



CHILTERNNS

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CONSERVATION BOARD

ANNUAL REVIEW 2017/18

Welcome to the Chilterns Conservation Board's 2017-18 Annual Review. This report highlights some of the important work we've carried out to conserve and enhance the Chilterns and deliver long term benefits for everyone living in, or close to, the AONB.

As pressure for housing and development continues to increase, we've supported local planning authorities to mitigate the negative impacts of new development on the landscape and tranquillity of the AONB. We published a position statement

on the cumulative impacts of development in November, and continue to provide expert planning advice which helps secure long-term protection for the AONB.

One of our duties is to increase the public's understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB. I am delighted to see that our Chilterns Walking Festival, now in its second year, has gone from strength to strength, encouraging



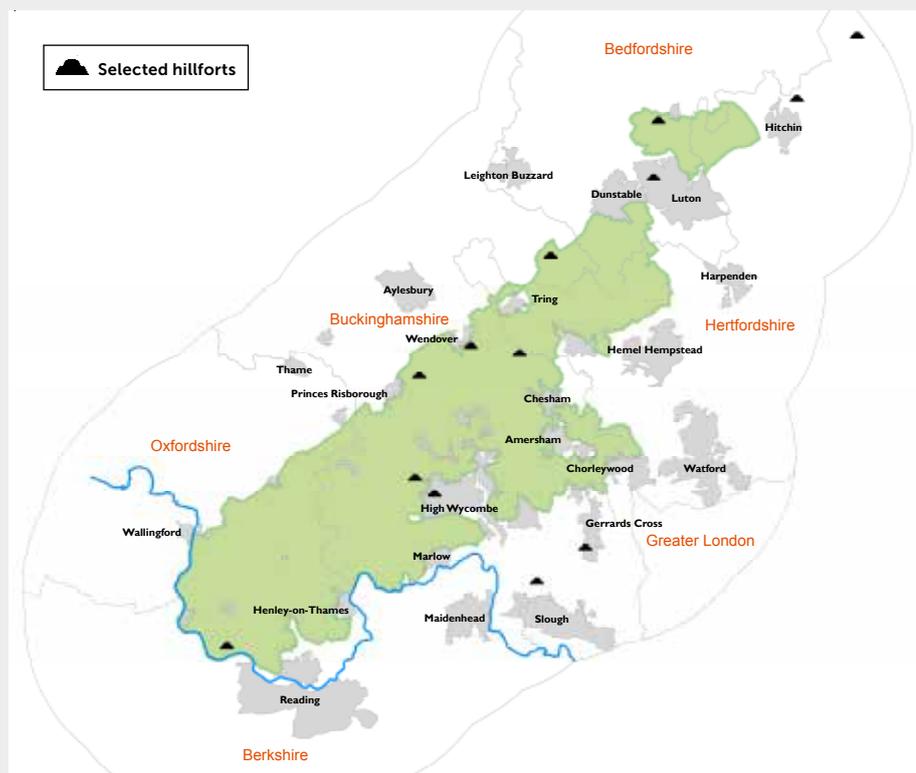
new and existing walkers of all abilities to explore our precious landscape with a broad programme of themed walks.

This year has seen the launch of an exciting new project which will help us learn more about the Chilterns' ancient hillforts. 'Beacons of the Past' will use the latest technology to reveal hidden structures beneath our landscape. This will be the first time the whole of the Chilterns has been surveyed in this way.

We've also begun a public consultation on the future of the AONB as we look to review and refresh our Management Plan. The Plan sets the priorities for the next five years and is a crucial document for everyone who cares about the Chilterns. Almost 1500 people have completed an online public survey which went live in January 2018, and over 100 partner organisations were invited to consultation workshops. Please do contribute as this important work continues.

Finally, I would like to thank the individuals and organisations actively helping to conserve and enhance the AONB. We are very grateful for your continued support.

Ian Reay, Chairman



About the Chilterns AONB

The Chilterns is a beautiful area of rolling chalk hills, woodlands, streams and quiet valleys with brick and flint cottages. It is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), in recognition that it is one of the finest landscapes in the country.

Our landscape has been shaped by the activities of farmers and foresters over hundreds of years and many ancient countryside features can still be found. It's a haven for wildlife, including spectacular red kites and endangered water voles.

About the Chilterns Conservation Board

The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is the public body with responsibility for protecting and enhancing the Chilterns AONB. It is managed by a small team based in Chinnor, Oxfordshire.

PEOPLE & SOCIETY



Chilterns Walking Festival

Over 1,200 people participated in 160 walks and events during our May and September 2017 Walking Festivals. An expanded programme of walks will be on offer in 2018 as we aim to encourage a wide range of audiences to explore and enjoy the Chilterns.

Our survey revealed:

- 54% discovered new parts of the Chilterns
- 58% of participants used a local business before/after their walk
- Over 40 organisations and walk leaders helped deliver walks and events, creating many new partnerships

Festival highlights included:

- A series of 'Wildlife on the Move' cruises on the River Thames in collaboration with Hobbs of Henley and two 'boat & walk' events
- Two 'Inspire' sessions delivered by Chiltern Rangers in High Wycombe, providing environmental education to school groups through art activities and practical conservation – a great opportunity to get to know their local countryside whilst having lots of fun!

New Project Development

We're busy creating new projects to help encourage people to make the most of our beautiful landscape, including a Food, Drink & Crafts bid, which builds on our successful 'Taste the Chilterns' initiative. Work continues on developing festivals, themed walks and 'Meet the Producer' events as we continue to encourage visitors to explore and enjoy the Chilterns.

We work closely with the Chilterns Tourism Network to support and promote tourism and to secure new investment for the AONB. This has included a proposal for a 3 year, £240,000 programme: **"Open for Business – building business resilience and expanding the visitor economy in the central Chilterns"**.

Beacons of the Past – Hillforts in the Chilterns Landscape

We were delighted to secure funding for a bid submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2017 focusing on exploring and conserving Chilterns Hillforts. A Project Manager and a Heritage Landscape Officer were recruited in April 2018, and almost 200 volunteers have already expressed an interest in getting involved. This four-year project will use innovative LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology to uncover hidden archaeological features of the Chilterns AONB using aircraft-mounted lasers. The project focuses on strengthening and enhancing public engagement, outreach and education.

"I loved the walks! I asked a friend to join me as I wasn't sure if being on my own would be an issue - but this wasn't the case and now I would be more than comfortable to turn up on my own".



Photo: Stephen Halton

LANDSCAPE & CONSERVATION



Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: Central Chilterns Landscape Partnership Scheme

The biggest ever conservation and engagement project in the Central Chilterns is under development thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Chalk, Cherries and Chairs – named to reflect the landscape, land use and industrial heritage – is a partnership of over 30 organisations and will deliver 18 community, wildlife and heritage projects.

Project highlights include:

- exploring, mapping and uncovering the stories of the ancient routeways and the people who have travelled them over the centuries
- strengthening wildlife corridors and 'stepping stones' to help wildlife flourish
- discovering how the lives of the rural communities associated with the furniture industry shaped the landscape we see today
- creating a sonic map of sounds that define the central Chilterns
- artistic and creative events to make heritage accessible to all
- teaching schoolchildren about settlement patterns of the local landscape

The Scheme will bring a total partnership income of around £2.8 million to the area

The project team has undertaken a wide consultation process, including local community organisations, parish councils and local authorities, as well as holding public meetings.

Planning

In 2017/18 pressure for new housing and infrastructure within the AONB boundary intensified. Indeed, development pressure in the Chilterns AONB was debated in the Parliament in January 2018 and raised at Prime Minister's Questions. Planning advice included design guidance in relation to about 400 ha of the HS2 corridor. We gave evidence at 2 local plan examinations and also responded to:

- 18 local plan consultations
- 7 neighbourhood plan consultations
- 5 government consultations
- 10 infrastructure consultations

We raised objections to 34 planning applications, supported 3 and commented on 56. We also attended 3 Public Inquiries relating to planning applications. Launched in November 2017, our position statement: Cumulative Impacts of Development in the Chilterns AONB, highlights how incremental changes from individual planning proposals could, cumulatively, result in the loss of the special qualities of the AONB. It explains how to assess changes across local planning authority boundaries and protect the special qualities.

The Chilterns Buildings Design Awards, run in conjunction with the Chiltern Society, saw a strong field of entries. The overall winner was the new Winery building at Hundred Hills Vineyard in the Stonor Valley, South Oxfordshire.

Special Project Grants

With our support, over 400m of fencing was replaced around exclusion plots at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve. The plots have not been grazed for almost 50 years and have yielded valuable experimental results helping us understand the effects of grazing/non-grazing on chalk grassland.

HS2

We continue to influence the HS2 scheme and press for the best possible design. Through the Chilterns Review Group, we have contributed to the development of detailed design principles for the AONB, and are in dialogue with main works contractors regarding significant structures, including viaducts and vent shaft buildings.

We have also helped influence priorities and criteria for the allocation of monies from the £3m 'Additional Projects' fund. Spending will be focused on enhancement and integration projects over and above agreed mitigation requirements, particularly in areas most affected by the scheme.

Chilterns Woodlands Project

The Chiltern Woodlands Project Officer has run a series of educational events including training on woodland archaeology, ancient flora, formative pruning and tree identification. In addition there have been several talks to groups and societies, a guided walk, and a training day for 33 Woodland Trust staff.

The Chilterns Woodland Conference was held in October. This successful event, delivered in partnership with the Chiltern Society, attracted over 60 participants and included speakers from the Forestry Commission and RSPB. Advice and assistance was provided to 61 woodland owners spread across the Chilterns. 39 of the sites were ancient woodlands or plantations on ancient woodlands, three were wooded commons, three had Tree Preservation Orders and five were SSSIs. The total area of trees and woodland covered by advice and assistance in 2017/18 was over 555 ha, with the average size of woodland being 9.1ha.

Chilterns Chalk Stream project

This year saw the CCSP and partners restore and enhance more Chilterns chalk stream habitat, whilst the latest River Chess water vole population survey revealed numbers are recovering from recent declines. The Project worked with the Upper Gade Fly Fishers and Chiltern Rangers to deliver a volunteer-led programme of Himalayan Balsam removal along 1km of the upper Gade. **In October, the 'Bringing Back the Bulbourne' Project won the award for best medium-scale restoration project at the Wild Trout Trust Conservation Awards.**

CCSP continued to work with Groundwork South to develop and deliver the catchment plan for the Colne. CCSP also supported the continued growth of the Chilterns, Herts & Middlesex Riverfly Hub, which has now trained over 150 volunteers who monitor almost 200 sites across the Colne & Lea catchments.

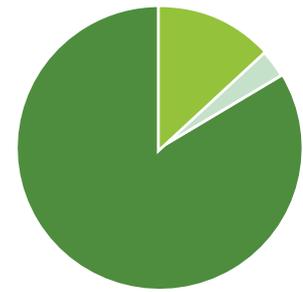
The work of the CCSP remains as important as ever. After a series of dry winters and disappointing rainfall, in late 2017 groundwater levels in some areas had declined to their lowest levels on record. The impact on chalk streams has been significant with some sections being dry for a second consecutive year and more than 50% of the total length of chalk stream habitat in the AONB being without flow. Rainfall levels improved somewhat over the most recent winter but, once again, aquifer recharge was below average. Consequently, much of the chalk streams are likely to dry up again this year.

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Consolidated Revenue Account 2017 – 18

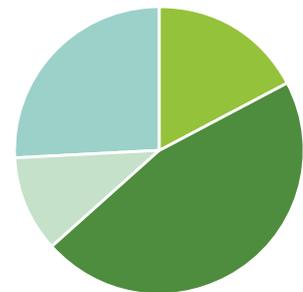
INCOME

Defra	●	427,194
Local Authorities	●	110,864
Project Income and other income	●	270,777
Total income		£808,835



EXPENDITURE

People and Society	●	135,542
Landscape and Conservation	●	361,036
Planning and Development	●	83,152
Overheads	●	201,555
Total expenditure		£781,285
Surplus for year		£27,550



2017-18 IN NUMBERS

Planning advice covering
2500ha of land



Gave advice to



61 woodland owners
over **555ha**
of trees

Improved
1.7 km
of rare
chalk streams



walking
Festival



16%
new or not
regular walkers

Received **474** responses
from the landscape
project survey



x70 meetings held for
potential partners

Secured **£695,000**



of HLF funding for
the **hillforts project**



£4
million

total value of
CCB-led projects

Every £1 received
from Local Authorities,
we generate a further £6



over
273,000

visits to the
AONB website



30,000
downloads
of **guides**
from the
website



The
Chilterns
extends across
833sq
kilometres



80,000
resident population



Visited by **55 million** people
who come to enjoy the beauty and
recreational opportunities each year



To find out more about the Chilterns Conservation Board or to find out how you can get involved please contact us:

office@chilternsaonb.org

01844 355500

chilternsaonb.org



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