

A woman in a blue and yellow athletic top and black leggings is running on a grassy path. In the background, a large town with many houses is visible, surrounded by green fields and trees under a blue sky with some clouds.

*Cultural &
recreational activities
in The Chilterns*

9. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING

The Chilterns is a living and working landscape, shaped, worked and enjoyed by people living in and around the AONB: 80,000 people live within the AONB and a further 1.6 million live within 8km. Communities and businesses within and beyond the Chilterns AONB enjoy many benefits from the landscape. From resources provided by its natural capital to cultural and recreational activities. There are tangible benefits from its natural resources such as clean water, fresh air and wood for fuel. And it is a place for relaxation, exploration and inspiration, offering a rich cultural heritage, contact with nature, a sense of place and numerous opportunities for leisure, recreation and learning. However, there is low awareness of the Chilterns AONB and its value to society is not fully realised especially to health and wellbeing. In addition, communities and businesses do not always recognise and value the importance of being in the Chilterns or the part they can play as custodians of this heritage.

This can be changed by measuring and demonstrating the value of the Chilterns, building the brand and profile of the area, and securing support and investment for the AONB. By doing this, we can bring even greater benefits to the communities and businesses in and around the Chilterns, and more resources to help protect the Chilterns for the future.



Chiltern Society Path Maintenance Volunteers

The Chiltern Society's South Chilterns Path Maintenance volunteers help Oxfordshire County Council improve access to the rights of way in south Oxfordshire. Since 2007 they have replaced 264 stiles with gates to improve access for all.

In 2017 they contributed 7,284 volunteer hours (2,138 on-site hours) through path clearance, gate installation, waymarking and path surveying.

Key Issues

Farming and forestry are in decline: While the economy of the Chilterns is above the national average, forestry and farming activities such as planting and managing woodlands to produce timber and grazing livestock on the hills are in decline. Work is needed to ensure the Chilterns remain a functional, working landscape with a viable rural economy.

Skills shortage: There is a shortage in the skills required to manage the Chilterns landscape, such as forestry and flint work.

Price of housing: House prices in the Chilterns are well above the national average, making it inaccessible to many that live in the local area. (See section 10, Development.)

Social, welfare and transport issues: Closures of village shops, pubs and community facilities is contributing to isolation and mental health issues experienced by a growing number of people. The volunteering and activities within the Chilterns AONB provide a way of addressing many of these issues. Better access links between rural and urban areas are also needed, as are improved public and community transport options, allowing local people access to facilities and services.

Strategic Objectives

- SO1** Increase the economic and social wellbeing of local communities and businesses by supporting the development of the visitor economy and improving community facilities.
- SO2** Ensure that the Chilterns AONB is recognised and valued by residents, visitors and the health sector for the contribution it makes to peoples' physical and mental health, offering connection with nature and a wide variety of recreational opportunities.
- SO3** Ensure that the natural capital of the Chilterns and its contribution to society is understood and valued by all decision makers and used to lever funding.
- SO4** Ensure that businesses and communities in and around the AONB value its special qualities, support initiatives and help raise the profile of the area.



VOLUNTEERS AT THE VILLAGE SHOP IN WIGGINGTON

Policies

To achieve these objectives, we must work together to:

SO1

SP1 Develop the visitor economy and increase its economic impact.

The Chilterns is a popular destination for local leisure, but awareness of it outside the area is low. There is great potential to attract more visitors, expand the short break market and raise the profile of the Chilterns. The Chilterns has some incredible tourism assets. More could be done to connect them, celebrate them and position them at the heart of the visitor offer.

SP2 Seek the coordination of visitor development and promotion across the Chilterns and secure dedicated resources.

Tourism promotion is largely based on local authority boundaries. Consequently, there is very limited Chilterns-wide tourism promotion other than by the CCB and Chilterns Tourism Network. Additional resources would help to develop and promote sustainable visiting.

SP3 Promote historic market towns as gateways to the countryside.

Many of our market towns are appealing visitor destinations. In addition, they have a special role as gateways to the Chilterns. They are easy to get to by public transport, provide visitor facilities such as car parking, pubs, shops and cafes, and allow easy access to the countryside by foot or on bike.

SP4 Support rural diversification that adds value to the local economy.

Only through diversification can many small to medium-size farms in the Chilterns remain viable. It can provide important visitor facilities, such as farm accommodation. This is in short supply in the Chilterns. What is approved needs to be sympathetic to its setting and the wider landscape.

SP5 Retain and promote community facilities, including shops, pubs, public and community transport, and encourage them where there are gaps in provision.

Many villages in the Chilterns have lost shops and/or pubs over the years, as well as a decline in community facilities and services. Others are under threat. These amenities are the life-blood of the community and affect both local people and visitors. We must support and promote such facilities to help them survive. For example, some villages have been able to step in and buy the pub/shop threatened with closure and run it as a community business.

SP6 Promote local food, drink and craft products.

Recent years have seen many new, high quality, artisan food and drink producers starting up. These range from Chilterns beer and wine to cheese and charcuterie producers. People are increasingly interested in knowing where their food comes from, but awareness of Chilterns produce is low. There is huge potential in promoting the Chilterns' rich diversity of food,



drink and craft products. This can be through festivals and events, promotional activity and business engagement. By promoting the Chilterns food, drink and crafts heritage, it is also a way of keeping cultural traditions alive (for example Chilterns Apple Days or Cherry Pie Festivals).

SO2

SP7 Encourage greater use of the AONB landscape to improve levels of physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The continued decline in physical activity is a key factor in the deepening health crisis. Yet there is recognition of the significant benefits to physical and mental wellbeing of spending time in a natural environment and taking exercise. There has been a growth in health and wellbeing programmes based on outdoor activity such as health walks and green gyms.

SP8 Expand opportunities for volunteering and lifelong learning and ensure it is better coordinated across the Chilterns.

Provide opportunities for local people and visitors to learn about the Chilterns and to help care for its environment and heritage. Volunteering can bring multiple health benefits; it can increase people's skills and confidence, and it can decrease health inequalities and isolation. There is great potential to attract a wider range of volunteers to reflect the diversity of communities within and close to the Chilterns.

SO3

SP9 Ensure that the value of the natural capital assets of the AONB is better understood and promoted, used to underpin investment and growth strategies, and secure net gain for the Chilterns.

The Chilterns provides multiple benefits to people in addition to the productive capacity of the land. It can support biodiversity, lock up carbon, help ensure clean supplies of water, as well as providing places for leisure, recreation, health and wellbeing. There is a poor appreciation of the benefits people derive from the AONB. In particular, the benefit for populations living outside the AONB is often over-looked. As more land is built on, the need to understand, value and promote the benefits becomes more important.



SO4

SP10 Ensure businesses and communities both in and around the AONB, recognise the value of being located in the Chilterns and endorse the Chilterns brand.

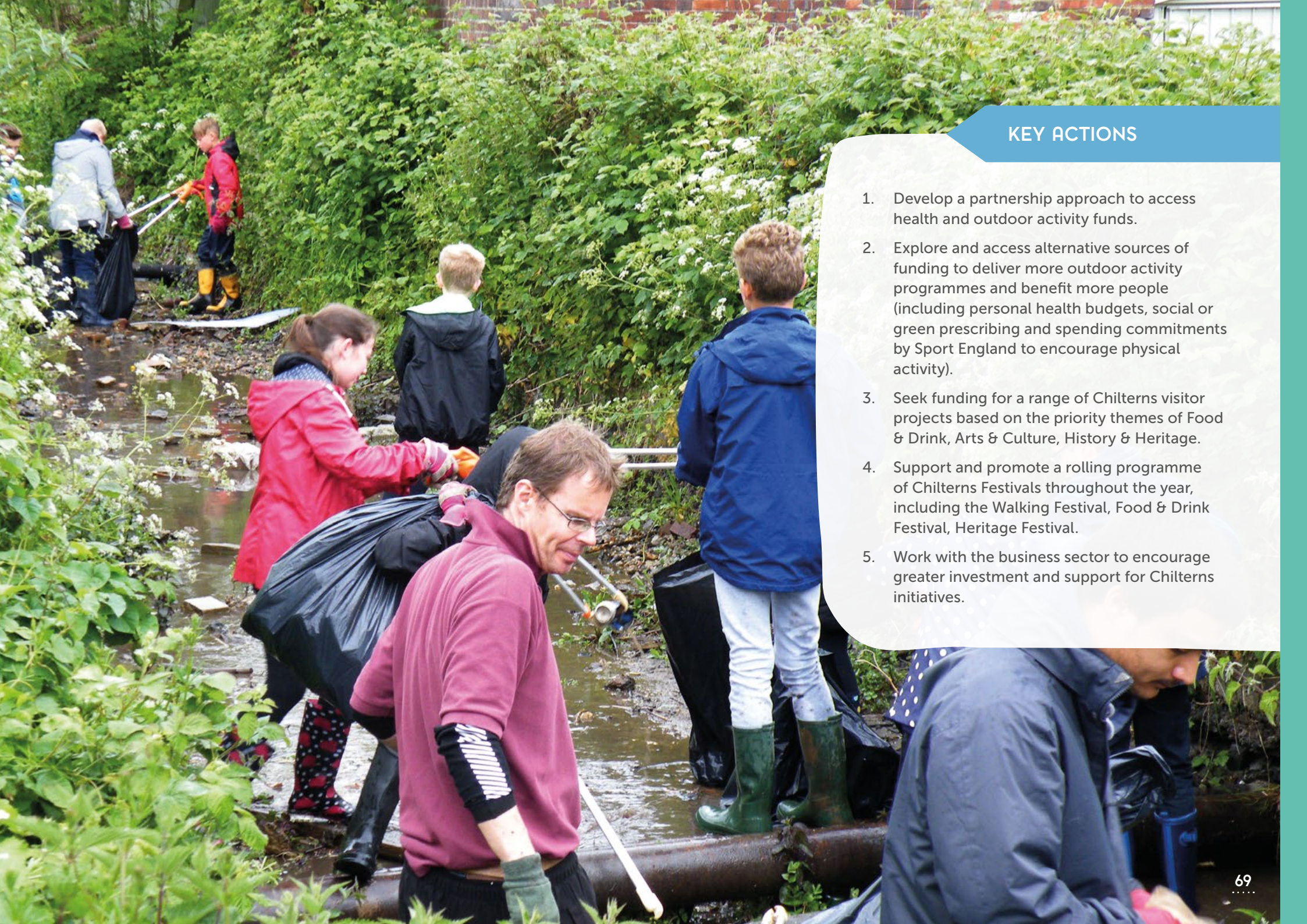
A Chilterns location can benefit businesses and communities. This is especially so for businesses with a connection to the visitor economy. However, the Chilterns does not have a strong brand. There is low awareness of the AONB and its value as a protected landscape. Businesses and communities can play an important role in creating a stronger identity and sense of place for the Chilterns.

SP11 Investigate income generation opportunities including visitor-giving schemes.

Visitor giving is a way of offering visitors and residents the opportunity to give a little something back and help look after the places they love. It is a way of providing a mechanism for collecting those small contributions that can add up to a significant amount.

SP12 Promote the Chilterns at key visitor entry points.

There are some major visitor gateways in or near the Chilterns, including railway stations and termini such as London Marylebone. There are many smaller gateways too, such as the market towns of the Chilterns. Yet people visiting or passing through are often unaware that they are in a special protected landscape and of the wealth of recreational opportunities they can enjoy. High quality information, interpretation and appropriate signage would help people access and enjoy this AONB.



KEY ACTIONS

1. Develop a partnership approach to access health and outdoor activity funds.
2. Explore and access alternative sources of funding to deliver more outdoor activity programmes and benefit more people (including personal health budgets, social or green prescribing and spending commitments by Sport England to encourage physical activity).
3. Seek funding for a range of Chilterns visitor projects based on the priority themes of Food & Drink, Arts & Culture, History & Heritage.
4. Support and promote a rolling programme of Chilterns Festivals throughout the year, including the Walking Festival, Food & Drink Festival, Heritage Festival.
5. Work with the business sector to encourage greater investment and support for Chilterns initiatives.