

# Landscape-scale impact for nature –

How farmers in the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster  
are making it happen



**Chilterns**  
National  
Landscape







# Foreword

Nature is the bedrock of our economy and our way of life, giving us the food, fresh water, air and shelter on which we all rely. It also provides places to relax, resources to build with, and mitigation of the impacts of a warming planet.

But the way we have ignored nature and the benefits it provides means it is in serious decline, fuelling climate breakdown and putting the nation's health, wealth and security in jeopardy.

We can halt and reverse this decline, but it will take partnerships working at large scale to bend the curve upwards to Nature Recovery. With 70% of England's land used for agriculture, farmers and land managers hold the key to making progress in this regard. After all, if Nature Recovery doesn't happen across our farmland it won't happen at all.

The custodians of the nation's fields, fells and valleys are closer than anyone to Nature and understand deeply its importance to their business, which relies heavily on

healthy soils, the tireless work of pollinating insects and a landscape resilient to flooding and drought.

I'm very pleased to say that I have seen plenty of evidence that farmers are rising to the challenge. This is very much the case in the Chilterns, where land managers are building partnerships beyond their boundaries, collaborating at a scale that can make a real difference for Nature.

I am grateful for the opportunity to celebrate their achievements and I hope that this fascinating collection of stories, information and advice will inspire others to support Nature Recovery.

**Tony Juniper CBE**  
Chair of Natural England

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*Verbatim quotes have been used throughout this document in order to include stakeholders' own voices. For authenticity, the spelling and grammar of these have not been corrected. [ ] denotes a deletion. ... denotes a partial quote. All quotes in this document are from members of the Farmer Cluster unless otherwise stated.*



The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster has 18 members who farm c. 6,500ha across the Buckinghamshire area of the Chilterns. It is facilitated and hosted by the Chilterns National Landscape and has been funded through the Chalk Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership Scheme (supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund) and established in 2019.



# The need

## Around 60% of the Chilterns National Landscape is farmland.

Farmland habitats are a vital part of our environment, providing us with the food we eat, the air we breathe, the paths we walk along and the habitats our wildlife calls home.

Yet, the farmed landscape faces a host of threats that are causing severe declines in our wildlife, including some of our most loved and iconic species. For example, a staggering 97% of the UK's traditional wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1940s and three-quarters of ponds have disappeared in the last century.

These losses ultimately affect the ability of our farmland (and its habitats) to provide us with the things we all need.

Wildlife needs more, bigger, better and better-connected habitats to thrive; places to feed, breed and shelter; corridors to move across the landscape in response to a changing environment and especially climate change.

Farmers in the Cluster care deeply about the way they farm their land and the wildlife their farms support, and came together to make a difference on a landscape scale.

From the outset, the Cluster Farmers wanted to find out more about the wildlife that lives on their farms, get excited by it, understand what it needs and explore options to help.

Farmers need support to ensure their farms are fit-for-the-future – balancing

the needs of employing wildlife-friendly and sustainable farming methods, but also supporting viable rural businesses.

Some support is available to farmers but it is often remote, not joined-up, nor tailored to their individual farm business and land, making it more difficult to work out what's right for their own situation and make solid plans.

Farmers are the guardians of much of our countryside and should be celebrated as such. If properly supported, they have the potential to make the huge difference we need for wildlife, environment and rural communities.

“I was beginning to feel despondent about the whole climate nature situation and now I'm feeling that my eyes have been opened and farmers have a unique opportunity to do something about it and contribute more than any other sector, and I'm feeling happy about that, that I can contribute and now we're taking part in that opportunity.”

“So often with things like this, something starts but then you have no idea who is who so it's hard to contact people when you need them.”

“Us farmers are all in our own bubble and thinking about what happens on our own farm, so to venture out and talk to other farmers, and the people who come onto the farm is really good for us, it gets us out of our comfort zone.”

“Before the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster was established, take-up of the agri-environment schemes in the Chilterns was very low – conservation projects had come and gone.”

Stakeholder



# The Cluster Farmers

The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster is made up of 18 farm businesses:

- Beechdean Farms
- Broomfield Farm
- Buckmoorend Farm
- College Farm
- Collings Hanger Farm
- Hampden Bottom Farm
- Handy Cross Farm
- Holly Green Farm
- Kensham Farms
- Lacey's Family Farm
- Little Horsenden Farm
- Manor Farm
- Manor House Farm
- Old Callowdown Farm
- Penn Street Farm
- Promised Land Farm
- Road Farm
- Stocken Farm



“We’re all different but we all get along and the best bit is everybody’s good at something.”

Farms range in size from the smallest beef farm, at 40 hectares, to the two largest arable farms, both covering over 900 hectares.

Farms also host, or adjoin, some of the most important wildlife sites in the county, namely nine Sites of Special Scientific Interest (‘SSSIs’) and 54 Local Wildlife Sites.

Farmer Ian Waller stepping up as Chair was key to the Farmer Cluster being farmer-led, and also for championing the need for evidence-based, collaborative work, and getting local farmers together.

This group of passionate farmers is bound together by the desire to make positive change for wildlife, whilst improving their farm businesses and producing high-quality food.

Coming together as the Farmer Cluster has helped to engage, excite and enthuse the farmers

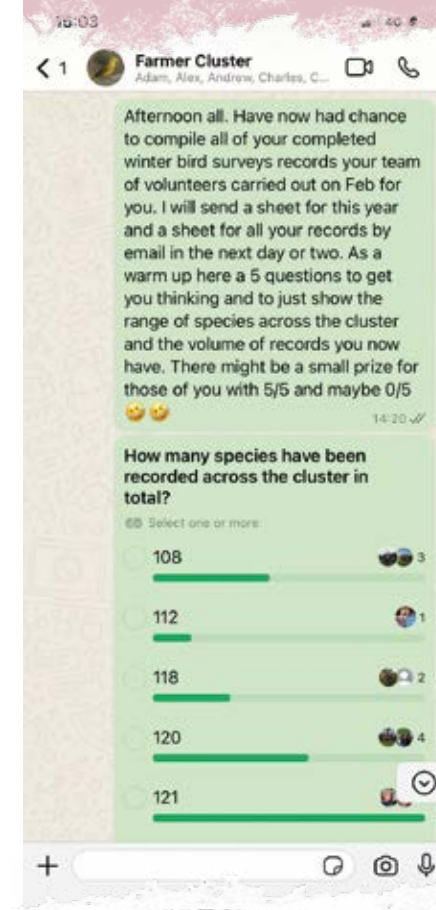
“We didn’t feel conscripted or forced into it, we did this out of interest and that’s very different from feeling like you have to do it as a government tick box.”

to better understand and care for wildlife on their farms. Peer support and a touch of competitiveness are married with expert advice, training and farmer-led initiatives which Cluster Farmers can opt into.

The work of the farmers is backed by a supportive community of over 90 organisations, experts and contractors, and at the centre of this are two Chilterns National Landscape staff. As well as plenty of hands-on support, the staff help to keep the Farmer Cluster work fun, informal and energetic, supporting a vibrant WhatsApp group and helping to generate a social and community feel between farmers.

“... linking up with other likeminded farmers has been a breath of fresh air.”

## Group work and individual benefits



Whilst farmers across the Farmer Cluster have many things in common, each has their own reasons for wanting to be part of the group, and to nurture nature on their farm.

Like many farmers, Ed Lacey of Lacey’s Family Farm has witnessed farmers getting a lot of negative press around environmental issues. However, as a seventh-generation farmer, he cares passionately about his family’s farm and the nature it is home to.

Although Lacey’s Family Farm is based around its pedigree herd of Guernsey cows, beef cattle and arable cropping, it also has a public-facing side, with award-winning farm shop and butcher’s. The project has enabled the business to shine a light on, and develop, its environmental credentials further whilst supporting nature.

On Lacey’s Family Farm 266 metres of new hedge has been planted, 2,038m coppiced and 1,215m of fencing erected to protect hedges from their stock while it grows.



In addition, Ed and his team have been part of a winter supplementary bird feeding project, installed four Barn Owl boxes and planted a new 200m wildflower field margin.

“The reason we got involved was that we knew we had all these things living on farm that my grandad could have named, but I couldn’t.”

“...we’re a very public facing business...It’s giving us something to engage people with, and a level of knowledge and evidence to show off.”

“This feels different for farmers. First and foremost we’re there because we have an interest, so it feels more like a social club with mutual benefit for our businesses.”

“...in the cluster you can share each other’s joy and think of what we’ve collectively achieved.”

all quotes from Ed, Farmer



# An end-to-end support package

## At the heart of the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster is an 'end-to-end' package of support for farmers.

Farmers are offered easy-to-access support to see plans through from initial idea, through detailed planning, advice and baseline data collection, to complete delivery in partnership with over 90 partners, specialists and suppliers. This is crucial for removing some of the barriers preventing farmers from taking action for nature.

Funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund has been essential for providing two members of Chilterns National Landscape staff\* to facilitate the Farmer Cluster, as a single point of contact and to be with farmers every step of the way. This has streamlined the process for farmers, and provided continuity and trust.

These staff are also the 'bridge' which helps enable both a rounded Whole Farm and truly landscape-scale approach. This capacity also helps to keep the Farmer Cluster moving forward at pace, ensure it remains farmer-led and to ultimately help make things happen on the ground.

The support is flexible and responsive to farmers' suggestions: everything from a brew at the kitchen table to chatting through ideas to buying and arranging delivery of supplementary bird seed to commissioning botanical surveys; engaging ecologists and agri-advisors; securing permissions; managing the tendering process for major chalk grassland contracts; coordinating teams of hedge-planting and fencing contractors; securing new funding streams and managing back-end budgets and invoicing.

The final vital element of the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster is that advice and practical support are paired with an innovative volunteer-driven programme of ecological monitoring. This is a powerful tool which enables farmers to track the impact of the changes they're making in real-time.

The end-to-end package components are:

1. Inspire, enthuse, engage farmers
2. Advice package
3. Project delivery
4. Secure funding
5. Long-term monitoring.

“It's very good they can organise things like fences, contractors and quotes. Often we don't have the time to do that, and knowing someone else was sorting it all out was just great.”

“When contractors started the work, Nick and Harriet actually turned up and were often the liaisons and boots on the ground. That was invaluable as I couldn't get there every time when questions were asked by the contractors. They went out of their way to be there.”



# Evidence-based planning drives ecological and economic impact

Up-to-date data and technical support are vital for quality planning of projects, and developing effective and appropriate Whole Farm Plans. In total, 55 pieces of ecological advice have been commissioned across the Farmer Cluster.

Key to the success of this has been building a team of easy-to-work-with consultants

that farmers trust and build relationships with. Having a flexible approach to bringing in specialists as the farmers need them has also meant advice is available at the point of need and when it is most likely to trigger action.

A package of ecological advice has been paired with practical support to work-up and submit Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and/or Countryside Stewardship agreement

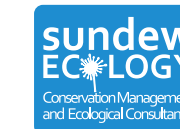
applications. In this way, farmers have been supported in their farm businesses' ecological improvements.

Oakbank, Sundew Ecology and Bernwood have all supported 12 farms to successfully submit 20 new such agreements worth over £2.6m. Working across the farms in this way has enabled the Farmer Cluster to be treated as an 'ecology' of farms, making

connections on and between farms more visible, and for those connections to more readily inform forward planning.

This support has enabled time and investment to be directed to the most appropriate projects, responding directly to both economic and ecological need, at both farm and landscape level.

“Our involvement with the Countryside Stewardship scheme had got to a point where I was getting quite despondent about it. [ ] If you needed help with something you'd try to phone up for advice but never get through to anyone and it was just pointless. But joining the group has been the way of sourcing good advice and team spirit. With the cluster [ ] there's always someone to speak to.”



BERNWOOD  
ECOLOGY



\* 1 Full-time equivalent



# What has been delivered

An impressive integrated package of surveying, mapping, advice, support and practical works has been delivered across the Farmer Cluster.

Together the farmers have achieved a huge amount – working at scale across the Central Chilterns landscape.

The member farms account for around 6,500 hectares of the agricultural landscape. Many of the farms directly neighbour each other and either include or border important wildlife sites – great news for habitat connectivity and collaborative projects.

Conservation on this scale enables the creation of more space for nature, stepping-stones for wildlife to move through the landscape as well help sequester more carbon, improve soil health and engage more local volunteers.

In short, the farmers' joint efforts are adding up to landscape-scale change for nature and environment.



“It’s so exciting working with the farmers; they have delivered so much in a short period of time and it’s really starting making a huge difference. For example, Rapid Habitat Assessments of the chalk grassland restoration work at Lodge Hill have shown a gradual increase in plant species recorded across the site. Great rewards for the farmers’ efforts to see nature recovering on their farms.”

Nick Marriner, Nature Recovery Manager at Chilterns National Landscape

Landscape-scale impact for nature — How farmers in the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster are making it happen

**40** grassland parcels now designated priority habitat

**2 major SSSI** chalk grassland restoration projects

**84 owl and raptor boxes installed** (29 with active barn owl/kestrel nests)

**18 farms** with Farm Carbon baseline<sup>1</sup>

Almost **20km** of hedge planted, coppiced and/or laid

**816,000 tonnes** carbon stored on farm soil



**60 tonnes** of supplementary winter bird feed

**8,574** new biological records on farms<sup>2</sup>



**225ha** Whole Farm designated Local Wildlife Site

**18 Whole Farm Plans** created covering 6,500 ha



**55** pieces of ecological advice commissioned to inform and support practical projects

**38 consultants** and expert advisers supporting farmers

**12** farm business supported to secure **20** agri-environment agreements worth **£2.6m**

**£840k direct grant funding** leveraged for habitat creation and/or management

<sup>1</sup>Via Farm Carbon Toolkit project. <sup>2</sup>Birds only.



# Old Callowdown Farm: an integrated package of support and actions

**Landowner Eleanor Cave joined the Farmer Cluster to get help and advice on how best to manage the farm for wildlife, including its Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Lodge Hill, in Buckinghamshire.**

Working in partnership with Natural England and Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC), an ambitious long-term chalk grassland restoration project was designed and set in motion.

A package of support was managed by Nick and Harriet from the Chilterns

National Landscape and included:

- Commissioning a full SSSI management plan
- Inviting tenders, awarding contracts and project management of an eight week scrub clearance project
- Arranging installation of new stock fencing, a stock pen and water supply to site.

Further specialist advice has helped draw up a Whole Farm Plan which has been used as the basis for a successful Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement and a new SFI agreement.

The farm has also attracted over £65k Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) partnership funding which has enabled conservation grazing to be introduced on 24 ha of species rich grassland.

In addition to the improvements for wildlife on the ground (see opposite), a team of volunteers have created a baseline against which changes have been tracked.

A team of dedicated volunteers have made possible four annual Rapid Habitat Assessments and two squares of multi-taxa surveys\* on the SSSI; winter and spring full farm bird surveys: bird ringing; winter bird feeder counts and owl box checking and ringing.

“Early on we’d decided that, because we have an SSSI which was in unfavourable condition and declining, that we’d apply for Countryside Stewardship at the highest level. They helped us pull together our application. It’s all been really useful.”

Eleanor, Landowner

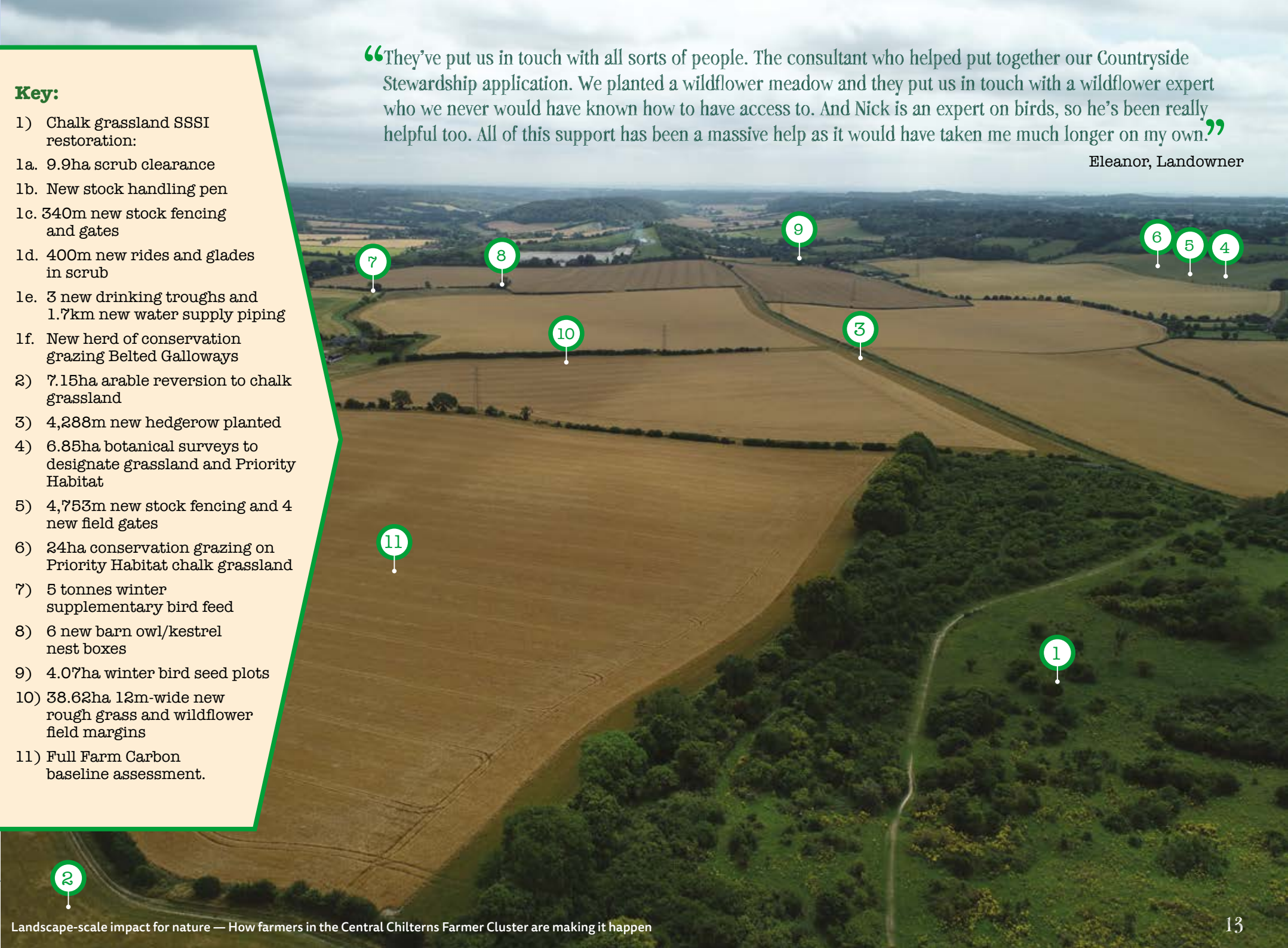
\*The coordinated package of surveys covers two Tracking the Impact squares, comprising a Breeding Bird Survey, Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey, National Plant Monitoring Scheme and a Reptile Survey on Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Visit: [www.chilterns.org.uk/flagship-projects/tracking-the-impact/](http://www.chilterns.org.uk/flagship-projects/tracking-the-impact/)

## Key:

- 1) Chalk grassland SSSI restoration:
  - 1a. 9.9ha scrub clearance
  - 1b. New stock handling pen
  - 1c. 340m new stock fencing and gates
  - 1d. 400m new rides and glades in scrub
  - 1e. 3 new drinking troughs and 1.7km new water supply piping
  - 1f. New herd of conservation grazing Belted Galloways
- 2) 7.15ha arable reversion to chalk grassland
- 3) 4,288m new hedgerow planted
- 4) 6.85ha botanical surveys to designate grassland and Priority Habitat
- 5) 4,753m new stock fencing and 4 new field gates
- 6) 24ha conservation grazing on Priority Habitat chalk grassland
- 7) 5 tonnes winter supplementary bird feed
- 8) 6 new barn owl/kestrel nest boxes
- 9) 4.07ha winter bird seed plots
- 10) 38.62ha 12m-wide new rough grass and wildflower field margins
- 11) Full Farm Carbon baseline assessment.

“They’ve put us in touch with all sorts of people. The consultant who helped put together our Countryside Stewardship application. We planted a wildflower meadow and they put us in touch with a wildflower expert who we never would have known how to have access to. And Nick is an expert on birds, so he’s been really helpful too. All of this support has been a massive help as it would have taken me much longer on my own.”

Eleanor, Landowner





# Outcomes for farmers



“By going to the meetings and getting all these incredible bits of info from Chilterns National Landscape and the cluster it was so helpful because a lot of farmers like me aren’t good at getting grants.”

This analysis is based on the COM-B Behaviour Change model which sets out that three elements are needed to make change happen – Capability, Opportunity and Motivation.

Farmers talk enthusiastically about the benefits of Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster membership, including:

- **Connecting with others** – this helps with sharing ideas and knowledge exchange between farmers, but also for farmers to feel part of a community and a positive force for good
- **Understanding nature more** – farmers have a much better idea of what habitats and wildlife are on their farm. This is not only a source of pride for farmers, but crucially helps to inform the way they manage their land and plan future projects
- **Support ‘on tap’** – the enhanced Cluster model provides ‘can-do’ staff that are on-hand for everything from running meetings, bulk ordering and managing contractors for conservation projects, to sitting at the farm table to work through agri-environment scheme applications
- **Access to expertise** – whereas it might be hard to know where to turn, the

Farmer Cluster provides an easy route to accessing technical knowledge when farmers need it most

- **Solid plans** – farmers now have more actionable insight at their fingertips through surveys and reports, as well as solid forward plans that are tailored to their farm business
- **Celebrating Chilterns farming** – the Farmer Cluster is helping to track the difference the farmers are making together and to shout about it.

Each farmer benefits differently, depending on their involvement in collective action, the make-up of their farm business, the land they manage, and the timeliness of the opportunities available.

Ultimately, the Farmer Cluster is throwing a spotlight on **farmers’ guardianship** of much of the Chilterns landscape, and the difference they are collectively making for nature.

It is helping farmers to be **ready, willing and able** to act for nature, whilst contributing towards their businesses being more **financially and environmentally sustainable**.

“It’s turned the farm around in terms of public knowledge on what we’re doing and any funding we can get for conservation is really important for farmers.”

“When you’re doing this on your own and for yourself, no one notices or appreciates and it’s sad. We have some poor land for struggling to grow crops and there’s no point in just putting more and more resources into trying. People were thinking we were just leaving the land... [the Farmer Cluster] gave me a new lease of life about what we were doing.”





# Outcomes for nature

The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster is seeing signs of significant gains for individual species, as well as for habitats that support them.

For example, the local volunteer-run Bucks Owl and Raptor Group (BORG) has partnered with the farmers for four years.



Together they have increased available nesting sites by surveying, and identifying suitable locations for, and installing, over 80 nest boxes<sup>1</sup> made from Stokboard, a recycled farm plastic.

Annual box checks by BTO-licensed volunteers have revealed around 35% of boxes are in active use, with barn owls and kestrels responding well to these artificial boxes. New Countryside Stewardship agreements will also soon provide more than 60 hectares of habitat for small mammals, providing more readily available prey – supporting owls and raptors further.

A large-scale, yet local-level citizen science programme<sup>2</sup> runs alongside the Farmer Cluster. It covers everything from bird, butterfly, plant and reptile recording to bird ringing and botanical surveys.

“This year I noticed one of the kestrel boxes which was occupied had 3 or 4 kestrel chicks. While I was haymaking they were fledging, so it was really nice to see them floating about.”



By using standardised national survey methodologies, the data gathered by volunteers can show trends across the Farmer Cluster area. For example, ringing recovery records are showing how farmland birds move around the Cluster Farms, and tracking barn owls occupying nest boxes are using the farmed landscape.

Results can also be compared with regional and national trends. This insight is a vital piece in the puzzle – enabling examination of the impact of farmers’ individual and collective efforts ‘on the ground’. The results are not only useful for motivating everyone, but are a foundation for plans and for applications for agri-environment schemes and new wildlife site designations (e.g. at Manor Farm).

“...the intensive dairy farm was the best one for birds, which was surprising but fantastic. We all cheered each other on and it was a fun sort of battle to see who was best at what.”

“We have fairly frequent interaction with [the volunteers]. For example if they come and do bird ringing [ ], it’s always fascinating to gain from their specialist knowledge and see the birds up close and have insights into the flora and fauna.”

<sup>1</sup>Part-funded by Bucks Bird Club and the National Lottery Heritage Fund

<sup>2</sup>Visit: [chilterns.org.uk/flagship-projects/tracking-the-impact](https://chilterns.org.uk/flagship-projects/tracking-the-impact)

## Early signs of recovery

For five years, volunteers have been carrying out structured Breeding Bird Surveys and British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) licensed bird ringers have been undertaking a regular winter study at a number of Cluster Farm feeding sites.

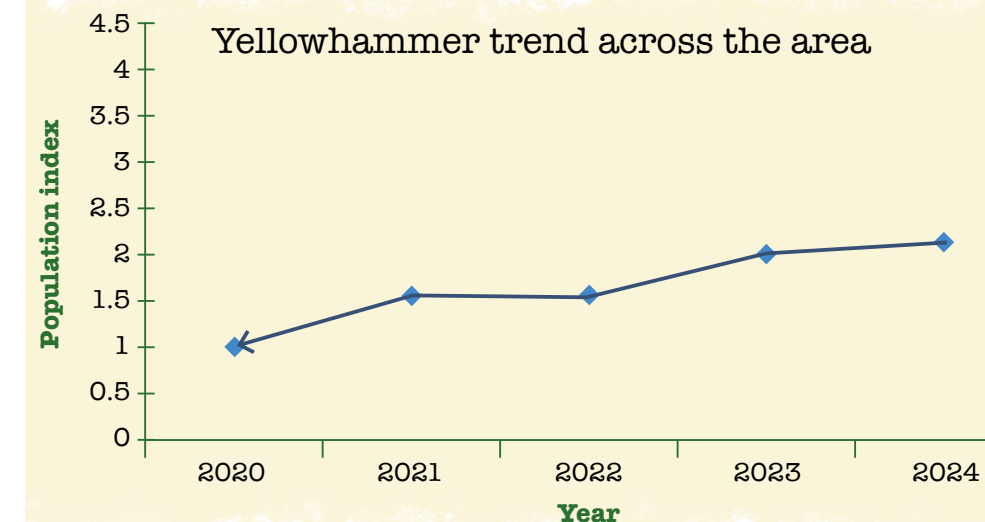


It’s still early days, but data analysis suggests:

- An increase in the abundance of yellowhammers across the Cluster area
- An annual increase in numbers of both:
  - Yellowhammers ringed
  - Young birds recorded – consistent with improvements in breeding success.

Taken together analysis shows a **statistically significant** landscape-scale increase in the population of yellowhammers across the Cluster area, in contrast to a long-term national population decline.

More detailed data analysis is needed to confirm the reason for changes, e.g. local breeding success or attraction of birds from elsewhere. However, the results highlight the potential for farmers to drive landscape-scale nature recovery.



In just five years farmers are **delivering results** by focusing on the needs of farmland birds through winter feeding and extensive habitat creation, and being supported by brilliant teams of skilled and dedicated volunteers tracking the impact of their work.

“[It’s amazing] Seeing the bird count results, seeing the evidence as I go around the farm on a daily basis, seeing the improvements that have been made.”

“I have three young children, and it’s nice taking them out to fill bird feeders. It’s rewarding getting them to witness what’s going on.”



# Investment-ready farmers

The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster works on a well-resourced, enhanced Cluster model. This has helped to make farmers more investment- and action-ready.



In effect, the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster has created a 'delivery-ready' vehicle into which other initiatives and actions benefiting the wider environment can be funnelled.

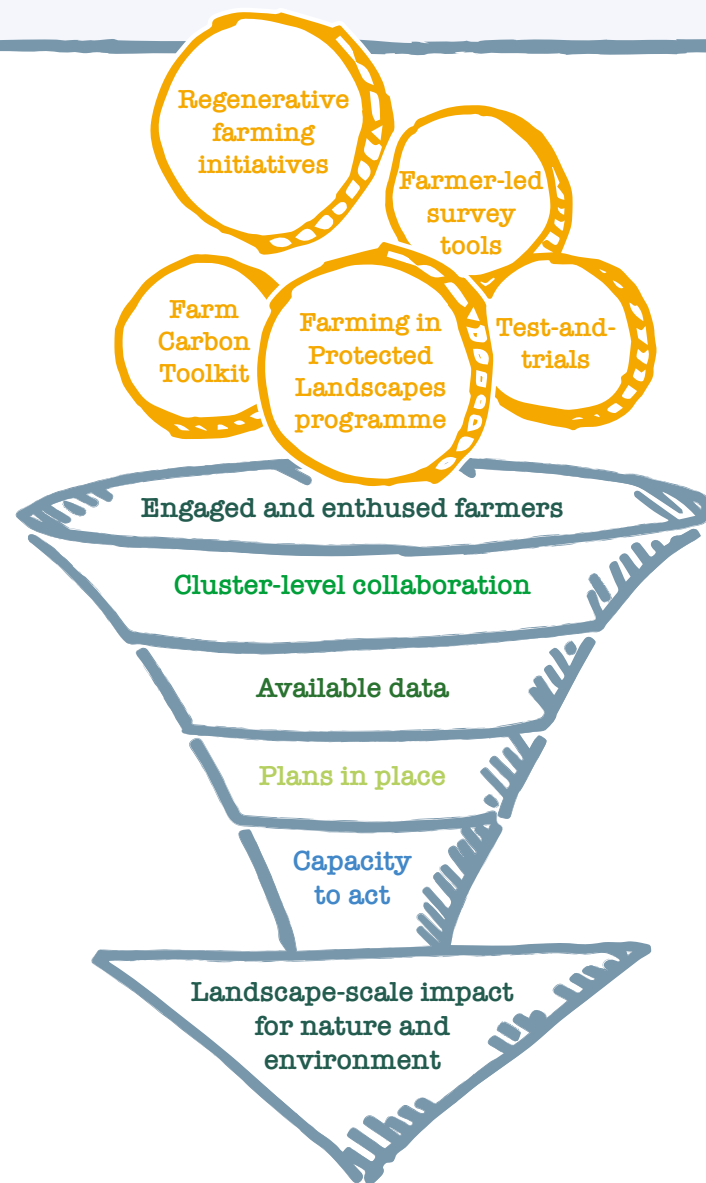
For example, the Rothschild Foundation has supported a Cluster-wide approach to reducing carbon emissions using the Farm Carbon Toolkit. The Farmer Cluster has also been able to present robust applications to Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and secure £432k of grant funding for projects.

Capacity created by this enhanced Cluster model has helped to leverage £8.14 additional money into the Cluster for every £1 core investment<sup>1</sup> from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, increasing the Cluster Farmers' impact for nature, the environment and their farm businesses.

<sup>1</sup>Excludes staffing costs

## An investment-ready funnel:

By investing in the Farmer Cluster, farmers are much more open to other initiatives and programmes, and are ready, willing and able to take part.



## Creating vital wildlife corridors across the landscape

As a priority habitat, hedgerows not only provide great value for wildlife, but are a defining feature in the Chilterns landscape and provide a fantastic way of sequestering carbon and protecting soil from wind and water erosion.



When the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grants became available, Cluster Farmers were already primed and ready to act. Their Whole Farm Plans, backed by hedgerow management survey evidence, provided a perfect basis for the FiPL programme. 15 farms worked together on a two year £450k<sup>1</sup> collaborative project achieving:

- 12,557m newly planted and gapped up hedges
- 6,562m of coppiced hedge
- 17,865m of fencing installed to protect hedges from stock and deer
- 335m hedge laid.

Central project management by the Chilterns National Landscape Landowner and Farming Engagement Adviser brought much-needed capacity, and allowed field-by-field, farm-by-farm planning. Packaging-up works into one contract, and using common specifications for planting, helped to create economies of scale.

Through the hedge project, farmers have helped to achieve bigger, healthier, better-connected hedgerows across the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster landscape.



<sup>1</sup>Total project cost of £452,065 with £227,146 from FiPL and £136,205 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with the remaining funding from HS2 Additional Projects, Bucks Community Boards and the farmers themselves.

“Commissioning a wide range of ecologists and advisers to support farmers establish baselines and options maps means individually and collectively they are ready to take advantage of new funding packages; doing what’s best for both wildlife and their farm businesses.”

Harriet Bennett, Landowner and Farming Engagement Adviser at Chilterns National Landscape



# A long-term solution with big rewards

By making things happen, farmers have been able to create an energy and dynamism and sense of scale of delivery on the ground, and showcase their work to funders, policy makers and the wider public.

Building relationships, creating trust, brokering partnerships, planning and delivery, supporting collaboration, creating momentum, making change happen and tracking the impact takes time. The return on investment is not immediate; the Farmer Cluster

has needed time to grow and bed-in if it is to be both effective and sustainable.

However, farmers are now starting to see tangible gains in terms of environmental improvements and investment in engaged and fit-for-the-future farm businesses.

“It took 10 years on our farm before we saw the benefits of what we were doing. But over time, once we stopped adding things to the soil and trying to farm on it, it turned out that there was a wildflower seedbank under the ground, waiting to grow again when the conditions were right.”

Build relationships, trust, confidence, capacity and a baseline

Increasing the number of hectares in active and positive management

Habitat conditions improve

Landscape-scale change and species recovery

Year 1 - 3



Year 3 - 5



Year 5



Year 10



## Introducing new regenerative farming techniques

One of the benefits of investing in the Farmer Cluster has been the ability for farmers to research, design and introduce new ways of working.

For example, in contrast to set stocking, mob grazing is short-duration, high-density grazing with a longer-than-usual grass recovery period.

As part of this regenerative farming technique, farmers move a large group of cattle on average once a day and leave the grass to recover for between 40 and 100 days.

This method of grazing can lead to hugely improved soil, healthier cattle and lower costs e.g. for fuel, feed and labour.

A package of advice, kit and improvements\* has helped to make a new mob grazing system possible at Road Farm.

This has included 8,838m of electric fencing, 3,140m of water piping, a solar-powered pumping system, four drinking troughs and 6ha of herbal ley has been planted.

Support from the cluster has helped David get set up and deliver benefits to his farm business, outcomes for nature and best practice for other farmers and agencies.

“We trust that the farm business will be just as viable, more enjoyable and more sustainable by the end of the conversion.”

David, Farmer

“We wanted to simplify our farming system, cutting inputs and using this modern take on good old fashioned grazing principles to future-proof it and encourage the wildlife on the farm. The goal will include the regeneration of healthy soils that will store more carbon, and the process involves us and our families plus the many visitors and Farm Helpers who visit Countryways CIC.”

David, Farmer

\*Funded by Farming in Protected Landscapes and The National Lottery Heritage Fund.





# Next Steps

**The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster is now well-established and delivering significant impact for nature and the rural economy.**

A key next step in its evolution has been for the Cluster to register as a Community Interest Company (or CIC), a special type of limited

company which exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders.

The experience of the Farmer Cluster has provided solid evidence of the importance of a well-resourced, enhanced Cluster model if significant landscape-scale impact is to be achieved. A large part of the funding came from the National Lottery Heritage

“I’ve said to my farming friends in other regions to get on with forming a cluster. There’s funds to help you achieve things you thought you could never get done.”

Fund and five-year grant to the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership Scheme, which has come to an end. The CIC is keen to maintain the momentum it has created and is working with the Chilterns National Landscape to secure new funding.

Scaling-up this approach across the whole of the Chilterns National landscape is central to delivering nature’s recovery and adaptation to climate change.

The model has now been transferred to other areas, with over 80 farmers involved in five clusters across the Chilterns National Landscape.

“The great work of the farmers in the cluster has provided a blueprint and catalyst for our wider work with farmers. We are very excited by the opportunities this brings, not only for farmers but for our wider Nature Recovery and Climate Adaptation plans. The opportunities to work at landscape scale are significant, and we are working to secure resources to scale support packages for all Farmer Clusters.”

Prof. Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape,  
Chilterns National Landscape



Landscape-scale impact for nature — How farmers in the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster are making it happen





## Chilterns National Landscape

### The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster is supported by a huge team of over 90 organisations:

**Consultants and Advisors:** Bernwood Ecology; Biological Recording Company; Biota Ecological Services; Coombes Services Ltd; Dan Bashford; Freshwater Habitats Trust; FarmEd; FWAG East; FWAG South East; Groundswell; Ian Waller; John Morris; Marek Nowakowski; Marlborough Downs Farmer Cluster; Nigel Adams; Oakbank Game & Conservation Ltd; People's Trust for Endangered Species; RSK Biocensus; Sundew Ecology; Tom Chapman; UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology; Woodland Trust.

**Suppliers:** Ashridge Trees; Briants; Brights Seeds; Cactus Tree Guards; Emorsgate Seeds; Farol; Landscape Matters; McVeigh Parker; Murray Maclean; Oakbank Game and Conservation Ltd; Perdix Feeders; Thorpe Trees.

**Contractors:** 4th Corner Landscaping; Agripower; Andy Nash; Barber Environmental; CD Agricultural, Chiltern Churchill Fencing; David Stocks Fencing; David Wise; Evolutions Groundworks and Development, Glebe Contracting; Groundlord; James Gardner; Kingfisher Contractors, MS Rural Services; Maydencroft; Pasturecare; Rand Contracting; RB Tree Masters Ltd; Sub strata; Wessex Woodland Management.

**Volunteer Groups:** Buckinghamshire Bird Club; Buckinghamshire Mammal Group; Bucks Owl and Raptor Group; over 30 Chilterns Conservation Board volunteers; Hughenden Ringing Group; Kitty Moss; Middle Thames Bird Conservation Trust; People's Trust for Endangered Species

**Partners:** Atkins Global; Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust; British Trust for Ornithology; Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre; Buckinghamshire Council; Butterfly Conservation; Chiltern Society; Chiltern Rangers; Chilterns Chalk Streams Project; Chilterns National Landscape; Country Land and Business Association; Farm Carbon Toolkit; Farming in Protected Landscapes programme; Forestry England; Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust; Historic England; HS2 Review Group; National Farmers Union; National Lottery Heritage Fund; National Trust; Natural England; North Chilterns Community Board; Plantlife; Ridgeway National Trail; River Thame Conservation Trust; Rothschild Foundation; South West Chilterns Community Board; Sustrans; The Gate pub; UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

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This document has been produced with, and on behalf of, the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster members. It has been researched and written by independent evaluation consultants, Heritage Insider Ltd, in collaboration with Nick Marriner, Nature Recovery Manager at Chilterns National Landscape.

[www.chilterns.org.uk/farmercluster](http://www.chilterns.org.uk/farmercluster)