

# Ministerial Foreword

**Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are some of our finest landscapes. They are cherished by residents and visitors alike and allow millions of people from all walks of life to understand and connect with nature.**

I am pleased to see that this management plan demonstrates how AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards can continue to protect these precious environments despite the significant challenges they face. With a changing climate, the increasing demands of a growing population and in difficult economic times, I believe AONBs represent just the sort of community driven, collaborative approach needed to ensure our natural environment is maintained for generations to come.

AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards have been the architects of a landscape-scale approach to land management. This approach is a key feature of the Government's Natural Environment White Paper and emphasises the need to manage ecosystems in an integrated fashion, linking goals on wildlife, water, soil and landscape, and working at a scale that respects natural systems.

This management plan also makes the important connection between people and nature. I am pleased to hear that local communities have been central to the development of the plan, and will be at the heart of its delivery. From volunteers on nature conservation projects, to businesses working to promote sustainable tourism, it's great to hear of the enthusiasm and commitment of the local people who hold their AONBs so dear.



AONBs are, and will continue to be, landscapes of change. Management plans such as this are vital in ensuring these changes are for the better. I would like to thank all those who were involved in bringing this plan together and I wish you every success in bringing it to fruition.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Rupert de Mauley".

**Lord de Mauley**

Minister for Natural Environment and Science



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Foreword

**The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is nationally-protected as one of the finest areas of countryside in the UK. It is a living landscape, shaped by nature and the activities of man. The future well-being of the Chilterns is dependent on everyone working together to conserve and enhance this special area.**

This Management Plan provides the framework to enable us to, collectively, maximise our effectiveness in managing the Chilterns AONB. It sets out the special qualities of the area, presents a vision of the AONB, identifies the challenges and identifies policies and actions to guide the work of all of those who care for the area over the next five years (2014-19).

The law requires that AONBs have a management plan in place. Even without this statutory requirement there are good reasons to produce one. The Plan is a collective expression of the interests and wishes of many individuals and organisations and it is only with this input that it can truly be a plan for the whole AONB.

There are many challenges ahead in the period this Plan covers including: the uncertainties of climate change; the spread of pests and diseases; the need for more houses; the demand for new development and the continuing aspiration to get more people to enjoy and appreciate the great outdoors. Should Parliament give the go ahead for High Speed 2, it is essential that everything is done to minimise the damage and disruption, ideally by putting the railway in a full length tunnel under the AONB.



We are fortunate to live and work in such a wonderful part of England. This Plan will help us all to care for it better on behalf of future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Fox', written in a cursive style.

**Mike Fox** Chairman

Chilterns Conservation Board

# A Vision for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Management Plan is based on a vision for the Chilterns AONB in which:



## *Conserve and enhance the natural beauty*

- Its special and unique character is conserved, cared for and cherished for future generations to enjoy.
- The importance of taking a landscape-wide approach to its management is accepted, which combines an understanding of its natural, historical, cultural, social and economic characteristics.
- The setting of the Chilterns is valued and protected by ensuring development adjacent to the AONB also respects its national importance.
- The historic and cultural environment of the Chilterns is conserved and appreciated widely.



## *Increase understanding and enjoyment*

- Opportunities to expand, enhance and enjoy natural beauty are created and taken.
- Local people and visitors can easily appreciate and enjoy its special qualities.
- Those who live, work, visit and enjoy the area also want to be its custodians and stewards.
- The knowledge, skills and resources needed to manage the AONB as a nationally important landscape are readily available.
- The potentially adverse impacts of pests, diseases and climate change are avoided or minimised.



## *Foster social and economic well-being*

- The health and well-being of local people and visitors is enhanced by their enjoyment of the area.
- The potential of a high quality natural environment to provide a high quality living environment for local communities and businesses is realised.
- There is a thriving market for environmentally-sustainable local produce which contributes to the viability of land management and enterprises.

## The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be an area where:



### *Natural beauty*

- Chalk grassland is more extensive, creating more open downland with thriving populations of its special wildlife.
- Woodland is well-managed and productive, growing high quality timber as well as providing natural spaces for recreation and a home for wildlife.
- Chalk streams have enhanced flows along their natural river beds and provide a healthy environment for their specialised wildlife.
- Local farms are thriving businesses which help to maintain landscapes and wildlife habitats.
- The historic environment, including the numerous hillforts, is conserved, enjoyed and appreciated.
- Common land is valued, enjoyed and well-managed with larger areas of open landscape and better conserved heritage features.
- New buildings, utilities and transport infrastructure are designed and built to high environmental standards that respect the character of the built environment and the character, setting and tranquillity of the landscape.
- More new buildings are constructed using traditional materials and vernacular architectural styles.
- There is a place for modern and innovative building and structural design which respects the setting and wider landscape.

### *Understanding and enjoyment*

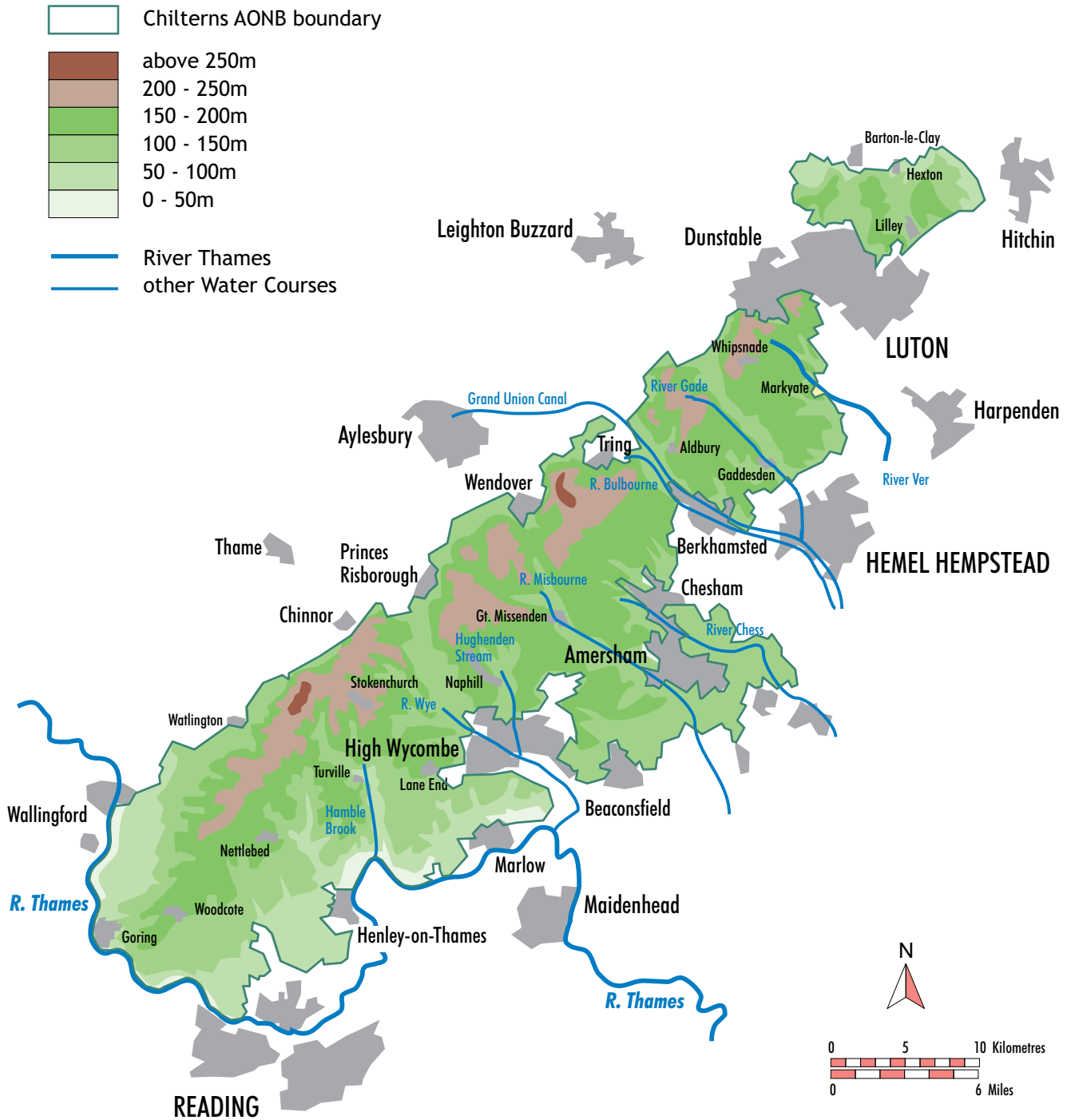
- The River Thames and its valley provide attractive landscape, recreational opportunities and enhanced wildlife habitat.
- The public rights of way, including the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails, are well-managed and easily used providing attractive networks of routes popular with walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.



- High quality visitor information and environmental education programmes are widely available.
- More local people and visitors become active volunteers to help care for all parts of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Tranquillity is conserved and where noise is a problem, peace and quiet is restored, in particular by reducing noise generated by road traffic, over-flying aircraft and trains.
- The impact of transport infrastructure and traffic is reduced, with more people walking, cycling and using public transport.



# The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



© Crown copyright and database rights  
 [2014] Ordnance Survey Licence no. 100044050

# Introduction

---

## The special qualities of the Chilterns AONB

*Kingwood Common  
Oxfordshire*



1. In 1965 an area of 800 sq kms of the Chiltern Hills was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Later, following a review of the boundary the AONB was enlarged to 833 sq kms in 1990. Natural England has recently lifted its de facto moratorium of the review of boundaries of AONBs and there may well be an opportunity during the lifetime of this Plan to consider proposals to change the existing boundary.
2. The Chilterns AONB was designated for the natural beauty of its landscape and its natural and cultural heritage. In particular, it was designated to protect its special qualities which include the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, the network of ancient routes, villages with their brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment of hillforts and chalk figures.
3. There is an extensive network of protected sites within the AONB, including 63 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), three National Nature Reserves and three European-designated Special Areas of Conservation. In 2012 98.7% of the Chilterns' SSSIs were in favourable or recovering condition.
4. The Chilterns is one of the most densely wooded parts of the UK with nearly 22% woodland cover of which two thirds is ancient woodland - the highest proportion in the country. The AONB also has a nationally-important concentration of high quality chalk grassland with over 700 ha.
5. Commons are amongst the most characteristic features of the AONB – part of its social and cultural heritage – accessible green places for recreation and public enjoyment and home to a wide diversity of wildlife. Today there are

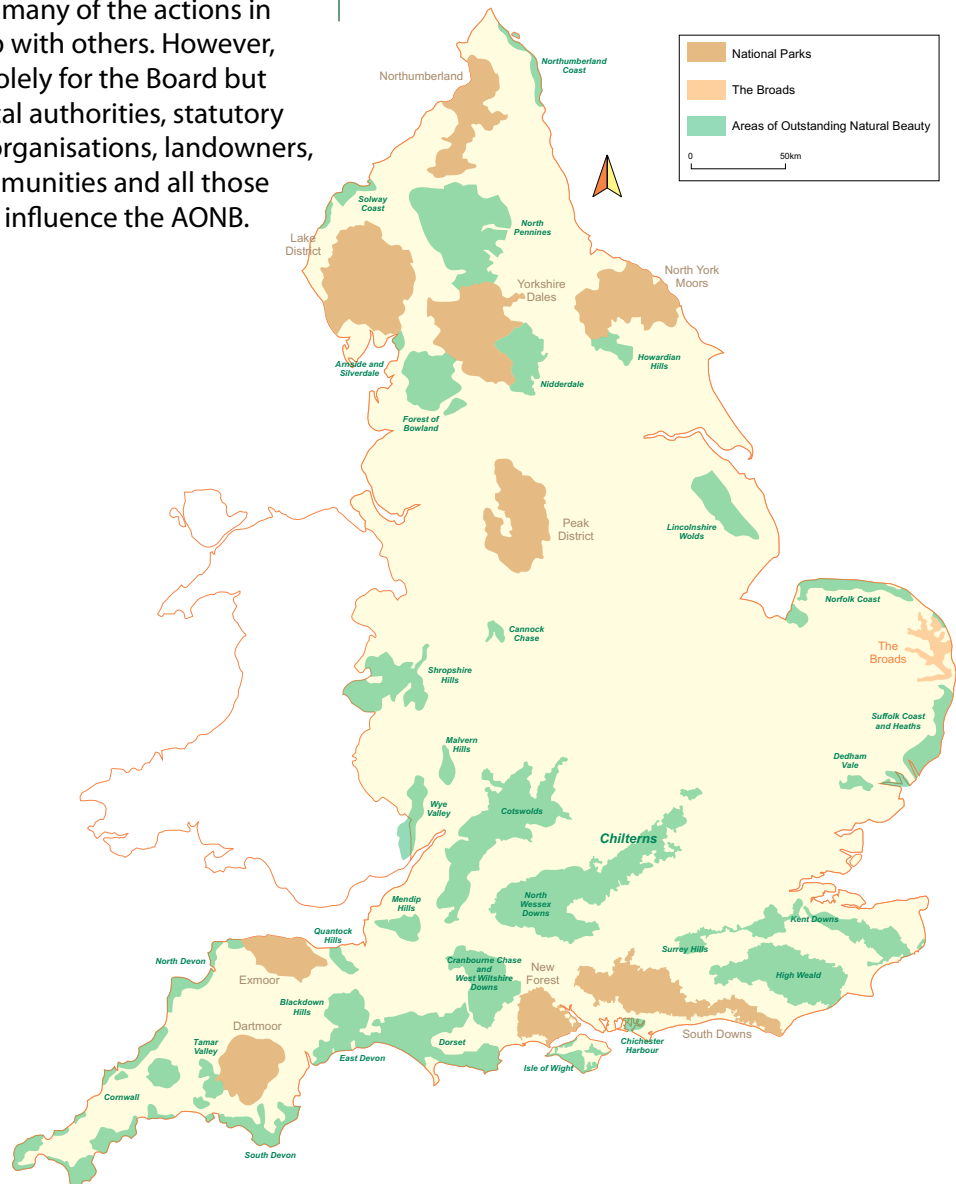
- 2016 ha of registered common land in the AONB – around 2.4% of the total area.
6. Some of the Chilterns' most distinctive natural features are its chalk rivers and streams, fed by groundwater from the chalk aquifer. A globally scarce habitat, chalk rivers support a range of specialised wildlife and in the Chilterns provide a home for the threatened water vole. Another significant water feature of the area, the River Thames, forms much of the southern boundary of the AONB.
  7. The Chilterns is possibly the most heavily-visited landscape in the UK with 55 million leisure visits a year<sup>1</sup>. Visitors come to enjoy over 2000 km of public rights of way, the Ridgeway and the Thames Path National Trails, the Chiltern Way and the recently opened Chilterns Cycleway and many more special routes.
  8. The area is rich in history with ancient man-made features scattered through the countryside and a legacy of grand houses and designed landscapes from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are 122 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the AONB and 15 parks and gardens on English Heritage's register. There are 2,149 listed buildings, of which 140 are Grade I and II\*, and 94 Conservation Areas.
3. In fulfilling these purposes, the Board has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the AONB, without incurring significant expenditure.
  4. In practice, where there is a conflict between conserving the special qualities of the Chilterns and its use or enjoyment, the Board will give greater weight to its conservation.
  5. There are 27 members of the Board: 13 are appointed by the 13 local authorities in the Chilterns AONB, eight are appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and six are elected by parish and town councils in the AONB.
  6. The Board has a small staff team based in Chinnor in Oxfordshire. It is also assisted by volunteers who lead guided walks, give talks, help at events and carry out project work.

### The Chilterns Conservation Board

1. The Chilterns Conservation Board was established by Parliamentary Order in 2004. It is one of the first two Conservation Boards (the other is for the Cotswolds) set up under the Countryside and Rights Of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 which enabled the establishment of independent statutory bodies to manage AONBs.
  2. The Board has two statutory purposes:
    - to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and
    - to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.
1. The CRoW Act places a duty on all local authorities which include an AONB, and Conservation Boards, where they exist, to produce a plan which outlines their policies for the management of the AONB and how they will carry out their functions in relation to it. Management plans must be reviewed at least every five years. The previous Plan covered the period 2008-13.
  2. An ongoing difficulty is monitoring the actual changes to the landscape and how they affect its quality. The Conservation Board prepares an annual State of the Environment Report based on a number of locally selected indicators and using the best available information. Ideally such a report would be based on a combination of local and national indicators to enable comparisons with other areas using up to date information. It is an objective of the new Plan to

<sup>1</sup> 2007 Chilterns Leisure Visitor Survey

- increase the amount of environmental data on the AONB which will be published in the annual State of the Environment Report and will contribute to monitoring of the Plan's progress.
3. The Management Plan for the AONB for 2014-2019 contains a number of broad aims for the management of the Chilterns AONB. The more detailed policies and actions in the Plan outline how these aims will be achieved by the Board and all other parties with an interest in the AONB.
4. The aims, policies and actions in the Plan have been formulated by the Board in consultation with a wide range of organisations and individuals. During the Plan's lifetime the Board will guide its implementation and will be responsible for undertaking many of the actions in it, in partnership with others. However, the Plan is not solely for the Board but is a guide for local authorities, statutory agencies, local organisations, landowners, businesses, communities and all those whose activities influence the AONB.
5. For clarification, the implementation of the actions identified in the Plan for the AONB will require the collaboration of many organisations - it is not a work programme for the Chilterns Conservation Board alone. Inevitably, the programme will be affected by the priorities of each partner and availability of resources. In recent years many of those bodies which will take a major role have less public funding available, a trend likely to continue for some time. This shortage of resource combined with an increased political emphasis on economic growth rather than environmental conservation will, inevitably, restrict the level of ambition and delivery that can be achieved in practice.





### Global, national and regional context of the AONB

1. The Chilterns AONB is one of 46 AONBs in the UK, which together cover 18% of the countryside. The AONB designation was created by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, which also established the National Park designation. The aim was that the two designations would protect the finest countryside in England and Wales. In June 2000 the Government confirmed that AONBs and National Parks have the same level of landscape quality and share the same level of protection.
2. AONBs are part of the global network of protected landscapes. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) has six management categories covering all types of protected areas. AONBs (and National Parks) fall into Category V – landscapes managed mainly for conservation and recreation.
3. The Chilterns Conservation Board is a member of Europarc, the umbrella organisation for Europe's protected areas. As a protected landscape the Chilterns AONB, along with other AONBs, is playing a key role in the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, ratified by the UK in 2006. The Convention aims to improve the protection and management of important landscapes and to increase co-operation across Europe.
4. The Board is an active member of the National Association for AONBs which represents the interests of the designation and those bodies responsible for them at a national level.
5. The Board also participates in the South East Protected Landscapes group to develop collaborative initiatives across the region and to develop working relationships with a range of regional partners. There is further scope for collaborative working in the East of England.

### Influences on the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB

#### Development

1. There has long been pressure on the Chiltern Hills for development and for changes in land use which would have a deleterious effect on the quality of the landscape. It was partly these pressures which led to the designation of the area as an AONB in 1965. In more recent times the pressures have grown, leading to a greater-than-ever need for a comprehensive and widely-implemented Management Plan.
2. The recent introduction of the new National Planning Policy Framework to encourage more development is intended to relax planning policies and controls to stimulate house building in particular. Great care will be needed to ensure that this does not lead to a proliferation of designs which do not reflect the traditional Chilterns styles and use of materials. A return to the universal design prevalent during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be greatly damaging to the AONB. The national policies highlight the need to ensure AONBs are given suitable protection, which will need vigilance and persistence on the part of local planning authorities.
3. The pressures for development and the long urban fringe along the AONB boundary means there will be continuing pressure which may lead to urbanisation, illegal activities such as fly tipping and problems for landowners especially those who wish to continue commercial farming. This pressure may also lead to loss of tranquillity due to increases in noise from roads, railways, aircraft and the general background noise created in built up areas.
4. The specific impact of High Speed 2 on the Misbourne Valley and communities of Great Missenden, Hyde Heath, South Heath and Wendover will be severe. The current proposed alignment and design are far from the best available. If Parliament decides the railway should go

ahead a full-length bored tunnel would be the least damaging option.

5. The threat of a significantly greater number of overflying aircraft is growing as a result of the plan by the operators of Luton airport to double the number of passengers using the airport from 10 million per annum to nearly 20 million.
6. Currently there are no plans to locate wind farms in the Chilterns or for 'fracking'. However that may change and such activities may be sited immediately adjacent to the AONB. Any proposal should be assessed in terms of its impact on the AONB and unless it can be proven that the environmental impacts are acceptable there should be a presumption in favour of refusal.

### Visitor pressure

7. Sitting on London's doorstep, and immediately adjacent to several large towns, the Chilterns provides highly valued landscapes and places to escape to. It is a place which has to cope with growing populations and increasing traffic levels as well as pressures for development which come right up to the boundary. Luton, Aylesbury and the Thames Corridor have been identified as part of growth areas by the Government and will see population increases in the coming years, which will result in a greater number of people travelling through the AONB and using it for recreation. The consequent demand for road improvements and greater infrastructure at countryside sites could have a damaging effect on the AONB so needs to be appropriately managed.

### Use of water

8. Greater development close to the Chilterns, and some inevitable development within the area, will lead to more consumption of scarce water resources. Abstraction of water for domestic use already has an impact on Chilterns streams and rivers and it is vital that public demand for water is managed sustainably.

### Changes in farming

9. The landscape of the Chilterns is dominated by farmland and woodland, and changes in these land uses have a major influence on the natural beauty of the area. The reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy and the introduction of new agri-environment schemes in the UK are affecting farming. The vagaries of the climate are proving an ever increasing challenge with extremes of weather becoming more frequent with potentially significant consequences. Experience has shown that when farming is more profitable there is greater investment in environmental conservation. The pressure on profit margins together with a relative decline in grant-aid is likely to have a negative impact on some aspects of the farmed environment.
10. Loss of traditional management practices - in particular grazing - and the almost total cessation of 'commoning' (the exercise of common rights) have affected the open habitats often associated with common land.

### Changes in forestry

11. The long term decline in the market for UK timber has had a pronounced effect on the Chiltern woodlands, with many suffering from a lack of management. The ageing beech woodlands no longer produce significant volumes of timber and are more valuable as places for recreation than as a part of the rural economy. However, the growing demand for wood as a renewable fuel has stimulated the improved management of some woodlands.

### Pests and diseases

12. The number of potentially damaging pests and diseases threatening woodlands, in particular, has grown significantly. The long standing problem of damage by grey squirrels and deer is now compounded by the threat from a number of diseases including ash dieback, acute oak decline and sudden oak death. These diseases will dramatically change the tree species composition of local woods and will result in other species being planted which are likely to be less vulnerable to damage and also may cope better with changes in climate. The aim is to create more resilience against the effects of pests and diseases through the choice of species and management prescriptions. For example this might mean more planting of lime, walnut and douglas fir.

### *Chenies Manor near Amersham*



### Cross-cutting themes of the Management Plan

A number of important themes, which will have a significant influence on the management of the AONB over the next five years, cut across all the chapters of the Plan. They are:

- climate change
- social inclusion
- health and well-being
- lifelong learning
- ecosystem services
- environmental sustainability

Many of these themes are integrated in the concept of green infrastructure (GI), which aims to provide a high quality environment which contributes to the well-being of local communities.

#### 1. Climate change

A changing global climate, principally caused by human activities, is now regarded as an indisputable fact by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>2</sup>. How much global temperatures will rise and how quickly are still under debate, but there is a broad consensus of opinion on the likely changes to the climate of southern England, and therefore the Chilterns AONB, over the next few decades. The likely long term changes are:

- summers will become warmer and drier
- winters will become milder and wetter
- storm events will become more frequent
- weather generally will become more unpredictable

Even short to medium term climatic cycles may be uncertain but there is consensus on the likely long term trends.

<sup>2</sup> IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change (2007)

These changes have the potential to affect the landscape, wildlife and communities of the Chilterns in many ways. For example, in future the Chilterns woods may well have less beech and ash (if any) and more lime, sycamore and even walnut.

The range of crops grown by farmers will change and there may be more growing of biofuels, although concerns over the security of food supplies may affect that market. Flows in rivers and streams could become more erratic and there will be changes in the fauna and flora of all habitats. The impact of tourism is particularly unpredictable. People may decide to holiday in the UK rather than to go abroad if the summer weather becomes warmer and sunnier but, as in recent years, poor weather may lead to fewer holidays taken in the UK.

### 2. Social inclusion

The Chilterns AONB is a national treasure, protected for all to enjoy and it receives millions of visits every year. Despite this, there are many who could benefit from the area and yet remain unaware of what it has to offer, or who face obstacles in accessing it. Ensuring that as wide an audience as possible understands the special qualities of the AONB and takes an active part in enjoying and caring for it is essential to the future of the area. The Management Plan seeks to achieve this in a variety of ways including reaching out to those in urban areas close to the Chilterns, improving public participation in conservation activities and increasing awareness of the AONB and its special qualities amongst those who are not regular visitors at the moment.

### 3. Health and well-being

Rising obesity levels and the ever-increasing costs of healthcare have prompted a much greater emphasis on preventative health solutions. There is an increasing perception of the countryside, and green space in general, as a place which offers tangible benefits to health and well-being. The value of protected countryside, like AONBs, in providing walking, cycling and riding routes and a tranquil rural escape from stressful lives is increasingly being seen in economic and social terms as well as environmental.

### 4. Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is the concept of providing people with learning opportunities at all ages and in many different contexts: at work, at home and during leisure pursuits as well as through more formal channels such as adult education. It is a Government priority and one which ties in with the Conservation Board's primary purpose of increasing understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns AONB. With greater understanding comes a sense of ownership and of stewardship. The popularity of the natural environment amongst the public combined with the resources that the AONB offers such as wildlife, special habitats, history and built heritage creates many opportunities to stimulate understanding, develop skills and encourage creative responses.

### 5. Ecosystem services

The environment provides many services in the form of wildlife, water, minerals, public enjoyment, flood protection, food, timber and other natural resources. This wide ranging and interlinked array of services is now being given better and more formal recognition in national environmental policies. A primary purpose of this increased emphasis is to ensure that any proposal which has an environmental impact results in the assessment of those impacts on the full range of ecosystem services and a full value thereby being accorded to those services.

### 6. Environmental sustainability

The Earth's resources, in simple terms, fall into those which can be renewed and those which cannot and will be exhausted unless their use ceases. The favoured approach is to give priority to minimising use of non-renewable resources and increasing reliance in those which are renewable. The most obvious examples are in the field of energy with more energy conservation, reduced reliance on fossil fuels and greater generation of solar power. It is not anticipated that wind turbines will be located in the AONB. Much greater use will be made of wood fuel, not least as very large volumes are likely to be available if, and when, the area is affected by ash dieback.