CHAIRMAN’S FOREWORD

Since taking over as Chairman from Sir John Johnson in October last year I have become even more aware of the sterling work carried out by the Board’s staff. This has been a busy period with the dominant issues inevitably being the proposed High Speed 2 rail line and the cuts in government funding. On the positive side we completed our application to the Heritage Lottery Fund aimed at improving the natural and cultural heritage of the Chilterns’ commons. We now know that this was successful and we can look forward to involving local landowners and volunteers in the work.

I came to the Chilterns 28 years ago from the north of England and whilst I still need my annual visit to the high fells I have come to realise what a special and unique environment I now live in. I am also aware of the pressures on development that arise from the urban growth around us, our proximity to London and our strategic location on major transport corridors. I have also learnt what an important role in maintaining our landscape is played by farmers and foresters. Sadly, there are several areas within our boundary that are being left neglected and this in turn could create further development pressure.

The need for a vibrant rural economy in maintaining landscape is something that has been recognised by the European Union and over the last two years a number of businesses in the Chilterns have benefited from the LEADER programme of European grants. Unfortunately this is another area that has suffered from government cuts. We would prefer to see the money which would be spent on building High Speed 2 and destroying the Chilterns’ environment instead redirected to support those businesses that help maintain our special landscapes of farmland, chalk grassland, beech woods and chalk streams.

The next year is likely to prove even more challenging than the last. Steve Rodrick and the staff are doing an excellent job in controlling expenses and increasing revenue to accommodate the reductions in government funding. We are grateful that many of our local authorities have maintained their valued level of support in spite of their own cuts. We also await with trepidation the outcome of the consultation on High Speed 2. If the government do give the go ahead we will continue, with our partners and local communities, to fight against it with all the resources at our disposal. However, the Board members and staff are looking forward to continuing our efforts to work with those same partners to conserve and enhance our special area.

Mike Fox, Chairman

THE CHILTERNs - AN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

The Chilterns was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1965, in recognition of its beautiful landscape which is amongst the finest in the country. The Chilterns AONB covers 833 sq kms and stretches from Goring in south Oxfordshire through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire to Hitchin in Hertfordshire. It has a population of 80,000.

The primary duties of the Chilterns Conservation Board are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and, in so doing, to increase the understanding and enjoyment by the public of its special qualities and to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities.
The proposed High Speed 2 railway has dominated the work of the Board since it was first announced in spring 2010. It would be devastating for the Chilterns and it is right that we have dedicated so much effort to resisting it - indeed resisting such development is what Parliament charged us with when it established the Board in 2004.

The chill wind of HS2 is already being felt as property blight takes hold and the true environmental impacts become clearer. It has brought into focus the purpose of the AONB designation and the role of the Conservation Board. It has also fostered a truly amazing community spirit here in the Chilterns, and across the country, in a struggle to protect some of the UK’s finest countryside.

During the year these are the sort of challenges and dilemmas we had to face:

1. Not everyone, least of all in some parts of Government, has grasped fully that designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty means that it is of national significance - part of our national heritage which we all have a duty to care for. There can be no question of calling anybody fulfilling that duty a NIMBY.

2. What exactly is the national interest and how it is defined? Conserving an AONB is in the national interest and there are plenty of national policies designed to achieve just that. But some claim that building a new railway is also in the national interest. Which should be given the greater weight? How are the two claims to be compared?

3. The proposals for HS2 are being justified largely on the grounds of a business case which assigns a monetary value to many attributes but not, it seems, to the environment. The result is to favour those characteristics to which a monetary value can be assigned. In the case of HS2 this has involved assigning a notional value of billions of pounds to the saving of time but not a penny to the importance of conserving the environment.

4. The relative lack of robustness of national policy and legislation intended to safeguard protected countryside from damaging development was highlighted. It would seem that in the final analysis it may not be quite up to the job.

5. How much information should the public be given to enable them to decide whether the impacts on the environment are acceptable or not? One clear lesson from the public consultation organised by the Department for Transport is that the public wanted much more information than the Government was prepared to provide. This meant that they were asked to endorse the route through the Chilterns without knowing the true impact. For example, nowhere did HS2 Ltd mention that up to 12 million cubic metres of spoil could be excavated from the tunnels and cuttings as the route passes through the AONB and deposited locally.

The response of local people has been truly gratifying. They have been prepared to commit their time, money and energy to defending something they care passionately about. They have been behaving like the national guardians we are all supposed to be. It has been a remarkable partnership between local people, community action groups, local authorities, local and national politicians, voluntary organisations, businesses and public bodies. This is rare. Is this Big Society? Very possibly.

This has been a steep learning curve for the Board and, as a relatively new organisation, I hope we have won the respect of those who may not have known about us or wondered whether we were up to the challenge.

I believe this was the year we came of age and truly earned our spurs. We take many positives from this campaign, which has a long way to go, to help us all ensure that the Chilterns is given the stewardship and care it deserves as one of England’s finest landscapes.

Steve Rodrick, Chief Officer

Looking across the Misbourne Valley from near Kingsash
Conservation and Land Use

The Lawton Review ‘Making Space for Nature’ published in September called for a ‘step change in nature conservation’, with areas for wildlife being ‘bigger, better and more connected’ for the benefit of people and wildlife. The report was welcomed by the Board and the nature conservation sector in general, and supports the efforts being made across the AONB to work at a landscape scale. The Board continued to work with a wide range of partners, local communities and private landowners to achieve long lasting improvements for our countryside, through training and networking events, advice to landowners and practical support.

Commons remained an important theme with a great deal of focused work culminating in an ambitious Heritage Lottery Fund application for a four year £0.5m Chilterns-wide Commons Project submitted at the end of February. The application was successful and will represent a major area of work over the next few years.

In November the Board published the second State of the Chilterns Environment report to inform its own work and to influence wider decision making.

- Over 35 people attended the Chalk Grassland Managers’ Day at Pegsdon Hills and Knocking Hoe NNR in Bedfordshire. Topics included research on seed bed preparation, arable reversion and reserve management issues.
- Over 50 people attended the annual Chilterns’ scrub bash, hosted this year by BBOWT on their Chinnor Hill reserve in Oxfordshire.
- Support was given to two landowners for scrub management to benefit species-rich chalk grassland and invertebrates.
- Four editions of the Commons Network e-bulletin were produced and distributed.
- 70 people attended a popular Commons Forum visit to Turville Heath (hosted by Robin Harman) which looked at grazing, flail mowing and invasive weed control; 50 people attended a very wet Commons Day held at Dunstable Downs.
- The 2010 Chilterns Wildlife and Landscape Award was won by Moor End Common hear high Wycombe, in recognition of the hard work and achievements of the Voluntary Wardens who oversee the management of the site on behalf of Lane End Parish Council.
- The Chilterns Land Use Survey was carried out for the sixth year running. Preliminary results indicated:
  - no significant loss in long-term set-aside strips (e.g. along woodland edges).
  - an idling of some of the grassland previously used for horse grazing and a decrease in visible evidence of horse grazing.
  - some rough grassland / uncropped arable land coming back into more productive management.
- A number of Chiltern farms opened to the public for Open Farm Sunday on a very wet 12th June - five of these events were supported by the Board and the events proved popular.
- 25 participants attended the Chilterns Farmers’ Forum in March which focussed on the direct marketing of farm produce - from Farmers’ Markets, farm shops, local food directories and direct sales to web marketing.
Woodlands

The Chilterns is one of the most heavily wooded areas in the UK with 21% woodland cover, of which 59% is ancient. A full re-survey was started during the year which should be completed by early 2012.

The public interest in woodland and high regard for the Forestry Commission came into sharp relief when the Government withdrew its plans for a possible sell off of many of the state-owned woods. Nonetheless the Forestry Commission is having to make significant cost savings and it remains to be seen what this means for the Chilterns.

The growth of the wood fuel market provided better economic prospects than for many years. The Board is a partner in an EU-funded programme called TIMBER, which aims to promote the installation of more, large scale wood-fuelled heating systems supplied by fuel from local woodlands.

- 60 delegates attended the Woodland Forum organised jointly with the Chiltern Woodlands Project on the subject of wood fuel.
- Displays of timber processing equipment were featured at the Chilterns Countryside Festival.
- The Board’s primary means of promoting woodland management was by providing office accommodation and financial support to the Chiltern Woodlands Project. With this support the Project:
  - Gave advice to 48 woodland owners covering 717 hectares of woodland.
  - Arranged four walks attended by 79 people and gave nine talks.
  - Held a training day on woodland archaeology attended by seven trainees.
  - Held a training workshop on managing young broadleaved woodland.
  - Published two editions of News of the Woods and a book on the Special Trees and Woods of the Chilterns.
- The Board also supported the Special Trees and Woods Project, managed by the Chiltern Woodlands Project, which attracted grant aid of £268,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund from 2006 - 2010.
- The Project ended with a conference to celebrate the publication of the Special Trees book, addressed by Thomas Pakenham, the renowned author of Meetings with Remarkable Trees.

Historic Environment

Following the completion of the Historic Landscape Characterisation for the Chilterns its main findings were published in October in the form of a full colour, accessible document with maps and images.

In response to a consultation by English Heritage on the setting of heritage assets the Board suggested that much greater recognition should be given to the importance of protected landscapes in conserving and enhancing historic places.

- The Walk Back in Time programme included a total of 79 history-themed events. A highlight was the Archaeology Day at the Ashridge Estate, jointly organised by the Board and the National Trust, at which 200 people enjoyed lots of hands-on activities.
- The Making of the Chilterns Landscape publication, describing the results of the Chilterns Historic Landscape Characterisation Project, was launched in October.
- The Board distributed 1,500 copies of Chilternsetna, a newsletter about the historic environment of the Chilterns.
- 5,000 leaflets promoting People and Places of the Chiltern Hills were distributed and there were 17,457 visits to the People and Places pages on the AONB website.
- The final legacy of the Special Trees and Woods Project, supported by the Board during its four and a half year lifespan, was the publication of a book containing 50 of the best stories about trees and woods in the Chilterns.
- The Board provided support to the Chiltern Woodlands Project which ran a training day on woodland archaeology.
Over the course of the past 18 months the Chilterns’ chalk streams came under increased pressure as a result of low rainfall. The first six months of 2010 were the driest since the severe drought of 1976, and river flows declined to particularly low levels in a number of streams by the autumn. Although the situation initially eased in early autumn the harsh winter provided less than three quarters of average recharge to the aquifer and another dry, warm spring in 2011 truncated the recharge season and restricted flows in the rivers.

In response to public funding cuts The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) developed new partnerships and provided consultancy and project management services to landowners and project partners to boost income.

- Advice and funding was provided to the River Chess Association and The Chiltern Society to set up riverfly monitoring groups on the Chess and Misbourne. These groups will be instrumental in monitoring the health of the rivers and detecting pollution events.

- The CCSP worked in partnership with Chepping Wycombe Parish Council and the Environment Agency to carry out a habitat enhancement scheme on the River Wye at Boundary Park in Loudwater. Tree work improved light levels reaching the river, and other works improved habitat for fish, reduced bank erosion and created marginal habitat.

- The Lottery-funded Discover The Ver project was launched in March. The project, led by the Ver Valley Society and Hertfordshire Countryside Management, with support from the CCSP, created nine new walks in the Ver Valley, made a series of access improvements and installed interpretation along the river.

- The Dacorum Chalk Rivers Restoration Strategy, developed in partnership by the Environment Agency, Hertfordshire Countryside Management and the CCSP, covering the rivers Ver, Gade and Bulbourne, was published in the autumn.

- The highly successful Trout in the Classroom project continued at Waterside Combined and Rickmansworth Park Schools in the Chess Valley. Both schools successfully released their trout in April and pupils from both schools made visits to the R. Chess in July.

- The CCSP worked with its partners to identify the potential impacts of the proposed high speed rail route on the R. Misbourne and the wider Misbourne valley and to raise awareness of them locally and nationally.

- Nine visits were made to sites along five of the Chilterns’ rivers to give advice on river and riparian management and to assist with the development of enhancement schemes.

- The Project Officer led walks along the rivers Wye and Chess, gave talks to a number of groups, including South Bucks BBOWT Group and Three Rivers District Council Environmental Forum and supported the National Trust’s family fun day at Hughenden Manor in August.

- The CCSP, working in partnership with Veolia Water Central and The Chiltern Society, carried out tree work along the River Misbourne at Chalfont Mill on the outskirts of Chalfont St. Giles.

- Over 40 delegates attended the 13th Annual Forum of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, which was held at Hambleden Village Hall in the Hamble Valley in May.

- The CCSP led a group of volunteers from the Impress the Chess initiative on a work party to enhance river habitat along a 200m stretch of the Little Chess in Chesham in September. A large amount of accumulated rubbish was removed and tree work was carried out to increase the amount of light reaching the river.
Planning and Development

In February the Government started a consultation on its proposal to construct a new high speed railway between Birmingham and London (High Speed 2). The Government’s preferred route passes along the Misbourne Valley through the heart of the Chilterns AONB and would cause considerable damage to the landscape.

The Board was involved in ongoing negotiations on a number of major development proposals within the AONB and its setting including: a 14 km underground electricity cable from Amersham to Saunderton; a sports stadium complex with associated enabling development near High Wycombe; a wind farm near Wingrave, east of Aylesbury; the proposed redevelopment of Carmel College near Crowmarsh, and a huge milk processing plant and other speculative development near Aston Clinton.

- The overall winner of the Chilterns Buildings Design Awards, offered jointly with The Chiltern Society, was a new house in Little Chalfont. A highly commended award was given for the extension and refurbishment of buildings at Aston Clinton Hill, and a commended award was given for the extension and refurbishment of a house in Chalfont St. Giles.
- Formal comments were submitted on 25 development plans and other documents ranging from national polices to local development documents.
- A total of 40 attendees came to two Planning Forum events.
- The Board was consulted on over 150 planning applications; detailed comments were submitted on 21, of which about 70% were determined in line with the Board’s comments.

Activities and Learning

National support for ‘Learning Outside the Classroom’ initiatives continued, and the Board responded by supporting and assisting with the organisation of several countryside events for schools. These, combined with a number of large public events, led to the Board having a strong public presence in 2010/2011.

The continuing demand for red kite talks was once again met by our group of knowledgeable and dedicated volunteers, who also provided invaluable assistance with events.

- The fourth Chilterns Countryside Festival at the Ashridge Estate, jointly organised by the Board and the National Trust, had over 100 stands promoting locally produced food and crafts and local environmental organisations. 3,500 visitors attended, despite poor weather, indicating that the event is developing strong local support.
- The Board helped to organise a number of large public events including BBC’s ‘Springwatch Wild Day Out’, ‘Sounds like Summer’ at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve and an Archaeology Day at Ashridge.
- The Activities and Learning Officer ran sessions at four whole-day events aimed at schools across the Chilterns. This included Natural England’s ‘Grow Wild on a Farm’ at Field Farm, Lewknor, which attracted over 500 children.
- In partnership with Buckinghamshire County Council’s School Improvement Service research began to produce a Key Stage 2 history and geography Chilterns-wide resource pack for local schools, to be launched in summer 2011.
- The Board supported higher and further education with lectures and field trips organised for Berkshire College of Agriculture and Reading University, plus two Bucks Adult Learning sessions.
- More than 500 people attended 24 red kite talks given to local organisations.
- 24 ‘Wildlife on the Move’ events were held in conjunction with Hobbs of Henley Ltd and Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway. Over 500 people attended these trips.
- The range of red kite-themed merchandise generated a net income of almost £1,800 which was invested in wildlife awareness-raising work.
- The ‘Friends of Red Kites in the Chilterns’ donation scheme, combined with donations from walks and talks, generated a net income of £1,800.
- 18 active volunteers helped with walks, talks and events.
There were 196,928 visits to the AONB website during the year, an average of 16,411 per month which was a 14% increase over the previous year. The number of downloads of leaflets and other publications was 40,862. New Chilterns Cycleway and High Speed 2 sections were developed and proved very popular with users.

New Twitter and Facebook pages were set up for the AONB and a walking and cycling blog established.

5,000 leaflets promoting the People and Places section of the AONB website were distributed and two talks given.

15,000 each of two editions of the Board’s magazines Chalk and Trees and What’s On in the Chilterns were distributed.

102 delegates representing 50 organisations attended the Chilterns Annual Forum in November 2010 at the Clare Foundation in Saunderton.

Over 50,000 walking, cycling and general information leaflets were distributed via libraries, information centres, visitor attractions and at events.

Five electronic newsletters were circulated.

The Board had a stand at six major local shows during the summer.

20 press releases and eight letters were sent to the local media, generating at least 100 press articles and mentions, 10 radio interviews and five TV interviews. Five articles written by the Board were published in local and national media.

Four editions of the Commons Network Newsletter, one edition of Chiltern Chalk newsletter and one edition of the Chiltern Slieve newsletter on the historic environment were distributed.

£990,000 was awarded to the South East Protected Landscapes Sustainable Tourism Project from the Rural Development Programme for England. Rural tourism products in the nine AONBS and National Parks of the South East including the Chilterns will be developed and marketed over the next three years.

390 copies of The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2008-2013 were downloaded from the AONB website.

The Board continued to support the National Association of AONBs and contributed articles for its Outstanding magazine.
Recreation and Access

There was an increase in organised walking and cycling events in the Chilterns, ranging from charity challenge events to walks and rides offered by clubs. The Ramblers' Association reported that the Chilterns Weekend Walkers group is the fastest-growing group in the UK.

There was a steady upward trend in the number of people attending health walks. The latest total attendance figure for health walks in the Chilterns was 33,947 with many new walk locations being offered close to urban centres.

Countryside sites with formal visitor facilities were more popular than ever. BBOWT's College Lake Nature Reserve opened its new visitor centre in May 2010 and visitor numbers have increased from 10,000 to around 40,000 per annum.

- The Chilterns Cycleway was launched by Formula 1 driver Mark Webber in June 2010. Over 30 members of local cycling groups were present plus representatives from The Chiltern Society and the CTC, partners in the project, and from the LEADER programme which provided most of the funding. Around the 173 mile Cycleway route 23 guided rides took place on launch day, organised by local cycling clubs, in which over 150 members of the public took part.
- Other Chilterns Cycleway initiatives included:
  - A comprehensive section on the AONB website plus an introductory leaflet and a guidebook. 650 guidebooks had been sold by March 31st 2011 and the website had received 11,793 pageviews.
  - Three short break itineraries were developed to be downloaded from the website.
  - A Chilterns Cycleway blog was launched.
  - A ranger scheme was launched, with 11 rangers appointed to inspect and monitor Cycleway signage along the route.
- Over 20 members of the Disabled Ramblers took part in a seven mile walk in June 2010 organised by the Board starting from the Sue Ryder Home at Nettlebed. The Board supported a Disabled Ramble from Ewelme the previous day.

A Disabled Ramblers walk near Swyncombe Downs in South Oxfordshire

- The annual Chilterns Access Conference was held in March 2011 at College Lake Nature Reserve near Tring, attracting 74 delegates from 45 different organisations. Tom Franklin, Chief Executive of the Ramblers Association, gave the keynote presentation on investing in access to the countryside: the economic case and there were presentations on The National Trust's Outdoors Vision in the Chilterns, Simply Walk and the Big Society, the impact on access of the forest sell-off, Local Distinctiveness and short break tourism in the Chilterns.
- The Chilterns Rambler bus service was supported by a Sustainable Development Fund grant from the Board. A slimmed-down service was operated by Community Action Dacorum for the 2010 season, and a review of the service and other options for running it more sustainably was undertaken at the end of the season.
- A number of Chilterns Country Walks were updated and reprinted, including the Red Kite Walk, two Hertfordshire pub walks, the Beacon View Walk, and the Ashridge Drovers Walk. Over 11,600 Chilterns Country leaflets were downloaded from the AONB website.
The Chilterns AONB Sustainable Development Fund supports projects which enhance the Chilterns and people's enjoyment and understanding of the area. During 2010-11 it made grants totalling £43,140 to support 22 local projects. The monies in the Fund are provided by Natural England. The total value of the projects supported was over £260,000.

Examples of projects supported include:
- £1,000 to Transition Town High Wycombe to produce a booklet and website promoting local food producers within a 10 mile radius of High Wycombe.
- £3,000 to Chiltern Archaeology to complete research and produce a publication on the finds from excavations at two Roman villa sites in the Hambleden Valley.
- £3,000 to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust for work on reedbeds at Marsworth and Wilstone Reservoirs near Tring to make them more attractive to nationally-rare species such as bittern and corn bunting.
- £1,051 to the Friends of Studham Common for equipment to help them manage Studham Common near Dunstable for wildlife and access.
- £2,500 to EnduranceLife Ltd. for the installation of electronic checkpoints along the Ridgeway National Trail to be used by runners taking part in the Trailblaze endurance challenge.
CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS FOR 2010/2011

- Sir John Johnson* Chairman (until October 2010)
- Mike Fox* Chairman (from October 2010)
- Cllr Mr W A Storey* Vice Chairman

Appointed by Local Authorities

- Cllr Mr R Pushman*
- Cllr Mr W A Storey+
- Cllr Mr D Nimmo-Smith
- Cllr Mr C Richards+
- Cllr Mr J Ryman*
- Cllr Mr I Reay
- Cllr Mrs S Roden
- Cllr Mr D Barnard+
- Cllr Mrs M Mustoe*
- Cllr Mr A Walters*
- Cllr Mr G Andrews
- Cllr Mr B Norman+
- Cllr Mr R Emmett+

Appointed by the Secretary of State

- Dr H Barrett-Mold*
- Mrs B Kirkham+
- Dr S Mortimer
- Mr J Willson+

Elected by Parish Councils

- Mrs M Goldsmith Bedfordshire
- Mrs S Judges* Buckinghamshire
- Mrs B Wallis+ Buckinghamshire
- Mrs M Jarrett+ Hertfordshire
- Mr J Griffin* Oxfordshire
- Mrs J Wells Oxfordshire

Executive Committee

- Board members marked with an asterisk *

Planning Committee

- Board members marked with a +

Mike Stubbs (National Trust), Richard Bossons (Architect) and Gill Gowing (Chiltern District Council) were co-opted.

OFFICERS

- Chief Officer: Steve Rodrick
- Finance Officer: Chris Smith
- Planning Officer: Colin White
- Countryside Officer: Kath Daly
- Activities and Learning Officer: Cathy Rose
- Information and Interpretation Officer: Claire Forrest
- Strategic Access Officer: Annette Venters
- Conservation and Landscape Officer: Neil Jackson
- Chalk Streams Officer: Allen Beechey
- Administration Officer: Donna Hunter
- HR Advisor: Sally Charman
- Clerk to the Board: Maureen Keyworth

Caring for the Chilterns
There are 47 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the UK and they show huge diversity, from the Isles of Scilly to the extensive moors of the North Pennines. The National Association for AONBs is an independent body which promotes the family of AONBs in England and Wales.

Acknowledgements
The Board would like to thank all the volunteers that contributed to its work during 2010/2011. It is also grateful for support from Peter Head of Howland Furniture Group.

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Photos supplied by: © Chilterns Conservation Board, John Morris, Chris Smith, Paul Keene, and Ian Rolfe
Cover photos (front) - Mark Webber launches the Chilterns Cycleway at the Ashridge Estate, Walkers on Ivinghoe Beacon and Lacey Green Windmill