

CHILTERN'S

CONSERVATION BOARD

ANNUAL REVIEW 2019-20



Welcome to the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) annual review, reporting on the CCB's work to conserve and enhance the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty over the year 2019-20.

This has been an unusual year in many respects, and the CCB has had to respond to several challenges, not least of which was maintaining continuity of service during a global pandemic.

Despite the complications caused by the Covid-19 crisis, the CCB has achieved a huge amount: the Beacons of the Past citizen science portal has enabled participants globally to help us discover new sites of archaeological importance in the Chilterns; in 2019 we saw two extremely successful walking festivals, benefiting local businesses and raising the Chilterns' profile; while our Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership project has completed its first year and is now working with an impressive number of partners on a variety of projects, including exciting conservation work with a new farmer cluster.

We were excited to launch a three-year tourism programme, "Open for Business", which aims to build and maintain a thriving visitor economy in the central Chilterns. Included in the programme was the release of the "Chilterns Pass" – an annual explorer card giving discounts and special offers at many local businesses. We're also hosting the Mend the Gap Programme Manager who, with the North Wessex Downs AONB, is developing a programme of activities to help mitigate the effects of the electrification of the Great West Railway as it passes through the Chilterns at Goring.

We are also delighted to have secured development funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for "Chalkscapes", a project that will focus on urban areas around Luton and Dunstable, inspiring those communities to discover their own Chiltern landscapes.

We were, of course, disappointed that HS2 was given the go-ahead, but we will continue to work tirelessly to press for the best possible outcomes for wildlife, landscapes, and people in the Chilterns. In addition, our Planners have responded to 115 planning applications and commented

on 30 local and neighbourhood plans and consultations, with some notable successes. In a time of unprecedented planning pressures, our planning expertise has been more valuable than ever.

I must mention John Morris, who has an unmatched knowledge of the trees and woodlands in the Chilterns. After 31 years of providing guidance to woodland owners, the project has now come to an end. I and everyone at the CCB would like to wish John well and thank him for his invaluable work over the last three decades.

This is the last annual review that I will present as Chairman of the Chilterns Conservation Board. I am appointed by Hertfordshire County Council and I will not be standing for re-election next May, so my membership of the Board will end then.

It has been a pleasure and an honour to be involved in the activities of the Chilterns Conservation Board and I would like to personally thank the staff team for the brilliant work they are doing. I wish the CCB well for the future, which looks to be full of exciting opportunities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Reay".

Ian Reay, Chairman

HOW WE MADE A DIFFERENCE

Hillforts



580 volunteers trained in GIS, LiDAR, and ground truthing

Recorded **8,000** archaeological features

Planning



Commented on **115** Planning applications and **30** other consultations

Chalk, Cherries & Chairs



Delivered environmental improvements with **18 farmers** covering **6,500 ha**

Supported wild bird populations with **9.5 tonnes** of supplementary bird feed in winter 2019

Planted **1500m** of new hedgerow

Walking Festival



attracted **2,395** participants on a total of **160** walks during two Walking Festivals in 2019

56% of walking festival participants discovered new parts of the Chilterns

Chalk Streams



Volunteers gave over **350 hours** of their time to clear invasive plants from the Rivers Gade and Misbourne

Trout in the Classroom project connected with more than **1,300** school children on chalk streams

Chalkscapes



Secured over **£200,000** from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for our Chalkscapes project in the northern Chilterns

Woodland



Advised **57** woodland owners on tree and woodland management including **28** ancient woods, **2** SSSIs, **2** commons and a hillfort

PROJECT NEWS

Chilterns Walking Festival

The 2019 Walking Festivals (spring and autumn) attracted 2,395 participants on a total of 160 walks. The programme of walks was expanded to reach new audiences and new parts of the Chilterns, with additional walks in the Bedfordshire Chilterns thanks to a grant from the Wixamtree Trust. Themed walks included archaeology walks, farm walks, outdoor art workshops, local produce tasting tours, steam railway walks and 'meet the maker' craft walks.

"I think, with each year, the event is beginning to gather momentum, more word of mouth, more exposure online etc. We had gorgeous weather and most people stayed for the refreshments at the vineyard at the end".

Hilary Warrell, A Breath of Fresh Air, May 2019 (Walk leader)



"Several walks stopped off at our farmshop/cafe and we benefited from the additional footfall and visitor spend. This was great as our farm kitchen is a new enterprise for us so the additional business at an early stage is really helpful and we have received return footfall from this already".

Steph Hares, Buckmoorend Farm

"Wonderful idea, social, interesting facts, beautiful scenery. Loved it. Thank you."

Participant, October 2019

"First time I've managed to get to one of the walks and I thoroughly enjoyed it, it was great to meet up and get to know other people – a very friendly group and so nice to have a guide to introduce me to a new part of the Thames Path."

Participant, October 2019

Open for Business – promoting tourism in the central Chilterns

Open for Business is a three-year tourism programme funded by the HS2 Business and Local Economy Fund which aims to boost the visitor economy. The project commenced in August 2019.

In the first six months of the project we:

- developed and launched the Chilterns Pass – an explorer card costing £9.99 a year and giving users a wide range of offers to tempt them to support local businesses and explore the Chilterns. We launched The Chilterns Pass and associated website/App in February. A total of 79 businesses signed up to the Pass, a mix of visitor attractions, hotels, pubs/cafes and independent shops.
- planned the first of six 'Celebrations of Chilterns Food & Drink' with tours, tastings and experiences in various locations across the central Chilterns where 20 businesses were due to participate. This wasn't able to go ahead due to Covid-19, however the event will be rescheduled in 2021.
- organised 13 Chilterns Walking Festival walks and events involving 11 businesses (pubs, cafes, distillery, farm shop), attracting 143 participants.
- held two business networking events attracting 46 businesses.

"We are delighted to be part of the Chilterns Pass. It promises to be a brilliant way for locals and visitors to the area to get the most out of the Chilterns and to inspire them with new and interesting places to visit and things to do".

Steve Gardam, Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre

The Chilterns Pass logo is at the top, featuring a location pin icon. Below it, the text 'Find your Chilterns with the new explorer card' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. A dark blue banner contains the text 'Just £9.99' in white, followed by an orange banner with 'unlimited savings for a year' in white. Below these, the text 'On attractions, pubs, restaurants and visitor experiences.' is written in a smaller font. At the bottom, the website 'www.chilternspass.com' and the Facebook handle '@ChilternsPass' are listed.

Read more:

www.chilternsaonb.org/projects/open-for-business

Beacons of the Past – Hillforts in the Chilterns Landscape



In the second year of the project, Beacons of the Past has gone from strength to strength, even in the midst of a global crisis. With hundreds of people around the world logging on for our remote LiDAR workshops and thousands registering for our Citizen Science portal (chilternsbeacons.org), we have been able to keep discovering Chilterns archaeology. Early in the year we launched our programme of teacher training for primary schools: both introducing a clear and accurate summary of British Prehistory and providing several practical hands-on exercises that teachers can replicate in the classroom to bring the past to life. We plan to have interpretation panels ready for installation at most of the hillfort sites by Dec 2020, with new bespoke artwork showing how the prehistoric landscape may have looked.

Find out more: www.chilternsaonb.org/projects/beacons-of-the-past



Chalk, Cherries and Chairs: Landscape Partnership Scheme

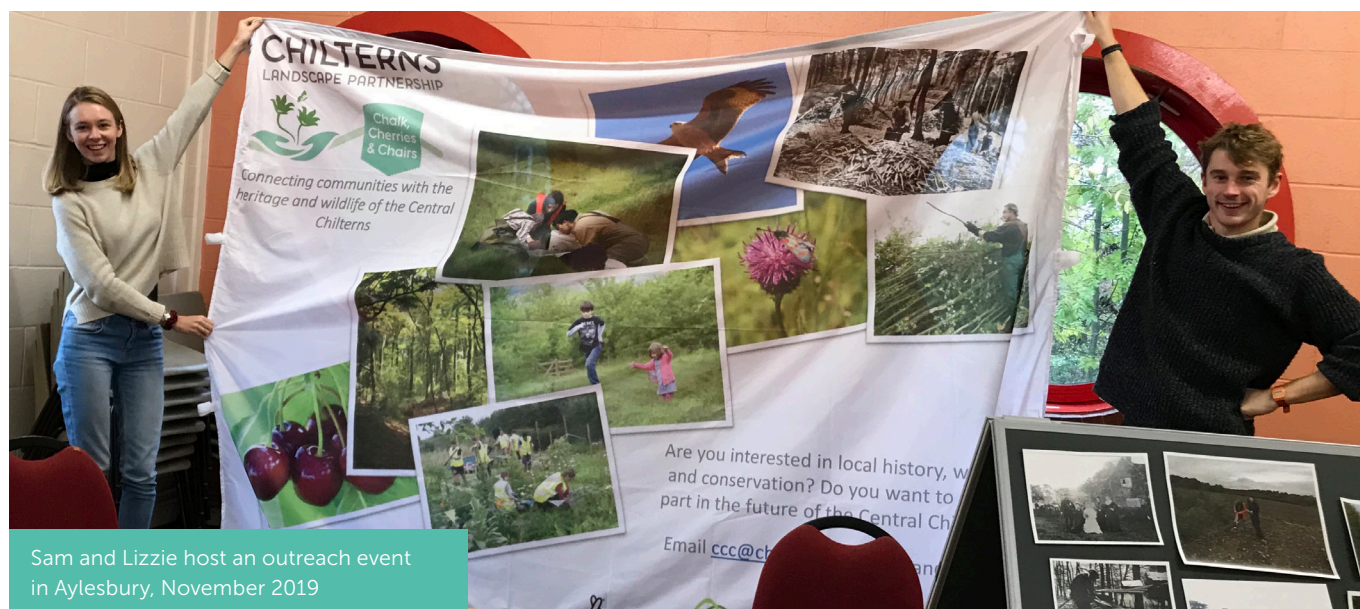


In the year since Chalk, Cherries and Chairs began recruiting its first staff members, much has changed. We are now a full team of five, from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences, working across the themes of landscape, heritage, community and partnership. Since May 2019, we have recruited over 240 volunteers, formed the first Central Chilterns farmer cluster (comprising 18 landowners covering 6,500 hectares), launched a sonic map and started planning a brand-new summer festival.

We have commissioned artists to work with local communities and young people, as well as creating a map for our themed railway journeys. We've started several large-scale conservation projects, with over 1,850m of newly planted hedgerow, 300 new chalk scrapes created, over 300 birds ringed and 9.5 tonnes of supplementary bird feed delivered to the farmer cluster.

Citizen science remains a focus for the project, with volunteers already surveying water levels, researching oral histories and undertaking species identification training to help gather key information. The team are very excited to start running more community engagement events going forward, including craft workshops, a Chilterns Summer Festival, training courses and a lecture series.

Read more: www.chilternsaonb.org/CCC



Sam and Lizzie host an outreach event in Aylesbury, November 2019



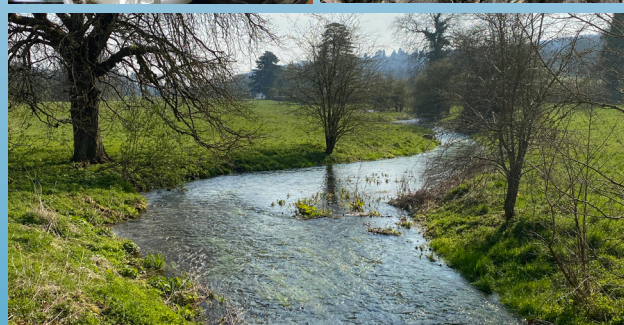
Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

2019 was a difficult year for Chilterns chalk streams. Following a third consecutive drier-than-average winter, flows dwindled rapidly through the spring and summer. In May a group of 12 organisations, including

the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP), which the Chilterns Conservation Board hosts, came together to launch a 'Chalk Streams in Crisis' campaign demanding better protection for these rivers. As a result, a debate was held in the House of Commons in July on the issues raised by the campaign.

By September, almost two thirds of the total length of chalk stream habitat in the AONB was dry and so, in October, the Chiltern Society held a Chalk Streams in Crisis Conference, bringing together senior representatives from Ofwat, the Environment Agency and the water companies to discuss the crisis and agree on action to address it. As a result, a Chalk Rivers Action Group was set up to find solutions and drive forward collective action.

October proved to be the low water mark for the area's rivers as an exceptionally wet winter brought about a significant recovery in groundwater levels, to the extent that rivers like the Hughenden Stream & Hamble Brook reappeared, the R. Wye extended by over a mile above its recognised source and even the Bourne Gutter began to flow. However, after such a severe and prolonged drought, it will take some time for the ecology of these rivers to recover.



HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2019-20 INCLUDE:

- The Water in a Dry Landscape project was launched in April. Part of our Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership Scheme, it aims to assess the health of the chalk stream headwaters that rise at the foot of the Chilterns escarpment, identify issues affecting them and carry out enhancement work to restore them, where appropriate.
- Working with Chiltern Rangers, Thames Water, the Upper Gade Flyfishers and the Chiltern Society, the CCSP led a series of nine volunteer work parties (350 volunteer hours) to clear invasive Himalayan balsam from the headwaters of the rivers Gade and Misbourne.
- As part of its role as joint hosts of the Chilterns, Hertfordshire and Middlesex Riverfly Hub with Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust, the CCSP held three Anglers' Riverfly Monitoring Initiative Training courses, training 33 volunteers, who will be monitoring rivers across the Hub area.
- The Project completed six advisory visits in 2019-20, providing advice on river and riparian management to landowners on the rivers Ver, Gade, Chess and Misbourne. One of the landowners on the Misbourne obtained a grant through Chalk, Cherries and Chairs to carry out willow coppicing and pollarding along the river at Little Missenden.
- The CCSP's Education & Engagement Project engaged with more than 1,300 school children in learning about Chilterns chalk streams through river visits, school outreach sessions and the "Trout In The Classroom" project.
- The Chalk Streams Project worked in partnership with Queen Mary University and the River Chess Association to deliver the ChessWatch project. The £22,000 project, funded jointly by QMUL, Thames Water and the CCSP, included continuous monitoring of water quality using data sondes deployed at four locations, as well as attendance at four community events to engage local people and find out more about their concerns for the River Chess.
- In February, the CCSP secured £20,000 from the Environment Agency Water Resources Communication and Engagement Fund to develop public engagement and educational resources.

Read more: www.chilternsaonb.org/projects/chalk-streams-project

Chiltern Woodlands Project

The Chiltern Woodlands Project has actively promoted the good management of local woods while raising awareness of their history, archaeology and wildlife for the past 31 years.

Highlights from its final year (to 31 March 2020) include:

- advised and assisted 57 woodland owners on tree and woodland management including 28 ancient woods, two SSSIs, two commons and a scheduled ancient monument (hillfort).
- Made eight felling licence applications to the Forestry Commission.
- organised a series of educational events including three training days with a total of 40 participants.
- organised planting of over 700 trees to enlarge a wood.
- With Woodland Trust support, Programme Manager John Morris advised on the creation of a new wood of over 2ha, which has now been planted, with a new hedge along a public bridleway.
- John gave seven talks on Chiltern Woods to groups and societies, with an audience of nearly 300 people. He also led six guided walks for a range of organisations and festivals.



New Project Development: Chalkscapes



In March 2020, we secured £232,600 funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop Chalkscapes, an exciting new project in the northern part of the Chilterns AONB. After delays to recruitment caused by Covid-19, the small project development team started in January 2021, working with our partners to develop plans over the next two years in order to apply for a full National Lottery grant.

Chalkscapes will be designed to undertake landscape-scale conservation across five focus areas, whilst inspiring communities in and around Luton and Dunstable to learn about, explore and love their local landscapes and finding new and creative ways of inspiring more people to understand and care about the landscape on their doorstep.

For more information about Chalkscapes please visit:
www.chilternsaonb.org/projects/chalkscapes

HS2: Chilterns AONB Review Group

The CCB has always opposed HS2, due to the devastating impact it will have on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Now the project is going ahead, we work with the HS2 Review Group and a range of partners to secure the best possible outcome for the environment. This includes using HS2 funds to take positive action for the Chilterns landscape and its communities. As part of the Chilterns AONB Review Group set up under the HS2 project, the Chilterns Conservation Board funded and helped prepare a three-year project to improve cycling and horse-riding opportunities around Wendover.

"Connecting the Ridgeway" focusses on creating good quality off-road routes, better quality surfaces and clear signage, making the Ridgeway National Trail better able to cater for riders.

Some stretches of the Ridgeway, such as the path over Bacombe Hill, are open only to walkers, so this project will enable the introduction of a riding route to run parallel to the Trail's footpaths. The route will also link in with the national cycle route network managed by Sustrans (www.sustrans.org.uk/national-cycle-network) and, in future, will link to proposed riding routes extending further along the Ridgeway National Trail.

The first phase, planned for early 2020 but delayed as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, is to improve the surfaces of rights of way at the bottom of Bacombe Hill, near Wendover.

Updates about the project will be available at:
www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/news
www.chilternsaonb.org/hs2



Mend the Gap

The Mend the Gap programme was established with £3.75 million from National Rail Infrastructure Ltd to support projects and schemes that will help to heal the scars on the landscape left by the electrification of the Great Western Railway, where it runs through the Chilterns AONB and the North Wessex Downs AONB, between Didcot and the outskirts of Reading. The programme is being delivered as a partnership between the Chilterns Conservation Board, the North Wessex Downs AONB, and local community organisation the Railway Action Group, and will support a suite of mitigation and compensation projects to enhance and enrich the landscapes of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs for wildlife, residents and visitors. The Chilterns Conservation Board hosts Mend the Gap and employs the Programme Manager.



Read more:
www.chilternsaonb.org/mend-the-gap

Planning and Development

2019-20 was another year of new housing and infrastructure pressure in the Chilterns AONB:

- Our planning officer formally responded to 30 local plans, neighbourhood plans, government consultations or infrastructure consultations.
- We responded to 115 applications, and were involved in several planning appeals. Unfortunately, we do not have capacity to respond to all 3,000+ planning applications made in the Chilterns each year.

Successes included the refusal of harmful proposals for 300 dwellings at Mill Lane, Monks Risborough. There were also pleasing appeal decisions for Pirton Water Tower where the Inspector gave full weight to the policies in the new Chilterns AONB Management Plan www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/management-plan.html, and at Harpsden where the Inspector rejected a replacement dwelling which had been built larger than the permitted plans and to a different design that was not compliant with the Chilterns Building Design Guide www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/planning-development/buildings-design-guidance.html.

But there were also disappointments: planning permission was granted for a major new road between the M1 and A6 north of Luton running through the AONB for 1.6 km, a decision which we unsuccessfully sought to have called-in by the Secretary of State.

www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/planning-development.html

We welcomed the Oakervee Review of HS2 and set out our deep concerns for the irrevocable damage to the natural beauty and tranquillity of the Chilterns that HS2 would bring. Unfortunately, the subsequent report and Government decision was that HS2 should go ahead, with no additional measures to reduce harm to the Chilterns.

Despite this setback, we continue to press for the best possible design for wildlife, landscape and people's enjoyment of the AONB through our work as part of the Chilterns AONB Review Group. We scrutinise HS2's emerging designs for viaducts, vent shafts and all elements of the new railway and assess them for compliance with the HS2 Detailed Design Principles. However, not being a statutory consultee in the very limited Schedule 17 process for HS2 is a significant barrier to being able to influence the designs.

This year we have been involved in a record number of aviation proposals, with the expansion of Heathrow and Luton Airports (both classed as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects), as well as airspace changes at RAF Northolt and Wycombe Air Park, all with flight paths over the Chilterns. We wait to see what impact the legal ruling will have on plans for a third runway at Heathrow, as well as the long-term shifts that coronavirus and climate change might bring to air travel.

The Chilterns AONB is extremely well placed to provide local healthy sustainable leisure and eco-tourism, giving us new impetus to protect the special qualities of the AONB for the nation's staycations and daycations of the future.

BOARD NEWS

Landscapes Review – an update

September 2019 saw publication of the much-anticipated Landscapes Review. Led by Julian Glover, and coming seventy years after the first National Parks were designated, the 'Glover Report' makes some exciting and inspiring recommendations to ensure that our special landscapes are healthier, greener, more beautiful and open to everyone.

The CCB welcomed the Glover Report, especially its recommendations that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty be better resourced and have a greater voice on development. In particular, the report highlighted the immense pressure on protected landscapes, especially the Chilterns, commenting, "Some national landscapes – the Chilterns for instance – risk changing very fast as a result and mostly not for the better. We shouldn't just accept this as sadly unavoidable. It should shame our generation to leave uglier, less liveable human settlements than those left for us by the generations which came before."

In recognising the pressures on the Chilterns, and the opportunities for recreation and access – such as walking and cycling on our extensive network of footpaths and bridleways – the report also recommended that the Chilterns be designated a National Park. We are very excited at the prospect of being better equipped to protect the Chilterns' landscape, cultural heritage, wildlife, communities and businesses, and throughout the year we have been working with Defra, the National Association of AONBs and others to help Defra plan its implementation of the report's recommendations.

A full government response to the Glover Report is expected soon. In the meantime, in November 2020, the government announced its plans to designate new National Parks and AONBs, saying that the formal process of designation will start in 2021. We are waiting to hear what this will mean for the Chilterns.

Impact Measurement Framework

The CCB is working with Heritage Insider to develop an Impact Measurement Framework to support delivery of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan (2019-24). Developed in collaboration with all our partners, the AONB Management Plan aims to deliver positive impacts for landscapes, habitats, species, organisations, businesses, individuals and the broader Chilterns community. During 2020-21, the staff team started working with partners and specialists at Heritage Insider to develop a shared long-term vision and a practical, prioritised plan to guide our work, along with an Impact Measurement Framework to identify and quantify the impact we're having in the Chilterns.

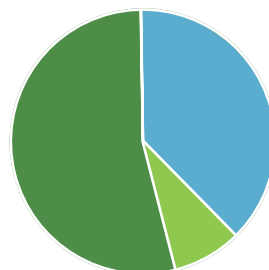
OUR FINANCIAL YEAR

CONSOLIDATED REVENUE ACCOUNT 2019-20



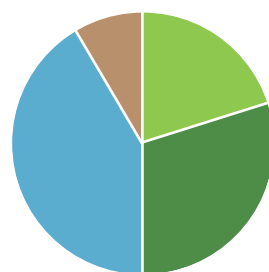
Income

Defra	●	442,015
Local Authorities	●	110,860
Project Income and Other Income	●	633,293
Total income		£1,186,168



Expenditure

Overheads	●	236,555
People and Society	●	360,283
Landscape and Conservation	●	484,589
Planning and Development	●	101,517
Total expenditure		£1,182,944
Surplus for year		£3,224



About the Chilterns AONB and the Chilterns Conservation Board

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

Established in 2004, the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is a public body with two key purposes:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB
- To increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.

Whilst fulfilling these purposes, the CCB also seeks to foster social and economic well-being in local communities. It has 27 Board members drawn from across the Chilterns and a staff team of 20 based in Chinnor.

To find out more about our work and how you can help us care for the Chilterns AONB please contact us:

office@chilternsaonb.org 01844 355500 www.chilternsaonb.org



CHILTERNS