



Members of the Chilterns Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are hereby summoned to a briefing and workshop of the Chilterns Conservation Board Executive Committee on

10 August 2021 at 10.00am

The session will be open from 9.30 am

By remote video conferencing

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Declaration of Interest
3. Notice of AOB
4. Chairman's update
5. Review Minutes of Previous Meeting (28.04.21)
6. Matters Arising
- ~~* Public Question Time~~
7. Finance and budget planning
8. Board Review
9. Mend the Gap
10. A.O.B

Future Meetings:

<u>Full Board</u>	7 September 2021 7 December 2021 1 March 2022 7 June 2022
<u>Executive Committee</u>	2 November 2021 1 February 2022 3 May 2022
<u>Planning Committee</u>	14 July 2021 13 October 2021 12 January 2022 13 April 2022

Item 8.2**Board Review (August 2021)****1.0 Summary**

The CCB team has continued to work effectively at home since mid-March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As lockdown measures ease, we are exploring a phased return to the office once various renovation works have been completed by the landlord.

During this period of reporting, we have continued to issue guidance and engage the media in urging people to behave responsibly in the countryside, while at the same time supporting our local businesses in their activities to open again and attract visitors and business during the summer season.

A key part of the team's focus is to work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including NGOs, businesses, MPs and government agencies – both locally and nationally. We are collaborating with other AONBs and National Parks on a range of subjects - including the Glover Review, sustainable tourism, land management and planning reform - in large part through the National Association of AONBs.

We are also contributing our time and expertise to a number of government-led initiatives and consultations – not least being a key element of Natural England's new designations programme and providing insight for the forthcoming government consultation on the Landscapes Review. All these activities will, hopefully, lead to benefits for both the Chilterns and protected landscapes overall.

As ever, the team consistently achieves a great deal in continuing uncertain and changing circumstances. Many in the team are enjoying delivering and planning outdoor activities, including surveys and monitoring, practical habitat restoration work, festivals and community engagement. Small numbers of staff and project teams are also starting to meet outdoors to share ideas and catch up with colleagues away from online platforms.

2.0 Over-arching and core work**Administration and IT**

- The admin team continues to be extremely busy in providing a diverse range of services to support the staff team.
- Due to staff numbers steadily increasing, we are currently recruiting to increase our admin and support capacity. The Business Support Officer vacancy did not attract candidates with the necessary experience and skills. We are revisiting the job description and title and hope to go back out to advert shortly.
- The work carried out last year on requirements for staff training for Hubspot is being reviewed and staff have attended a refresher/training course on GDPR.
- Other work includes exploring the best file sharing method for key documents for Board members; supporting projects with information on financial transactions for end of year reporting; and helping to set up a tracking system for Farming in Protected Landscapes inquiries.
- Our Employee and Board Induction process is currently being reviewed and updated, which will include Hubspot training (a contacts management system) for all staff.
- Building improvements, including repairs and redecoration, are being carried out by the landlord to the office in Chinnor. Frustratingly, the work has been delayed. It is now due to start at the beginning of September and take four weeks to complete, after which we anticipate some of the team starting to use the office on a regular basis on a 'hybrid' basis – working part of the week at home and part in the office.

- Covid Risk Assessments continue to be reviewed and an update issued to staff recently in line with Government guidance, with a view to a phased return to the office once renovation work is complete.

2.1 Planning

- The Planning Team is moving towards a more structured quarterly reporting process, and we're currently in a transitional phase. In future, a quarterly report will be made to Planning Committee, with a separately circulated monthly bulletin of updates. Reviews for the Board and Executive Committee will contain highlights of the latest issues.
- Activity for the Q1 2021/22 (Apr-Jun) is mostly covered in our [reports](#) to PC on 14 July, but not explicitly in the quarterly format.
 - Strategic planning highlights included our strong [submissions](#) to the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan main modifications consultation, with regard to the 'North of Luton' expansion and M1-A6 link road, both of which have direct impacts on the AONB and its setting. The plan was adopted on 22 July without the changes we had sought.
 - On development management, from April to June CCB responded to 40 planning applications. Most responses were comments (25 cases), where CCB made recommendations and proposed conditions, including design amendments consistent with the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and recommendations on the weight and thus importance given to AONB legislation, policy and the AONB Management Plan. 10 objections were also lodged and the remaining cases were responses expressing support or appeal representations. Most decisions are aligned with our recommendations, but it is sometimes difficult to gauge that relationship. Our greatest sway appears to be in design matters and where the planning principle is or is not acceptable.
- A significant appeal decision was received at the end of June, granting permission at Little Sparrows, Sonning Common for a 133-unit assisted-living development. This is a significant disappointment and a decision that is troubling in its logic, applying AONB legislation and planning policy tests in a very partial, even illogical manner, in our view. For example, while recognising that legislation and policy "give equal protection to all parts of the AONB" (para 53), the Inspector's reasoning very much develops a position that some parts of the AONB are more equal than others.
- Further, he described the appeal site and its setting as not "representative of the special qualities as set out in the Chilterns AONB Management Plan", but that where it "does exhibit some such qualities, they are generic" (para 52). We deem this incoherent and, together with other points, CCB has written a [letter of complaint](#) to the Planning Inspectorate and a news item [here](#). We are in liaison with South Oxfordshire DC, discussing what options remain open, including that of a legal challenge (known as statutory review).
- The [Three Rivers Local Plan](#) was published for consultation in June, running to 20 August. A joint strategic plan for the whole of South West Herts is anticipated shortly.
- MHCLG has started its engagement process on [creating a vision for the Ox Cam Arc](#), which runs to October. Bizarrely, and with no explanation, the plan area does not include Hertfordshire, despite that county being a part of the England's Economic Heartland transport planning region, the proximity of parts of the county to two of the Arc's principal urban areas (Cambridge and Milton Keynes) and the many transport connections for the Arc that necessitate travelling through Hertfordshire.
- On 20 July, MHCLG issued a revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#), plus lots of changes to the online planning practice guidance including the national design guide and national model design code. All of this followed the consultation earlier in the year. The

NPPF changes include a reworking of the key policy relating to development in AONBs (former para 172, now 176 and 177), including a vital new policy applying to the setting of protected landscapes. An analysis of the changes will be brought to the next Planning Committee.

- You can keep up to date with responses on strategic planning matters on our [website](#).

2.2 Nature and Landscape

Farming in Protected Landscapes

This three-year Defra funded programme was launched at the start of July and we are currently finalising the panel, recruiting for a Farming Engagement Officer to coordinate the programme, and responding to initial enquiries.

The funding will support our work with farmers and other land managers across four themes:

Climate – supporting delivery of nature-based solutions.

Nature – supporting delivery of the Nature Recovery Network

People – improving health and wellbeing through increased access to nature.

Place – supporting protected landscapes as flourishing places to live and work, with strong identity, cultural heritage, and high recognition as visitor destinations.

- The CCB has emailed details of the programme in the Chilterns AONB to over 670 farmers, landowners and agents and we have received a flurry of enquiries.
- Interviews for a new **Farming Engagement Officer** were held on 4 August.
- Around 15 enquiries have been received to date and further promotion is planned once the panel is in place. Responding to and generating enquiries in advance of a dedicated officer being recruited has been a team effort, with Neil Jackson, Nick Marriner, Harriet Bennett, Luke Burgess, Annette Venters and Wendy Morrison all involved.
- So far enquiries have been very varied – including big ticket machinery items such as direct drills as part of farming systems to improve soil carbon, enhancing wildflower diversity in field margins and pasture, wildlife ponds and access improvements such as replacing stiles with kissing gates.

We are also exploring how best FiPL funding might be used to complement existing schemes (such as Countryside Stewardship and the pilot Sustainable Farming Incentive, SFI) and schemes that will be introduced shortly (include Local Nature Recovery, Landscape recovery and the Farm Investment Schemes).

Key risks in relation to this programme:

- a) spending the full year one allocation considering the late launch of the programme nationally, and the fact that funding cannot be transferred between years.
 - b) skills / expertise in land management – there is a lack of capacity in the sector and competition for suitable candidates.
 - c) reputational risk for CCB amongst the farming community - for example there is a lack of clarity over FiPL's relationship to other Defra funding programmes.
- On 14 July we were delighted to host an away day for the Defra Farming in Protected Landscapes team, including visits to Butler's Hangings, West Wycombe Hill, and Promised Land Farm. Thanks to Ian Waller (Hampden Bottom Farm, Chair of the central Chilterns farmer cluster), Deborah Bartlett (Promised Land Farm) and Steph Rodgers (Chiltern Rangers) for joining CCB staff in hosting the visit. This was a great opportunity to get to know the Defra team, showcase our work, raise queries and discuss programme priorities and risks.

Chilterns Partnership and Nature Recovery Plan4

- Work continues on the partnership delivery plan however progress has been delayed due to other operational pressures/ priorities and lack of capacity. We are planning to accelerate both areas of work through the autumn.

Buckinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilot (LNRS)

- Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a key measure in the Environment Bill and intended to drive more coordinated, focussed action and green investment to help nature and people flourish together, whilst delivering wider nature-based environmental benefits. They will consist of:
 - A Statement of Biodiversity Priorities, reflecting stakeholder priorities for environmental outcomes and actions.
 - A Local Habitat Map, identifying the existing distribution of habitats and target locations for delivering the outcomes identified.
- The strategies will be a statutory requirement of the upcoming Environment Bill, to be developed by local councils when the Bill becomes law.
- The Bucks pilot LNRS process has now been completed. Kath was a key member of the core delivery group and fed in reflections on process and outputs to the Pilot Area Team evaluation session.
- **Ash Die-back**
Over the last few months we have seen an increasing number of felling licence notifications from our colleagues at the forestry commission, associated with Ash Die Back. Undoubtedly, the disease has taken hold of our ash dominated woodland (many of the woodlands impacted by the Great Storm of 1987 were naturally recolonised by ash) and is being increasingly seen affecting hedgerow ash trees.
- John Morris published an article on ash die back in our last edition of [The Chilterns AONB - Outstanding Chilterns Magazine](#) and we will continue to raise awareness of management and safety requirements with woodland owners and the wider public.
- **Dunstable Downs Undergrounding**
Work to remove the two parallel lines of electricity cable, supported on steel pylons, that cross the Dunstable Downs is now underway with preliminary works for new underground cable routes beneath local roads (apologies to anyone who has been affected by road closures near Whipsnade!). Main cable laying will be happening in the next couple of months with the existing overhead cables and pylons due for removal in September and October.
- **Other work**
- CCB staff are working with farmers and landowners to roll out a **Landscape and Wildlife Connectivity project** while the **Ridgeway Project** is using funds to enhance the Ridgeway around Wendover – particularly for horse riders.

We have also been pleased to support a new application to the fund for a radical upgrade of the **towpath for the Wendover Arm** of the Grand Union Canal. The towpath is well used by many Wendover residents, both young and old, and had fallen into a dangerous state of disrepair. The upgrade will mean that the path will be fit for purpose for many years to come, linking into a wider access network. Plans are still being finalised, but we hope work might start within the next 12 months and hopefully before the end of 2021.

HS2

- **Tunnel Boring Machines, Chalk Streams and the Aquifer**
The first of the two giant tunnel boring machines ('Florence') has now passed beneath

the M25 and is boring beneath the Chiltern Hills. The second machine, Cecilia, has now also started its journey and, using information fed back from Florence, will travel faster and soon catch the first machine up.

- Along with Buckinghamshire Council, we have continued to press for answers to our concerns over risks to the aquifer and chalk streams, including a [joint statement](#) with Bucks Council in May.
- To date, we feel that the response from HS2 is wholly inadequate with no plans to mitigate for potential loss of flow to the River Misbourne or damage to the Wendover springs that feed the Weston Turville Reservoir SSSI and the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal.
- HS2 Ltd and its contractors remain very bullish, but we will continue to press for better protection of the aquifer, chalk streams and springs.
- **Schedule 17 planning approvals**
Although the CCB is not a statutory consultee for the HS2 planning process, we are grateful that Natural England continue to seek our expert advice and local knowledge when they respond to pre-app detailed information.
- Buckinghamshire Council also invites us to comment on the Schedule 17 applications when they are submitted. Very often the 'devil is in the detail' and we continue to offer our advice on protection of existing features, landscape design and planting of appropriate species for the Chilterns, as well design of the permanent structures including bridges, viaducts and vent shafts.

Additional Project Fund

During the Hybrid Bill progress through parliament, while we were unsuccessful in trying to persuade the government to not plough the high-speed line through the centre of our nationally protected landscape, the CCB and local stakeholders were granted funding to set up a **Chilterns Review Group** to oversee the development of Detailed Design Principles and allocate £3M for additional works to integrate the route into the landscape.

The CCB's webpages on HS2 are [here](#).

2.3 People and Society

- Plans for a **Chilterns autumn celebration** are underway. This will incorporate the 9th Chilterns Walking Festival 16-31 October, with a celebration of Chilterns Food & Drink 24-31 October. The programme will include several community events delivered by the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project linking food, farming and the Chilterns landscape. There will also be a series of local produce walks. The festivals aim to raise awareness of the Chilterns, reach new audiences and benefit local businesses. We are currently using the [CWF web page](#) to promote the many on-going walking opportunities in the Chilterns to encourage greater participation.
- The new Farming in Protected Landscape programme enables grants for farm diversification, rural tourism and access related projects. I have contributed to the CCB guidance and applicant information and have been responding to enquiries and Expressions of Interest relating to People and Place.
- The new Green Recovery Challenge Funded chalk streams project includes a substantial investment in revitalising the Chess Valley Walk, our most popular promoted route, as well as an education and interpretation programme. This is an exciting opportunity for engaging new audiences, raising awareness of chalk streams and improving the visitor experience. I am assisting the Chiltern Society with recruitment of the Education & Engagement officer post.

Sustainable Tourism and promoting the rural economy

- We have been scoping opportunities to market and promote **Chilterns Countryside Experiences**. This fits with our aspirations to develop sustainable tourism and promote new experiential tourism products which help to communicate the special qualities of the Chilterns. We are planning a workshop in the autumn to help businesses develop and market countryside Experiences, and we are preparing a dedicated page on the new Chilterns AONB website which will give businesses a route to market. We are currently exploring options for an online booking system.
- We held two Chilterns **Food & Drink workshops** in July, aimed at walk leaders, local businesses and those interested in or involved with promoting the Chilterns. The workshops explored opportunities for developing the food and drink offer in the Chilterns, and ideas for promoting this as part of the destination offer. There were presentations from food producers, farm enterprises and tourism businesses. The workshops attracted 40 participants.

Communications

- Prepared a blog looking at our favourite outdoor café walks, featuring several new businesses [here](#) and a blog on enjoying the Chilterns safely this summer [here](#), with suggestions for family-friendly activities and places to visit.
- We continue to promote the new Countryside Code and ‘respect the countryside’ messages via the website and social media.

3.0 Development & Funding

- Interviews are about to be held for the two part-time posts created to deliver our Green Recovery Challenge Fund project: Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows. This is a 12-month project with both staff being hosted by the Chiltern Society. Chiltern Rangers are also project partners. The project will be concluded by October 2022.
- The Development and Funding Manager continues to ensure the CCB is represented at a national level with the development of collaborative projects with other AONBs and National Parks through the National Association of AONBs, along with taking a strategic overview, and providing support and advice to other members of the team, on internally generated initiatives to secure funding for projects and other activities.
- We are currently working collaboratively with The Conservation Volunteers, Surrey Hills AONB, Kent Downs AONB and High Weald AONB on the development of a ‘**Rail to Trail**’ project proposal to be submitted to the second tranche of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF). The outcome of this application should be known by the summer.
- We are supporting the development of the **Big Chalk Initiative** alongside eight other AONBs, and the South Downs National Park. The aims are to work with landowners, farmers, and local communities to build resilience in calcareous landscapes (chalk and limestone) on an unprecedented scale. The current focus is on preparatory work for an EOI for a funding bid to the National Heritage Lottery Fund. We have made specific contributions around landowner / farmer engagement and support, environmental monitoring, liaison with NHLF and advisor networks.

4.0 Communications

- The Communications Teams welcomed a new member on 19th July. Kim-lin Hooper is an experienced communicator with a strong background in arts and culture and a masters degree in creative writing. She joins Vicki and Helen three days a week.
- It has been an extremely busy couple of months. On 24 June Natural England announced, in conjunction with a [written ministerial statement](#) (WMS) from the government, that the Chilterns AONB would be considered for an extension to its boundary. The communications team worked hard with Natural England to support communication of the announcement, publishing a local press release, [news article](#) and

social media posts. We achieved a lot of interest from local media including articles in the [Bucks Free Press](#), [Hemel Today](#) and [Watford Observer](#).

- The government also launched, on the same day as the WMS, its Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL). The Communications Officer liaised very closely with the Defra press team, while also supporting the CCB's countryside team to create assets to [help promote the programme](#) and inform and encourage farmers to apply.
- The communications team has also been working closely with Annette (People and Society Officer) with promotion and awareness of [staying safe in the Chilterns over summer](#), published in line with the government's final step in the relaxation of lockdown rules on 19 July. We have also published blogs promoting [local cafes with walks nearby](#), which have proved extremely popular.
- Outstanding Chilterns 2020/21 magazine is underway and is due for publication w/c 13 September. We have a wide range of contributors and articles including themes such as: a celebration of Chilterns Food and Drinks producers, an interview with our Planner, Matt Thompson, about planning reforms and the boundary review, the benefits of cow grazing, a focus on Marlow, water saving, the impact of HS2 on the aquifer, an introduction to fungus, and more.
- On 7 June Boris Johnson visited Chesham to campaign with Peter Fleet, the Conservative candidate in the upcoming Chesham and Amersham by-election. Whilst he was there, he gave an interview to the Bucks Free Press, where he spoke about his support for a Chilterns National Park. We issued the [following statement](#) in response to his comments and published our statement via our social channels. You can read more on the [interview with the Prime Minister](#) in the Bucks Free Press.
- The communications team supported the People and Society Officer with promotion and awareness of the May Walking Festival, which received a lot of positive interest from local media including [The Countryman Magazine](#), [Henley Standard](#), [Bucks Free Press](#) and radio interviews with Wycombe Sound and Marlow FM among others.
- In May we published a case study sharing the achievements of the Central Chilterns Farmer Cluster, we shared a [news item](#) on our website and also via our social channels, which has achieved a lot of positive feedback and support for its work.
- In May we supported Affinity Water with the launch of their SOS (Save Our Streams) campaign and will also feature a single page spread on the campaign in Outstanding Chilterns magazine.
- The new website development project continues and will showcase both the Chilterns AONB and the work of the CCB. Helen (Communications Assistant) has been busy creating the pages on the new site and flowing content on to the pages. The copy writer continues to work with the project leads and we are progressing well. As part of the website project, the Comms Officer has commissioned a professional photographer, [Dave Olinski](#), to create a portfolio of new imagery including landscape, flora, fauna, and lifestyle images including people enjoying the countryside. We also commissioned an aerial photographer, [Hedley Thorne](#), who has taken drone footage of the Chilterns for us to use on our website and in social posts.
- The communications team continues to work closely with colleagues internally and at Buckinghamshire Council to provide regularly updates about the work the CCB is doing to hold HS2 Ltd to account. Our latest update can be found [here](#).
- Our comms volunteers have been going above and beyond to help recently. Matt Writtle, professional photographer and writer for the Guardian, has agreed to write a monthly blog series for our website as he walks parts of the Chiltern Way. He also interviews people he meets along the way and photographs what he sees. His latest instalment is [here](#).
- Similarly, nature enthusiast and Duke of Edinburgh award participant Amy Shayler has been sharing her own experiences of the Chilterns with [her own blog contributions](#) too.
- Finally, we have also taken on a new regular volunteer, Robert Hunter, who has been supporting the comms team by writing [blog content](#), updating webpages, researching

and checking information for quality on our interactive map and more! Robert is supporting the team for six hours per week.

- The communications team continues to work hard to raise the profile of the AONB, CCB and its work, and regularly posts content on its social channels to support this. We have been recently supporting more national awareness days and making relevant connections to the Chilterns to help. We are seeing a steady increase in followers with 7,460 Twitter followers and over 3,000 Facebook followers (see @ChilternsAONB). We have also started publishing more on LinkedIn and Instagram.

5.0 Projects

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project updates

- **Chess Smarter Water Catchment Plan** - The CCSP is a co-host of the R. Chess Smarter Water Catchment initiative, working alongside the River Chess Association and Thames Water. Thames Water's [Smarter Water Catchment initiative](#) aims to deliver improvements at a catchment scale, aimed at restoring the Chess over the next ten years. As part of the initiative, Thames Water are investing £3m into the delivery of a plan for the Chess catchment over the next five years. The Project worked with stakeholders to develop a [catchment plan](#) which was launched in April. A steering group has been set up to drive forward delivery of the plan and set priorities for action in the years ahead. The CCSP is chairing the steering group for the next year. Discussions are ongoing with Thames regarding the Project's role in acting in a coordination role for delivery of the plan.
- **Dr Kate Heppell Secondment** – The CCSP has been fortunate in being able secure Dr Kate Heppell from Queen Mary University of London, on secondment for a year from September. The Project has worked with Dr. Heppell over the last decade, helping to teach MSc. Students about hydrogeomorphology of chalk streams and, more recently, the ChessWatch Project. Kate will be working with the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project to understand the state of, and threats to, globally rare chalk streams in the Chilterns AONB.
- An important component of Kate's work will focus on developing and implementing an integrated catchment management plan for the River Chess as part of Thames Water's Smarter Water Catchments Initiative. This work will build on the ChessWatch project which is embedded into the plan. The Storymap resource that was developed for ChessWatch can be viewed [here](#).
- **GRCF success** - The Chiltern Society and Chilterns Conservation Board was successful in an application to the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund for a grant of £294,000 to enable delivery of the Chalk Streams and Wetland Meadows Project (CWMP).
- The grant will fund a suite of schemes developed by the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) focussing on chalk streams and wetland habitats across the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The work will combine practical restoration and enhancement with education and engagement projects. The Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chiltern Society, two key partners of the CCSP, will be working together to deliver this exciting project.
- The CCB team provided staff resources to fulfil an important convening and facilitation role in helping develop the application. The grant will now enable the creation of two jobs with the Chiltern Society, while also increasing the capacity and resilience of other NGOs and voluntary organisations including Revive the Wye, Benson Environment Group and Chiltern Rangers CIC.
- The project involves the recruitment of two new officer posts to lead on delivery. The CCSP has worked with the Society on the staff recruitment process. Shortlisting of candidates for both the Rivers Officer and Education and Engagement Officer posts has

been completed and interviews will be held on the 11th and 12th August. The twelve-month Project will start in October.

- By connecting nature and people, the project aims to secure a healthy future for chalk streams and for the people, communities and businesses of both the Chilterns AONB, and nearby urban areas.
 - **HS2 – Bottom House Lane** – The CCSP has continued to provide expert advice in pressing HS2 and its contractors Fusion and Align to recognise and implement appropriate mitigation for the damage that they have caused to the banks of the Misbourne at Bottom House Lane, near Chalfont St. Giles. The damage (see CCB [news article](#) for photos) caused extensive flooding of neighbouring farmland with river water contaminated with raw sewage. Several landowners have been unable to use their land as a result. A site meeting was held with Fusion, Align and representatives from the Environment Agency team, that consented the Bridge works, in June. Although agreement over appropriate mitigation was reached during the meeting, Fusion and Align have subsequently backtracked on elements of the mitigation. Negotiations are continuing.
 - **Save Our Streams - The** CCSP has been working with Affinity Water to support the development of their [Save Our Streams](#) campaign, which was launched in May. The Project has been helping to raise awareness of the campaign which is the biggest ever water saving campaign by a UK water company. The aim of the campaign is to drive down water demand to support the company's ambitious plans to reduce abstraction across the Chilterns and Hertfordshire to restore chalk stream flows. As part of the campaign the Project featured in an [article](#) in the Observer on chalk streams in June.
 - **Riverfly training courses** – The CCSP has delivered three Anglers Riverfly Monitoring Initiative Training courses so far this year. Training 27 volunteers to monitor rivers across the Chilterns and Lea catchment areas. In addition, the Project trained a new tutor for the Chilterns, Hertfordshire & Middlesex Riverfly Hub to support delivery of further training across the Hub area in future. Riverfly monitoring groups are now active on all but one stream in the Chilterns (Hughenden Stream).
 - **Landowner advice** – In July, The CCSP provided advice to the Ver Valley Society regarding suitable techniques to repair a section bank along the R. Ver at Gorhambury. The location of the work is particularly sensitive as it is a perched former mill leat which is vulnerable to bank collapse. It also lies immediately downstream of the site that will be the focus of the re-introduction of water voles to Ver. The re-introduction is being carried out by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust and will be completed in August.
 - **Advice and support to Water Companies** – The CCSP has provided advice and technical input to Affinity Water to support the development of its river restoration plans at Redbournbury Meadows. The scheme aims to restore approximately 2km of the R. Ver between Redbourn and the Gorhambury Estate near St Albans. The Scheme is one of a number of projects being delivered by Affinity Water on chalk streams across the Chilterns and Hertfordshire, funded through the Water Industry National Environment Programme, in support of its abstraction reduction programme. The CCSP is in discussions with Affinity Water with regard to leading the delivery of elements of the Redbournbury Meadows Scheme.
 - **Trout in the Classroom** – Despite the impacts of the pandemic, working with the River Chess Association, the CCSP was able to run Trout in the Classroom units

in five schools in the Chess and Wye Valleys this spring. The schools were all given copies of the CCSP's new book on the life cycle of Brown Trout. At Millbrook School alone, over 700 pupils interacted with the project.

- **Ceri, the CCSP's Education and Engagement Officer**, returned from maternity leave at the beginning of July and has already visited three schools to deliver education sessions and release trout from this year's Trout in the Classroom units, into the Chess and the Wye. She has also begun to upload content to the CCSP's new Chalk Streams microsite and has written two articles that will appear in the CCB's forthcoming Outstanding Chilterns magazine.

Chalk, Cherries & Chairs

- The CCC landscape partnership scheme is nearing the end of its post-Covid19 review period and now faces the challenge of securing agreements from principal funders for the necessary scheme adaptations. These are likely to include:
 - Additional support and work in scheme elements which have adapted well to the new environment, including more schools-based projects, landowner engagements, social history volunteering and smaller, themed celebratory festivals
 - An extended delivery timeframe for the elements of the scheme which have been most significantly impacted by public health restrictions placed on outdoor and group activities over the last 18 months, including the necessarily delayed inceptions.
 - Reallocation of resources from the overall underspend of around one-quarter over first two years of the scheme, so that these adaptations can be secured from within existing allocations.
 - Refocus and rearrange the cultural heritage workstream, taking opportunities presented by the sad departure of Heritage Officer Sam Johannsen, in conjunction with project partners at Buckinghamshire Council.
- Over the early summer, the team has successfully navigated the government's roadmap towards eased restrictions and reconnected with all but one of the previously engaged schools and community groups across our 18 projects.
- At the time of writing, we are making final preparations for a summer celebratory festival, with guided walks, a Bodgers pub tour and an activity day on Wycombe Rye at which there will be participatory sessions celebrating the traditional Chilterns crafts of chair making, paper making and willow weaving, as well as other events and entertainments.
- The summer festival has been promoted using our own original song, commissioned from a local artist as part of Echoed Locations, our Chilterns soundscape project. We are also busy planning events for our food-themed autumn festival in October, in a joint venture with the CCB's own Chilterns Food Festival, and a Spring Festival next April in conjunction with Wycombe Museum, in which we hope to successfully engage schools of the central Chilterns in a celebration of the landscape through visual arts.
- Despite recent restrictions, we are ahead of schedule in securing all the volunteer time contributions to scheme match funding requirements and will move further ahead when the current busy season of wildlife surveying is fully accounted:
 - Young volunteer wildlife survey training sessions continue under Chilterns New Shoots, with Buckinghamshire Bird Club membership secured for all participants
 - Farmland Amphibian & Reptile surveys are set up with trained volunteers under the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust's National Reptile Survey
 - 6 online species ID training sessions delivered to volunteers, with 2 more scheduled
 - 18 in field species ID training sessions delivered to volunteers, with 6 more scheduled
 - Data from 47 surveys covering 25x1km squares entered Breeding Bird Survey

- Data from 52 surveys covering 17x1km squares entered into the Countryside Butterfly Survey

The landscape scale nature and wildlife strands of our partnership also continues to exceed expectations:

- 18 Whole Farm Plans across the Central Chilterns farming cluster are complete
- 400+ hectares of farm grassland surveys are commissioned and underway
- 18 Carbon Self Assessments are underway with soil samples taken from 36 fields across all 18 farms, as part of Rothschild Foundation funded Farm Carbon project
- Regenerative farming study visit to FarmED demo farm near Chipping Norton
- New mid-tier Countryside Stewardship application submitted for one farm
- Three farms supported in applications for ELM Sustainable Farming Initiative
- Eight farms actively working on tailored projects for delivery this Autumn/Winter
- Expression of Interest to DEFRA for Landscape Recovery Test & Trial
- Two Rapid Habitat Assessments at Butlers Hangings SSSI and Sands Bank LNR
- Advice on 8 ha grasslands at North Dean
- Volunteer work parties managing habitats across cluster farms
- 1 ha stock fencing on important butterfly conservation site at Wardrobes Lane
- Corn Bunting nest conservation work before hay cutting

Beacons of the Past

- Registered Portal users are now over 8700, with steady daily work carried out both in initial recording and reviewer portal quality checking. 6000+ verified records, 15000+ features identified.
- Erosion mitigation and path re-siting are taking place on Ivinghoe Beacon.
- Our new Landscape Heritage Officer Giles Carey has – alongside volunteers – completed the database of 500+ high-priority feature records. These records will be transferred to the county HERs and form an important legacy of the project as well as the foundation for future protection and planning.
- Sadly, Giles Carey will be leaving his post on 30 July and will be replaced by Dr Ed Peveler on an ad hoc day rate basis.
- Wendy continues to respond to requests to offer consultations to farmers, forestry, and local authorities on the archaeological resources and implications of activities in the AONB, as well as consulting on potential FiPL applications.
- Wendy led a successful and well attended guided walk on the archaeology of the Ver Valley for the Ver Valley Society on 18 July and addressed almost 100 attendees at the Ashmolean Museum's online Festival of Archaeology event on 28 July.
- BotP will be teaming up with CCSP to deliver two chalk stream archaeology walks for the Chiltern Society in Sep/Oct for their Heritage Festival.
- Capital works planned at the Tier One hillfort sites are now in line with projected Covid restriction changes. However, we are also planning contingencies in case of third waves and will not be conducting any large public events until Oct at the earliest, when an outdoor event is planned in Letchworth/Hitchin (23 Oct).
- An Expression of Interest was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in May, and we have been invited to submit a Development Phase application for a new chalk streams/archaeology collaborative project scheme (*Not Bourne Yesterday*).

Mend the Gap – joint venture between the CCB and North Wessex Downs AONB Enhancement Projects

- Mend the Gap has confirmed support for additional projects, including in principle support to the partnership seeking to secure a future for the Youth Hostel in Streatley. MtG funding is specifically towards costs associated with undertaking a formal feasibility study.

- Relationships with local landowners continue to develop, including being boosted by the promotion of FiPL across the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs. There is some crossover between the two schemes' areas of interest, with some proposals potentially suitable for either scheme.
- Liaison between the MtG programme manager and other members of the CCB team has enabled a proposal from a landowner, which originally came in via FiPL, to be switched across to MtG. This will facilitate a decision early enough to meet the landowner's requirements in relation to timescales, which would not have been possible whilst the FiPL panel and internal processes are being established.
- A positive discussion with BBOWT's Chief Executive has moved discussions regarding potential BBOWT-led/facilitated enhancement project(s) forward. Follow-up discussions with members of the BBOWT team are scheduled

Mitigation Project

- Discussions with FWAG South East are progressing, focussed on bringing FWAG on board as a delivery partner for the Mend the Gap Mitigation Project. FWAG SE's skill set, and organisational priorities are a good fit with the Mitigation Project. This approach will bring on board the additional resource required to implement mitigation schemes at priority locations through the MtG area.
- South Stoke Mitigation Projects - discussions with Christ Church College and the Diocese of Oxford have moved forward since the last report to the Board. The agents for both these landlords have indicated support in principle for mitigation schemes on their land at South Stoke. The next step is to develop the design for the schemes for the relevant South Stoke sites.
- Network Rail has responded positively to our enquiry as to whether it may be willing to enable a mitigation project on NR-owned land outside Moulsoford where the impact of the electrification equipment is particularly bad. The proposal is at an early stage, but NR will hold an internal meeting in mid-August to discuss whether it is able to take the site out of its current use as a storage/holding compound and thereby facilitate a plating scheme.

Chalkscapes

- The Chalkscapes development stage is now six months into its 23-month timetable.
- Jenny Ponsford, the Development Manager of the Chalkscapes project, has resigned due to ill-health and we are seeking to replace her on a full-time basis.
- The rest of the Development Team, Inga Garriock and Luke Burgess, continue to make excellent progress developing project plans. For example, confirmed pilots include events for both the wider community as well as the project's priority audiences (eg under-served audiences including BAME and young people in the project area). Consultations with our target audiences will begin in September 2021 and events run from February – July 2022.
- Events include: TOKKO goes Wild (a series of events spanning six weeks where young people will explore the project area to learn skills in orienteering, natural and social history and creative activities to engage with the project principles and natural environment), a community art piece and workshops led by local Luton artist from the BAME community; and an event celebrating Wildlife in the Margins with a collaboration between the National Trust and the Wildlife Trust.
- Chalkscapes has appointed Prof. Gurch Randawaha and team from the University of Bedfordshire to help inform the community engagement elements of Chalkscapes. The commission will be complete by next Spring.
- A Chalkscapes 'intranet' has been established to share project information with partners. Project documents and summaries can be viewed [here](#): Board members have been granted access but, if the link does not work, please contact Claire Readey creadey@chilternsaonb.org

- The Chalkscapes Advisory Group (Steering Group) is in urgent need of a chair. The commitment would be a quarterly 1.5-hour meeting from now until November 2022 and associated input. Please contact Claire Readey creadey@chilternsaonb.org if you are interested in the role.
- The introduction of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, and an Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme in due course, presents a wonderful opportunity for Chalkscapes, something which is recognised by NLHF. This period of uncertainty provides a good opportunity for the formation of a farmer cluster in the North Chilterns area, through which Chalkscapes can support farmers through the transitional period, helping them to access ELM, and other new funding opportunities, at the appropriate level.

6.0 National focus

- Liaising with a range of organisations and individuals, including our partners - both nationally and locally – continues to be a key feature of much of our work. This has included conversations with our local authorities over responding to the Covid-19 emergency, for example the CEO is a member of Buckinghamshire Council's Strategic Partners Board.
- We are also working with the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), AONB Lead Officers, National Parks and others on a range of operational and strategic matters, including responding to the Landscapes Review, Climate Adaptation and Mitigation, Nature Recovery Plans and securing funding.
- Strong links have also been maintained and developed with Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency on a range of matters. We have worked especially closely with Natural England regarding its new designations programme and the announcement on 25 June that they will be exploring an extension to the Chilterns AONB, alongside new management and governance measures to support the improved conservation, understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns landscape.

Defra

- The CCB staff team continues to communicate and share information on our work with Defra. We are liaising with Defra, Natural England and others on the Landscapes Review, the Government's Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme, Nature Recovery Networks, sustainable tourism, the rural economy, HS2 and developing measures to improve the protection of chalk streams.
- Elaine continues to represent the AONB network with several other AONB colleagues on Defra's Contact Group for AONBs and National Parks, exploring implementation of the Review's recommendations. The group is currently meeting every week in the lead up to the Government publishing a consultation this summer/autumn on its proposals to implement the recommendations in the Landscapes Review.

NAAONB

- Members of the team continue to work closely with Lead Officers and their teams in other AONBs and the National Association of AONBs on a range of strategic and operational matters, including comms, nature recovery, visitor management and farming. This includes regular meetings with the South East and East Protected Landscapes group (SEEPL).
- Elaine continues in her role as a member of the NAAONB's Colchester Declaration Steering Group - along with Kath and Claire. The Declaration was agreed by all AONBs in July 2019 and aims to increase the scale and pace of conservation activity in AONBs, along with increasing our engagement with people and local communities.
- Work includes developing an ambitious plan for nature recovery across all AONBs in England and has resulted in securing Natural England funding for a national Nature Recovery Officer to work across all AONBs in England.

- Claire is leading the development of a proposal as part of the Colchester Declaration, work. The Urban Hinterland Cluster (Kent, High Weald and Surrey Hills AONBs) seeks to engage with young, black people aged 16 - 24 in central London.
- Elaine meets with other AONB Lead Officers and National Parks to discuss collaborative working on Nature Recovery Networks and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilots (of which Buckinghamshire is one).
- Members of the CCB team also attended the online NAAONB annual conference on 7/8 July, which covered a range of subjects, including the role of protected landscapes in climate change adaptation and mitigation, developing nature recovery networks and collaborating with farmers to deliver positive environmental outcomes.
- The blog summarising the presentations at the [conference](#) includes key points from a key note speech made by Lord Benyon, the Defra minister responsible for protected landscapes, who thanked AONBs and National Parks for all their hard work, especially their role as 'the places where people have been healed in body and mind' during the Covid-19 crisis.

Other

- [The Landscapes for Everyone](#) national conference was held online on 13 October. The proceedings are now available online ([morning](#) and [afternoon](#) sessions). Elaine chaired the morning session, which included a keynote speech from Julian Glover and a series of expert presentations.
- Elaine was invited to chair a second online national conference on the Landscapes Review – 'Glover Review' proposals, this time on [Farming with Nature](#) in May. The first was [Landscapes for Everyone](#) in October 2020.
- The staff team is involved with either chairing or acting as members of external Boards and steering groups. For example, Elaine continues in her role as member of the Buckinghamshire Culture Development Board and the Bucks and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership.
- The announcement of the Chilterns AONB boundary extension has generated positive interest from residents, community groups, NGOs and local councils, leading to valuable new connections being made and meetings held or planned. This includes with CEOs, senior managers and Chairs at South Oxfordshire District Council, Luton Borough Council, Three Rivers District Council and Buckinghamshire Council.