Farming and forestry have shaped the Chilterns landscape but it is important to recognise that many other forms of rural land use now exist. The wide range of diverse uses includes golf courses, private parkland and nature reserves. This chapter describes issues common to all and encourages positive engagement with farmers, woodland owners, other land owners and advisers alike.

Farming

1. Farmland covers approximately 60% of the Chilterns¹, creating a mosaic of landscape and habitats: small and large fields, ancient hedgerows, woodland, chalk downland and ponds. This figure does not include land used for equines, which makes up approximately 5% of the AONB land area. Farming also created the farmhouses and barns which dot the landscape, often form the heart of villages and hamlets and make a significant contribution to landscape character.

2. Since the advent of farming in Neolithic times, the Chilterns landscape has been incrementally altered and moulded. Each period in history has contributed to the piecemeal enclosure of the land for cultivation and livestock management. Examples of periods of agricultural change, the remnants of which can still be seen in the landscape, include the creation of coaxial fields in the Bronze Age, the clearance of woodland for open fields from the Middle Ages and the creation of parliamentary enclosure fields in the 19th century. The cumulative result is the familiar landscape we see today - a diverse patchwork of different shaped fields of arable crops and grassland, enclosed by hedgerows interspersed with woodland, common land and downland.

¹ Chilterns Land Use Survey 2010
Agricultural land use

- 90 - 100% Grassland
- 80 - 90% Grassland
- 70 - 80% Grassland
- 60 - 70% Grassland
- 50 - 60% Grassland
- 50 - 60% Arable
- 60 - 70% Arable
- 70 - 80% Arable
- 80 - 90% Arable
- 90 - 100% Arable
3. In terms of its agricultural classification, much of the land is grade three, largely based on poor clay and flint soils which overlay the chalk. Traditionally farming was mixed with both arable and livestock found on every farm. Now farms specialise and increasingly grow cereals and other crops rather than keep dairy cattle, pigs and other livestock.

4. About 60% of Chilterns farmland is devoted to arable crops, the balance is grassland. Sheep and cattle make up the bulk of livestock in the Chilterns but, despite some minor fluctuations, numbers declined between 2000 and 2010, particularly the case for dairy cattle (the number of commercial dairy farms falling from 29 to 8 during this period\(^2\)). This was due to declining profitability.

5. In 2010, Defra recorded 602 commercial holdings in the Chilterns. This large reduction from previous numbers is due, in part, to the exclusion of holdings less than 5 ha\(^2\). However, we continue to see commercial holdings increasing in size, with contract farming responsible for a greater hectarage, as medium sized farms struggle to remain economically viable. Lifestyle or hobby farming still remains popular.

6. The character of the Chilterns needs viable farming to maintain landscape features and habitats. Reducing livestock numbers raise concerns over long term management of specie rich grassland (both the chalk grassland of the escarpment and steep valley sides and acid grassland often associated with commons). Well managed horse grazing can help to maintain such grassland but currently numbers are declining while, at the same time, equine use is intensifying\(^3\). Often the associated equine infrastructure can be detrimental to landscape character and contribute to increased urbanisation of the countryside around towns and villages.

7. EU policies and global markets are the main influences on farming in the Chilterns. The formal abolition of set-aside in 2008 combined with rising cereal prices has led to a decrease in uncropped land and an increase in the area of arable. Revisions to the Common Agricultural Policy will be agreed during the period of this management plan. At the time of writing, a greater emphasis is being placed on “greening measures” as requirements for many farms before they qualify for a percentage of CAP subsidy. Such measures are likely to include crop diversification, maintenance of grassland areas and the creation of Ecological Focus Areas on holdings over 15ha.

**Forestry**

1. The Chilterns is perhaps best known for its woodlands which dominate the landscape, covering 21.5% (17,888 ha) of the AONB.\(^4\) The Chilterns is one of the most heavily wooded parts of the country. Over 60% of this woodland is ancient (11,058 ha) making the Chilterns one of the most important ancient woodland landscapes in England\(^5\).

2. For many centuries the Chilterns provided significant quantities of fuel and timber to London, helping to make Henley and other towns thriving Thames-side ports. Then, at the time of the industrial revolution, the dominant beech woodlands supported the evolution from cottage based furniture-making to chair making factories in and around High Wycombe. Today the industry has declined but not disappeared, however local beech is no longer the favoured timber as quality has suffered largely due to grey squirrel damage.

3. The decline in traditional woodland management has also affected commons, many of which would in the past have been managed through the exercise of common rights. 50% (by

\(^2\) Defra Farm Statistics 2010
\(^3\) Chilterns Land Use Survey 2010
\(^4\) Forestry Commission Woodland Inventory 2011
\(^5\) Ancient Woodland Inventory for the Chilterns, July 2012
Woodland cover

- Chilterns AONB boundary
- Ancient Woodland in management
- Other woodland in management
- Ancient Woodland not known to be in management
- Other woodland not known to be in management

Map 2: Woodlands in the AONB

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Tring Aldbury
Gt. Missenden
Amersham
Hele Husse
Rotherfield
Chinnor
Stokenchurch
High Wycombe
Beaconsfield
Maidenhead
Henley-on-Thames
Goring
Wallingford
R. Thames

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area) of Chiltern commons over 5 ha are known to have management plans. The Chilte...ns with current management plans, and additional uptake of Environmental Stewardship and English Woodland Grant Schemes.

4. In the 20th century, following increased war time harvesting, many native woods were inter-planted with conifers, creating plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) which cover 3,943 ha. Restoration to more natural conditions is a priority.

5. About 75% of woods in the AONB are privately owned. 9% (1,560 ha) are managed by the Forestry Commission. The National Trust, Woodland Trust, local authorities and other charities own over 10%.

6. The woods are now highly valued for their amenity, recreation, scenery and heritage. Most communities live within walking distance of a wood with open access or rights of way. They are full of largely un-surveyed remnants of past activity, especially of the sawyers, charcoal makers and bodgers who worked in the woods until the early 20th century.

8. Much of the beech is over-mature and young beech face serious pressures (both climate change and pest damage – including grey squirrel, Glis glis and deer). Forestry Commission forecasts suggest that beech will decline but will not disappear so we should expect to see a gradual change of our characteristic Chilterns beech woodlands. Instead the woods will become more mixed, perhaps as they once were with more oak and birch.

9. Tree health concerns (both pests and diseases) are increasing and future planting strategies will need to be examined. Current thinking suggests increasing planting diversity, from the limited number of species planted at the present time, to increase woodland resilience.

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**Broad Aims**

- Productive forestry and farming remain the dominant land uses in the AONB.
- Natural beauty and biodiversity are maintained by viable and environmentally sustainable farming, forestry and other forms of land management.
- Resilience of woodland to threats - including pests, diseases and extreme weather events - is increased.
- The public acquire a broad level of understanding and appreciation of farming and forestry and how they shape the natural beauty of the Chilterns landscape, influence wildlife habitats and contribute to the local economy.

**Special Qualities**

1. Farming and forestry shaped a landscape of national importance and continue to represent the main influencing forces on its present quality.

2. Small and medium-scale historic field patterns defined by hedges are visible in the Chilterns. Many of the hedges are species-rich. The estimated length of hedgerow in the Chilterns is 4,045km (2528 miles) and there are approximately 44,000 hedgerow trees many of which are veterans.

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6 State of the Chilterns Environment 2012
7 UK Forestry Strategy 2012
8 UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) 2013
9 The Government’s Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement
10 Chilterns Hedgerow Survey 2006 and 2007
3. Surviving areas of open chalk downland along the scarp ridge are one of the AONB’s most valuable habitats.

4. Well maintained farm buildings and sensitively managed farmland enhance the area.

5. An increasing number of farmers are diversifying into quality local food production and selling direct to the public. Such a direct interface between farmers and the public provides opportunities to promote greater awareness of food production and land management among both residents and visitors to the AONB.

6. The famed Chilterns beech woods provide extensive high quality landscape and amenity, much of it close to local towns and villages.

7. Public access to woodlands is extensive and amongst the best in the country.

8. Ancient woodland is a particularly rich, distinctive and prominent feature. Some of this woodland, especially the beech yew woods, are important for their biodiversity and included within the Chilterns Beech Wood Special Area of Conservation, a European designation recognising their importance.

9. Parkland is a feature of the area, including wood pasture, often associated with the larger estates, with a significant number of veteran trees.

10. Chilterns woodlands are capable of providing a sustained annual yield of 60-80,000 tonnes of renewable wood fuel per annum. 11

11. Remnants of woodland heritage are extensive including sawpits, charcoal hearths and wood banks. There is a considerable amount of archaeology in woodlands as yet unsurveyed.

Key Issues

1. Increasing global demand for food, future ‘food security’ and buoyant prices may see more land cropped under arable production and decrease areas managed under agri-environment schemes.

2. The continued contraction of the livestock sector is likely to result in the area of managed grassland declining and make it more difficult to secure favourable management of wildlife sites that require grazing.

3. The lack of infrastructure, particularly abattoirs and knackers yards, causes difficulties for the livestock sector, particularly small producers and graziers. Increased transport distances add to production costs and are detrimental to animal welfare.

11 Mike Render Ph.D thesis
4. The decline in small and medium sized mixed farms is leading to a homogenisation in land use and landscape character.

5. As farm units amalgamate, use of contractors and contract farming increases with larger and faster machinery being used. Overall the numbers of farm workers are also declining. This means that the pool of skilled people with time available for traditional land management such as hedge-laying is also reducing, such activities increasingly being taken on by specialist contractors or volunteer groups.

6. The average age of farmers and other rural workers is increasing. This trend might lead to changes in land ownership patterns and management systems with a reduced number of skilled farmers in the future. This might further exacerbate concerns expressed in issue 5 above.

7. Training course providers have reduced and the number and variety of training courses has declined.

8. The high cost of housing makes it more difficult to recruit and retain skilled workers – particularly relevant for livestock farming where workers need to be on hand to tend stock.

9. Commercial shoots can provide important additional income for landowners and, when sensitively managed to avoid damaging impacts on biodiversity and landscape, they can also potentially provide food and habitat for wild birds.

10. Farm diversification, often away from traditional farm enterprises, including non-farming use of buildings and houses, can provide an important source of income and occupation for farming communities.

11. The rising demand for local food could help viability of farming and help generate income to pay for management of the countryside.

12. Fewer local authorities now hold rural estates that offer farm and small holding tenancies. This pathway for new entrants into the farming industry is, therefore, very limited.

13. The Chilterns, situated as it is in the busy south east, continues to be attractive to lifestyle and hobby farmers. Land ownership may be seen as a means of providing a personal buffered environment with personal recreation and enjoyment the main priority. Owners may not have the skills and resources to manage land (e.g. grazing and hedgerow management) and maintain landscape quality.

14. Infrastructure associated with intensive equine use (subdivision of fields into small paddocks, permanent exercise arenas, stabling, jumps, horse shelters) can lead to increasing urbanisation.

15. Traditional orchards with local fruit varieties (including cherry, prune and apple) were once common but many have now disappeared. Recent establishment of new commercial and community orchards and increased interest in fruit juicing is encouraging.

16. Few common rights, particularly grazing rights, are now regularly exercised by commoners on Chiltern commons, allowing the establishment of bracken, scrub and secondary woodland. Whilst habitat diversity may have increased in some areas, these changes have led to a considerable loss of open landscape.

17. Rising numbers of people visiting the countryside as a recreational resource can present pressures on sites and can cause erosion and lead to disturbance of wildlife. At the same time, however, visitors provide opportunities for local businesses (including farm shops and cycle hire) and developing tourist attractions which can help support the local economy. Also, visitors ‘connecting with nature’ can learn to appreciate the importance of our landscape and wildlife which, in turn, can help to build long-term support for work to conserve and enhance the Chilterns AONB.
18. Increased variability and extreme weather conditions associated with climate change are presenting challenges to farming and forestry alike. Periods of both drought and heavy rains affect for example agricultural operations and tree growth.

19. The threats posed by pests and diseases and non-native invasive species affecting livestock, crops and trees, spreading from continental Europe and further afield are increasing. These present considerable challenges to both farmers and landowners, the increasing cost of which may threaten economic viability for some.

20. Management of woodland is made more difficult by increasing numbers of deer, including fallow, muntjac and roe, which can prevent regeneration. Damage by grey squirrels and, increasingly, the fat or edible dormouse (Glis glis) provides a disincentive to growing beech and other trees.

21. The low prices for timber from the Chilterns have resulted in a relative lack of management of woodland, particularly small woodlands under 20 hectares. However, the growing demand for woodfuel is creating an expanding market for low grade timber from the Chilterns and has seen the reintroduction of management in some woodland. Woodfuel is most efficiently used to generate heat rather than electricity.

22. In 2010, 70% of farmland within the AONB was included within an agri-environment scheme, dropping to 64% by 2012. The LEADER programme (2008-2013) has been particularly successful in securing investment for the forestry sector. However, delay over CAP reform has led to uncertainty over the form future European support may take. This may limit investment in both the farming and forestry sectors over the early years of this management plan.

23. Inappropriate management, especially by new owners of ancient woods, could lead to loss of both woodland biodiversity and historical interest, including banks and buried archaeology.

Policies

FF1 Greater understanding and appreciation of Chilterns landscape character should be encouraged among farm, woodland and other landowners, managers and advisors.

The natural beauty of the Chilterns was created by farmers, foresters and other landowners and the management of the landscape largely remains in their hands. It is important that managers can recognise the importance of their land in the context of the wider landscape.

FF2 The work of farm and woodland owners and other land managers to conserve and enhance the landscape, biodiversity, traditional farm buildings and archaeology found on their land should be supported.

The task of managing farmland, woodland and other land uses is complex, not least as society places demands for a wider range of benefits and ecosystem services, especially in return for public funding.

FF3 Developments in agricultural and forestry practices which improve resilience, assist adaptation to climate change and mitigate damaging impacts on the environment should be supported.

Climate change and extreme weather events are likely to be significant long term factors affecting farming and forestry in the Chilterns and the health of the wider environment. The challenge is to enable management practices not only to adapt to these changes but also help mitigate climate change itself. For
example, changes in management that lead to reduced fuel use should benefit farm profitability and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Other measures might include improved infrastructure, use of appropriate renewable energy sources and precision farming techniques that reduce damage to soils and artificial fertiliser use. Best practice guidance and current advice should be readily available and disseminated widely, e.g. the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers (CoGAP)\(^\text{12}\).

**FF6** Initiatives to secure sensitive grazing of ecologically important grasslands should be encouraged.

With the livestock farming sector continuing to contract, securing suitable and sustainable levels of grazing on many sites is becoming challenging. Initiatives to encourage appropriate levels of grazing with suitable stock and mechanisms to assist movement of conservation grazing stock are needed. BCN Wildlife Trust’s ‘Cut and Chew’ web site\(^\text{14}\) provides a good model for matching available stock with sites requiring grazing.

**FF7** The AONB should remain a predominantly, actively farmed landscape.

The mosaic of farmed and forested land and field patterns needs to be maintained and land abandonment and urbanisation resisted.

**FF8** Landscape-scale coordination of initiatives enhancing and linking fragmented woodland and farmed habitats should be promoted.\(^\text{15}\)

Many of the ecologically rich habitats (both wooded and farmed) are often small in size and may be separated from similar habitat by land of far lower biodiversity value. The ‘Lawton’ principles\(^\text{16}\) (more, bigger, better and joined) highlight the importance of creating a greater number of these rich habitat areas, expanding their size, improving management of existing sites and linking them. Such aims depend upon landscape scale activity, which will require a large number of owners to work towards a common goal. Increasing the number and area of sites in positive beneficial

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\(^{13}\) *UK National Ecosystem Assessment 2011*

\(^{14}\) www.cutandchew.org.uk

\(^{15}\) *Natural Environment White Paper 2012*

\(^{16}\) *Making Space for Nature, September 2010*
management (whether they are chalk grassland, ancient woodland or another important habitat) will improve both biodiversity and landscape within the AONB.

**FF9** The negative impacts of fragmentation of farmland and woodland into smaller units should be resisted.

The character of the landscape can be affected by sub-division into small plots which often results in a variety of land uses and new, sometimes discordant, features. In some cases division can enable people to afford to become new and caring landowners. In general very small parcels of land are harder to manage in a way which maintains and enhances natural beauty.

**FF10** The economic viability of farming, forestry and other new business ventures which contribute to the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the AONB should be supported.

Whilst the strategic primary importance of sustainable food and timber production is recognised, increasingly farmers and foresters are seeking to diversify into other forms of economic activity. This provides opportunities to develop ventures which contribute directly to the environmental well-being of the area.

**FF11** The active management of commons should be encouraged.

Both landowners and local groups have an important role to play in protecting this important historic resource.

**FF12** Initiatives to maintain, restore and expand traditional orchards should be encouraged.

With poor economic viability, aging traditional orchards remain under threat. New community and commercial initiatives supporting traditional orchards are to be encouraged.

**FF13** Equine management sensitive to both habitat and landscape features should be encouraged and the potentially detrimental landscape and soil quality impacts associated with intensive equestrian use should be resisted.

With reducing numbers and availability of sheep and cattle, careful horse grazing may gain increasing importance in maintaining grassland. However, intensive equestrian use may lead to the erection of ranch style and tape fences, new buildings and access tracks. Maintaining hedges and in-field trees are rarely a priority and in some cases such features are removed as it is not thought they are compatible with keeping horses in the same field. If the wider importance of these landscape features is recognised, equine businesses may provide a valuable contribution to protecting the AONB.

**FF14** Broad public awareness of the importance of active farming and forestry industries in maintaining the Chilterns landscape should be promoted.

The public places a high value on the amenity of the countryside and opportunities to enjoy it. There is widespread lack of awareness of farming and forestry, within rural and urban communities. It is essential that there is a better understanding of how the countryside has been, is currently and will be managed in the future.

**FF15** The national importance of Chilterns box woodland should be promoted and initiatives to conserve and enhance this resource encouraged.

As home to the largest box woodland in the UK, the Chilterns provides an ideal location to explore this forgotten habitat.