

Chilterns Conservation Board Annual Review 2016/17

Photo: Chris Smith

Welcome from the Chairman

Welcome to the 2016/17 Annual Review from the Chilterns Conservation Board, the public body with a duty of care for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It has been a busy year as we seek to grow our impact and deliver important benefits for communities in and around the AONB, while focusing on becoming a more sustainable organisation. Many of the key challenges remain – unprecedented pressure from housing and infrastructure development, fragmented and neglected wildlife habitats, pest damage, changes to land management, and the impacts of climate change. We have continued to deliver landscape enhancements to meet these challenges through restoring chalk streams, advising woodland owners, contributing to the HS2 Review Group and providing planning expertise.

In other ways, the past year has been one of change. This has included decisions on HS2 and the decision to exit the European Union, coupled with an increasing expectation for AONBs to become more self-sufficient. We have focused efforts on securing external funding to meet our key objectives (see right). I am delighted to report that we secured LEADER funding to deliver a three-year programme of walking events, Defra funding for a local food and drink initiative and Heritage Lottery Fund grants to develop a landscape restoration scheme and a hillforts project. We also welcomed new project staff to deliver this work.

The past twelve months have therefore set the groundwork for enhancing the Chilterns and delivering more long-term benefits for those who live in and around the area.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people and organisations across the AONB who have worked so hard over the past year to conserve and enhance the AONB for the benefit of the landscape and of society as a whole.

Ian Reay, Chairman

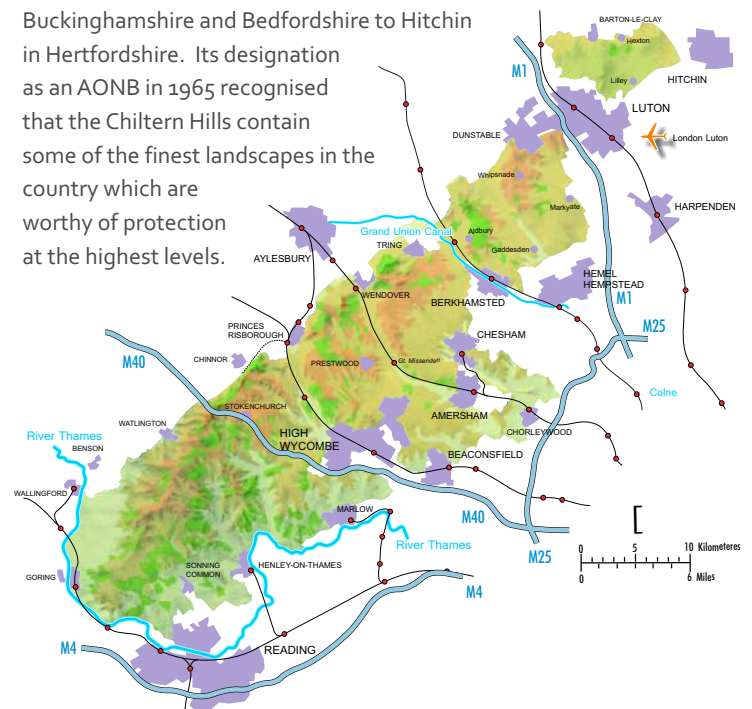


Photo: Colin Drake

Visit by Lord Gardiner, Defra Minister, to the Chilterns AONB, February 2017

About the Chilterns AONB

The AONB covers 839 square kilometres of countryside, from the River Thames in southern Oxfordshire up through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire to Hitchin in Hertfordshire. Its designation as an AONB in 1965 recognised that the Chiltern Hills contain some of the finest landscapes in the country which are worthy of protection at the highest levels.



About the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB)

The CCB is an independent, public body set up by Parliamentary Order in July 2004. The purposes of the Board are set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and include a duty to:

- conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB, and
- increase the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB.



The CCB also has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities. The CCB has 27 members drawn from local communities and relies on funding from Defra and Local Authorities.

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an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Looking after the landscape

Developing a Central Chilterns landscape project

The Board was successful in its first stage bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop a major Landscape Partnership Scheme in the Central Chilterns called "Chalk, Cherries and Chairs". The CCB was awarded a development grant of £185,600 and appointed a project team to work on what will be the biggest conservation and engagement project in the Chilterns. It will create a network of stewards and champions for the local heritage and special landscape; restore, enhance and record habitats, landscape features and cultural heritage; ensure that wildlife habitats are better-connected; upskill land managers and volunteers; and establish a strengthened partnership to ensure the legacy lasts.



The project team started working on the detail of the Stage 2 bid which, if successful, will bring a total partnership income of around £2.8 million to the Central Chilterns area.

The submission of the bid involved over 30 organisations working closely together and demonstrated the importance of partnership working to deliver benefit to the AONB. This partnership will be crucial as the bid is developed.

Making a difference through supporting local projects

Over the past twelve months, the Board supported 7 local projects to secure over 65 hectares of positive conservation management on some of our most precious wildlife-rich sites. Projects include maintenance of a site vital to the rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly and management of, and research into, rare chalk grasslands and the species that they support.

Working closely with the High Speed Rail 2 Review Group

Throughout the Lords Select Committee process, which continued in 2016, the Board continued to argue for improvements to reduce the impact of HS2 proposals. Disappointingly, the Bill received Royal Assent without major improvements to the route.

The Board is now working closely with the Chiltern AONB HS2 Review Group, seeking to influence the design and identify extra environmental measures to help integrate the scheme into the AONB and benefit the wider community.

Delivering rural skills

The CCB continued its successful rural skills programme, with a free scything day and courses in hedge laying and pruning of traditional fruit trees. We also gathered together partners from across the Chilterns to take part in an annual scrub bash which will help to restore the important chalk grassland on the steep scarp slope.



Photo: Collin Drake

Annual scrub bash 2017, Whiteleaf Hill



Photo: Richard Gillan

Ivinghoe Beacon

Researching, promoting and conserving our ancient hillforts

In June 2016, the CCB was awarded a first-round grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to develop an exciting new project to research, promote and conserve iron-age hillforts and their landscape settings across the Chilterns. If successful at Stage 2, we and other project partners will secure nearly £1 million to the project.



A Hillforts Project Development Officer was appointed in June 2016 to oversee the development of the bid, working with a network of project partners and stakeholders. A key feature of the project, an aerial LIDAR survey has been planned, which will capture new archaeological information across the AONB. In addition, consultants have been commissioned to create a portfolio of recommendations for each of the 22 hillfort sites within the project area and a number of urban sites have been identified for special inclusion, creating an exciting opportunity to work with communities and partners in these areas. Work now starts on raising support and match-funding for the project.

Protecting our woodland

Woodland is an important landscape feature of the AONB with around 21% woodland cover, of which 60% is ancient woodland. These are often important wildlife sites with specialised flora and fauna and often conceal features of archaeological and historical interest. Most of the ancient woods can be found on the hilltops, adding height and changing colours seasonally.



Photo: Clive Ormonde

Bluebells, Southend Common

The Board supports the Chilterns Woodland Project which is an independent charity. Over the past twelve months, the Project offered advice and assistance to 63 owners on approximately 550 ha of trees and woodland; arranged practical work on 29 sites with contractors and volunteers; ran 7 workshops and talks; and continued a programme of 11 ancient woodland surveys and reports for woodland owners, looking at potential restoration projects.

Conserving our rare chalk streams

With only 200 chalk streams worldwide, Chilterns' chalk streams are a special feature of the landscape. They support rare wildlife habitats and species and add to a sense of tranquility. This year, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) worked with a broader range of partners to achieve more for the area's chalk streams and sought new funding to secure the future of the Project.

In 2016/17 CCSP delivered, or supported delivery of, improvements to around 2kms of the Misbourne, Bulbourne and Wye. A scheme to restore a 1km section of the Bulbourne at Box Moor in Hemel Hempstead was completed. The £100k scheme, proposed by the CCSP, was delivered by the Environment Agency (EA), Box Moor Trust and CCSP working in partnership.

The Project also supported the Wild Trout Trust's restoration scheme of the Lea, worked with the EA and Affinity Water on delivery of their ambitious chalk stream restoration programme throughout the Chilterns and worked alongside Defra, Groundwork South and partners to develop and deliver the catchment plans for the Colne. CCSP worked to raise awareness and understanding of chalk streams, working with partners to install interpretation boards and with volunteers on restoration work; advising on riparian management; and supporting the EA's volunteer training course for a new citizen science survey technique, due to be rolled out in 2017.

CCSP supported the Chilterns, Herts and Middlesex Riverfly Hub to train 15 new monitors – 115 sites are now monitored. In addition, the popular Trout in the Classroom programme, working with the River Chess Association, was run in 8 schools.

Finally, the Project worked with the River Chess Association on its successful Water Vole Recovery Scheme. A BBOWT survey of the Ewelme watercress beds revealed no signs for a second year, leaving the Chess with the only remaining population in the AONB.

Focusing on planning and development

2016/17 was a particularly busy year with increasing development pressure across the AONB. This included many large-scale housing proposals, in part due to some local planning authorities not being able to demonstrate the required 5-year supply of land for residential development. The CCB has worked hard to support local authorities (LAs) with advice on the AONB impacts of such proposals.

Local Plan making was exceptionally busy, with all LAs working to meet a Government deadline. The CCB worked with Bucks LAs on the question of what constitutes major development in the AONB, leading to one authority dropping a number of proposed sites for housing allocations. The CCB developed a model policy for the AONB which each LA can drop into its emerging plan. This ground-breaking approach should give consistency across the 13 LAs, and stronger protection by incorporating newer ideas like protecting tranquility and dark skies, and assessing cumulative effects – a subject which was explored in a workshop organised by the CCB.

The Board sat on an Advisory Group on rail electrification and continued to push Network Rail to change to alternatives from the poorly-designed gantries running through the AONB on the Great Western Mainline around Goring and South Stoke.

The CCB submitted formal comments on 42 development plans, which included neighbourhood plans and Government consultations, and detailed comments on 100 planning applications. The Board provided training and advice for LAs through 2 AONB Planning Forums and held a training session for planning officers.

Delivering benefit for people and society

The focus of activity in the last year has been on developing new projects which deliver benefit from the AONB to people and communities, in particular the 10 million people who live within an hour of the Chilterns.

Promoting Chilterns' Food and Drink – Taste of the Chilterns

The CCB successfully bid for £24,000 funding from Defra's Great British Food programme to promote the Chilterns as a food and drink destination and increase tourism to the area throughout the year.



The project was delivered over a four-month period from December to March and included a seven-day Chilterns Food and Drink festival; development of new marketing materials including Chilterns' Vineyard and Brewery Guides, a "Taste of the Chilterns" short film and food and drink guides to four market towns. A communications campaign increased impact and awareness through national and local press and social media. The project also supported the first print edition of Chilterns Food Magazine.

“ We have seen a 'halo' effect: the event enabled us to have 'something to talk about' and engage customers new and old. We had a very busy Easter as a result. We were also thrilled to see the 10 best pub walks in the Chilterns in the Telegraph particularly as it featured one of our closest pubs. Again we shared this on social media platforms.” *Local food business*

Encouraging health and wellbeing – Chilterns Walking Festival

In November 2016, the CCB secured LEADER funding for a three-year programme of Walking Festivals, promoting walks and events throughout the Chilterns. The project aims to attract visitors from outside the area and increase the number of overnight stays in the Chilterns, as well as appealing to local audiences of all levels and abilities. There will be six festivals from May 2017 to October 2019, promoting the Chilterns as the superb walking destination that it is.



A part-time project manager was appointed to work with partners to develop and market the walks and events. Marketing materials (logo, microsite, booking platform and festival programme) were created alongside a PR programme. In addition, £7,000 was secured in Festival sponsorship.

“ For keen walkers, the Chilterns offer the promise of an adventure playground on the doorstep of the nation's capital, just an hour from central London.” *The Telegraph*

Developing the visitor economy – Chilterns Tourism Network (CTN)

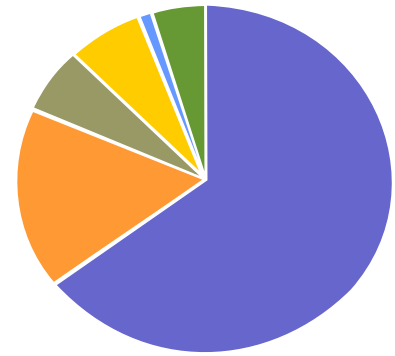
The CCB played a key role in supporting the CTN's activities and collaborating on projects to develop the visitor economy. The Visit Chilterns website saw a sharp increase in visitors (20% increase in January to March 2017 compared to the previous year) due to the new "Taste of the Chilterns" and Chilterns Walking Festival pages. The "Taste of the Chilterns" project generated 119 new CTN Food and Drink members, raising the total number of members to 336.



Consolidated Revenue Account 2016-17

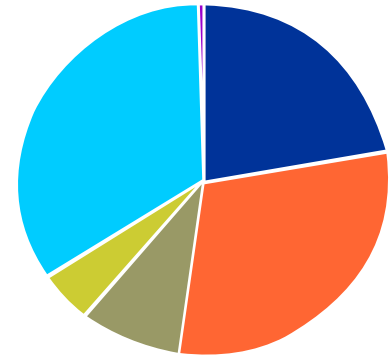
Income

	£
Defra	419,968
Local Authorities	109,557
Chalk Streams	39,483
Hillforts Project	42,300
HS2 fees	7,234
Other income	29,797
Total Income	648,339



Expenditure

Promotion and Awareness	145,655
Countryside and Landscape	195,238
Planning and Development	58,446
Recreation and Access	30,145
Overheads, Office and Governance	222,077
National Association of AONBs	2,500
Total expenditure	654,061



Deficit for year **5,722**

2016-17 in numbers



over **2,000** people
attended events and training

55 university students
took part in field trips...

...and there were **310** educational visits

Comments submitted



on
42
development plans..



8 schools

took part in Trout in the Classroom

Improvements to **2km** of
rare chalk stream



..and

100

planning applications

Advice on

550ha of trees and woodland



Visitors benefitted
from over

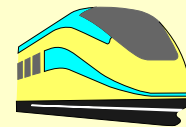
2,000kms

of **rights of way**



3million

project income secured



HS2

Chilterns AONB Review
Group secured

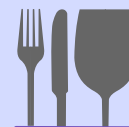


**1st Chilterns
Walking Festival**

launched



200,000 users of the AONB website



40 businesses

took part in

Food & Drink Festival