2012/2013
ANNUAL REVIEW
OF THE
Chilterns Conservation Board
Caring for the Chilterns
It has been heartening at a time of cutbacks and belt-tightening that the Board has been able, over the past year, not only to maintain its broad programme of work but expand it. This was thanks, in part, to successful bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund. We secured support for a project to research and conserve the rare box woodlands of the Chilterns. This will make great use of volunteers, which is another reason that the Board is able to accomplish so much these days. Another HLF-supported initiative, the Chilterns Commons Project, has successfully attracted tremendous help from a huge number of volunteers.

Volunteers are making a great difference to so many areas of our work, as are the immensely productive partnerships we have with a number of voluntary bodies, not least The Chiltern Society, National Trust and Wildlife Trusts.

Alongside exciting new work a great deal of staff and Board Member time has been taken up, as in previous years, with fighting the enormous threat of the High Speed 2 rail line. The current proposal will cause unacceptable damage to this nationally-protected area. If the route cannot avoid the Chilterns then it must be placed in a bored tunnel under the whole of the AONB. As its predicted cost mounts and the business case becomes ever weaker the Board, with many others across the country, continues to press for this hugely-flawed project to be cancelled.

Close working links with local authorities remain a cornerstone of the Board’s activities and we are grateful for their financial and technical support. We are taking an active role in the new Local Nature Partnerships; they are at an early stage and will need resources to make them effective. We hope the, also new, Local Enterprise Partnerships will be a source of assistance.

I am pleased that we have helped forge new tourism initiatives, notably the Chilterns Tourism Business Network, the regional Our Land project and the Cycle Chilterns project. More than ever there is a need for strong partnerships such as these to link the public, voluntary and private sectors.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our staff, nearly all of whom have been with us for many years. It was particularly pleasing to win The Bowland Award from the National Association of AONBs, in recognition of the outstanding work on our Chalk Streams Project.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to two of the original members of the Board, Bill Storey and Richard Pushman, who retired this year. Both have served the Chilterns AONB for many years in various guises, clocking up an incredible 90 years of public service between them.

Mike Fox, Chairman
ISSUES AND TRENDS

Do we have the skills and knowledge to care for the Chilterns’ natural beauty? We’d like to think so but the reality is that much of that knowledge and many of those who have the skills we need were lost as public spending cuts went deeper still in the last 12 months.

Once upon a time it was the landowners, their agents and workers who possessed all that was needed to create and maintain what we now cherish, and wrongly call, natural beauty. Those days are long past and public funds are needed to help pay for the quality of environment we all want.

Two excellent examples of how public investment brings the benefits we are seeking are the Chilterns Commons Project and the Box Woodland Project, both of which are grant aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Commons Project’s events and training courses are consistently over subscribed. The number of volunteers far exceeds our targets. To our surprise it seems that the Chilterns is probably the most important part of England for box woodland; and now we have the funds to train volunteers to undertake surveys.

The sixth Chilterns Countryside and Food Festival organised by the Board and National Trust at Ashridge had its best year yet and attracted over 6,000 visitors and 120 stall holders. More evidence of the Chilterns’ popularity with visitors was the continuing success of the Chilterns Cycleway and support for the Chilterns Tourism Business network from the Chilterns LEADER fund.

It is heartening to know there is such an appetite for things Chiltern. The fact is that nobody will do anything to look after the Chilterns unless they care about it first. The astonishing grass roots campaign against High Speed 2 is testament to just how much local people care about this area.

It’s just as well, because when push comes to shove we need the skills, knowledge and energy of everyone to keep the area special. That will be tested when ash dieback arrives, as it will. There are an estimated ten million ash trees in the Chilterns and most will die in the next few years and it will transform the landscape. The challenge is to get everyone to take the long view and help regenerate and replant those lost trees and woods. It might take a generation or more to achieve.

And finally - it rained and the chalks streams returned and kept flowing - more than a silver lining.

Steve Rodrick, Chief Officer

River Wye in February 2013, flowing at its highest for 12 years, upstream of West Wycombe
Take up of schemes to support environmentally-friendly management of farmland appears to be declining in the Chilterns (albeit from a high baseline) - this is thought to be due in part to continued uncertainty over the future of the Common Agriculture Policy.

Pests, diseases and non-native invasive species continued to be a serious and growing concern - from those long-established such as grey squirrels to the more recent such as Chalara ash dieback.

This year saw continued threats to the Chilterns environment in the form of the HS2 high speed rail line proposals, with huge amounts of time and effort being needed to analyse likely impacts and respond to proposals. Meanwhile, programmes of work to conserve and enhance the Chilterns' natural environment continued, with the following highlights:

- The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the Board £79,400 for a Chilterns Box Woodland Project which commenced in January and will run to the summer of 2015. The project will identify areas of box woodland across the AONB, research its historic use and value and promote this often forgotten treasure through a new box walk and series of events.

- Chilterns Commons Network activity - Commons Day at Moorend Common was attended by 69 people, there were three site visits (22 – 25 participants at each) and two e-bulletins produced.

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

- Over 50 people attended the Chalk Grassland Managers’ Day in June at Lough Down (Streatley, North Wessex Downs AONB), Chalkhills, Bozedown Farm, the Hardwick Estate and Coombe End Farm all near Whitchurch-on-Thames. The effects of different grazing regimes and animals (from horses to alpacas) were highlighted, grassland restoration discussed and Austrian scything demonstrated.

- With help from a volunteer, management advice was delivered to seven sites in the Radnage Valley Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) and a programme of practical scrub management and fencing works was carried out on a total of 11 chalk grassland sites across the AONB.

- Over 30 professionals and volunteers from across the AONB came together in February to make significant inroads into the scrub on Holtspur Bank Local Nature Reserve (near Beaconsfield) for the annual Chilterns’ scrub bash.

- A number of Chiltern farms opened to the public for Open Farm Sunday on 17th June - the events were promoted via the Board’s website, supplied with AONB literature and officer time. They continue to grow in popularity with the general public.

- Restore Hope, Latimer hosted the Chilterns Farmers’ Forum in March at which farmers updated on their farming sectors and there were presentations on the Farming and Rural Interest Group and a potential historic farmsteads project.
Woodlands

A full re-survey of ancient woodland was published in July 2012 and showed that 60% of all woodlands in the AONB are ancient – the highest percentage in the UK. The threat of tree pests and diseases increased considerably over the past year, with new diseases affecting oak, ash and various conifer species. Although no woods were identified as having ash dieback it will certainly arrive in the near future and will probably kill a high proportion of the ten million ash trees in the Chilterns.

Increasing numbers of deer, grey squirrels and other species are continuing to have a serious impact on the growth of trees and need much more effective control if forestry is to thrive.

- Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) is nearby at Pangbourne, on the Thames and in west London. The Forestry Commission is working hard to eradicate it before it spreads any further.
- 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 53 woodland owners covering 785.4 ha of woodland. Developed woodland management plans and helped owners to organise practical work in their woods.
  - Held seven training days and guided walks on woodland archaeology attended by over 150 trainees.
  - Organised workshops and visits on managing woodland for woodland owners, funded by LEADER. Six information sheets were published on the AONB website.
  - Published one edition of News of the Woods - annual report and e-news updates.
  - Helped the Forestry Commission organise a Chilterns Tree Health seminar in March - fully booked with 200 participants.
  - The Government plans to drive a high speed railway through the Chilterns will mean the destruction of several ancient woodlands including Mantles Wood, Jones Hill and Sibleys Coppice. Misleadingly, Government spokespersons have suggested that these ancient woods can either be re-located or “partially re-created”. The reality is that ancient woodland cannot be replaced and, once lost, is lost forever.

Mature ash trees
**Chalk Streams**

**Extremes were a feature of 2012-13.** At the beginning of April 2012 groundwater levels had fallen to their lowest ever recorded levels across the Chilterns as a result of the worst drought on record. 56% of the total length of chalk stream habitat in the AONB was dry. With groundwater levels continuing to decline and water use restrictions in place, prospects for the year ahead were grim. April however, proved to be the turning point as the remainder of the year brought record rainfall leading to a startling recovery in groundwater and rejuvenated rivers. By March 2013 river flows were the highest for twelve years.

- The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, working in partnership with the Environment Agency, continued work on two (£46,000) water meadow restoration projects on the Rivers Chess and Misbourne. In April 2013 contractors completed work on the Misbourne scheme, restoring the river and creating new wetland habitat.

- In October, working in partnership with the Environment Agency, the Wild Trout Trust and River Chess Association, a habitat enhancement masterclass was held on the River Chess at Scotsbridge Mill. 14 volunteers from three river groups were trained and 200m of river was enhanced.

- The Project assisted the Angling Trust and partners in the development of a Charter for Chalk Streams calling for greater action to protect England’s chalk streams and provided support to Hertfordshire County Council at their Hertfordshire Water Summit in March.

- Working with the Chesham Walkers are Welcome group, the Chess Valley walk was revised and reprinted.

- In partnership with the Thames River Restoration Trust and the River Chess Association, the Project successfully carried out a weir removal scheme on the River Chess at Sarratt Bottom in March.

- The Project supported the set-up of a riverfly monitoring group on the River Ver and provided funding to the Ewelme Watercress Beds Association to enable the purchase of riverfly monitoring equipment.

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

- The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project worked with Groundwork South and stakeholders to develop a draft action plan for the Colne catchment, as part of the pilot phase of Defra’s catchment-based approach.

- The Project provided regular updates on the condition of the Chilterns’ rivers on the AONB website and gave five talks to local groups.

- Working with the River Chess Association, the Project expanded the Trout in the Classroom Project to four schools in the Chess Valley.

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*Olympic rower James Cracknell and Defra Minister Richard Benyon launch the Love Your River campaign on the River Chess at Latimer in October 2012.*
Commons

There are about 200 commons in the Chilterns, covering over 2,000 hectares, or 2.5% of the Chilterns AONB. 75% of them are less than 5 ha, now often fragments of a once-larger common. Since its launch in September 2011, the Chilterns Commons Project has been reconnecting people with their commons. This £500,000, four-year project receives 75% of its funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with volunteer time and contributions from 19 financial partners, including the Chiltern Society, making up the balance.

- The Commons Project funded practical work to restore valuable habitats and the enhancement of historic features on seven commons. Projects included pond restoration, tree work, improving access and new interpretation boards.
- The Project provided over £10,000 in small grants to parish councils, volunteers and friends groups to purchase tools, help fund practical tasks like hedge laying, and for specialist training like interviewing parishioners for oral histories and First Aid.
- Over 160 people volunteered more than 300 days of their time on local projects instigated by the Commons Project. They researched local history and recorded oral histories; cleared scrub, restored ponds and improved access; surveyed archaeological features from ancient boundary banks at Marlow to WWI troop training trenches on Berkhamsted Common; took photos of commons; created a website and much more.
- Working in partnership with local experts, the Project funded botanical and butterfly surveys at Tottenhoe Knolls (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) and a geo-phys survey of two Scheduled Monuments at Moneybury Hill on Pitstone Common.
- The Project ran nine training workshops which provided 144 training places for those who own and/or manage commons in the Chilterns, usually on a voluntary basis. Topics ranged from ecology and habitat management to leading volunteer work parties or running public consultations with local communities. These workshops are proving very popular and feedback has been excellent.
- 480 people attended 15 evening talks and guided walks about commons which were given to local groups across the Chilterns.

Wintry day on Berkhamsted Common (photo: Colin Drake)
April marked the start of the full application of the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The NPPF, along with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, marked some significant changes in the planning world. One key issue to emerge this year has been interest in the production of Neighbourhood Plans. There still seems to be confusion over much of what the NPPF stands for and further advice is likely to be issued in the future. Towards the end of the year a successful bid was made to Scottish and Southern Energy to put nearly 3,000m of overhead powerlines underground near Turville. The undergrounding will take place in 2014/15.

- The overall winner of the Chilterns Buildings Design Awards, offered jointly with the Chiltern Society, was a new dwelling, Horseshoe Hill House, at Littleworth Common in Buckinghamshire. Two highly commended awards were given, for a new garden studio at The Lodge, Bledlow Ridge and the restoration and extension of listed buildings at London End, Beaconsfield. The restoration and conversion of a former youth hostel to dwelling at The Old Brewery House, High Street, Ivinghoe received a commended award. A special commendation award was given for the new visitor centre at College Lake Nature Reserve, Bulbourne, Hertfordshire.
- Formal comments were submitted by the Board on 34 development plans and other documents ranging from national policy consultations to local development plan documents. 20 representations were in connection with documents prepared by planning authorities within the Chilterns AONB.
- The Board was consulted on 140 planning applications and detailed comments were submitted on 25. Of those applications where decisions have been made 55% were determined in line with the Board’s comments. This marked an alarming drop from the average rate of about 80% over the previous 11 years. This situation is being monitored and may relate to pressures from the NPPF and development plans for greater levels of development.
- The Board was involved in the provision of training and advice for local authorities, professional and educational bodies attended by about 200 delegates. This includes 95 people who attended the Board’s biennial training for parish and town councils. 38 town and parish councils in the Chilterns were represented and received information and advice about Neighbourhood Planning.
- The tenth annual Chilterns Planning Conference was held in Benson in South Oxfordshire and attended by 75 delegates from 40 different organisations. The theme was ‘The National Planning Policy Framework – Where do we go from here?’ Delegates considered a number of issues arising from the NPPF including neighbourhood planning, the duty to co-operate and some thoughts on things that might be missing.
Activities and Learning

Increasing financial pressures this year left the Board relying even more on income from our public events and educational activities. Through a combination of charging the public to attend events, requesting donations, selling merchandise and contracting out our services to other projects, this area of our work generated an income of over £11,200.

- The provision of public events at Natural England's Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve and also school visits to the Reserve in conjunction with visits to Field Farm in Lewknor continued. 14 school sessions were delivered. The ‘Go Wild in the Chilterns’ family fun day attracted 200 visitors, which along with four glow worm walks and an evening Lantern Walk in October attracting over 200 visitors, brought in a combined income of over £1,000.

- Education activities were delivered at whole-day school events at Englefield Estate near Reading (two days) and Ewelme Park Estate near Henley (one day) and three half-day sessions for the Aston Rowant Talking Trail project.

- £535 was generated through education consultancy work.

- The Board supported higher and further education with field trips organised for Oxford Brookes University and Reading University, plus one Bucks Adult Learning session.

- The sixth Chilterns Countryside Festival at the Ashridge Estate, jointly organised by the Board and the National Trust, had over 120 stands promoting locally produced food and crafts and local environmental organisations. Nearly 6,000 visitors attended, and a net income of almost £6,000 was generated.

- 24 ‘Wildlife on the Move’ events were held in conjunction with Hobbs of Henley Ltd, Field Farm in Lewknor and Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway.

- The range of red kite-themed merchandise generated a net income of over £1,500 which was invested in wildlife awareness-raising work.

- 12 volunteers helped with walks, talks and events, with four trained to assist with school visits to Field Farm and Aston Rowant NNR. Six volunteers were trained for the Woodland Trust to lead walks around Penn Wood.

Historic Environment

- 800 leaflets promoting People and Places of the Chiltern Hills were distributed and a new booklet on Famous People of the Chilterns was prepared.

- The Board published Chilternsaetna, a newsletter about the historic environment of the Chilterns.

- Grants from the Chilterns AONB Sustainable Development Fund supported a thatching project at the Chiltern Open Air Museum and some local history plaques in Harlington.

- The Cheltern Commons Project supported work to research, protect and promote historic features on many commons.

- The Board provided support to the Chiltern Woodlands Project which ran seven training days and guided walks on woodland archaeology.

School girl on a visit to Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve
Recreation and Access

Cycling in the Chilterns received a boost with a successful £868,000 funding bid for a new three year project to encourage both residents and visitors to use bicycles to get around. The Cycle Chilterns project will improve cycle facilities at railway stations and selected gateway towns, introduce electric bikes for leisure use, organise led rides, provide cycle training and promote the Chilterns Cycleway.

- A Chilterns Cycling Development Officer was recruited in January by project partner CTC to start on the delivery of the Cycle Chilterns project. Stakeholder workshops were held at some of the project gateway towns.
- The Chilterns Tourism Network increased its membership to 150 and was successful with its Leader funding bid, enabling it to deliver a Chilterns tourism branding project. This included a new Chilterns tourism website (visitchilterns.co.uk), ‘Choose the Chilterns’ logo and branding, a range of marketing resources for businesses and a PR programme. These resources have provided a platform for other sustainable tourism initiatives.
- The annual Chilterns Access Conference was held in March 2013 at Hastoe Village Hall near Tring, attracting 72 delegates from 39 different organisations. There were presentations on smart-phone technology for countryside visitors, managing commonland for people and wildlife at Dunstable Downs, access issues on the Ashridge Estate and a round-up of access issues facing the Open Spaces Society.
- A number of Chilterns Country Walks were updated and re-printed, including the Red Kite Walk and the Chess Valley Walk was also re-designed and re-printed.
- Two new stile-free walks were devised in conjunction with The Chiltern Society. The walks start at Crocker End near Nettlebed and Warburg Nature Reserve near Henley-on-Thames and can be downloaded from the Chilterns AONB website.

Walkers at Bison Hill near Whipsnade
Information and Interpretation

Social media is proving an effective way to reach out and make links with a wide range of organisations and individuals. With the website now fully-managed in-house the Board has a much more comprehensive online presence. The value of face-to-face working is very clear, however, and the Board continues to put a lot of effort into organising training and networking events which are very popular.

- There were 156,490 visits to the AONB website during the year, an average of 13,041 per month. Over 46,500 leaflets and other publications were downloaded.
- The AONB Twitter and Facebook pages were frequently updated and had double the number of followers by the end of the year.
- A new booklet on Famous People of the Chilterns was published.
- 13,000 each of two editions of the Board’s magazine Chalk and Trees were distributed.
- 102 delegates representing 38 organisations attended the Chilterns Annual Forum in November 2012 at Hastoe Village Hall near Tring.
- Over 35,000 walking, cycling and general information leaflets were distributed via libraries, information centres, visitor attractions and at events.
- 20 press releases and six letters were sent to the local media, generating at least 100 press articles and mentions, 14 radio interviews and one TV interviews. Eight articles written by the Board were published in local and national media.
- Five electronic Board newsletters were circulated. Two editions of the Commons Network Newsletter and one edition of the Chilternaeta newsletter on the historic environment were distributed.
- 65 Chilterns businesses joined the South East Protected Landscapes Sustainable Tourism Project, titled Our Land. Nine of them attended an event on the Chilterns landscape in January 2013.
- The Board continued to support the National Association of AONBs.
Financial Statement 2012/2013

This report is based on the Financial Statement approved by the Board on 24th June 2013. 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.

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Excess of expenditure over income £57,046
From Restricted and Earmarked Reserves £57,046
To General Reserve -

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 Defra for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)
(5) Includes local authority and others contributions to projects

The expenditure includes VAT which the Board is not able to reclaim.

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 2012-13 it made grants totalling £21,459 to support 25 local projects. The total value of projects supported was £95,800.

Examples of projects that received grants include:

- £412 to the Hertfordshire Orchard Initiative for new equipment so they can demonstrate apple juicing at public events.
- £1,500 to a project run by Chiltern Archaeology to research the geology of the area and the different building stones that have been used in historic buildings.
- £2,020 to Aylesbury Youth Action to work with young people in Chesham who created a colourful mural in a subway depicting features from the town and local countryside.
- £275 to Aston Rowant Parish Council for the extension of a stream-side nature trail in the village.
- £400 to Harlington Parish Council in Bedfordshire for visitor information and a heritage trail interpreting the history of the village including its links with John Bunyan.
- £1,100 to London Youth to help their instructors at a residential centre near Amersham introduce young people from urban backgrounds to the wildlife and geology of the Chilterns.

St Nicholas Church in Barton-le-Clay, Beds, researched by Chiltern Archaeology.
Conservation Board Members for 2012/2013

Mr Mike Fox*  
Cllr Mr I Reay*

Nominated 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 Mr D Taylor  
Cllr Mr D Barnard+  
Cllr Mrs M Mustoe*  
Cllr Mr A Walters*+  
Cllr Mrs A Badcock  
Cllr Mr B Norman+  
Cllr Mr R Emmett+

Chairman  
Vice Chairman

Appointed by the Secretary of State
Dr H Barrett-Mold*  
Mrs B Kirkham+  
Dr S Mortimer  
Mrs H Tuffs

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

Executive Committee
Board members marked with an asterisk *

Planning Committee
Board members marked with a +

Mike Stubbs (National Trust) and Gill Gowing (Advisor to the Chiltern Society) were co-opted.

Officers

Chief Officer  
Finance Officer  
Planning Officer  
Countryside Officer  
Activities and Learning Officer  
Information and Interpretation Officer  
Access Officer  
Conservation and Landscape Officer  
Chalk Streams Officer  
Commons Project Officer  
Box Woodland Project Officer  
Administration Officer  
Administration Officer (maternity cover)  
HR Advisor  
Clerk to the Board

Steve Rodrick  
Chris Smith  
Colin White  
Kath Daly  
Cathy Rose  
Claire Forrest  
Annette Venters  
Neil Jackson  
Allen Beechey  
Rachel Sanderson  
Sarah Wright  
Donna Webb  
Theresa Stuart  
Sally Stuart  
Deirdre Hansen

Caring for the Chilterns
There are 46 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. Download copies of this report from the website www.chilternsaonb.org

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.

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Download copies of this report from the website www.chilternsaonb.org
Photos supplied by: © Chilterns Conservation Board, Jill Eyers, Chris Smith and Bryan Edgley
Cover photos (front) - Boats at Henley on Thames. Children on Swyncombe Downs. Harvesting near West Wycombe

Acknowledgements
The Board would like to thank all the volunteers that contributed to its work during 2012/2013.