review, we were delighted to work closely with Natural England towards a formal review of the Chilterns boundary. This is significant work that will ensure both the protection for even more of our precious landscape and enable more people to feel directly involved. We look forward to sharing more details on what that might look like in 2024.

You will see as you read through this report that we are on our way to achieving great things, but we recognise we have a way to go and there are many challenges to be faced. However, we will continue with our momentum and never stop caring for, and protecting, our precious Chilterns landscape.

Elaine King



Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer

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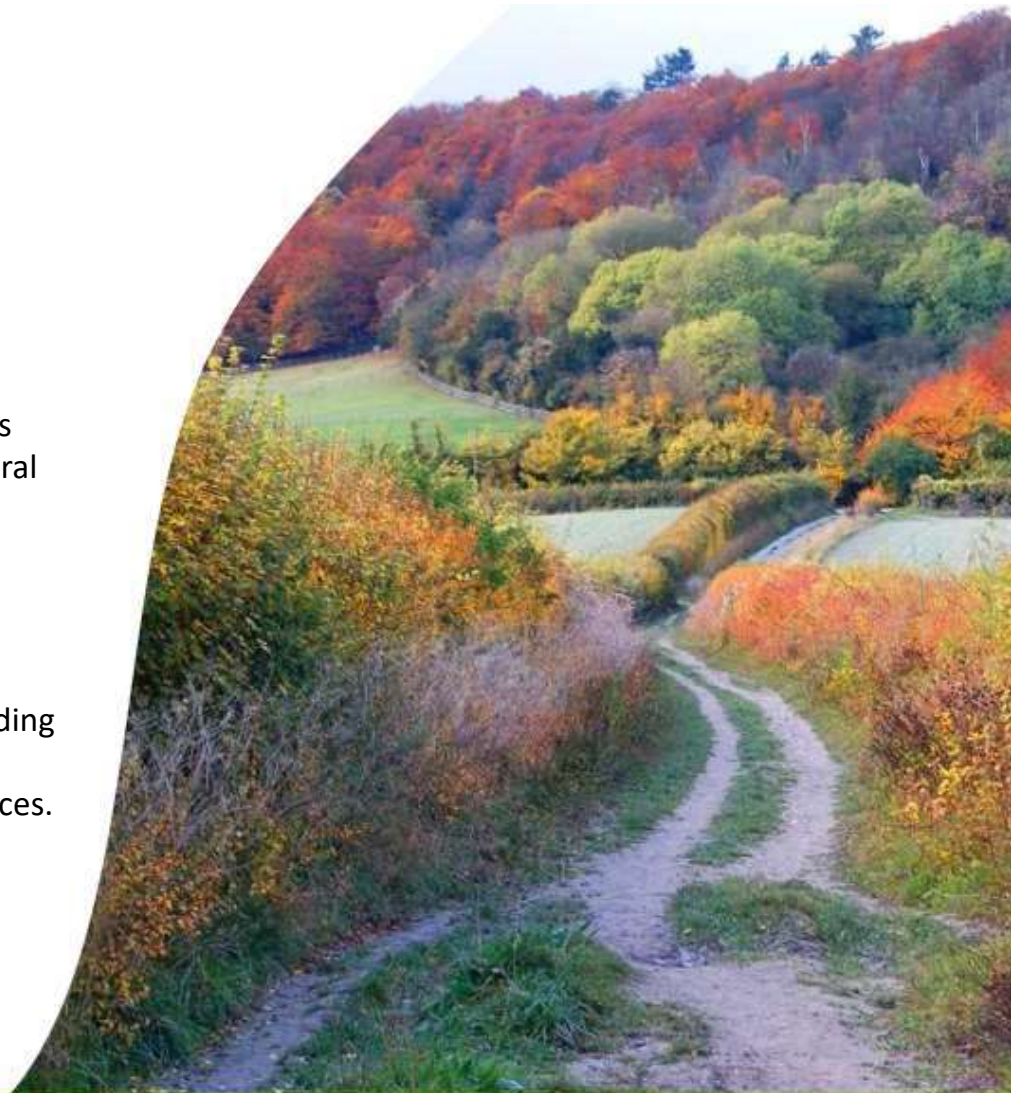
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Future-proofing the Chilterns AONB

A new future for the Chilterns AONB: boundary extension

In June 2021, after over a decade of CCB activity and a flurry of activity around the government's landscapes review (Glover 2019), Natural England committed resources to working with us on both a boundary extension and exploring enhanced management and governance arrangements for the Chilterns.

Natural England appointed Land Use Consultants (LUC) at the end of 2022 to carry out an assessment of 'natural beauty' for potential areas to be included in the AONB. In spring 2023 LUC undertook a series of visits to survey areas and prepared a report for review. We hope this report will help identify boundary change proposals that can be submitted for formal and public consultation between spring and summer 2024.

We have also been working with Natural England to explore how we might enhance our management and governance arrangements. There is a big overlap between this and both CCB's internal governance review and Defra's implementation of the wider recommendations of the Glover review (see next page). The project could put CCB in the frontline for a new model of governance for protected landscapes that could result in better outcomes – and certainly better value for money – than National Park status.

[Find out more on our website](#)



Key things to note

- Combination of CCB's governance review, Defra's response to Glover and the new project with Natural England could be a better outcome than being a National Park.
- Natural England are managing the review of the AONB boundary and have appointed Land Use Consultants to assess the natural beauty of potential areas to be added to the AONB.

A new future for the Chilterns AONB: the Glover review of protected landscapes

January saw the publication of the government's long-awaited response to the landscapes review (Glover 2019) with an accompanying consultation. The review paid particular attention to the Chilterns due to the AONB's scale and complexity, proximity to major urban areas and pressures for development, and we have actively engaged with Defra, in partnership with the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), as proposals have been worked up. Nonetheless, the proposals put forward by government did not match the ambition for transformational change embodied in Glover's recommendations.

Our response to the consultation supported that of the NAAONB, adding local examples and emphasising the issues faced both by Conservation Boards (under-recognised in the government's response) and by landscapes in high pressure areas. Our response focused on the measures necessary to support Glover's Proposal 24 – that AONBs be “strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources”, and made the case that protected landscapes are critical components of the nation's social, economic and environmental infrastructure, as highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

[Read more about our submission to the Glover review consultation](#)



Key things to note

The discussion will carry on. Nothing that the Glover review proposed, or was proposed in the government's response, has been carried across into the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill (May 2022), including the reforms to planning law that are critical to the future management of protected landscapes. Watch this space.



Our flagship projects

*Collaborative and ongoing action for
the nature, heritage and communities of the Chilterns
landscape.*

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: Landscape Partnership



An overview of Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership

The Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership has continued apace between April 2022 and March 2023.

As we approach the end of the scheme in 2024, while high quality delivery across the three themes of wildlife, heritage and people continues, focus moves to sharing lessons learned and driving legacy beyond the life and area of the project.



In June 2022 we were delighted that Chilterns farmer Andrew Stubbings received Local Wildlife Site status for his 225-hectare farm, Manor Farm, on the National Trust's Bradenham Estate.

Izzy Bassick
Trainee Ranger



Jack Derrick
Trainee Ranger



We supported partner Chiltern Rangers to recruit two trainee rangers for a year. They are now a crucial part of the CR team, working with volunteers in the local community.



Our second cohort of 'New Shoots' took to the Chilterns to learn about conservation, the environment and some new practical skills.

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: wildlife and nature in summary

- Farmer cluster working toward Community Interest Company and new Landscape Recovery application.
- Collaborative chalk grassland cut/remove project and chalk grassland conservation grazing project.
- Lessons learned in Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategy Big Chalk.
- New farmer cluster being rolled out in the north Chilterns and support for new cluster in Chess Valley.
- BBOWT continue to deliver training, support and guidance to a variety of community groups and orchards, such as grassland management, networks of ponds and ditches, wildlife habitat days and more.
- Support on national JNCC working group looking at localised citizen science projects.
- [Water in a dry landscape](#) chalk stream work expansion along chalk escarpment with RTCT.
- Move into regenerative farming training and support package for farmers.
- Our partner Chiltern Rangers opened their new community tree nursery, supported by CCC – based off Winchmore Hill in High Wycombe. Chiltern Rangers staff and volunteers will grow native trees and shrubs from seeds harvested throughout the Chilterns.
- [Tracking the Impact](#) collected the prestigious BTO Marsh Award for Local Ornithology.



Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: a spotlight on our farmer cluster hedgerow project

Overview

The Chalk, Cherries and Chairs team has been working with 18 farmers in the [Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster](#), to help plan and deliver landscape scale habitat creation and restoration projects.

Objectives

The project had multiple objectives including:

- **Biodiversity:** maintaining, enhancing and creating new hedgerow habitat for wildlife.
- **Climate:** carbon sequestration and reduction of surface run-off.
- **Place:** reinforcing and enhancing the quality and character of the landscape.

Key outcomes

Over the three-year project, some fantastic results have been achieved, including:

- Over 15,000m of hedge planted.
- Over 5000m of hedge coppiced.
- Over 300 hedgerow trees planted.
- 350m hedge laid.
- 18,000m of fencing to protect from cattle and deer.
- £275,000 partnership funding generated.



Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: a focus on Tracking the Impact

Overview:

Together with the Butterfly Conservation, British Trust for Ornithology, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, BMERC, BBOWT and Plantlife, the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs team developed this landscape-scale wildlife surveying programme across the central Chilterns area. The four-year project has created new surveying opportunities, not only for experienced surveyors but also for the next generation, through a species ID and survey training package.

Key outcomes:



93 out of a possible 150 survey squares covered, with 220 volunteers engaged and 130 trained. Project expanded into Chess Valley, working in partnership with the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment project.



3237 records of 335 species, layered with data from previous years onto our new online map of records to date, seen below – this will build a picture year-on-year - chilternsaonb.org/trackingtheimpact



80 owl boxes made, installed and monitored.
5 years of farm bird surveys completed.
3 years winter bird ringing on five farms.
3 years of farm reptile surveys completed.



Award winners!

In October 2022, we were delighted when Tracking the Impact volunteers picked up the Award for Local Ornithology at the prestigious Marsh Awards, organised by the British Trust for Ornithology.

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: heritage

CHILTERN'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CONFERENCE

Celebrating the work, skills and crafts of Chilterns women



CONFERENCE GUIDE

Weds 8th March Missenden Abbey 9am-6pm

Key note speaker - Panel discussions - Craft demos
Book and craft shop - Networking - Exhibitions - Guided walks



A highlight this year was our one-day conference to celebrate the working women of the Chilterns for International Women's Day on Wednesday 8 March 2023 at Missenden Abbey.

The conference was an inspiring day celebrating the women who excelled in some of the traditional crafts, skills and work found in the Chilterns AONB – where the record books tell us the development of a modern local economy was driven by the men of the High Wycombe furniture trade, agricultural merchants, and landowning farmers.

The lives and critical importance of contributions made by the working women in this area have often been overlooked.

From weavers and sculptors, to historians and policy makers, we hosted a range of experts who presented and demonstrated their skills.

View the slides and read the conference guide at www.chilternsaonb.org/ChilternsWomenConf



Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: heritage


March also saw the launch of our Hidden Hands: women and work in the Chilterns exhibition and events series at Wycombe Museum.

Historically, women's paid work has often been belittled and forgotten. This exhibition hunted down the hidden women's work in Chilterns villages that formed a crucial part of the local economy during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The six-month long exhibition was curated by the Woodlanders' Lives and Landscapes project team in partnership with Wycombe Museum and Buckinghamshire New University and is the culmination of years of work by our Woodlanders' team.

We have enjoyed getting the volunteers together to review and appreciate their work in this excellent exhibition, which brings to life precious stories from the past.

Find out more at www.chilternsaonb.org/HiddenHands



Hidden Hands

Women and Work in the Chilterns

Exhibition at Wycombe Museum

7 Mar – 10 Sep

Image © The Evening Standard

An exhibition exploring the hidden women's work in Chilterns villages during the 19th and 20th centuries. A look at lace making, straw plaiting, tambour beading and cane & rush chair seat making.

CHILTERN WOMEN
TRADITIONAL CRAFTS, SKILLS & WORK
From the woodlands of the Chilterns AONB

CHILTERN
LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

HERITAGE FUND

Supported by the
HS2 Community & Environment Fund

WYCOMBE MUSEUM

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEW UNIVERSITY

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: people and communities

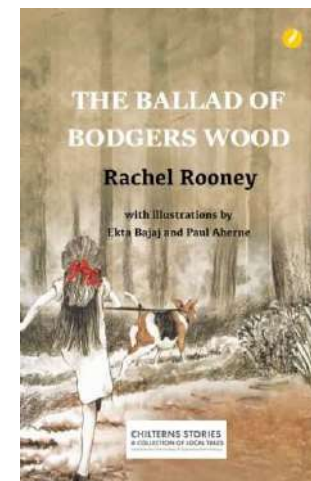
Chilterns Stories is a collection of tales inspired by the diverse cultural and natural heritage of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to provide new ways for people living and working in the area to appreciate the value of the landscape all around. In 2023/24, the full collection of stories will be presented to school and public libraries across the area, as well as to community libraries and groups.



In November 2022, Chalk, Cherries and Chairs presented A Return to Metroland: Julian Barnes in conversation, at Amersham Museum. Booker Prize winning writer Julian Barnes, with Sebastian Groes, joined Sean Keegan in conversation about the echoes of Britain's changing identity and the sense of place in modern literary fiction.

CHILTERNS STORIES A COLLECTION OF LOCAL TALES

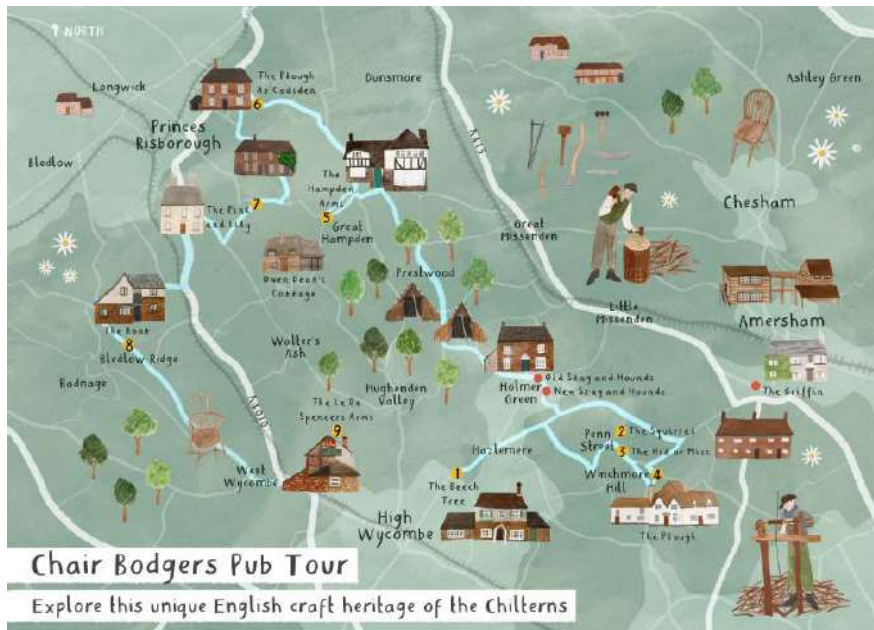
Inspired by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



A new ballad for little ones, written by acclaimed children's poet Rachel Rooney, explores the lives of two children at the turn of the industrial revolution, who are drawn together over a love for the Chiltern woods and the magic therein.

From January to March 2023, a series of interactive creative writing workshops took place exploring the sights and sounds of the Chilterns AONB, including our memories and stories about the past, present and future. These inputs were used to enhance our Sour Cherry Soup play and book, adding community contributions about the Chilterns which will result in a new production of Sour Cherry Soup. The play will tour in June 2023 at local outdoor venues.

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: festivals and events for the whole community



Beacons of the Past: understanding the Chilterns Iron Age hillforts



Beacons of the Past: hillforts project

Between April and October 2022, Beacons of the Past wrapped up its final six months, but it was by no means a quiet exit!

There was a two-week community excavation on one of the earthworks in Burnham Beeches, followed by an open day of prehistoric activities in the park, attended by over 400 people. The summer was filled with heritage themed guided walks all around the AONB, as well as public talks given to village societies both online and in person.

There was an exciting moment at the end of September when the first Beacons of the Past interpretation panel was installed at Kidmore End/Gallowstree Common. Project partners joined together and hosted a celebratory evening after the unveiling, culminating in an evening talk that was attended by nearly 100 people ranging in age from 5 to 87!



Kidmore End/Gallowstree Common hillfort panel

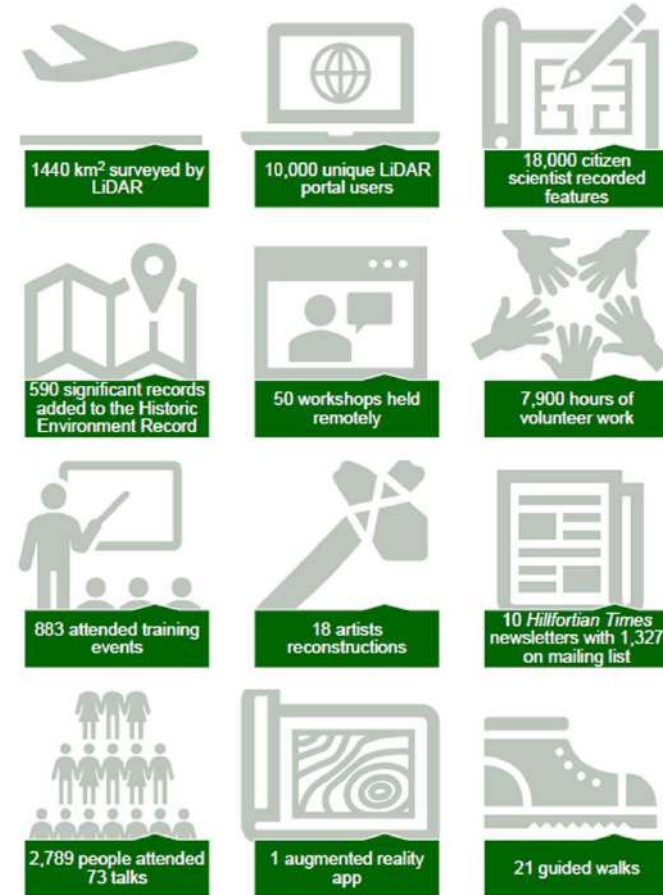


Joan Elding Prize (October 2022)

Project Manager Dr Wendy Morrison has commissioned a series of YouTube videos which give more information about many of our Chiltern hillforts and these are linked to the QR codes on the panels. You can watch one of them [here](#).

Finally, in the last days of the project, we were honoured to be classed 'Highly Commended' by the prestigious Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society's Joan Elding Prize Committee.

Summary of Some Statistics ...



Beacons of the Past: creating a legacy

- Inspired other LiDAR projects, including the design of the Kent Downs LiDAR portal.
- Continued and strengthened relationships with local authority Historic Environment Records and Historic England.
- Enhanced relationships with local archaeology societies and heritage groups.
- A cohort of well-trained volunteers.
- Publications on hillforts and original research by the volunteers.
- A permanent core member of staff for the AONB dedicated to heritage and archaeology.
- Development of the Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership (CHAP).



British Orienteering is the UK organisation that governs orienteering and there are local clubs who organise and run events in their areas. Thames Valley Orienteering Club (TVOC) is the local club for Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire – covering the area between Oxford and Marlow and includes the Chilterns.

Orienteering is an outdoor sport in which participants use a map and compass to navigate the course using a series of points marked on the map.



Orienteering map of The Coppice – prior to use of LiDAR data. Image: TVOC



Orienteering map of The Coppice – after the use of LiDAR data. Image: TVOC

Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership (CHAP)

The CCB now has a permanent member of staff, Dr Wendy Morrison, who is now heritage and archaeology manager for the AONB. Among other deliverables, she will be heading up the CHAP initiative, a partnership modelled on the CCB's highly successful Chalk Streams Project. CHAP will foster meaningful partnerships across the AONB that deliver work related to heritage and archaeology.

The first of these is the Bledlow Cross project, funded through Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL). This brings together Chiltern Rangers, the Chiltern Society and the Carington Estate to conserve, enhance and protect an ancient monument. See photos below.



The Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership (CHAP)
Ensuring a future for our past

THE PURPOSE: The Chilterns landscapes and the habitats they support are conserved, enhanced, and sustainably managed in balance with the protection and enjoyment of their archaeological legacy. The narrative of human-nature interconnectedness is shared widely for future generations and opportunities are created for diverse audiences for all Chiltern communities to participate in the discovery of the past, in order to better understand the present, and plan for the future. *CHAP would be the 'voice for archaeology' in the Chilterns AONB, ensuring that the millennia-long story of the region is shared with the millions who live in and visit.*

THE INNOVATION: CHAP would be the driving force in the conservation and sustainable management of heritage and archaeological assets in the Chilterns, working in partnership with organisations and local communities throughout the AONB and environs to effect significant and lasting positive change.

Significantly, CHAP would be a flagship model for other protected landscapes – the first of its kind in vision, the first three years (covered by this business plan) would work as proof of concept and allow development of a methodology to be adopted and adapted across the country.

THE PARTNERS: led by the Chilterns Conservation Board, but formed as a partnership of statutory agencies, charities, local authorities and voluntary bodies committed to the vision of protecting, understanding, and increasing access and engagement with the heritage of the Chilterns.

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project



Chilterns Chalk Streams Project



This year has been a great year for the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP). Our 25-year celebration conference with keynote speaker Charles Rangeley Wilson was hosted in St Albans, and included a guided walk along the River Ver. We also published our Celebrating 25 Years of the Chilterns Chalk Streams document, which can be seen on our new website [here](#).

We had two new members of staff join our team – a Citizen Science Officer and a Chess Valley Farming Officer.

The **Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows** project included updates to the Chess Valley Walk, with 10 new interpretation boards, new signage, a new logo and an updated walk leaflet. We celebrated the revamp of this walk in May with a River Chess Discovery Day, which was well attended – even the Mayor of Chesham was in the River!

If you'd like to hear more about the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, please do sign up to our e-newsletter (<http://eepurl.com/hU4795>). We also plan to produce an annual report.



Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project

In March 2023, the Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project came to an end. The project set out to combine practical river restoration, education and engagement along four of the Chilterns Chalk Streams. For the first time, this was a combined effort of the Chilterns Conservation Board, Chiltern Society, and the Chiltern Rangers.

We had fantastic achievements through this project. Out of the 25 objectives, only three were not fully met, however we exceeded in other targets, for example, reaching 887 Key Stage 3 pupils with our Riverfly educational programmes compared to our target of 100. Our project also included delivering the largest winterbourne restoration scheme ever attempted in England (according to the Environment Agency's chalk stream technical specialist Tim Sykes) on the Hamble Brook.

From this project, we have left a legacy of continued monitoring and management of the chalk streams, community engagement (having engaged with over 300 volunteers), increased education in local schools on the importance of chalk streams, as well as setting up citizen science programmes and retaining two valued members of staff, originally funded through the project.

The Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project has been a huge success for both organisations, with capacity for delivering practical chalk stream restoration projects and raising awareness of the importance of chalk streams across the Chilterns increasing dramatically. We hope we have inspired and encouraged people to learn and care more for the Chilterns' chalk streams.

**2.7KM OF CHALK
STREAMS RESTORED**



**10 GUIDED WALKS WITH
OVER 100 PEOPLE**



**ADVICE LEAFLET
CREATED**



**DELIVERY OF WATER
EDUCATION ACTIVITIES
TO OVER 2000
STUDENTS**



**OVER 300
VOLUNTEERS
ENGAGED IN RIVER
RESTORATION
WORK**



**ECOLOGICAL
SURVEYS FOR ALL 4
PROJECT AREAS**



**20 INTERPRETATION
BOARDS INSTALLED
ALONG THE RIVER
CHES AND RIVER WYE**



**2 NEW MEMBERS OF
STAFF EMPLOYED
PERMANENTLY**



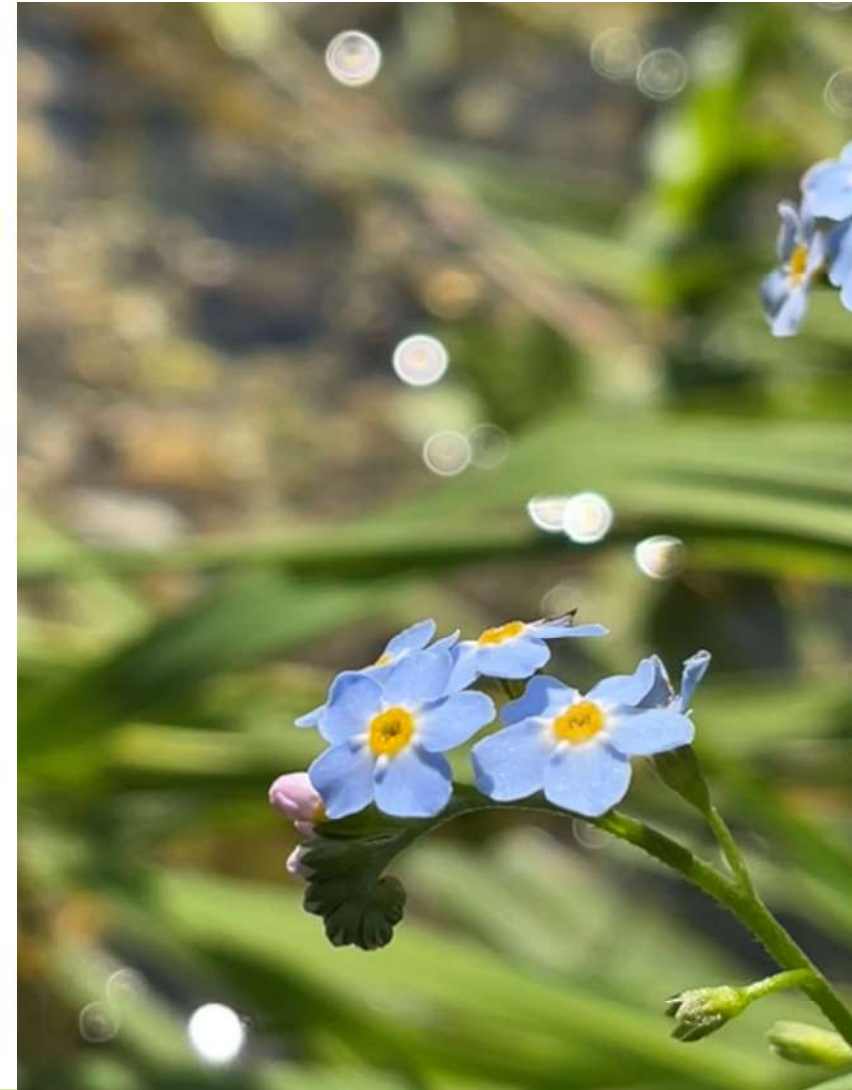
**NEW CHES VALLEY
WALK LOGO**



River Chess Smarter Water Catchment

In 2022/23 Chilterns Chalk Stream Project continued work as a host and partner in the delivery on the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment Initiative. The initiative, which is facilitated by Thames Water and is bringing £3 million worth of investment to the River Chess, aims to tackle issues effecting the River Chess on a catchment scale involving water companies, statutory bodies, conservation organisations and local groups.

Work is being delivered under six key themes:



Chess Smarter Water Catchment

Key achievements over the last year:

- New staff, new logo and a [new website](#).
- Work with Thames Water to update the [Chess 10-year management plan](#) showcasing the SWC model for use in other catchments.
- Funded the CCSP to increase to four the number of sondes currently delivering live 15-minute interval data, enabling us to have full coverage of the river from the headwaters in Chesham down to the Rickmansworth.
- Awarded over £43,000 worth of grants via the landowner grant scheme to deliver environmental projects that will improve the River Chess catchment, such as arable reversion, new boardwalks, fencing and woodland management.



Mend the Gap: healing the scars of rail electrification



Mend the Gap: healing the scars of rail electrification

About

Mend the Gap is a £3.75m programme, funded by Network Rail, that will help to reduce and compensate for the visual harm done to the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs by the electrification of the Great Western main line, where it runs through the two AONBs.

Mitigation work

This year the programme has planted over 990m of mitigation hedgerow and trees in the South Stoke area in partnership with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and hopes to maintain this momentum in the area from Goring to Purley in 2023/4.



Electrification gantries (March 2016)

Mend the Gap: healing the scars of rail electrification



Enhancement projects

The programme has committed over £100,000 to enhancement projects in the area between Reading and Didcot. This work has included £70,000 to the South Stoke Parish Council for a shared use garden space with the school, wildlife group, church and the local community.

Money has also been given to Action for the River Kennet who are looking at improving the quality of water coming into the Thames on the River Pang at Pangbourne and allocated to the Hardwick Estate for their community larder feasibility study.

Recruitment

This project now has a new Programme Manager, Ruth Staples-Rolfe, appointed in February 2023, and a Project Support Officer, Fran Crowther, who has been supporting this programme since the last programme manager left.

[Find out more about the programme here](#)



A wide-angle photograph of a field filled with numerous red poppies. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, some fully open and others as buds. The field is interspersed with green grass and some small white wildflowers. In the background, there are rolling green hills under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. A semi-transparent white box containing text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

Summary so far:

- Delivery spend over £400,000.
- 16 projects supported.
- Five projects completed.
- 990m of hedgerow planted.

Mend the Gap is still open to project proposals.
Find out more [here](#).



Farmer Engagement

Working with our farmers and landowners to support sustainable land management benefitting Chilterns' landscape and wildlife.



Farmer clusters

The farmer cluster movement started as recently as 2011. While each cluster group may be different, the essential characteristics are groups of farmers working together to identify their own priorities for the land they manage. Clusters are often supported by facilitators bringing independent expertise, providing access to training, and identifying grants and other measures supporting sustainable farm management.

The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster, supported by Nick Marriner through the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership, was the first cluster to be established within the Chilterns. This cluster is successfully delivering a farmer-led approach to conservation.

[Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster | Chalk Cherries and Chairs \(chilternsaonb.org\)](http://chilternsaonb.org).

We are now also supporting the Christmas Common Farmer Cluster and newly emerging clusters in the River Chess catchment and the north Chilterns.

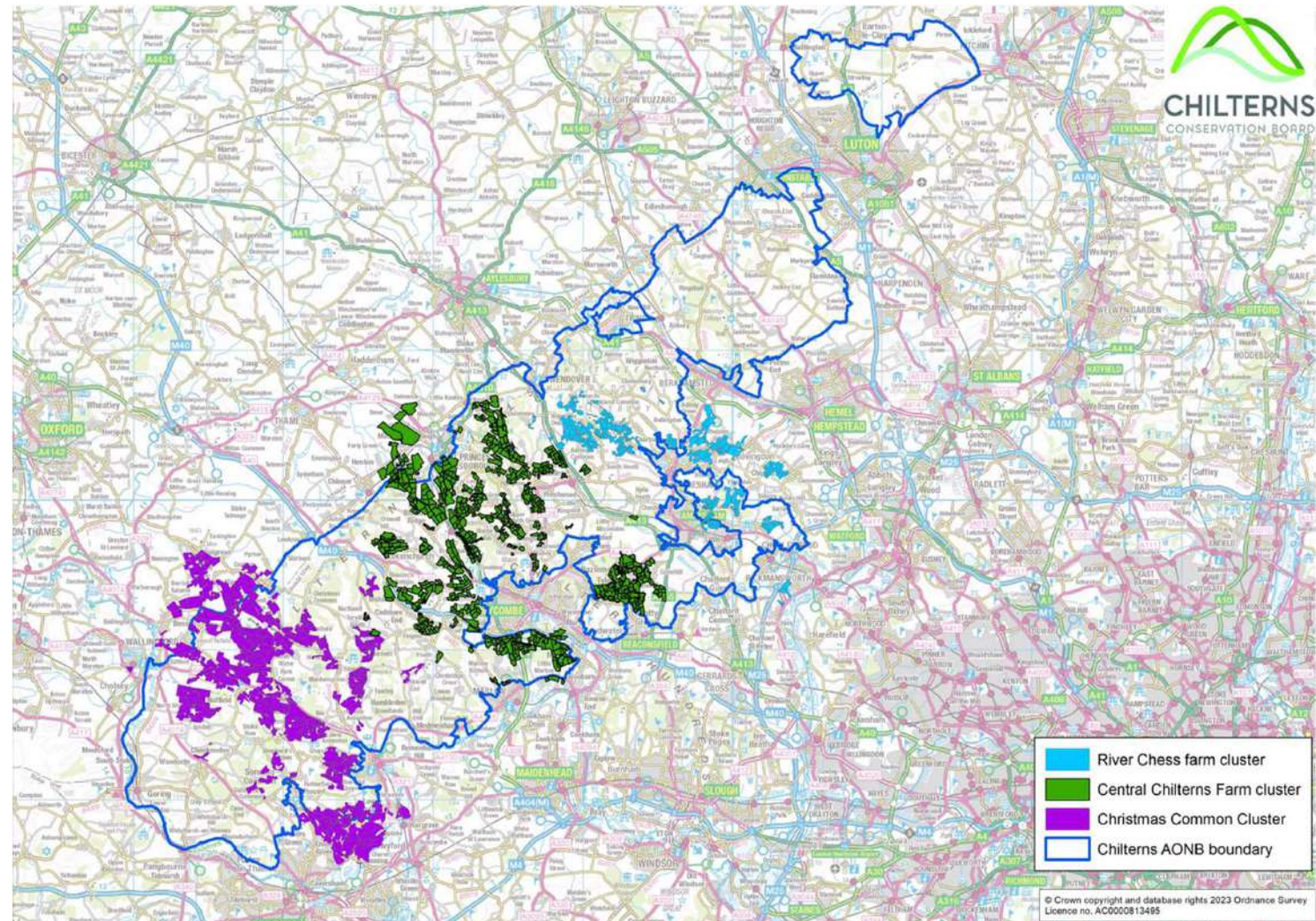


Farmer clusters

This map shows the current farms who are part of the farmer clusters in the Chilterns.

- Christmas Common Cluster (purple).
- Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster (green).
- River Chess Farmer Cluster (blue).

* The North Chilterns Farmer Cluster is still in its infancy and not shown on this map.



Farming in Protected Landscapes



Farming in Protected Landscapes

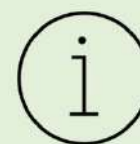
Defra introduced the **Farming in Protected Landscapes** programme in July 2021. It was originally intended to run until March 2024 but due to the success and popularity of the programme, it has now been extended until the end of March 2025.

The programme helps farmers and land managers carry out projects meeting one or more of the following themes:

- **Nature** – increased area of wildlife rich habitat, increased connectivity of habitat, better management of existing habitat, increased biodiversity.
- **Climate** – carbon sequestration, reduced flood risk, increased understanding among farmers and the public, increased resilience of the landscape.
- **People** – opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape, greater public engagement e.g. volunteering.
- **Place** – reinforcing landscape character and quality, conservation and interpretation of historic features, increased resilience of nature friendly farm businesses.



Chiltern Rangers, community tree nursery, Penn Estate.



Farming in Protected Landscapes is a programme of one-off projects designed to complement Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan.

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme – projects delivered so far:

Year and delivery spend	Projects supported	Projects completed	Hectares supported
Year 1 (£271,797)	20	14	508*
Year 2 (£462,956)	31	18	388

*Excludes farm carbon advice and land managed by min till drills.

Nine projects delivering for climate, including:

- 4.4ha of orchard creation.
- 137ha of land being managed with regenerative farming techniques.
- One project to improve soil quality.
- One project helping to reduce flood risk.
- 10 projects contributing to carbon sequestration.

11 projects delivering for people, including:

- Three projects delivering educational visits.
- Six projects to make the landscape more inclusive for visitors.
- Six projects to support greater public engagement in land management.

21 projects delivering for nature, including:

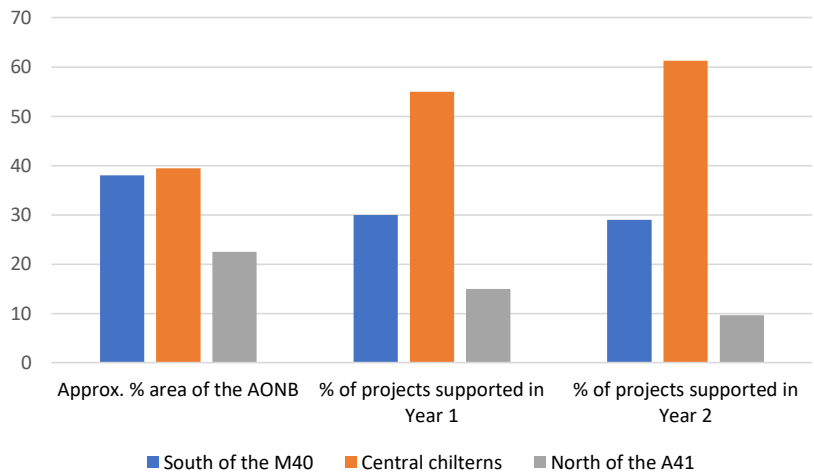
- 4850m of hedgerows planted.
- 43ha of habitat improvement for biodiversity.
- 3978m of improved habitat connectivity.
- One project to reduce the impact of deer.

12 projects delivering for place, including:

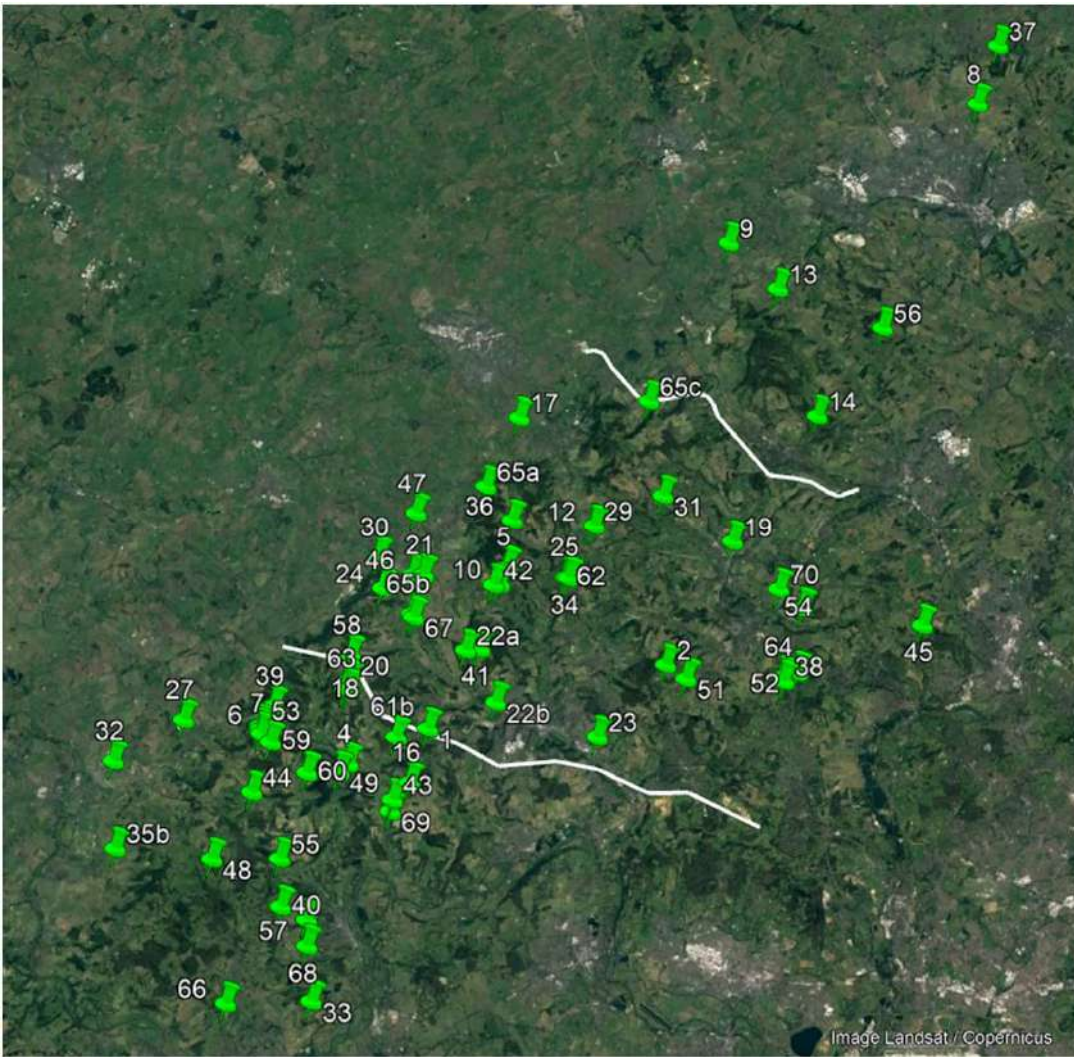
- Six projects increasing the resilience of nature friendly sustainable farm businesses, contributing to a more thriving local economy.
- 4.4ha of orchard creation.
- One project investigating and restoring a historic feature.
- One project showcasing a traditional structure.

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

Geographical spread of projects in Year 1 and Year 2.



An important target for Years 3 and 4 is to expand the number of projects in the north of the AONB.



Farming in Protected Landscapes programme: case study

The National Hedgelaying Championships


Held at Crowmarsh Battle Farms in October 2022, a Farming in Protected Landscapes grant helped make this event possible and paid for a video of the event to share knowledge of this traditional technique with a wider audience. The video can be found at: https://youtu.be/uqWV0y_layM. The craft of cutting and laying hedges rejuvenates them as effective field barriers and as a high-quality habitat for wildlife.





Influencing

*Holding contractors and authorities to account
by ensuring the highest environmental
standards are maintained.*



CHILTERNS
CONSERVATION BOARD

Planning and development: an overview



It was another very busy year for the planning team.

Our work locally was set against the context of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill slowly progressing through parliament. The Bill had been intended to deliver the radical changes to the planning system proposed in the previous year's planning white paper.

The scope of the reforms reduced following concerns from the back benches, and the subsequent publication of the government's Growth Plan in September. We tried to keep on top of the shifting goalposts and to engage with discussions where we could through the National Association of AONBs.

(The Bill would eventually receive Royal Assent and become an Act in October 2023, including a last-minute amendment that will potentially benefit AONBs: 2023/24 will require us to get to grips with the new legal landscape).

Planning and development policy: the big picture

We responded to several strategic consultations, including:

- An initial consultation on a joint strategic plan for **South-west Hertfordshire**, which was commendable for the importance given to the Chilterns AONB as part of the area's environment, but which failed to carry through into the plan's vision or policy objectives.
- Early consultation from the Civil Aviation Authority on changes to air traffic movements from **London Heathrow Airport**, which was trying to avoid impacts on the tranquillity of the AONB, in the context of difficult technical constraints.

In other news:

- The inspector's report on the **North Herts local plan** made frustrating changes to the council's positive version of our model AONB policy. (The plan was adopted as recommended by the inspector in December).
- **Oxfordshire's** local authorities withdrew from the preparation of a joint strategic plan for the county, having failed to reach agreement on the distribution of challenging housing requirements to support unsustainable planned economic growth in a county containing parts of three AONBs and one of England's most historic cities.



Planning and development: in your neighbourhood

We contributed – mostly positively – to the preparation of neighbourhood plans across the AONB, including in Cholsey and Benson in Oxfordshire, and Hazlemere in Buckinghamshire.

In Oxfordshire, we were pleased to hear that an independent examination supported Woodcote's neighbourhood plan for fewer new homes than their identified housing need in reflection of the village's location within the AONB – a proposal that we had supported.

Conversely, we appeared at the examination hearing into the joint Henley and Harpsden neighbourhood plan to oppose that plan's proposal to exceed their housing need, including by building on a greenfield site within the AONB. Our position was that the housing need should be met on brownfield sites or on smaller sites outside of the AONB. We highlighted that the changes made to South Oxfordshire's local plan in examination had resulted in Henley being expected to deliver a number of homes that was harder to achieve without harm to the AONB, contrary to national planning policy.

Planning and development: the fine detail

We made observations on 62 new planning applications, including support for two, objections to the principle of 16, and 'comments' on 44 proposals (comments are made when we are satisfied with the principle of a development but think changes are needed to make the details of a proposal acceptable in the AONB or its setting).

We also submitted written representations objecting to 10 planning appeals. Of most significance is the appeal against Dacorum Borough Council's refusal of a proposal for 1400 homes on a greenfield site adjacent to, but outside of, the AONB east of Tring. The site had been proposed in Dacorum's draft local plan, to which we had objected the previous year. We gave evidence to the appeal inquiry, commencing in March 2023, and attended as an 'interested party'. The inquiry included a test of a new national planning policy on the setting of protected landscapes (that "development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts"), and the Secretary of State chose to 'recover' the decision for his personal attention (the decision is still awaited almost a year later).

A total of 50 decisions were made during the year on planning applications or appeals on which we had submitted observations. We had objected to 26 of these, 20 of which were refused or dismissed on appeal, and the other six of which were withdrawn. Of 16, on which we had submitted comments (seeking changes to enable permission), nine were refused (including four dismissed at appeal) and seven were approved (including two granted at appeal). The remaining eight decisions were all proposals that we had supported, and all were granted.

Holding HS2 to account

We continue to assess designs as they are submitted to Buckinghamshire Council for planning approval (Schedule 17 applications) and offer our comments to lessen landscape and visual impacts, increase protection of cultural heritage and improve mitigation for environmental damage. Where possible, we offer support to individuals and groups also seeking to protect the Chilterns AONB and minimise the short- and long-term disruption of HS2 construction. One example is efforts to encourage HS2 and their contractors to 'green' overbridges by including vegetated strips linking both sides of cuttings. The hope is that such measures will provide connectivity for wildlife communities otherwise separated by the route.

We also view concerns over the poor establishment of mitigation tree planting and continue to keep a close eye on progress of the Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) with potential impacts on the aquifer and flow of the Misbourne, one of our internationally rare chalk streams, still uncertain.



*Leather Lane looking east towards Potter Row (June 2023).
Image Credit: Chiltern Society*

The Leather Lane Conservation Group have done sterling work to identify the importance of the mature oaks lining Leather Lane as foraging habitat for bats, including the rare barbastelle. This has caused a rethink in the bridge design aiming to mitigate existing tree loss (see gap in line of trees towards the centre of the picture) and minimise any further tree loss along the lane.

[Find out more on our website](#)

HS2 Chilterns AONB Additional Projects Fund

As members of the Chilterns Review Group, the Chilterns Conservation Board also recommends projects and supports those wishing to apply for a share of the £3 million funding made available by the Secretary of State for extra enhancement and integration measures within the AONB.

Currently four projects are being undertaken:

- Landscape and Biodiversity Connectivity.
- Ridgeway Riding Route.
- Wendover Canal Towpath Upgrade.
- The Misbourne Greenway.

The Review Group is particularly keen to allocate the remaining funds to projects that will offer further enhancements once the full impacts of construction are finally known.



Wendover Canal Towpath (February 2021)
Image Credit: Wendover Canal Trust



Bank Stabilisation (June 2023)

[Find out more on our website](#)

Undergrounding electricity infrastructure: conserving the Chilterns natural beauty

Last year we reported on work with UK Power Networks (UKPN) to deliver a project at Latimer/Chenies to remove 8.72km of 11kv cable and 100 wooden poles on routes beside and crossing the River Chess.

We are pleased to report that contractors have now dug new channels and laid most of the cables along the new underground route in the Chess Valley.

We would welcome new proposals to take advantage of this OFGEM approved allowance to remove overhead electricity infrastructure to improve the Chilterns landscape.

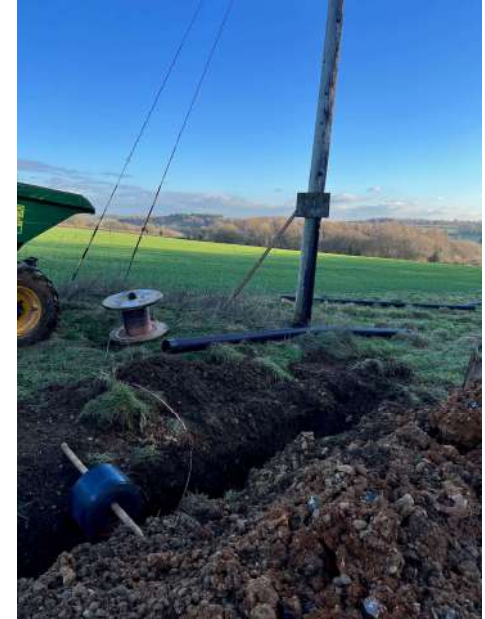


Image credits: Allen Beechey (top left), Paul Jennings (others)



Engagement and partnerships

*Supporting rural businesses and
creating a welcoming countryside
for everyone.*



CHILTERNS
CONSERVATION BOARD

Chilterns Walking Festival

Two walking festivals took place in 2022, one in May and one in October, and they were both well received:

- The festivals offered **113 walks**, attracting a total of **1034** participants (with additional participants on third party walks).
- The local economy benefitted with **53%** of participants using a local business before or after their walk, and **36 businesses** were directly involved in the festival (pubs, cafes, leisure attractions and local tour guides). Many more businesses benefited from additional footfall to the area and from media coverage.
- **41% of participants** came from outside the Chilterns, many from nearby urban areas.
- The festivals focused on expanding the programme of family-friendly walks, health and wellbeing walks, and walks involving local businesses like farm shops, cafes, pubs and attractions.
- We worked with **over 50 organisations** and **volunteer walk leaders** across the Chilterns and involved diverse groups with a strong focus on mental health and wellbeing, tying in with Mental Health Awareness Week.



Chilterns Walking Festival: quotes and feedback

“Both leaders were excellent...very knowledgeable and personable. The Marlow players were just fabulous at bringing the history alive during the walk with their tales and costumes.”
– **participant.**

“We really enjoyed ourselves and would recommend this experience to others. Stuart was excellent – he ran the walk well, catering for all ages and abilities. I learned a lot about map reading too.”– **participant, Practical map reading and walk planning.**

“[Participants] enjoyed the slower pace and noticed more aspects of nature they wouldn't otherwise have. One participant said she's not generally interested in poetry but loved the poetry they shared because of its connection with the natural features.”
– **Andy Shipley, walk leader, Sunrise walk.**

“It was a magical walk through the woods and park – we experienced owls, deer, ghostly mushrooms, the Hound of the Baskervilles, Jupiter and Dr Who!”
– **Philippa Sanders, walk leader, PipsticksWalks, Walk on the dark side!**

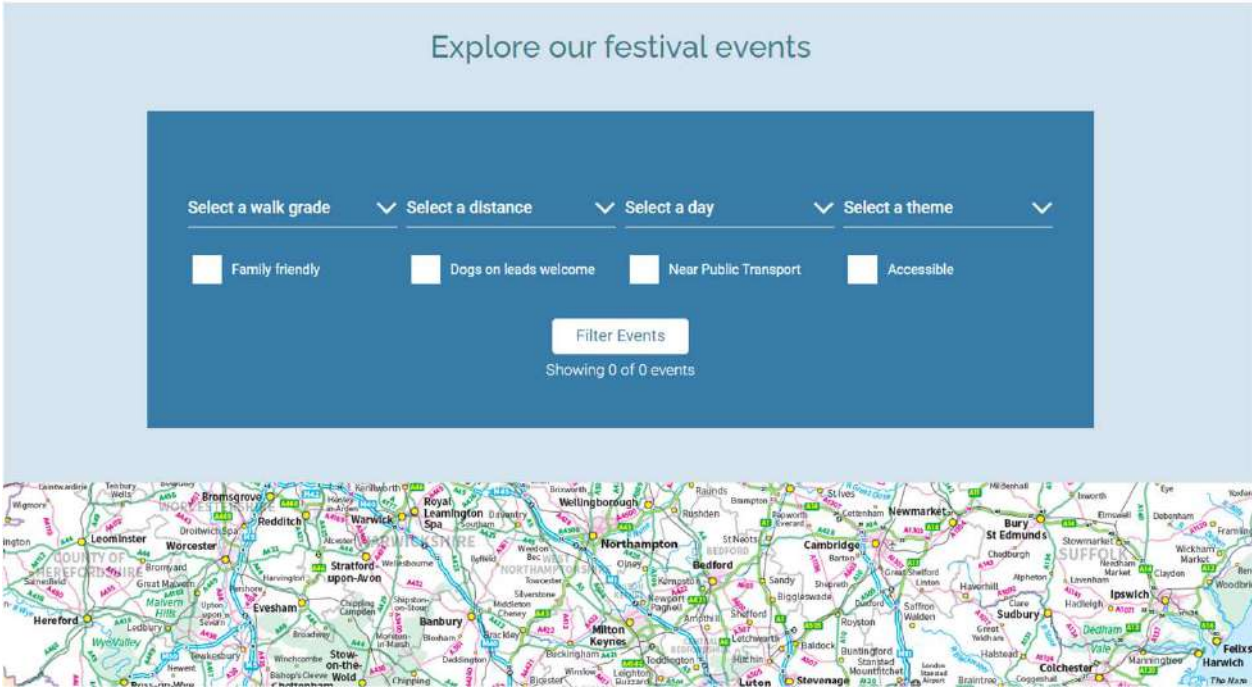


CHILTERNS
CONSERVATION BOARD





Our new web pages have a refreshed design and search capabilities, as well as a map.



Promoting tourism and the rural economy

We worked with the Chilterns Tourism Network, Visit Buckinghamshire and other leisure and hospitality partners to promote the rural economy. The **Open for Business** programme has enabled us to provide support to businesses in the central Chilterns affected by HS2.

Our focus over the last year has been on promoting experiential tourism through the **Open for Business** programme, which helps to communicate the special qualities of the Chilterns. We have promoted the Chilterns countryside experiences through a digital marketing campaign, by working with influencers (Muddy Stilettos), an advertorial and a promotional day at Marylebone Station in conjunction with Chiltern Railways.

Our tourism activity over the last year included:

- **Promoting 34 experience providers** through our [website](#) and campaigns.
- **12 businesses** receiving 1:1 business support.
- **35,205 visits** to the 'experience' landing page.

We held two tourism networking events (June and October 2022) attracting **43 businesses**.



Above: digital marketing campaign

Right: advertising in local media



Open for Business programme

In addition to the digital marketing and local media campaigns, we included a spread on Chilterns experiences in our flagship magazine, Outstanding Chilterns.

“Thank you for featuring me – it was great welcoming participants to my Adventure Skills Day here in the Chilterns...they all appreciated time in the woods, and there was no sign of winter blues, just smiles, learning, and campfire conversation.”
– Bushcraft with David Willis.

MAKING MEMORIES

A GUIDE TO COUNTRYSIDE EXPERIENCES IN THE CHILTERNS

Immersive leisure experiences are very much in vogue, providing the opportunity to learn a new skill or try something new, meet the local community and come away with unforgettable memories. This increasing desire for activities that are meaningful and original has led to an exciting array of immersive experiences right on our doorsteps in the Chilterns! So many quirky and special activities are now on offer, from blacksmith experience days and trying your hand at other rural crafts to nature walks, bushcraft, and chair bidders pub tours.

FORAGING AND FEASTING!

Escape to hidden woodlands tucked away in the Chiltern Hills. Enjoy a spot of foraging followed by a feast cooked over an open flame - all inspired by the wild ingredients that grow in abundance around us.

Join herbalist and forager, Justine Gens of Secret Adventures in rural Oxfordshire learning to identify and forage plants in the woods and open glades, gather wood, light a campfire and enjoy a spot of outdoor cooking.

Just a short trip out from London, Nomadic offer "hidden woodland feasts inspired by nature" and have curated four course woodland feasts celebrating the seasons.

"Our aim is to use food and nature to reconnect our guests with the world around them. Our restaurant without walls has no boundaries other than the stars and the sky."

FOOD & DRINK TOURS AND TASTINGS

The Chilterns has seen a food and drink renaissance in recent years, with growing numbers of new artisan producers making award-winning cheese, wine, gin, ales and charcuterie. Many offer events, tastings and tours or will teach you a new culinary skill. For example, in the vineyards, there are opportunities to roll your sleeves up and help with grape harvesting and other volunteer tasks throughout the year, from winter pruning to bud rubbing! And you can learn more by meeting the vintners and enjoying lunch among the vines, accompanied by their own sparkling wine.

Dawn Hill vineyard is a boutique vineyard nestled in the beautiful and tucked away Redgrave Valley near West Wycombe. In addition to regular tours, the vineyard hosts many special events including cheese and wine pairing and local heritage crafts. They also offer regular volunteer days.

Jazz enthusiasts should head for Oakley Grove Vineyard near Harley-on-Thames for their Sunday afternoon jazz on the terrace with sweeping views across the vines. Pocket size gin distilleries can also be found in the Chilterns, offering tours, tastings and special events from cocktail making to gin & food pairing. (include examples)

"We are very proud to look after our vines by hand and care for each of them individually. Join us for a day in the vineyard and experience what it's really like to own a vineyard".
Holly, Dawn Hill Vineyard

LEARN, MAKE AND CREATE!

Get hands-on with a range of rural crafts at the Chiltern Open Air Museum, home to 30 reconstructed and restored buildings from the local area on a beautiful estate. You can experience being a blacksmith for the day in their Victorian forge, learn the ancient craft of willow weaving and sculpture, or try your hand at the niche craft of working with straw. All the tutors are highly knowledgeable and experienced, so you don't need to be!

Join professional photographer Matt Writtle for a half-day walk from Chesham. Feel a sense of calm and wellbeing as you walk the hills and rivers around the Chess Valley, capturing the mood through photography under Matt's expert guidance and discovering many interesting facts about the local area at the same time.

SEEK FUN & ADVENTURE

Path Hill Adventures offer family-friendly activities in the extensive beech woodlands of the Hardwick Estate near Reading. You can test your mettle on an adventure course or learn how to survive in the wilderness.

For walking tours with a difference join the formidable and entertaining Mary Doe Marlow for a theatrical exploration of historic and literary Marlow-on-Thames. Or head to Amersham Museum to join one of their popular costumed guided walks for a fascinating insight into Amersham's past and present.

Looking for adventures on the doorstep? Wild Cycles was born out of a passion for cycling and a love for the Chiltern Hills. Whether you are new to cycling and just want to give it a go, or are a battle-hardened lycra-lover, their rides will leave you grinning from ear to ear.

Visit our website for further information on all these experiences as well as many more bookable leisure activities throughout the Chilterns.
www.visitchilterns.co.uk/chilterns-experiences



CHILTERNs
CONSERVATION BOARD

Promoting active outdoors

We promoted the many ways to enjoy the outdoors and connect with nature, with a strong focus on mental health and wellbeing. We ran campaigns focused on shopping locally, family friendly activities and interesting new local experiences.

[New immersive tours and experiences](#), Chilterns AONB blog (April 2022).

[Jubilee royal tales and attractions](#), Chilterns AONB blog (May 2022).

Blogs by Muddy Stilettos (June and July 2022).

- <https://bucksoxon.muddystilettos.co.uk/things-to-do/family-days-out/family-days-out-breaks-chilterns-buckinghamshire-oxfordshire/>
- <https://bucksoxon.muddystilettos.co.uk/kids/chilterns-days-out-kids-summer-holidays/>

[Autumn Festival of Food and Drink and other autumn events](#) Chilterns AONB blog and social media (October 2022).

[Novel Christmas gift ideas in the Chilterns](#) Chilterns AONB blog and social media (December 2022).

[Beat the winter blues](#) Chilterns AONB blog and social media (January 2023).



Valentine's gift recommendations with a difference!

From brewery and distillery tours for those who like a luxury locally brewed tipple, to romantic opera and theatre shows timed perfectly for Valentine's day, to lazy cafe walks. Enjoy a little love in the Chilterns!

Read more: <http://bit.ly/3Yxer0k>... See more



Chilterns AONB @ChilternsAONB · Dec 13, 2022

Do you need [#christmaspresent](#) ideas for a friend or family member who doesn't want to gather more 'stuff'?

Why not give them the gift of an [#experience](#) in the [#Chilterns](#)?

Here are some novel ideas, plus some family [#walks](#).

bit.ly/3Fs2K37

[#getoutdoors](#) [#familytime](#)



Shop local: blogs
and social media

We used our website and social media channels to encourage visitors and residents to make the most of wonderful local producers.



Widening the Welcome

We were awarded **£227,000 additional funding from Defra** in October 2022 to make our protected landscapes “more accessible to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds”. We worked with a range of partners to fund and deliver projects which achieved these objectives. Projects included:

- A seven-seater electric vehicle for Chiltern Rangers, providing additional capacity for conservation volunteering for special needs young people, those with dementia, and others requiring transport.
- The installation of an accessible toilet at the Chiltern Open Air Museum.
- New and enhanced ‘access for all’ facilities at College Lake Nature Reserve.
- Mobility vehicles for the Centre for Outdoor Accessibility Training at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve.
- Augmented reality apps for three hillfort sites, allowing younger audiences to experience the ancient sites in a new and innovative way.
- Surface improvements to the Wendover Canal towpath.
- Accessibility surveys at four popular countryside sites.

Outstanding Chilterns magazine – featuring outdoors for all



OUTDOORS FOR ALL
A GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CHILTERNS

When it comes to walking and outdoor recreation there is no 'one size fits all' – a gentle amble to one person can be a marathon for another.

We'll have different needs and motivations when visiting the countryside, and sometimes people can't put off uncertainty about the state of the paths and what the availability of accessible transport, means about getting lost, lack of confidence or simply not feeling like the countryside is a welcoming place. For certain physical or mental health needs, the challenges can feel greater still. Yet we are lucky in the Chilterns to have a huge variety of outdoor groups aiming to make the Chilterns countryside more accessible and welcoming to all – from health and wellbeing through nature and landscape to for everyone.

HERE'S A FLAVOUR OF WHAT'S ON OFFER:

Natural Inclusion
Andy Thelby of Natural Inclusion invites you to join a Nature Sense Session and immerse yourself in the natural world, create and experience. Building on the partnership as a visually impaired person, Andy works with groups and individuals in natural settings to explore the power of their own mind to open a deeper connection with nature.

"The very act of closing our eyes ignites our other senses, setting the stage for them to come into their own. We'll take time out from the daily rush to truly see, feel and hear the world around us. Our focus, the character of the birds and the breath of the breeze."

www.naturalinclusion.org

Wild Song Walks
Rula Tait of Wild Song Walks is a professional singer and harpist by background. Now a certified nature connection guide, Rula leads gentle Wild Song Walks in the woods around High Wycombe, combining music and nature as a powerful way to help us connect and feel.

"Come and walk with the songbirds of Chilterns, across and outdoors and re-engage the land with summer songs, songs and stories."

www.wildsongwalks.com

Circle Partnership
Circle Partnership charity supports mental health and well-being in the Chilterns and surrounding areas. Supporting people of all ages it offers a range of services including free weekly walks for health and wellbeing. The walk takes place on Fridays, 10am-12pm from the Gargal Centre in Chesham.

"Our mission is to improve quality of life by reducing disadvantage, isolation and loneliness and to increase skills, confidence and wellbeing."

Contact: steph@circlepartnership.org or call 0300 668 2947 for book your place.

Reading Associates for the Blind
Reading Associates for the Blind's reading group offers country walks followed by a book launch, story and other work, for visually impaired members and sighted volunteers. Some books will require you to be pushed over a table with a suggested assistance of £5.

"Our reading club was set up nearly 27 years ago by a member who missed being able to go for country walks."

www.readingassociates.org

Wash Walks
Rula Tait was set up by a group of people with autism and a love of walking and nature and a new belief in the importance of nature to mental wellbeing. They offer one or two hour weekly walks in the southern Chilterns and Thames Valley countryside within easy reach of Reading. The walks are very much an activity, meeting new people and having fun!

"I've joined a walking group and I've found it to be a great way to get outdoors, meeting new people and having fun!"

If you love walking and prefer not to go alone, please join us!

Search for Wash Walks on Facebook or call 07808 240018 or email info@washwalks.co.uk

Dodds & Dogs
Dodds & Dogs is a friendly walking group which aims to improve mental health and wellbeing. Designed as a safe space for men to get together, walk and talk. If you feel lost – no problem! The group of people walk new places in the Chilterns and south Oxfordshire area. Members are welcome to bring friendly, well behaved dogs, but do not have to own a dog to join.

www.doddsanddogs.co.uk

Linkinggate
Linkinggate Charity near Wendover invites you to wander through its scenic garden and nature reserve. Discover trees, plants and medicinal herbs and learn how to use them for medicinal purposes. The charity also runs a monthly walking group supporting people from local and national backgrounds, and a grant-funded programme for under 18s.

www.linkinggate.org.uk

Books in the Woods
Books in the Woods is a weekly woodland poetry project, inspired by children's books. Children-led activities and free play. The group is based in Henley-on-Thames and meets in various locations around the Atheridge Estate and Tring Park and Forest.

Chiltern Rangers
Chiltern Rangers is a volunteer conservation group every Thursday in green spaces around High Wycombe which is open to all. Informal but fun, the group is keen to improve mental wellbeing and can be a great way of getting outdoors, meeting like-minded people and improving your own skills.

www.chilternrangers.co.uk

Path Hill Outdoors
Path Hill Outdoors at Goring Heath is a skilled team of outdoor educators and support workers who work with young people who find the outdoor environment a challenge. Working with people, using their brains, anxiety disorders as well as the autistic spectrum, they run a pre school group, family comes, activities for adults and community groups as well as a number of activities for adults' wellbeing including a wild women's group and forest bathing. Get in touch if you feel your school, community group or family would benefit.

www.pathhilloutdoors.com

Please let us know of other providers we've missed and we'll add them to our website.

Wendover and post-hack friendly walks
The Chilterns has a number of what with its beautiful views and it is accessible to all. The Chilterns has a number of what with its beautiful views and it is accessible to all. The Chilterns has a number of what with its beautiful views and it is accessible to all.

Any you are experienced outdoors or a mobility scooter user or walk leader who would lead walks for us? We've got a number of opportunities for you. Please get in touch! We would love to hear from you.

Adopted outdoor activities:
WE'VE GOT A NUMBER OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU. Please get in touch! We would love to hear from you.

SOUTH BUCKINGHAMSHIRE for the Disabled
We offer a number of opportunities for you. Please get in touch! We would love to hear from you.

WASH WALKS
We offer a number of opportunities for you. Please get in touch! We would love to hear from you.

WASH WALKS
We offer a number of opportunities for you. Please get in touch! We would love to hear from you.



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Communications

Sharing our work and engaging new audiences.



CHILTERNs
CONSERVATION BOARD

Communications: summary

The communications team has had a busy year focussing on several campaigns and initiatives to support the work of its projects, to help raise the profile of the Chilterns Conservation Board and increase the enjoyment and understanding of the Chilterns AONB for those who visit it.

In addition to our ongoing communications activities like Outstanding magazine, monthly e-newsletters and social media channels, the team have also focussed on:

- Delivering a new suite of websites launched in October 2022 – www.chilternsaonb.org.
- Supporting the national Green Space Dark Skies initiative with an exciting event at Dunstable Downs which invited people from all paths in life to experience beautiful landscapes at dusk, using low impact lighting to create magical, memorable moments outdoors.
- Supporting a national campaign to protect red kites by encouraging people not to feed them – working with journalists across different media outlets including radio interviews, printed articles, online articles and magazine articles.
- Delivering communications to support the Natural England boundary extension project.
- Working with all project teams to provide communications support and advice.

Right: Lumenators at the Green Space Dark Skies Event at Dunstable Downs (July 2022)



Outstanding Chilterns Magazine

Our annual flagship magazine was published in July 2022 with a wide range of articles including a look into the lives of the amazing volunteers who dedicate hours of their lives to support the area, a guide to inclusive outdoor opportunities, a guide to Chilterns countryside experiences, a wander round Wallingford, a guide to Chilterns butterflies, and more. We increased our distribution by 50% this year – up to 30,000 – expanding our reach to outside the Chilterns boundary and encouraging more people to visit and enjoy our beautiful countryside.

Communications: content and campaigns

The communications team have worked hard over the past year to plan and produce an interesting variety of informative, educational, and inspiring content. A small selection of the campaigns we've published over the past year includes:

- [Our submission on the government response to the landscapes review consultation](#)
- [Six reasons not to feed red kites](#)
- [Chilterns farmer achieves Local Wildlife Site status for Manor Farm](#)
- [600 people gathered at Dunstable Downs to create a stunning artwork](#)
- [Tracking the Impact scoops prestigious Marsh Award!](#)
- [Celebrating four and a half years of Beacons of the Past Chilterns hillforts project](#)
- [Novel Christmas gift ideas in the Chilterns](#)
- [Chilterns AONB Boundary Review Update January 2023](#)
- [New film: National Hedgelaying Championships comes to the Chilterns](#)

Visit the news section on our website for more:
<https://www.chilternsaonb.org/news/>



e-Newsletter

Sign up to receive our monthly newsletter and be the first to hear about the latest events, festivals, news, and opportunities to get involved with our work to protect and care for the Chilterns countryside.

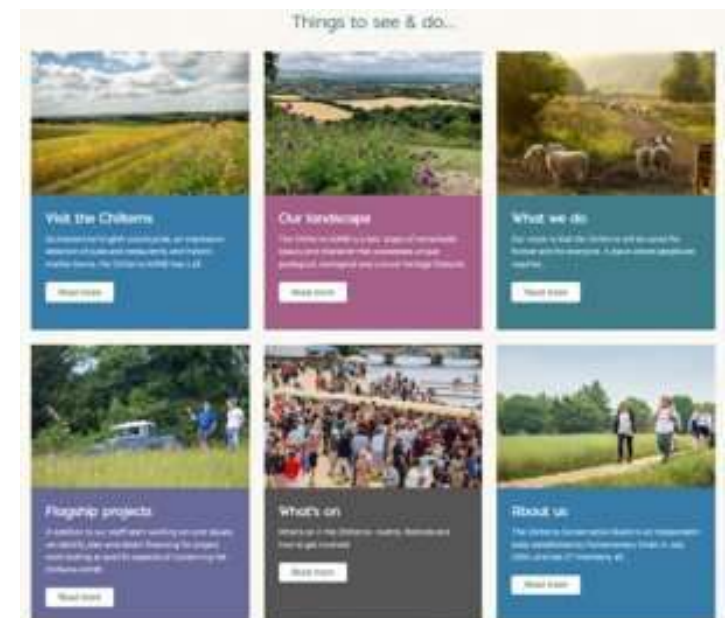
Sign up here: <https://bit.ly/Chilterns-News>

Communications: our new websites

- In October 2022 we launched a new website for the Chilterns AONB, merging with Visit Chilterns and creating microsites for our flagship projects: [Chalk Streams](#), [Chalk Cherries and Chairs](#), [Mend the Gap](#) and [Smarter Water Catchment](#).
- This has been a huge project five years in the making and has involved subject specialists from across the organisation as well as external content providers and the communications team.
- The vision for the new website is to raise the profile of the CCB and Chilterns AONB and help achieve our statutory purposes by providing:
 - Clear, concise and relevant content about the AONB and CCB.
 - A simple navigation system.
 - Impactful imagery showcasing the Chilterns' remarkable beauty and distinctive character.
 - Relevant news, information and resources.
 - Clear calls-to-action.
 - Content that is simple and accessible to all.



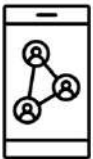
The new site is mobile optimised.
We discovered 50% of our traffic was from a mobile phone or tablet. Since going live this has increased to nearly 67%!



Communications: outcomes at a glance



Website: 335,000 page views – this is a dramatic drop in views year-on-year, which was expected due to the new website going live and the time required to build up our Search Engine Optimisation on Google. The interactive map and Chess Valley walk continue to be our most popular pages in addition to ‘Experience the Chilterns’ which was boosted by a digital advertising campaign. The average time spent on a page is 1 minute 33 seconds.



Chilterns AONB social media channels continue to perform well overall. We have seen a steady increase on Instagram with 278 new followers and a reach of 12,000. We’ve seen a slight increase on Facebook year-on-year with 306 new followers – this is a 53% increase on the number of new followers achieved last year (199). We have seen a large decline in the number of new followers on Twitter, from 580 last year to 280 this financial year. This is due to the popularity of the platform as a whole rather than a reflection of the content we publish.



In 2022 we sent over 32,000 individual emails to our subscribers, achieving an average open rate of 41% – this is a year-on-year increase of 7.3%. The average percentage of people who clicked a link within the e-newsletter was 11% (more than double the industry average of 5.1% and a year-on-year increase of 6.8%).

Communications: Chilterns in the news



Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty could exp-

18 March



Secret Bedfordshire event will light up the night skies with choreographed display and live music

Only people who sign up will be told the location of the event – which will feature a stunning light display

**HIGH-FLYING
CONSERVATIONISTS WIN TOP
NATIONAL AWARDS**

Communications: Chilterns on the news



ITV Meridian's report on Chilterns farmer Andrew Stubbings gaining Local Wildlife Site status.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvdE9Mig_f4&t=8s



Professor Kate Heppell of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project talking on ITV Meridian News about the effects of this year's drought on chalk streams.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFgCfyGI2Hc>



Finances

Our financial year and more about us.

Our financial year: ending March 2023

The large increase in Defra funding for 2022/23 was due to the Access for All and FiPL projects totalling £790,000.

Income

Defra	£1,304,849
Local Authority Contribution	£119,448
Project and other Income	£1,270,303
Total income	£2,694,600

Expenditure

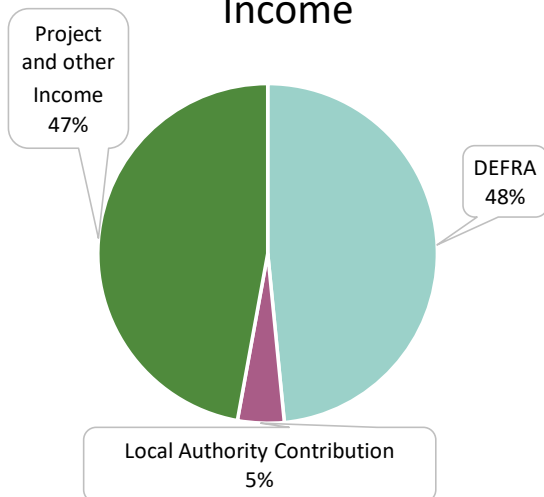
Overheads	£213,015
People & Society	£272,942
Landscape & Conservation	£2,375,072
Planning & Development	£287,268
Total Expenditure	£3,148,297

The deficit for this financial year is due to payments made in arrears for Chalk, Cherries and Chairs and Smarter Water Catchment. These payments were completed using CCB reserves and will be recouped in the next financial year

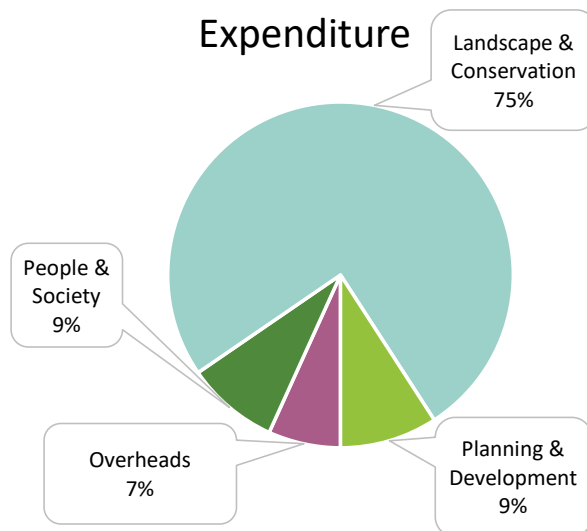
Deficit

Total Income	£2,694,600
Total Expenditure	£3,148,297
Deficit for year	£-453,697

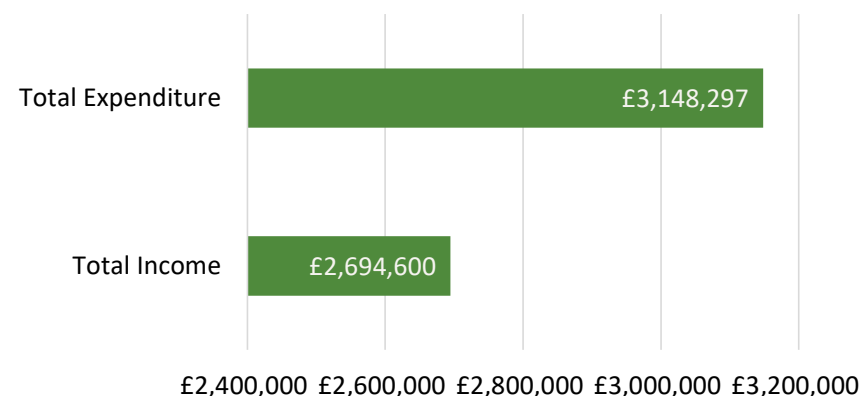
Income



Expenditure



Total Income vs Total Expenditure





About us

- The Chilterns was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in recognition that it is one of the finest landscapes in England. The Chilterns Conservation Board is responsible for caring for this special landscape and work to fulfil our statutory purposes and duty which are:
 - To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB.
 - To increase understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.
 - To foster the social and economic wellbeing of local communities.
- Established by Parliamentary Order in 2004, the Chilterns Conservation Board is an independent body and one of only two Conservation Boards in the country, the other being the Cotswolds.
- Our Board comprises 27 members drawn from local authorities, parish councils and appointments made by the Secretary of State at the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs. See our list of Board Members [here](#).
- Our staff team is based in Chinnor, Oxfordshire and comprises individuals with a wide range of skills and expertise including ecologists, planners, archaeologists and tourism professionals.

Thank you

Thank you for reading our annual review 2022/23. Please contact us if you would like any further information on any of the work highlighted in this report.

Contact us

Chilterns Conservation Board

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Chinnor OX39 4HA

Telephone: 01844 355500

Email: office@chilternsaonb.org

Keep in touch

Keep up to date with the latest news and information from the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chilterns AONB by following us on social media:

[Twitter](#)
[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)
[LinkedIn](#)

