CHAIRMAN’S FOREWORD

After nine years as Chairman, first of the Shadow Board and from 2004 of the Chilterns Conservation Board, I have told Defra that I will leave at the end of 2010. I will miss it and the able team of officers under Steve Rodrick at Chinnor. It has been a pleasure to chair the hard working Board Members now reduced from 29 to 27 after the creation of Central Bedfordshire Council. They have forged a strong team approach to the job of looking after the Chilterns and working with our many partners.

Recently I attended the conference of the National Association of AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I was struck by how much has changed in the field of protected landscapes. The emphasis now is on climate change, biodiversity and ecosystems services because of concerns about our environmental security. I apologise for the long words which run counter to the sheer thrill of being in the Chilterns countryside. The Misbourne Valley, as I write, is golden with barley stubble broken up by hangers of beech, ash and larch. I took heart from the forestry expert who assured us that beech woods would not disappear from our slopes. There is not enough stress on the vital contribution to our landscape from farmers and woodland owners.

I frankly doubt whether this plethora of scientific terms interests the public much. The Chilterns AONB is their countryside and they want to use and appreciate this priceless asset. Many people want to walk our network of footpaths, to ride or cycle on our bridleways and the new Chilterns Cycleway designed in partnership with The Chiltern Society and the Cyclists’ Touring Club. In the fine summer weather many families just enjoy picnics beside the chalk streams.

But we face real challenges. Clearly there will be spending curbs which will curtail the ability of our hard-pressed local authorities to maintain so many of our amenities. Natural England has given us advance warning of budget cuts and we have made economies in staff and operations. The starkest threat comes from the proposal to build a new high speed rail link (High Speed 2) through the Chilterns, initially to Birmingham. The Board is totally opposed to this project and so are many people in the Chilterns. We believe that the economics of the business plan are flawed and the environmental impact has not been properly assessed. That is why it is fortunate that we have in the Board a strong independent body to champion the Chilterns.

I shall miss the people, many of them volunteers, who work to enhance the Chilterns countryside. But I shall still see them installing new gates and watching over red kites. And I will have more time to explore and enjoy one of England’s finest landscapes.

Sir John Johnson, 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.
ISSUES AND TRENDS

Last year we published a State of the Environment Report which was based on 20 indicators covering everything from quality of water in rivers and condition of hedgerows to the area of land with open access rights and the number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments at risk. We are one of the first protected landscapes, either AONB or National Park, to have published such a report. These are the main findings:

- Only 2 out of 140 Grade I and II* listed buildings are at risk.
- Only 1 out of 19 registered parks and gardens are at risk.
- 14 out of 113 Scheduled Ancient Monuments are at risk.
- Open access rights apply to 2,883 hectares and a further 5,342 ha of open access is provided by a range of landowners.

The indicators show the importance of ensuring that the biodiversity of the Chilterns is in good condition, which it generally is. However, some aspects require considerable work to improve the situation, not least on the rivers. As ever, actively farmed land provides most of the landscape interest and rural character. There is a high level of uptake of environmental schemes intended to help landowners manage their farmland and woodland to provide environmental benefits.

During the financial recession the pressure for new housing development has fallen but the Government announced in March 2010 that it planned to go ahead with a new High Speed Railway (HS2). Three possible routes, all of which pass through the Chilterns AONB, were published, with the preferred route running for 12 miles through the AONB along the Misbourne Valley. This would be a major scar on the landscape. The Board does not believe this project has yet been justified in the national interest and is opposing the plans in alliance with many other local organisations and communities.

Steve Rodrick, Chief Officer
With continued national concern about declines in species and biodiversity, particularly in the South East region, there remains a pressing need to look beyond the boundaries of protected sites and to conserve and restore habitat across the wider countryside. The Board worked with a wide range of partners and local communities to support and promote such approaches, for example, through training/networking events, advice to landowners and practical support.

Commonland - its future management and past and present value for local communities - continued to generate considerable interest and activity. The awarding of a Heritage Lottery Fund development grant meant that ambitious plans for a four year £0.5m Chiltern-wide commons project could start to be worked up into a full bid.

The Board is committed to gaining a better understanding of the condition of the Chilterns environment, and in 2009 it published the first State of the Chilterns Environment report.

Other highlights of the year included:

- 70 people attended the Chalk Grassland Managers’ day in the Bradenham Valley, looking at landscape-scale action on and adjacent to the National Trust’s land to increase connectivity of the chalk grassland resource.
- 35 people attended the annual Chilterns scrub bash, held this year at Wycombe District Council’s Sands Bank reserve in High Wycombe.
- Support was given to the Local Wildlife Trusts for practical works on two reserves (Galley and Warden Hills in Luton and Frogmore Meadows near Sarratt) and for the purchase of a vehicle to support and improve management of chalk grassland on 12 reserves in Bucks and Oxon.
- Support was given for the training of over 20 volunteers, access enhancements and practical conservation on four commons.
- Four editions of the Commons Network e-bulletin were produced and distributed.
- 50 people attended Commons Day which was held on the Ashridge Estate and focussed on the history and management of commonland there. In addition there were four Commons Forum meetings and four Forum site visits.
- The Chilterns Commons photo competition attracted 63 entries and the winning entries went on display at the Commons Day.
- Advice was provided for the management of nine commons.
- The 2009 Chilterns Environment Award (an amalgamation of the Conservation and Woodland Awards) went to Offley Hoo Farm near Hitchin, managed by Pilkington Farms, for the extensive conservation work being carried out there, including the restoration of chalk grassland.
- The Chilterns Land Use Survey was carried out for the fifth year running. Preliminary results indicated:
  - no significant loss in long-term set-aside (e.g. along woodland edges).
  - a resting of some of the grassland previously used for horse grazing and a decrease in visible evidence of horse grazing.
  - some rough grassland and uncropped arable land coming back into more productive management.
- Seven Chiltern farms opened to the public on Open Farm Sunday on June 7th with one farm alone having over 1200 attendees.
- 45 participants - mostly farmers and land managers - attended the Chilterns Farmers’ Forum in March which focussed on the outlook for the different sectors in the Chilterns, along with a farmers’ wish list for the forthcoming General Election.
**Woodlands**

The Chilterns is one of the most heavily wooded areas in the UK with 21% woodland cover, of which 59% is ancient. In 2007 a pilot survey showed that the area of ancient woodland may be under recorded by as much as 18%. A new, full survey was established in partnership with the Forestry Commission, Natural England and several local authorities. The results of the survey will be completed in late 2011.

The growth of the wood fuel market provided better economic prospects than for many years. Increasing awareness of the commercial potential of wood fuel, confidence in the technology and a desire to use renewable energy have all resulted in a steady increase in the installation of wood fuel systems and domestic wood burning stoves. There is the possibility that demand may outstrip local supply unless more local woodland owners take advantage of this growing market.

- 110 delegates attended the Woodland Forum organised jointly with the Chiltern Woodlands Project on the subject of Hedgerow and Field Trees. These distinctive landscape features are gradually disappearing and relatively few replacements are being planted or helped to avoid annual cutting of hedges.
- 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 61 owners covering 690 hectares of woodland
  - Arranged 10 walks attended by 160 people and gave eight talks.
  - Held five training days on woodland archaeology attended by 80 trainees.
  - Published three editions of News of the Woods and a book on the Cultural Heritage of Chiltern Woods.
- 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. Highlights included:
  - Identifying and recording over 700 trees and 150 woodlands.
  - Organising an annual conference attended by over 120 people addressed by Stuart King, an authority on the bodgers of the Chilterns.
  - Organising 11 training events for 40 volunteers.

**Measuring an ancient beech at Whipsnade Heath for the Special Trees and Woods Project.**

**Historic Environment**

After many years the Chilterns is covered fully by an Historic Landscape Characterisation. This national programme will enable everyone to understand better the complexity of the landscape and how it has evolved. Coupled with the State of the Chilterns Environment Report we also have a better understanding of what requires attention. The registered parks and gardens are in generally good condition but there is cause for concern over the number of listed buildings at risk.

- The Walk Back in Time programme included a total of 75 events. A highlight was the Archaeology and Local History Family Day at Totternhoe which attracted 200 visitors.
- The People and Places project, initially supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, identified a total of 65 notable people with strong connections to the Chilterns, including Charles de Gaulle and Benjamin Franklin. 5,500 copies of a very successful leaflet were distributed and there were 14,500 visits to the website.
- The Board printed 1,500 copies of Chilternsaetna, a newsletter about the historic environment of the Chilterns.
- The Board continued to support the Special Trees and Woods Project (part of the Chiltern Woodlands Project), which with considerable support from over 100 active volunteers and the Heritage Lottery Fund has identified and researched a total of over 700 trees and 150 woods for their social and historical associations.
- The Board provided support to the Chiltern Woodlands Project which held three training courses on woodland archaeology attended by 80 trainees.
Good rainfall during the 2008-09 winter recharged the aquifer and most Chilterns’ rivers flowed throughout their length. There were some notable exceptions however. The Rivers Gade and Ver continued to fall someway short of their historic winterbourne heads and the middle section of the Misbourne remained stubbornly dry. As the year progressed, much lower than average rainfall caused flows to decline sharply and by September most had long dry headwater sections. Fortunately, concerns that a drought could occur in 2010 were allayed as above average winter rainfall helped groundwater to recover quickly and restore flows.

- Water vole surveys of the Chess, Misbourne and Ewelme Brook were completed. The water vole population on the R. Chess recovered to 87% of the population size recorded in 2001. Water vole populations were confirmed along the lower Misbourne whilst the population on the Ewelme Brook remained stable.

- Over 50 delegates attended the 12th Annual Forum of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project at Boxmoor, Herts, in June.

- Pupils from Rickmansworth Park School and Waterside School in Chesham who took part in the Trout in the Classroom scheme released their trout into the R. Chess in April and June. BBC Countryfile filmed the June release as part of a programme which also looked at the R. Misbourne. The second season of the scheme began in January.

- The Meades Water Gardens Regeneration Project on the River Chess in Chesham won an award at the Wild Trout Trust Conservation Awards in October. The Trust gave the award in recognition of the success of the project not only in re-establishing chalk stream habitat and revitalising a valuable urban green space, but also in getting the local community involved.

- The Project provided a grant to the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust for its work to enhance habitat and improve public access to Frogmore Meadows SSSI at Chenes on the R. Chess.

- Officer time was given to help develop an enhancement scheme carried out by the Environment Agency at Wooburn Park on the R. Wye. The work invigorated flows along a straightened reach of the Wye, providing habitat for invertebrates and fish.

- The Project produced two interpretation panels to raise awareness of the recently completed restoration project on the R. Bulbourne at St. John’s Well, Berkhamsted. The Project also supported the production of two interpretation panels for locations along the R. Wye at Wooburn Green and Loudwater.

- The Project carried out 13 visits 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 Misbourne Walk leaflet was revised and re-printed and a new advisory leaflet for riparian owners along the R. Misbourne was produced.

Julia Bradbury of BBC’s Countryfile and Allen Beechey of the Board filming on the River Chess
Planning and Development

In March the Government published its proposal to construct a new high speed railway between Birmingham and London. It proposed a recommended route along the Misbourne Valley and two alternatives, all three of which will slice through the Chilterns and cause considerable damage to the landscape.

In February the Board launched the second edition of the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide. This guidance, supplemented by a range of technical information, is intended to help planning authorities, parish councils and developers ensure that proposed new development is sympathetic to the Chilterns’ vernacular architecture and landscape.

- The overall winner of the Chilterns Buildings Design Awards, offered jointly with The Chiltern Society, was a house extension in Berkhamsted. Highly commended awards were given to developments in Frieth in Wycombe District and Tring in Dacorum Borough.
- Comments were submitted on 30 formal development plans and documents ranging from national policies to local development documents.
- The Board was consulted on over 100 planning applications; detailed comments were submitted on 29 of which 87% were determined in line with the Board’s comments.
- The Board organised training for local authorities, professional and educational bodies attended by over 120 delegates.

Activities and Learning

The Government’s ‘Every Child Matters’ programme and ‘Learning Outside the Classroom’ manifesto gained momentum and Natural England launched its ‘One Million Children Outdoors’ programme. The Board strongly supported these national initiatives by promoting and organising several events as part of its ongoing commitment to encourage school-age children to visit the countryside.

While it is over 20 years since red kites were re-introduced, there was still a demand for talks to groups, both local and from beyond the Chilterns. These talks were almost exclusively provided by a group of knowledgeable and dedicated volunteers, without whom the demand could not be met.

- Over 5,000 visitors attended the third Chilterns Countryside Festival at the Ashridge Estate, jointly organised by the Board and the National Trust.
- The Activities and Learning Officer ran activities at four whole-day events aimed at schools across the Chilterns and contributed to Natural England’s ‘Natural Connections’ school programme in High Wycombe. Four Bucks Adult Learning lectures were also given.
- The Learning Outside the Classroom Directory was promoted across the Chilterns.
- Over 150 people attended guided walks with themes including woodlands, red kites and chalk streams. The programme of walks based on the historic environment of the Chilterns was developed and expanded.

More than 700 people attended 28 red kite talks given to local organisations.

- 22 ‘Wildlife on the Move’ events were held in conjunction with Hobbs of Henley Ltd and Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway. Over 600 people attended these trips.
- The range of red kite-themed merchandise generated a net income of almost £2,600 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 over £3,600.
- A group of 18 active volunteers helped to run the programme of walks, talks and events.
The demand for information on how to enjoy the Chilterns, particularly information on walking and cycling opportunities, continued to grow. The new Walks and Rides section on the AONB website was therefore a timely addition, with an enhanced search function that internet users now expect.

The High Speed 2 announcement in March created a great deal of press work at local, regional and national level with many interviews involving Board members and staff.

- There were 172,000 visits to the AONB website during the year, an average of 14,333 per month which was a 20% increase over the previous year. The number of downloads of leaflets and other publications was 43,186.
- The new Walks and Rides section launched in June proved extremely popular, getting a third of all site visits. A poll feature and weather feed were added to the homepage and new sections on High Speed 2 and Learning created.
- 25 profiles of famous people were researched and added to the People and Places section of the AONB website. 5,500 promotional leaflets were distributed.
- 15,000 each of two editions of the Board’s magazines Chalk and Trees and What’s On in the Chilterns were distributed.
- 135 delegates representing 54 organisations attended the Chilterns Annual Forum in November 2009 at the Green Park Conference Centre near Aylesbury.
- Over 50,000 walking, cycling and general information leaflets were distributed via libraries, information centres, visitor attractions and at events.
- The Board had a stand at six major local shows during the summer.
- 22 press releases and five letters were sent to the local media, generating at least 100 press articles and mentions, 11 radio interviews and six TV interviews. Three articles written by the Board were published in the local media.
- Four electronic Board newsletters were circulated. Four editions of the Commons Network Newsletter and one edition of the Chilternsaetna newsletter on the historic environment were distributed.
- The Board’s office and operating activities were given a Silver award by the Green Tourism Business Scheme.
- 12 businesses attended a workshop in January on promoting sustainable tourism in the Chilterns.
- 377 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 is strong demand for stile-free routes and they are as popular as ever. There have been a large number of stiles removed over the last year, thanks to the success of the ‘Donate a Gate scheme’, which has enabled new stile-free walks to be developed and promoted.

Chesham became the first town in the Chilterns to obtain a ‘Walkers are Welcome’ accreditation and there is interest from many other market towns in this innovative new community-led scheme. It helps strengthen a town’s reputation as a place for visitors to come to enjoy the outdoors, bringing useful benefits to the local economy and helps to ensure that footpaths and facilities for walkers are maintained in good condition, benefiting local people as well as visitors.

- Great progress was made with the Chilterns Cycleway project thanks to a successful Leader funding bid which secured £48,000 towards the project. An additional £32,000 of match funding was generated. Great support was also received from project partners The Chiltern Society and the CTC. Detailed signage schedules were prepared and agreed with the Highways Authorities for the 173 mile route, involving 665 signs of all types. Chiltern Society volunteers helped to test final route amends.

- Contact was made with 412 tourism businesses (accommodation providers, pubs and cycle shops) located within 3 miles of the Chilterns Cycleway and the first of three tourism workshops was held in January 2010 looking at how businesses could benefit from the Chilterns Cycleway.

- Four new stile-free walks starting from Whitchurch Hill in Oxfordshire were designed and added to the Chilterns AONB website. The routes were made stile-free thanks to the efforts of the Chiltern Society Path Maintenance volunteers.

- Four Chilterns Country Walks were updated and reprinted (Chinnor, Galley and Warden Hills, Views of the Vale and Walk like the Clappers) plus the popular leaflet Cycle, Ride, Walk in the Central Chilterns. Over 12,500 Chilterns Country leaflets were downloaded from the AONB website.

- The annual Chilterns Access Conference was held in February 2010 at Ballinger Memorial Hall near Great Missenden, attracting 80 delegates from 37 different organisations. In addition to updates on Countryside Access Improvement Plans, topics included attracting young people to the countryside, Chesham Walkers are Welcome case study, the latest ‘access for all’ developments, developing walking and cycling tourism in the Chilterns and how to attract new walking audiences.

- Over 20 members of the Disabled Ramblers took part in a walk organised by the Board starting from the Chilterns Gateway Centre at Dunstable Downs and using the new Multi-user trail.

- A downloadable children’s quiz sheet was produced for the Chinnor Chilterns Country Walk to make the walk more fun and interactive for all the family.
**Financial Statement 2009/2010**

This report is based on the Financial Statement approved by the Board on 23rd June 2010. The Audit Commission had not completed its audit at the time of publication of this Annual Review. A copy of the auditor’s report will be available from the Board when it is published and will be posted on the Board’s website.

### Expenditure

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countryside Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation and Access</td>
<td>£73,716</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning and Development</td>
<td>£108,764</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion and Awareness</td>
<td>£161,316</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance(1)</td>
<td>£48,090</td>
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<td>Management and Administration (2)</td>
<td>£187,256</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other costs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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The expenditure includes VAT which the Board is not able to reclaim.

### Income

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<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Natural England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Authorities (3)</td>
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<td>Natural England -SDF (4)</td>
<td>£47,728</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (5)</td>
<td>£77,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£764,025</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balance carried forward - £2,497

### Notes

1. Includes members’ allowances, personnel and legal costs
2. Includes premises, office costs, IT and finance charges
3. Local authority contributions to core costs
4. Grant aid from Natural England for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)
5. Includes local authority and others contributions to projects

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**Sustainable Development Fund**

The Chilterns AONB Sustainable Development Fund supports projects which enhance the Chilterns and people’s enjoyment and understanding of the area. During 2009-10 it made grants totalling £44,496 to support 27 local projects. The monies in the Fund are provided by Natural England. The total value of the projects supported was £273,664.

Examples of projects supported include:

- £5,000 to the Berks Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust for a major project to restore and extend chalk grassland on 12 of its Chilterns reserves.
- £2,500 to the Field Studies Centre in Amersham to fund activities for children from two High Wycombe schools to help them understand and enjoy the countryside.
- £950 to the Greensand Trust for a project to involve local people in restoring and planting hedgerows in Harlington and Studham, Bedfordshire. The work at Studham had a particular focus on dormice as this is one of their Bedfordshire strongholds.
- £470 to Tring in Transition for the Tring ECO Fair which promoted sustainability and local produce.
- £2,500 to the Braziers Park community in south Oxfordshire to help fund a tractor which will be used to move locally-produced woodchips to their planned woodchip boiler heating system.

*Hedgerow maintenance at Studham Common*
Conservation Board members on a visit to Missenden Abbey parkland

Conservation Board Members for 2009/2010

Sir John Johnson* Chairman
Cllr Mr W A Storey+ Vice Chairman

Appointed by the Secretary of State
Dr H Barrett-Mold
Mr M Fox
Sir J Johnson
Mrs B Kirkham+

Elected by Parish Councils
Mrs M Goldsmith Bedfordshire
Mrs S Judges* Buckinghamshire
Mrs B Wallis+ Buckinghamshire
Mrs M Jarrett+ Hertfordshire

Board members marked with an asterisk *

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

Executive Committee

Appointed by Local Authorities
Cllr Mr R Pushman* Buckinghamshire CC
Cllr Mr W A Storey+ Hertfordshire CC
Cllr Mr D Nimmo-Smith Oxfordshire CC
Cllr Mr J Ryman Aylesbury Vale DC
Cllr Mr I Reay Chiltern DC
Cllr Mr D Worliding Dacorum BC
Cllr Mr D Barnard+ North Herts DC
Cllr Mrs M Mustoe* South Beds DC
Cllr Mr A Walters* South Bucks DC
Cllr Mr G Andrews South Oxfordshire DC
Cllr Mr B Norman Three Rivers DC
Cllr Mr R Emmett+ Wycombe DC

Counties
Bedfordshire
Buckinghamshire
Hertfordshire
Oxfordshire

Office Managers
Mr K Mayne*
Mr S Mortimer
Dr M Render
Mr J Willson+

Elected by Parish Councils
Mrs M Goldsmith Buckinghamshire
Mrs S Judges* Buckinghamshire
Mrs B Wallis+ Buckinghamshire
Mrs M Jarrett+ Hertfordshire
Mr J Griffin*
Mrs J Wells

Executive Committee

Board members marked with a +

Chief Officer
Steve Rodrick

Finance Officer
Chris Smith

Planning Officer
Colin White

Countryside Officer
Kath Daly

Activities and Education Officer
Cathy Rose

Information and Interpretation Officer
Claire Forrest

Access Officer
Annette Venters

Farming and Land Use Officer
Tracy Adams (until July 2009)

Chalk Streams Officer
Allen Beechey

Office Manager
Roelie Reed (until Feb 2010)

Administration Officer
Donna Hunter

H R Advisor
Sally Charman

Clerk to the Board
Maureen Keyworth

The Chilterns Conservation Board

Caring for the Chilterns

9
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 2009/2010. It is also grateful for support from the following: Peter Head of Howland Furniture Group, John Hall of Fidget Computerware, Jim Matthews of H G Matthews and HSBC (for supporting the Annual Forum).