



Chilterns
National
Landscape

Annual Review 2023/24



Contents



A Word from Our Chair	2
About Us	3
Our Vision and Purposes	4
Our Team	5
Leading and Making an Impact	7
• Management Plan Update	
• Planning and Development	
• Chilterns Boundary Review	
• Nature Recovery in the Chilterns	
• Chilterns HS2 Additional Projects Fund	
• Supporting Farmers	
Engaging Communities and Building Partnerships	11
• Chalkscapes	
• Art in the Landscape	
• Open for Business	
• Access for All and Walking Festivals	
Our Projects	12
• Chilterns Chalk Streams Project	
• River Chess Smarter Water Catchment	
• Farming in Protected Landscapes	
• Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership	
• Mend the Gap	
• Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership	
Financial Year 23/24	15
Contact Us	16



A word from our Chair

2023/24 has marked significant change for the Chilterns.

All areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales have been renamed National Landscapes – to highlight their equal place with National Parks and underscoring their critical role in sustainable public access, climate change mitigation and nature recovery.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 has further strengthened the legal duty on relevant bodies to “seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty” of these areas.

In 2024/25, alongside Natural England’s review of the Chilterns boundary, we will undertake a review of the Management Plan to set the strategic direction for the next five years. We look forward to robust engagement in these consultations to help shape a plan that reflects the ambition of the Chilterns National Landscape.

We also anticipate continued government support, including funding from Defra’s Access for All programme and the final year of the Farming in Protected Landscapes initiative. Our team remains committed to pursuing further opportunities to enhance the landscape for both wildlife and communities.

Finally, I would like to thank our dedicated staff team, whose consistent commitment and hard work are clearly reflected throughout this annual report.

COLIN COURTNEY

CHAIR 2023/24



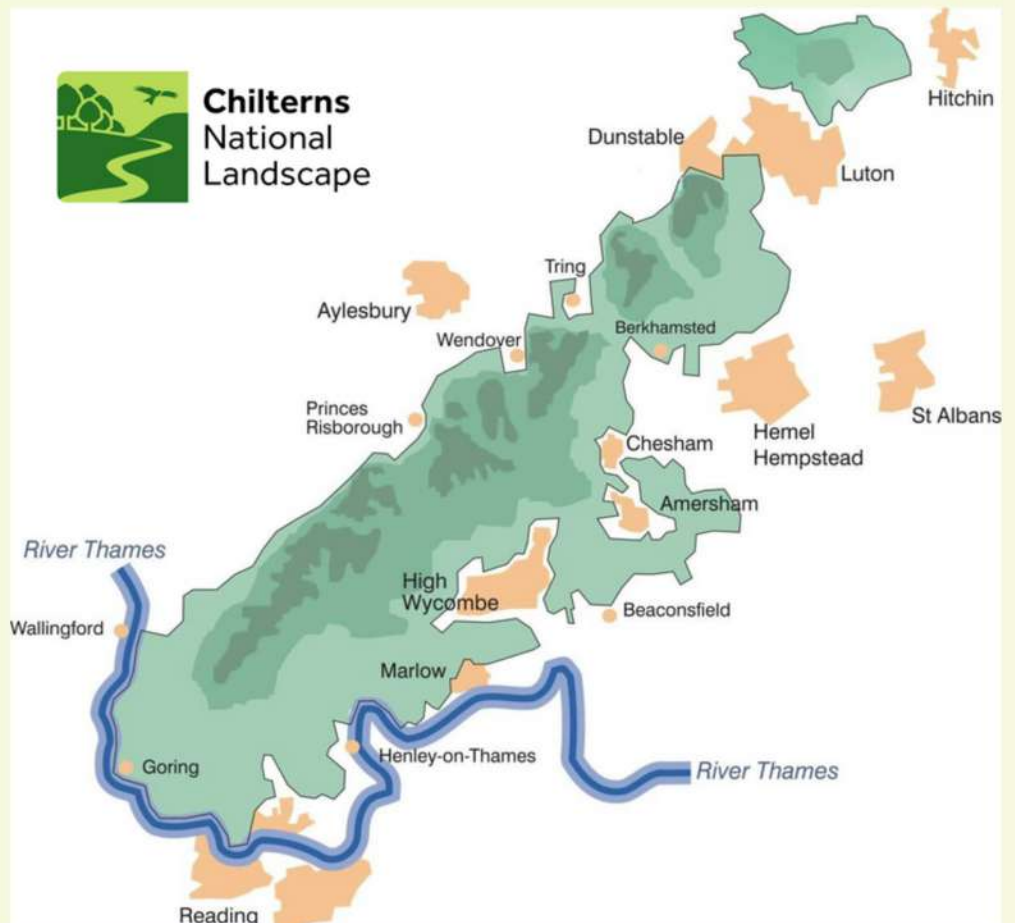
About us



**Chilterns
National
Landscape**

The Chilterns National Landscape covers over 838km² (324 square miles) across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire. It was originally designated as an AONB in 1965 and subsequently extended slightly in 1990. It is one of 34 National Landscapes in England, which are designated on the basis that their area is of such outstanding natural beauty that steps should be taken to conserve and enhance that natural beauty. In relation to natural beauty, the criteria for designation are the same as for England's 10 National Parks (including the Broads).

The Chilterns Conservation Board is an independent public body established to conserve and enhance the Chilterns National Landscape. The Board is supported by a staff team of 27 individuals who work in partnership with local authorities, voluntary organisations, businesses, local communities, and others who live and work in the Chilterns.



Our vision

Our vision is that the Chilterns will be cared for, forever and for everyone. A place where people are inspired by its distinctive natural beauty, space and tranquillity, to enjoy and care for the landscape. A place where natural beauty and cultural heritage is celebrated and enhanced. A place which gives space for nature to flourish and which provides us with the ingredients for healthy living, such as clean water, healthy soils and thriving wildlife. A place where communities live, work and breathe. A haven for people and wildlife.



**Chilterns
National
Landscape**

Our purposes

The Conservation Board's purposes are given in Section 87 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000:

It is the duty of a conservation board established in relation to an area in England, in the exercise of their functions, to seek to further —

- (a) the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and
- (b) the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty,

but if it appears to the board that there is a conflict between those purposes, they are to attach greater weight to the purpose mentioned in paragraph (a).

A conservation board, while fulfilling their duties under subsection 1 (above), shall seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities within the area of outstanding natural beauty and shall, for that purpose, co-operate with local authorities and public bodies whose functions include the promotion of economic or social development within the area of outstanding natural beauty.



Our team



Dr Elaine King

Chief Executive



Dr Matt Thomson

Head of Strategy & Planning



Annette Weiss

Head of Engagement & Partnerships



Dr Kate Heppell

Head of Landscape



Andy Brock-Doyle

Head of Operations



Neil Jackson

Conservation & Landscape Officer



Gareth Clay

Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer



Dr Wendy Morrison

Heritage & Archaeology Manager



Vicki Pearce

Communications Manager



Helen Valvona

Communications Officer



Fiona Skeggs

Communications Officer



Lynne Cordice

Senior Administration Officer



Eloise Small

Administration Officer

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project



**Allen
Beechey**

Project Manager



**Ceri
Groves**

Education &
Engagement
Officer



**Laura
Silverstone**

Education &
Engagement
Officer



**Adrian
Porter**

Rivers Officer

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership



**Anna
Foster**

Project Manager



**Nick
Marriner**

Nature Recovery
Manager



**Harriet
Bennett**

Landowner &
Farming
Engagement
Advisor



**Fran
Crowther**

Assistant Project
Manager

River Chess Smarter Water Catchment



**Steph
Horn**

Project
Coordinator



**Hannah
Parry-Wilson**

Citizen Science
Coordinator



**Dr Claudia
Bernardini**

Project Support
Officer

Mend the Gap



**Ruth
Staples-Rolfe**

Programme
Manager



**Sarah
Hebbes**

Project Support
Officer



Leading and making an impact

Management plan update

Working together with local authorities, farmers, landowners and other stakeholders, the Conservation Board is required to produce and review a management plan with objectives, policies and actions aimed at conserving and enhancing the National Landscape's natural beauty and promoting its understanding and enjoyment.

The current management plan ran from 2019 to 2024, but the government invited us to undertake a "light-touch review" and extend it until the end of March 2025 in light of changes to the law and national policy.

The ongoing boundary review could result in new areas being included in the Chilterns National Landscape within the next two to five years, at which point we intend to produce a completely new plan. The Board determined that the best approach for the period after the current plan expires is to roll forward, or "refresh", the current plan's key content, with changes limited to factual updates and enhanced content on key national priorities, including nature recovery, adaptation to climate change, and encouraging diversity in access to the landscape, as well as embedding in the plan the government's new Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. We will start work on a new management plan as soon as the outcome of the boundary review is known.

Key highlights:

- Working with stakeholders, we have delivered significantly on the plan's objectives during 2023/24, as set out elsewhere in this review.
- We have extended the period covered by the current plan to the end of March 2025.
- We have put in place a programme to "refresh" the current management plan, rolling forward the existing content, with updates and enhancements, to cover the period 2025-30, replacing this with a new plan as soon as the boundary review is completed.

"Our priority over the past year has been to celebrate the evidence and engagement that went into preparing our current management plan and not lose sight of that good work while the boundary review is being completed. This is a shared plan that involves everyone, and we will work closely with partners and stakeholders to enhance the management plan's content on nature recovery, climate adaptation, and inclusive access."

Dr Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy & Planning



Planning and Development

A key role for the Conservation Board is advising policymakers on what matters should be considered in development proposals affecting the National Landscape. This is mostly achieved by responding to formal consultations, publishing material and engaging with relevant authorities. While resources are limited, the Board's reputation as being evidence-focused, and backed up by the expertise and experience of our Planning Committee, means we can be highly effective. The legal and policy context has changed radically over the year, and looks set to change further next year, and the Conservation Board is at the forefront of assisting the National Landscapes family in their response to these changes.



Key highlights:

- Submitted responses to over 50 planning applications, two neighbourhood plans, one site development brief, a joint strategic plan and two local plans, as well as two national consultations on permitted development reform and national infrastructure planning processes.
- Participated in several planning appeals, including hearings on a 1,400-home speculative proposal adjacent to the National Landscape in Tring, and attended the examination on the proposed expansion of Luton Airport, introducing key issues relating to the Boundary Review and recent changes to national legislation.
- Made progress towards publishing a new position statement covering the Board's policy on lighting in the National Landscape and an online toolkit to support communities in conserving and enhancing their local landscapes through neighbourhood planning (both due to be published early next year).



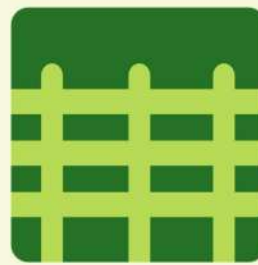
"There's never a dull moment with planning and development in the Chilterns National Landscape, whether you're supporting a village trying to protect its cherished surroundings, or trying to reduce the impacts of aircraft on the tranquillity of the countryside. While we are effective at influencing decisions, we don't have any direct planning powers, so everything we are able to achieve depends on making a good case with the best possible evidence. And we can't do that without the expert advice of our staff – not just in planning – and volunteers, including members of our Planning Committee."

Dr Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy & Planning

Chilterns Boundary Review

Throughout the last year, the Chilterns National Landscape team has continued to assist Natural England's work to consider extending the current AONB boundary by providing local knowledge and technical advice to Natural England and their consultants, Land Use Consultants (LUC).

Two workshops were held in November 2023 to share LUC's assessment of "natural beauty", with local authorities and other experts providing in depth knowledge of a broad area of search. Attendees supported potential candidate areas for inclusion though asked for further assessments to be made, particularly of areas between urban areas and the current boundary.



Key highlights

- Detailed natural beauty assessment of 61 separate landscape areas carried out by LUC.
- Second stage "desirability to designate" assessment looking at planning, other constraints and refining candidate areas is almost complete.
- Formal and public consultation to consider potential new boundaries expected during winter 2024/25.

"Extending the Chilterns National Landscape was always going to require significant technical and local expertise and input. We are pleased with the positive progress Natural England and its consultants, LUC, have made this year, and we look forward to exciting work to define new boundaries in the coming year."

Neil Jackson, Conservation & Landscape Officer

Nature recovery in the Chilterns

Along with other National Landscapes, we are drawing together a plan to guide the recovery of nature within our landscape. We will identify priorities and potential action for the habitats and species found within the Chilterns' special quality landscapes. These include our chalk grassland, chalk streams, ancient woodland, farmed land and hedgerows.

At the same time, our four local authorities are also creating Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), and we are pleased to be working closely with each LNRS team to agree priorities for the Chilterns.

Key highlights:

- 16 organisations and authorities involved in the working group for the Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan.
- Two working group meetings convened.
- Strategy for the Chilterns to be published April 2025.



"The Chilterns is home to a wonderful variety of habitats and wildlife, including many protected and notable species. The area is particularly important for its chalk grassland, chalk streams and woodlands. Unfortunately, studies have shown that nature is in decline across the country, and the Chilterns is no exception. To safeguard our special qualities, and to help nature recover we must implement a Nature Recovery Plan. This plan will help organisations, landowners and farmers in the Chilterns work together to create a connected and thriving landscape across the National Landscape for future generations."

Dr Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape

The Chilterns HS2 Additional Projects Fund

As members of the Chilterns HS2 Review Group, we help identify projects that will bring additional “enhancement and integration” benefits around the construction of HS2. We are currently working with farmers and landowners on a landscape and biodiversity connectivity project, which includes hedgerow rejuvenation, willow pollarding and tree planting.



The Review Group is keen to allocate remaining funds, approximately £1.3 million, towards nature recovery and heritage projects.

Key highlights

- Over 22 landowners and farmers supported to deliver landscape and biodiversity improvements in the Misbourne Valley.
- Improved access along The Ridgeway National Trail, the new 4km Misbourne Greenway between Great Missenden and Wendover, and 2.7km of the Wendover Canal towpath between Wendover and Halton.
- Further projects to deliver nature recovery and heritage improvements currently in development.

“We remain committed to reducing the negative impacts of HS2 through the Chilterns and are grateful for the commitment of the Chilterns HS2 Review Group to work with local partners to fund enhancement projects within the Misbourne Valley through the HS2 Additional Projects Fund.”

Neil Jackson, Conservation & Landscape Officer

Supporting farmers

Our focus on supporting farmers in the Chilterns is making a significant impact on a landscape scale. The Chilterns now has five Farmer Cluster groups involving over 75 farmers - Christmas Common, Central Chilterns, Chess Valley and North Chilterns - with a new group in the South Chilterns supported by the Mend the Gap programme. Each group is at a different stage of development but all contribute to delivering high impact, on the ground support for their businesses and wider nature recovery aspirations.

Each cluster is funded differently. With support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Defra’s Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, the Mend the Gap programme, Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund, Thames Water and the Rothschild Foundation, farmers have achieved:

- Over 30km of hedgerow planting and management, with plans for more.
- 21 new Agri Environment Scheme applications worth £2.6m, covering 1,500ha.
- Carbon baseline surveys across 53 farms.
- Support for farmland birds through ongoing winter and spring bird surveys and providing 20+ tonnes of winter supplementary feeding.
- Ongoing advice through workshops and farm visits.

“The response from farmers to the creation of clusters has been fantastic. Since the first Central Chilterns Cluster meeting in 2017, 75 farmers across five groups have shown their passion for collaboration and the value of tailored support packages. Significant funding has recognised the crucial role farmers play in creating more, better, bigger and better connected habitats, and I’m excited by the impact they’re making.”

Nick Marriner, Nature Recovery Manager

Engaging communities and building partnerships

Over the past year, we have actively engaged with communities and individuals through a range of projects and partnerships, offering activities such as events, guided walks and volunteering opportunities.

These initiatives have been designed to encourage participation, enjoyment, and learning, with a strong focus on reaching underserved audiences. Our efforts have been bolstered by major new projects like “Nature Calling”, which help us deliver on our vision of inclusivity and connection to nature.

Key highlights:

- **Chalkscapes project:** In March 2024, we unveiled ground-breaking research funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The research focused on creating green spaces that diverse communities can easily access and enjoy. This initiative has strengthened our relationships with community groups through engagement activities like countryside walks and heritage crafts.
- **Art in the Landscape:** The Chilterns was selected as one of six hubs for the £2 million national programme, led by the National Landscapes Association and funded by Arts Council England and Defra. Our “Nature Calling” project, part of this initiative, aims to engage diverse communities through an arts programme, culminating in activities from May to September 2025.
 - **Open for Business:** Concluding in December 2023, the programme supported 58 tourism and hospitality businesses in the HS2-affected central Chilterns. The programme helped promote local experiences, launched a new visitor guide and boosted the region’s visibility through a digital media campaign.
 - **Access for All:** With £54,000 of Defra Access funding, we made significant improvements to countryside accessibility. This included new paths, off-road mobility vehicles and enhanced facilities for people of all abilities. We are planning further enhancements in 2024/25, which will include improvements to online accessibility resources.
 - **Walking festivals:** Our two walking festivals, held in May and October 2023, attracted over 1,000 participants across 120 walks. These festivals emphasised mental health and wellbeing through activities including mindfulness walks and forest bathing, and worked closely with local businesses and community groups.



“This year, we’ve made significant strides in reaching more diverse audiences and ensuring that our projects are inclusive and accessible to all. We’re excited to build on this momentum and continue fostering deeper connections with communities across the Chilterns.”

Annette Weiss, Head of Engagement & Partnerships



Our projects

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

At the end of 2022-23 we completed the “Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows” project funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The two staff members employed to deliver this 18-month long project have been retained. With the strengthened staff team the project has entered a new phase, with a marked increase in the scale and ambition of work we can now deliver. In addition to this expansion of our core work we continue to be a key partner in the delivery of the Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project.

This year we have delivered a busy programme of river restoration, landowner advice, education and engagement activities, surveys and citizen science projects, invasive non-native species control and catchment planning.

Key highlights:

- **Extending our project on the Hamble Brook.** Creation of a 2,500m² wetland and planting 60 native saplings.
- **Education and engagement programme delivery:** 44 school visits and workshops delivered, engaging 1,200 children in learning about local chalk streams. An additional 200 pupils from nine schools involved in our flagship “trout in the classroom” project.
- Working with local partners we have led on **developing evidence-based catchment plans** for the Ewelme Brook and River Misbourne.
- **Citizen Science** – Bi-annual Chess Water Vole survey completed with voles found in the recently restored section at Latimer for the first time. Rare winterbourne mayfly and stonefly recorded in the Hamble Brook – a new record for Bucks and the Chilterns. First annual Riverfly newsletter produced.

River Chess Smarter Water Catchment (SWC)

In 2023/24, SWC focussed on prioritising, collecting and adding to its evidence base to deliver actions on the ground. A total of £800,870 was spent delivering a myriad of projects working with farmers, landowners, citizen scientists and community groups, as well as supporting key staff across the catchment partnership.

Key highlights

- Delivered 980m of river restoration across 12 projects, including 290m of rare chalk stream and the removal of three weirs to support fish passage.
- Recorded 2,566 volunteer hours across 12 survey types.
- Continue to deliver a strong research programme into geology, sources of sediment, and chemicals of emerging concern, expanding knowledge and allowing SWC to make evidence-driven decisions.
- 31 individuals attended the last Chess Valley Farm Cluster meeting.



“The year, the project engaged with 76 organisations and its delivery is reliant on them all. With only one more year of confirmed funding, we are now entering the stage of having the momentum to act on the right projects to deliver for the catchment, with huge ambition from the partnership as always across a breadth of issues and priorities.”

Steph Horn, Project Coordinator



Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

This year, the Defra-funded FiPL programme supported three farm clusters with funding for facilitation, hedgerow planting or restoration, and farm carbon assessments.

Other projects included access (kissing gates to replace stiles), orchard creation, restoration of wildlife rich habitat, deer chillers, educational farm visits and fencing for grazing projects. In total, over 100 farmers have benefitted either directly or indirectly (e.g. via help to stalkers to control deer).

“It was a very successful year of funding for all of the FiPL themes (nature, climate, people, place). Farmers and land managers were brilliant at getting projects completed, although some projects had to be postponed due to the very wet winter and early spring.”

Gareth Clay, FiPL Officer



Key highlights

- Spent £628,214 out of a Defra project delivery allocation of £648,882.
- £11,141 average spend per project (across 56 projects).
- Approx. 500 volunteer days across all projects, representing about 370 people.

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership

With a new project management team in place, and the five year scheme extended by eight months until November 2024, this year has been another fantastic year for the Central Chilterns.

Key highlights

- Supported various community groups in enhancing local sites, boosting their confidence in conservation projects and access to advice, while increasing willingness to seek further funding.
- Sour Cherry Soup, a new play in the Chilterns, drew nearly 300 attendees across nine performances.
- The Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster has established itself as an independent Community Interest Company (CiC) and a huge scrub clearance project was completed at one of the farms.
- Hidden Hands, a six-month long exhibition and events at Wycombe Museum, highlighted the role of women’s work in the Chilterns in the 19th century.
- 20 young people signed up for New Shoots and took part in different conservation activities such as scrub bashes and species ID sessions.
- Geophysical survey of Grim’s Ditch, involving two branches of the Young Archaeologists Club and New Shoots.
- Expanded Tracking the Impact survey coverage, trained more volunteers in species monitoring, and successfully delivered species identification courses.



“As the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs programme looks to its final year, our delivery leads and partners have been able to carry on with the project’s great work, going from strength to strength. We now look forward to the legacies we leave behind as the project draws to a close and reflect on the fantastic work for wildlife, heritage and people the scheme has achieved.”

Anna Foster, Project Manager



Mend the Gap

This year, the programme focussed on realising the benefits for landscapes that have been negatively impacted by the electrification of the Great Western Railway around the Goring Gap.

Working in partnership with the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the local Railway Action Group, the programme has accelerated mitigation planting efforts, supported by the project management skills of Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South East.

Key highlights

- Over 2km of hedges and 120 trees planted.
- Committed over £600,000 to six larger projects including Withymead Nature Reserve, BBOWT Cholsey Marshes, Sulham Wetland creation, and Rectory Farm chalk grassland restoration.
- Over 20 enhancement projects in the delivery phase or completed, including access enhancements to the Bull pub in Streatley and the establishment of Goring Gap Environment Organisation.

“We’ve spent a considerable amount of time looking at programme effectiveness and listening to the needs of the landowners, community and the nature recovery champions. Moving forward, we’ll be focussing on enhancing the chalk, wetland, and arable habitats which make the Thames and in particular the Goring Gap so important.”

Ruth Staples-Rolfe, Programme Manager

Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Project (CHAP)

Over the last year, CHAP really found its feet, gaining recognition not only as a one-stop heritage shop for the Chilterns, but also as the potential linchpin for bringing organisations together.

From working with Natural England and Historic England on initial plans for managing assets like Hexton Hills, to collaborating with landowners and charities to deliver improvements on ancient monuments like Bledlow Cross, CHAP looks forward to a bright future developing and delivering projects and guidance to protect and share our Chilterns past.

Key highlights

- Delivered 15 public talks on archaeology.
- Secured over £50,000 in funding to deliver heritage projects in 2024/25.
- Submitted the Development Phase application in collaboration with Chilterns Chalk Streams Project for “Not Bourne Yesterday”.



“Increasing the visibility of heritage and archaeology in all areas of our work is bringing additionality to everything we do to enhance and protect our landscapes, and CHAP has been key in being that voice for the past at the conservation table where we are planning for our future.”

Dr Wendy Morrison, Heritage & Archaeology Manager



Financial Year 2023/24



Income (£)

Defra	1,316,720
Local authority contribution	174,635
Project & other income	2,338,700
Total income	3,830,055



Expenditure (£)

Overheads	223,723
People & Society	286,663
Landscape & Conservation	3,017,960
Planning & Development	301,709
Total expenditure	3,830,055



Contact us



Please do contact us if you would like further information about any of our work. You can find contact details for all of our staff and project teams on our [website](#).

You may also be interested in signing up to our [newsletter](#) for news and ideas for getting out and about in the Chilterns countryside.

Browse the [visit](#) section of our website for ideas and inspiration, from gentle strolls and picnic sites, to local attractions and cycle routes. There are so many memories to be made in the Chilterns National Landscape.



01844 355500



www.chilterns.org.uk



office@chilterns.org.uk



@ChilternsNL



The Lodge, 90 Station Road, Chinnor, Oxon, OX39 4HA



Chilterns
National
Landscape