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Outstanding Chilterns

EXPLORE AND ENJOY IN 2017/18



Welcome to Outstanding Chilterns magazine – our annual magazine which shines the spotlight on the very special Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This edition is jam-packed with information and ideas on how to make the most of our beautiful countryside – explore and understand our landscapes; find out about ancient heritage; taste some of the foods and drinks produced in the Chiltern Hills; and take part in our brand new 3-year Walking Festival. We hope that you will discover all that the Chilterns has to offer and how you can get involved in helping us to protect it.

www.chilternsaonb.org
The Chilterns AONB website has a wealth of information on the area, including hundreds of downloadable walks and cycling routes, an interactive map highlighting places to visit and places to eat, a local events listing and lots of information on the special features of the Chilterns.



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Outstanding Chilterns is published annually by the Chilterns Conservation Board. Established in 2004, the Board 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

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



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- St Albans Abbey
3 miles
4 mins
1 hr 30 mins
- Park Street
3 miles
4 mins
1 hr 30 mins
- Brickett Wood
2 3/4 miles
3 mins
1 hr 15 mins
- Garston
2 1/2 miles
3 mins
1 hr 15 mins
- Watford North
1 3/4 miles
2 mins
45 mins
- Watford Junction

Why not be part of the AbbeyLine CRP as a volunteer or Station Adopter, get in touch!

Chilterns Walking Festival



What's not to love about walking? It's a fantastic way to discover new places, to meet people and it's good for us.



Walking brings out our inner explorer as we discover amazing landscapes and hidden follies, have-a-go activities and have-a-taste sessions. All of these excellent reasons helped the Chilterns Conservation Board to win LEADER funding for the new Chilterns Walking Festival, the first of its kind covering the whole Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty from Goring in Oxfordshire to Hitchin in Hertfordshire.

No previous experience is necessary and each walk description indicates the suggested level of fitness. The walks require pre-booking, and a new online system makes the whole process easy. So what are you waiting for?

The Chilterns Walking Festival takes place in spring (15–29 May 2017) and autumn (18 September–01 October 2017) and will run over three years. For experienced walkers and novices alike, this is an open invitation to enjoy an amazing programme of guided walks and events, to find the best places for cherished seasonal highlights like woodland bluebell trails and autumn colours, to learn about Chilterns Food and Drink, historic hillforts and filmed TV locations.

Grab some comfy walking shoes and let's get out there and do it!

Why walking really is the best medicine

Hippocrates got it right! Numerous studies have shown that being in a natural environment while taking part in a physical activity like walking has proven health benefits not only for your physical health but also your mental wellbeing. It can help reduce levels of stress and depression, lower blood pressure, improve the immune system and reduce obesity. Studies have even shown that it can boost your levels of creativity!



There are walks involving boats and trains, windmills, foraging, pubs, vineyards, artists, e-bikes and nature reserves. Some walks are ideal for families, some topics will have particular appeal for history buffs and some are perfect for those who enjoy a local tittle.

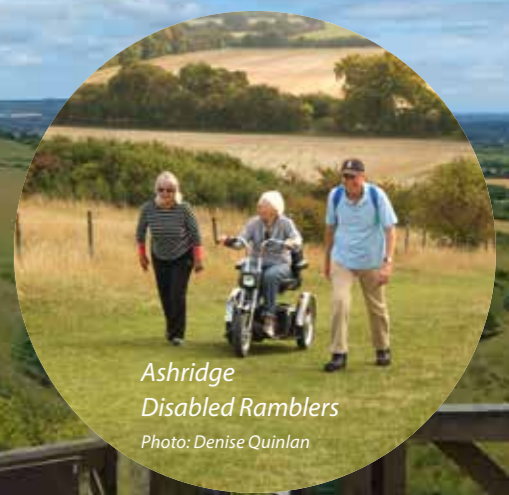
Whether you tackle them on two legs, four legs, or a set of wheels, our website has detailed descriptions for all walks, events and activities.

The Chilterns is easily reached by public transport so do get out and enjoy it whether as part of the walking festival or any time of year – it's open for all.

Our website has walks and rides to download for all levels and abilities, including those with limited mobility.

Share your stories and photos on Facebook and Twitter – we would love to hear from you @ChilternsAONB.

For more information on the walking festival please visit www.visitchilterns.co.uk/walkingfest



Ashridge Disabled Ramblers
Photo: Denise Quinlan

Cyclists with view of Ridgeway and Pitstone Hill

▶ A Taste of the Chilterns

The Chilterns has always been known for the quality of its produce and recent years have seen the development of an exciting food and drinks scene with new micro-breweries, vineyards and food producers thriving alongside established businesses. With its own cheeses, meats, milk, ice-cream, chocolates, beer, wines and spirits (plus lots more!), and wonderful pubs, cafes, markets and farm shops, the Chilterns has something for everyone.

We were very proud to secure Defra funding for our *A Taste of the Chilterns* project which culminated in a new Chilterns-wide festival of food and drink with a special programme of walks, visits, tours and tastings, that took place at various destinations across the Chilterns in March 2017. As part of the project we were also able to publish guides to vineyards and breweries in the area; developed 8 new food and drink itineraries; produced a Taste the Chilterns video; and worked with bloggers and print journalists to raise awareness of the brilliant food and drink on offer here.

Our huge thanks to the 60 plus businesses who have supported our ideas and initiatives with their own, offered amazing products as competition prizes, allowed access for the travel



New vineyards and brewery guides

Our new guides showcasing many of the wonderful vineyards, distilleries and breweries in the Chilterns are available at: www.visitchilterns.co.uk/food-and-drink/

and food bloggers and video production team and shared their photographs and videos. But best of all, we have many new friends and are looking forward to building on this great initiative!

The Vineyard and Brewery Guides are organised and promoted by the Chilterns Tourism Network and Chilterns Conservation Board. Here, we cover just two of them – do go online to find out more!

Bell Street Brewery

Brakspear's Bell Street Brewery was only founded four years ago, but its heritage stretches back to 1711, when William Brakspear founded a brewery on Bell Street – just yards from where the microbrewery now stands. Brewing continued in Henley until 2002, when the brewery was sold, but restored in 2013 when the new owners of Brakspear resolved to bring brewing back to the town. The Bell Street Brewery opened that year and immediately started to brew Brakspear Special – a beer that had been popular in Henley for many years and was welcomed back by the town's beer lovers. Special is now brewed permanently at the Bell Street Brewery, as well as a number of seasonal ales.

The Bell Street Brewery is located behind the Bull on Bell Street pub, in the heart of Henley. It's the perfect spot to enjoy a pint of Brakspear Special or other cask ale which are available in Brakspear pubs only.

For more information visit www.bellstreetbrewery.co.uk



Chiltern Valley Winery

Set high in the Hambleden Valley near Henley, Chiltern Valley is one of the oldest wineries in the Chilterns and has been run by the same family since 1980. It is a real centre of delight for food and drink lovers, having not only a vineyard and winery on site, but also a brewery, cellar shop and cookery school, and a farmhouse B&B to relax in once you have visited everything! The winery produces a range of award-winning white, red and sparkling wines. It runs very popular two hour 'behind the scenes' tours of the winery and brewery facilities which take place all year round and must be booked in advance.

If you are just passing, you can drop in to visit the cellar shop which offers tastings of their wines, ales and liqueurs and also stocks specialist food products including local chutneys, jams and honey.

For more information visit www.chilternvalley.co.uk



Photo: Chiltern Valley Winery and Brewery



Photo: Chris Smith



Make a day of it

The Hambleden Valley is a real slice of idyllic English countryside and is a great base for a stay, full of picturesque villages, medieval churches, welcoming country pubs and good walking.

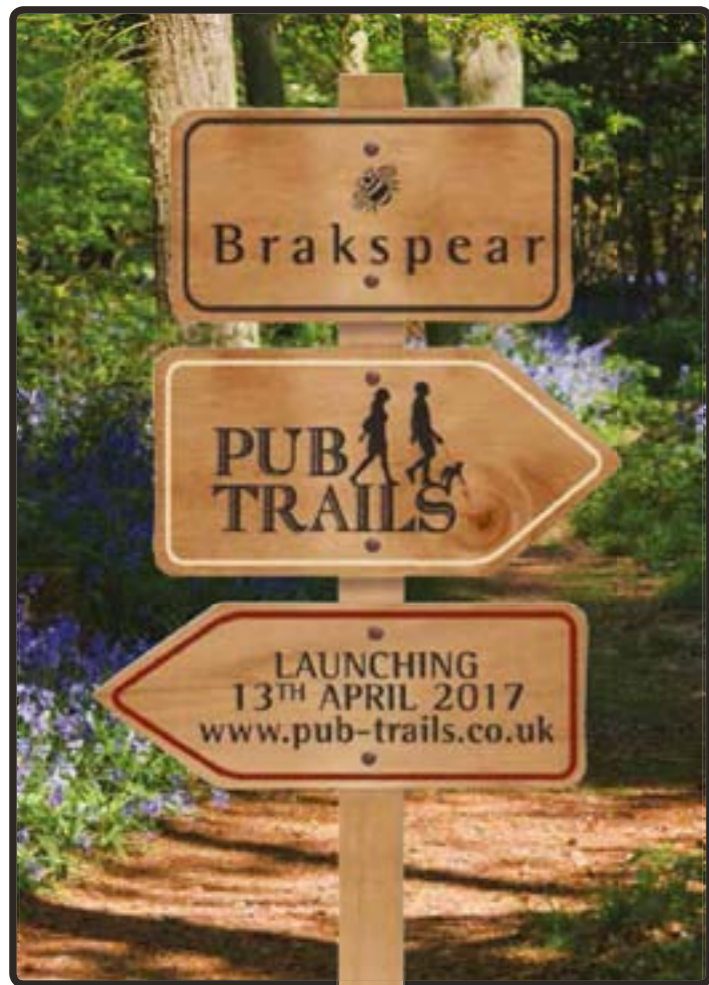
Explore the picturesque villages of Hambleden, Fingest, Skirmett and Turville. For a spectacular picnic spot, head for Turville village and walk up the hill towards the windmill, where you can enjoy panoramic views.

The Brakspear's Country Ale Trail which can be found at www.countryaletrail.co.uk features many of the best rural pubs in the Hambleden Valley and beyond (don't try to visit them all in one day!)

We also recommend the Thames and Chilterns route (available to download at www.chilternsaonb.org), a five-mile circular route along the River Thames with great views of the wooded hills.

Visit the busy market town of Henley-on-Thames with its bustling riverlife, shops and restaurants. Take a leisurely stroll along the Thames, followed by a traditional afternoon tea.

In the balmy, summer months there is nothing nicer than messing about on the water. Hire a boat or join a public cruise on the River Thames at Henley – more information on pages 18-19!!



► Chief Officer's letter



Welcome to the 2017-18 edition of Outstanding Chilterns. 2017 has got off to a busy start in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As we go to print we have just held our first ever Chilterns Festival of Food and Drink, which we secured Defra funding for. It was a great opportunity to showcase the dynamic food and drink sector in the Chilterns, which is known for the quality and taste of its local produce and exciting entrepreneurial spirit, as new businesses emerge alongside traditional farms and producers. Since I moved to this area a few years ago, I have really enjoyed getting out and about, trying local foods and seeing the pride that people have in the Chilterns – the festival was a great way of sharing what we have on offer here.

We are fighting hard to conserve and enhance the AONB for future generations and for all our benefit.

Sue Holden

May and October see the first events in a new 3-year programme of Chilterns Walking Festivals where people of all ages, abilities and interests will be able to explore this very special area. We are really excited about the huge possibilities across the 3 years and hope that you will be able to join in. We are also extremely excited about two Heritage Lottery Fund grants, for a hillforts project and a landscape restoration project – sign up to our e-newsletter if you want to receive news on these.

Unfortunately, pressure on the Chilterns AONB continues to grow. The HS2 proposals have now received Royal Assent so we expect to see the first phase of building works begin this year and at the same time we are grappling with increased development pressure across the four counties. Our work with the HS2 Review Group and giving planning advice are more important than ever! Changes to land management also have an impact – for example, large woodland areas are being broken up and sold off, which can make woodland management more complex. This, coupled with pest damage caused by glis-glises and grey squirrel and woodland diseases such as ash dieback, threaten the future of our ancient woods.

We cannot, and do not, take this unique landscape for granted. The Chilterns Conservation Board is the statutory body with a duty of care for the area and we are fighting hard to conserve and enhance the AONB for future generations and for all our benefit. You can help too, whether it's by volunteering with one of the organisations carrying out conservation work in the Chilterns, standing up to inappropriate development, designing or extending your own properties in ways which are sympathetic to the landscape and the community, or even by picking litter in your own neck of the wood, we are all guardians of the Chilterns and all that this represents.

View of Dashwood Mausoleum, West Wycombe Hill



Chilterns AONB facts and figures

10 million people live within an hour's drive



55 million leisure visits a year



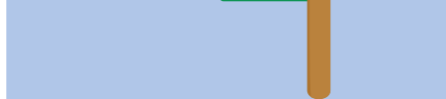
113 Scheduled Monuments



531 important sites for wildlife



2000km of footpaths and bridleways



Over £2bn spent annually by visitors to English AONBs



► Celebrating 20 years of championing Chilterns Chalk Streams

This year, the Chilterns Conservation Board is celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project set up in 1997 to protect and conserve the area's chalk streams. A key feature of the Chilterns' landscape, these rare chalk streams are also internationally important. With only about 200 worldwide of which 85% are found in England, we have a responsibility to protect these geologically unique rivers which are fed by groundwater springs in the chalk bedrock and support a wide range of wildlife.

The creation of the Project was driven by the contrasting fortunes of two neighbouring rivers, the Misbourne and Chess. The Misbourne had been in long-term decline since the end of the Second World War because of increasing abstraction for public supply and development pressure. On the other hand, the neighbouring Chess was noted for its reliable flows, nature conservation value and largely unspoilt valley landscape.

Local communities and the Chiltern Society brought the Misbourne's problems to the attention of the authorities and a plan was developed between the water companies, regulator and environmentalists to address its poor state of flow. All these bodies were represented at the launch of the Misbourne and Chess Valley's Project on 23 April 1997 and have remained major players in the Project to this day.



Yellow May Dun



Water Crowfoot flowers

Over the years, the Project was expanded to cover all major chalk streams in the Chilterns (see map page 22) and since its creation huge progress has been made, with more than £1 million invested in conservation – including projects to enhance and restore river habitats, improve access and education, develop monitoring schemes and provide guidance for landowners. Perhaps most significantly of all, the Project has helped to support and enthuse local communities across the Chilterns to enable them to protect and improve their local rivers. The network of committed and enthusiastic local river groups plays an essential role in the conservation of the Chilterns' special rivers.

The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is the longest running chalk streams project in the country and has made an outstanding contribution to the protection and conservation of the chalk streams of the Chilterns AONB. The issues that led to the creation of the Project are still as relevant today as they were in 1997. Therefore the need to continue to deliver an effective, coordinated approach to the management of the Chilterns Chalk Streams is as great as ever.

For further information see www.chilternsaonb.org/about-chilterns/chalk-streams/chalk-streams-project.

What was life like in the Chilterns 2000 years ago?

We're a step closer to finding out!

Cholesbury Camp in Buckinghamshire

Prehistoric roots

People have been living in the Chilterns for thousands of years, raising families, trading and protecting their livestock across this chalky landscape. Today we can still experience its ancient heritage, including stunning hillforts.

There are 22 of these evocative prehistoric monuments scattered across the Chilterns. Some are prominent, such as the iconic Ivinghoe Beacon, many are hidden beneath thick woodland canopies in quiet villages, like Cholesbury. Yet despite being one of the densest concentrations of hillforts in the UK, very little is known about the Chilterns hillforts or the two distinct tribes that might have lived here.

In June 2016, the Chilterns Conservation Board was awarded a first-round grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to develop an exciting new project to research, promote and conserve hillforts and their landscape settings across the Chilterns. We have made fantastic progress working with partners and local communities to build ideas which will enable us to preserve and raise awareness of this rich ancient history.

A wonderful opportunity to bring the Iron Age to life locally and inspire local schools and families to help protect this special monument and its landscape.

John Shaw, Director of Chilterns Rangers CIC



Survey and advisory session with landowners at Wilbury Hill hillfort (above) and Bucks University Technical College clear litter from Desborough Castle hillfort (left)

Inset photos: (above) Cathie Hasler, (left) Chiltern Rangers

Highlights

We've galvanised support from hillfort owners, are designing exciting resources for schools, and plan to commission the first archaeological aerial survey to capture the full length of the Chilterns AONB area using cutting edge LiDAR technology.

We are also very excited to be taking forward a number of specific projects at the heart of some of our urban populations, including Desborough Castle in High Wycombe, where the hillfort is a conspicuous, but misunderstood, historic community asset. John Shaw is Director of the Chilterns Rangers CIC, who manage the site on behalf of owners Wycombe District Council. He is delighted to be involved in the partnership: "The Chilterns Rangers see this as a wonderful opportunity to bring the Iron Age to life locally and inspire local schools and families to help protect this special monument and its landscape".

The project is also planning interactive ways for the public to learn about the prehistoric landscape – from reconstruction drawings, and a beacon-lighting launch event, to Iron Age food tasting and using augmented reality and virtual reality technology to offer engaging Iron Age experiences.

Thank you

We would like to thank our partners for their continued and invaluable help: Heritage Lottery Fund, Bucks County Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Chiltern Rangers, Chiltern Society, Chilterns Woodland Project, Hertfordshire County Council, National Trust, Oxfordshire County Council, plus many local history and historical societies, parishes and community groups.



Could you help us?

► **Donate** We need to raise £100,000 before we can make the project happen, to match the funding provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Whether you're an individual or a company owner, we're reliant on every penny to make this project a success and are grateful for all donations, large or small.

Please send donations by cheque made payable to 'Chilterns Conservation Board' to the CCB office or donate on our website – www.chilternsaonb.org

► **Volunteer** If we are successful with our bid to HLF there will be lots of different ways to get involved in the project: you could survey the archaeological findings from LiDAR data, inspire others at a family event, or safeguard your local hillfort by joining a Heritage Watch group.

► **Spread the word** Do you know others who could support the project? Maybe local interest groups, access to funding through local and parish councils, or organisations that distribute grants? We'd love to hear from you.

► **Next steps** We expect to hear the outcome of our Stage 2 application in September 2017 and if successful, the project would start in winter 2017 / 2018.

► **Keep in touch** If you would like to keep in touch with news from the Beacons of the Past project and receive our project e-newsletter, please send an email to our Hillforts Project Development Officer at office@chilternsaonb.org.

Inset photo: Gerry Whitlow



Ivinghoe Beacon

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Stuck in a 1930s time warp, see England how it used to be, and discover a wonderful little world tucked away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. *Note: Only assistance dogs allowed in the village.*



For a chance to win a Family Ticket (2 adults & 2 children) to Bekonscot Model Village & Railway answer this question: *The black & white photo was taken at Bekonscot in 1938 – who is the girl in the photo?* Email your answer to office@chilternsaonb.org by 31st December 2017. The winner will be drawn at random. Strictly one entry per household.

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► What do we mean by 'landscape'?

The European Landscape Convention describes landscape as 'part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings'.

Landscape includes the geology, soils, topography, land cover, hydrology, historic and cultural development and interaction between people and land. These pages explore some of the special features of the Chilterns.

Chalk landscape

The dramatic chalk landscape of the Chiltern Hills with its prominent escarpment rising to 300 metres and flower-rich chalk downland is designated under UK law. It is considered of international significance due to the rarity of chalk landscapes. Water stored in the rock emerges from springs to feed sparkling, chalk streams which are important wildlife habitats. There is evidence of chalk use since the Stone Age, and the Industrial Age saw large-scale chalk extraction from this area. Water remains a scarce resource in the Chilterns and today the chalk aquifer supports local watercress beds as well as large-scale water-abstraction for domestic consumption, agriculture and business.



Chalk stream – River Wye

Ancient Woodland

The Chilterns remains one of the most wooded part of England with over one fifth covered by woodland, of which 60% ancient woodland (continuously wooded since 1600AD), one of the most biodiverse habitats in Britain. Ash, cherry and oak are widespread as well as beech. Before the Industrial Revolution, its woods provided fuel for London and there was woodland management activity such as charcoal burning and sawpits. More recently, there have been woodland industries such as chair-making.

Photo: Adrian Scottow



Photo: Colin Drake

Fingest Valley



Bluebells at Ashridge



Field patterns and hedgerows

The Chilterns is characterised by small fields defined by hedgerows. Many are 'ancient', existing before the Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries. They are vital for wildlife, and for local history, often marking ancient boundaries or early woodland clearance. Hedgerows need special management to thrive.



Cottage, Bradenham

Built heritage

In the past natural, locally-produced materials such as clay tiles, bricks, flint and timber were used to build houses and barns, so these buildings blended in with their surroundings perfectly. Traditional farm buildings also provided valuable roosting and nesting for barn owls, swallows and bats. Today, with the pressure for development, it is more important than ever that new buildings reflect and complement the landscape.

Facing the Challenges

This iconic landscape is under pressure from many directions: major infrastructure projects; unprecedented housing growth; severed, fragmented and neglected wildlife habitats; ancient woodlands divided up and sold off. We have a lot to do to rebuild and strengthen connections between people, place and heritage, and to ensure that future generations can enjoy the social, health and economic benefits this special landscape provides.

This is where our 'Chalks, Cherries and Chairs' Landscape Partnership Scheme comes in, which aims to awaken a new sense of stewardship, increase volunteering, develop skills and inspire people to investigate and celebrate local heritage. We are developing plans to secure final funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver this project.

If you would like to find our more, or support us, please contact jakam@chilternsaonb.org

Ancient features and routes

The Chilterns AONB has notable archaeological features dating back over 8,000 years, including iron-age hillforts, and lynchets (terraces cut into hillsides for growing crops on). The ancient network of old tracks and routeways criss-crossing the area include The Ridgeway and Icknield Way, both important prehistoric trading and communication routes. Look out for 'holloways' – sunken tracks often through woodland, the result of thousands of years of passage by man and beast.



Sheep on Pegsdon Hills

Farming and land-use

The Chilterns has been farmed for thousands of years and today agriculture accounts for 75% of land use within the AONB making a major contribution to the landscape. The steep slopes at Ivinghoe Beacon and Whiteleaf Cross support livestock, while the gentle slopes of the plateau are better for arable crops.

Orchards, especially cherry, used in liquor and gin as far back as 1730, were once a key feature of the landscape and 19th century pickers came from London and Reading at harvest time. Recent years have seen a resurgence in vineyards and breweries across the Chilterns.

▶ Fighting for the AONB



Panorama from Whiteleaf Hill
Photo: Colin Drake

“We are quietly losing something important.”

Planning Officer,
Chilterns Conservation Board

2,700 homes are planned in this view from Whiteleaf, a bright green jewel of grassland surrounding an island of currently compact town.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) have the same planning protection as National Parks - great weight should be given to conserve their landscape and scenic beauty and major development should be refused except in exceptional circumstances. But how well is this standing up?

HS2, the biggest development in the AONB's history, is going ahead, and the housing crisis makes the news on a daily basis. Putting landscape first is a challenge because unlike National Parks, AONBs do not have their own planning authorities, so decisions are made by our 13 constituent local authorities, who are all juggling conflicting priorities. They are under immense pressure to find land for housing in their local plans and maintain a 5-year supply of sites ready to go for housing. If a Council fails to do this, it risks losing control of where development goes, because of a national policy called the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Sadly, several of our Councils are in this position and, even though it shouldn't apply in the AONB, we are seeing more inappropriate planning applications than ever.

Protecting the Chilterns from damaging developments and their impact is an important part of our work at the Board. We have a key advisory role as experts on AONB planning. We employ a Planning Officer to advise our local authorities on planning proposals, and we have a planning committee who oversee this work. But we have limited powers, and do not make the final planning decisions. We encourage good practice through our policies and publications, and by showcasing good design through the Chilterns Buildings Design Awards. There are over 3,000 planning applications a year in the Chilterns AONB and the development pressure from housing and infrastructure projects is acute. Well-loved panoramic views face permanent change over the next twenty years, such as from the expansion of Aylesbury and Princes Risborough (see photo from Whiteleaf).

With so much going on, we need your help. As householders improving your own homes, please think quality, scale and local materials. As residents, you can use our planning documents to make informed comments about planning applications that fail to conserve and enhance the AONB. Many changes to the special character and qualities of the AONB are small; house extensions not in the vernacular style or local materials, over-sized replacement dwellings, pretentious entrance gates, fields turned to manèges for exercising horses, inappropriate security lighting or trendy glazed extensions spoiling dark skies and the sense of tranquility – the suburbanisation of the countryside. Put together we are quietly losing something important. We should look after our best nationally protected landscapes and protect them for the long term. They are among our greatest assets, giving nature and society space to breathe.

Learn more: www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/planning-development

Chiltern Hills: the Fight for Beauty

We are delighted to welcome Dame Fiona Reynolds, DBE, as guest speaker at a special event organised by the Chilterns Conservation Board on 26th September at the Elgiva Theatre in Chesham. Former Director-General of the National Trust, Fiona recently published *The Fight for Beauty: A Path to a Better Future* in which she sets out an alternative vision for our environment and our society. She will speak alongside Sue Holden, Chief Officer at the CCB and Howard Davies, Chief Executive of the National Association for AONBs who will explore this theme in relation to the Chilterns.

The event will start at 6pm and tickets (costing £12 per head) will be available from the Elgiva. Please keep an eye on our website for more information or sign up to our e-newsletter.



Photo: David Levinson

▶ Our world class landscape deserves the very best design



It was a sad day for the Chilterns when, despite the CCB working very hard with our partners to lessen the impact of the HS2 proposals on this internationally significant landscape, the HS2 Hybrid Bill received Royal Assent to proceed. Although the bored tunnel was extended by 2.6km, saving three areas of ancient woodland and reducing impacts to a few local communities, our main request for a fully bored tunnel under the Chilterns was rejected by the HS2 Select Committee.

Despite our disappointment, we now need to focus our efforts on securing the best possible design for all the infrastructure (the bridges, viaducts, buildings, noise barriers etc) and the mitigation (for example tree planting, embankments and reinstated hedgerows) and looking for new opportunities to improve the route through the Chilterns for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

To these ends, we are working closely with the Chilterns AONB Review Group – which we and Local Authorities pushed hard to secure - which includes Local Authorities in Buckinghamshire, the Chilterns Conservation Board, Natural England, HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport. As well as seeking to influence the design, the Group will identify extra environmental measures to further integrate the scheme into the AONB and enhance the wider area.

The Review Group has commissioned consultants to develop detailed design principles and a long list of additional projects to enhance the route. This work is at a very early stage but, on a very windy day, members of the independent Design Panel came to see the route through the Chilterns for themselves so that they could give their advice as to how best to develop improvements to the route through the AONB.

In the coming months, Helen Hall (*photo*), the new Review Group Programme Manager, will be liaising with local communities and groups to inform this work and garner support for further projects benefitting both the landscape and communities within the AONB. If you would like to be involved in this work please email Helen at hhall@chilternsaonb.org.

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Bowood Lane, on HS2 route



Micklefield Barn

Buildings Design Awards

The Buildings Design Awards are an annual event organised jointly by the Chilterns Conservation Board and Chiltern Society, to celebrate outstanding design and construction in the Chilterns area. We were delighted that 2017 saw the most entries for a decade.

The winners will be announced in June and will be showcased on our websites and publications. The awards are open to all so if you are involved in a successful building project which seeks to conserve and enhance the character and the beauty of the Chilterns, don't forget to enter our 2018 Awards (closes 1 March 2018)! Building projects completed within the past 3 years are eligible.

► Focus on Watlington

As the M40 rushes south into the Chilterns, Watlington stands at the gateway to some of Britain's most beautiful countryside. The town's rich past and thriving present epitomise a relationship which is vital across this region – between landscape and the people that live and work in it.



Watlington Town Hall

Dating back to the 6th Century, the settlement of Watlington owes its existence to the Icknield Way, the vital ancient trackway which runs within half a mile of the town as it follows the chalk escarpment across southern England. The modern street plan was in place by the 1300's, and Watlington's three main streets and multitude of historic buildings, including the landmark 17th Century Town Hall, have staged some of the most colourful characters and stories in the region's history.

Scholars, preachers and Civil War soldiers have been replaced by walkers, cyclists and tourists on the hunt for Midsomer Murders locations, but visitors today still benefit from Watlington's hospitality. Set right on the edge of the Chilterns AONB, the town offers easy access to the Ridgeway National Trail, which joins and then leaves the Icknield Way in this area. Watlington Hill – the Chilterns scarp slope that rises behind the town – provides wonderful views over the countryside as well as beautiful beech woodland and chalk downland. The Hill also boasts the White Mark – a chalk triangle dug in the 18th Century to create the illusion of a spire for St Leonard's Church.

21st Century Watlington has found fame amongst birdwatchers as the epicentre of the magnificent red kite. Now a busy town with around 2,800 residents, it is also building a reputation as a gastronomic destination, with a surprising number of high quality eateries and independent, artisan producers.



Watlington Deli

Visit Watlington

- **Eat** Food lovers are spoilt for choice with three good pubs, elegant, modern food at The Social, coffee and cake at The Granary Delicatessen or curry at House of Spice. Don't miss homemade sausages and oven-ready meals at family butcher Calnan Brothers, fruit, veg and local produce at The Undercroft Market and award-winning chocolates made on site at TuTu Delicious.
- **Shop** Specialist retailers include K is for Kitchen, gift shop The Rhubarb Tree, lighting gallery Bella Luce, Watlington Fine Wines and boutique beauty salon Peppermint Lime. Cyclists should head to Sprocket Science for repairs and servicing.
- **Stay** The Fat Fox offers comfortable rooms as well as excellent food, or for self-catering try Wisteria Cottage.

► Proud residents raise thousands to save the Watlington Viking Hoard

In early 2017 local donations helped Oxford's Ashmolean Museum to purchase the Watlington Hoard, a significant collection of silver coins, jewellery and other artefacts dating from the time of King Alfred and the Vikings.

Found in a field outside Watlington in October 2015 by local metal detectorist James Mather, the Hoard is one of the most significant discoveries from the Viking period ever found in the region. Some of its 200 complete coins depict the great kings Alfred and Ceolwulf together; their kingdoms, Wessex and Mercia, bordered in Oxfordshire, but a possible alliance between them against the Vikings had not been known before the Hoard's discovery.

The Ashmolean raised £1.35 million to purchase the Hoard, preventing it from being broken up and sold to private collectors. Grants and major donations, including a pivotal sum from the Heritage Lottery Fund, were supplemented by over 800 gifts from members of the public: Watlington residents gave an impressive £4,820.77.

Parish Council Chair Ian Hill explained local enthusiasm for the collection: "The discovery of this Hoard on our doorstep



Watlington Hoard

has grabbed the attention of the people of Watlington at a time when we are on the verge of great changes in our community. I welcome this opportunity to celebrate our past and to help bring the history of this area to life. It is a reminder that we have a long and interesting history with many ups and downs, and that we should not ignore our yesterdays as we look ahead to a growing town."

Indeed, our sense of pride in our communities and our enjoyment of the countryside around us have a surprisingly large part to play in discoveries of this kind. Dr Julian Baker, Assistant Keeper of Medieval and Modern Coins at the Ashmolean, explains: "Most historical coin hoards in England and Wales are currently being found by amateur archaeologists. In this sense conservation and the general attractiveness of the countryside,

and the laws which govern access to it, are all conducive to the recovery of such treasures."

The Hoard will return to the Ashmolean later in the spring. A number of activities and lectures related to the Hoard are taking place in Watlington over the coming months: check the Parish Council's website at www.watlington.org for details.

We have a long and interesting history with many ups and downs, and we should not ignore our yesterdays as we look ahead to a growing town.

Ian Hill, Parish Council Chair

A walk back in time *Watlington's historic Ridgeway*

This gentle 2.5 mile walk is buggy and wheelchair friendly. Start at the car park on Hill Road. Turn right away from the town centre, then keep left and continue along Hill Road for ½ mile. Just as the hill starts to climb, turn left onto the Ridgeway National Trail footpath, also the route of the ancient Icknield Way here. Continue for ½ mile, then turn left onto Station Road, part of the Oxfordshire Way, and continue for ¾ mile.

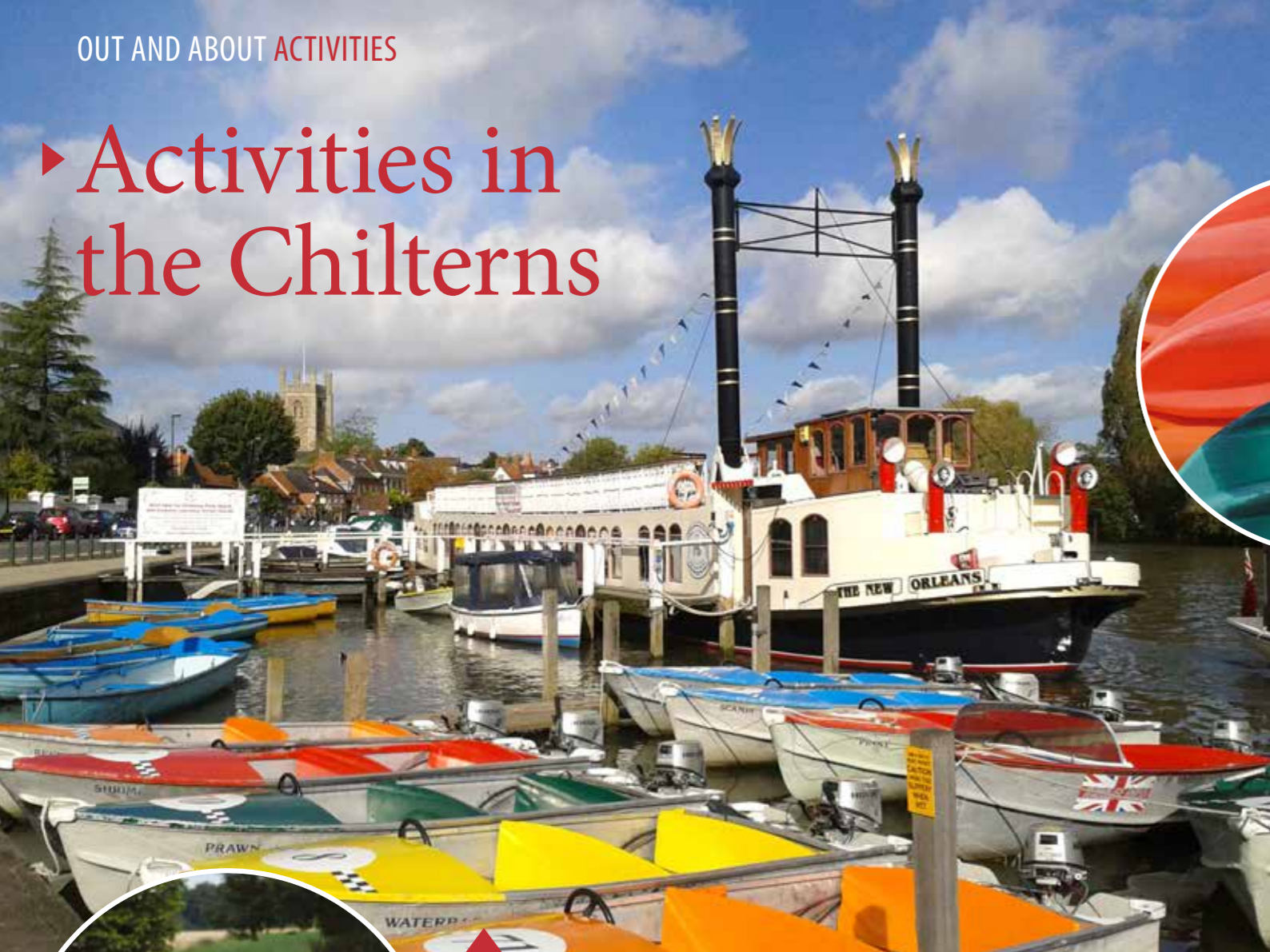
At the crossroads, turn left and carefully cross the main road onto the pavement. Continue a short distance then escape the traffic by diverting right through the trees into

Watlington Recreation Ground. Walk parallel to the road alongside the sports pitches, play area and exercise equipment, then along an alley.

At the end of the alley turn left onto Love Lane, and then right onto Shirburn Street. Continue past the Fat Fox pub towards the Town Hall. Just before the Town Hall turn left onto Hill Road, and back to the car park.

If you have time to spare, you could also pass by St Leonard's Parish Church, parts of which date back to Norman times.

▶ Activities in the Chilterns



Paddle your own canoe



Longridge, the Olympic Training Centre on the Thames at Marlow, provides an introduction to all sorts of water sports in activity days and short breaks for families with children aged eight and over.

There's more activity on the water at clubs such as Adventure Dolphin at Pangbourne or the Chiltern Canoe Club near Tring and coaching at 3 Counties Kayak and Canoe.

For day trips (or more!) Henley Canoe Hire have itineraries for all levels including families, some of which are on the quieter backwaters.



Other ways to get active in the AONB

If you want to get active we have over 2,000 kms of rights of way which means there is plenty of space for walking, horse-riding and cycling. The Chilterns Cycleway is a popular 173-mile route through some of the most beautiful parts of the Chilterns with plenty of different options for shorter rides!

For more information, check out our interactive map at www.chilternsaonb.org/explore-enjoy/interactive-map and enter a postcode or place name to find out what there is to do near you.

For visitor information, www.visitchilterns.co.uk has a wealth of information to help you plan your next trip.

Rowing

The Henley Rowing Association organises a whole range of rowing packages on the famous Henley Regatta course on the River Thames, including half-day sessions for beginners and 'champagne rowing sessions for ladies who lunch'. There are rowing clubs all the way along the Thames – British Rowing have a useful search facility.



With our beautiful cover image of Goring Lock, this issue focuses on our waterways and opportunities to get a different perspective on our beautiful AONB.

Cruises

Take a leisurely cruise on the Thames or the Grand Union Canal. Hobbs of Henley operate regular river trips and boat hire along the beautiful Henley Royal Regatta reach. They also offer a series of themed cruises, such as Comedy on Water or a Wildlife Cruise. Salter's Steamers run scheduled passenger services on the Chilterns section of the Thames, with stops including Wallingford, Goring, Reading, Henley and Marlow.

Boat hire

Hire a self-drive launch or rowing boat. There are lots of places to hire boats on the Thames – in the summer months Higginson Park in Marlow is a good place to start or again try Hobbs of Henley or Salter's Steamers where you can hire complete with a skipper. Guests at the Compleat Angler in Marlow, the Beetle and Wedge at Moulsoford or the Swan at Streatley might like to hire a boat and picnic.

For a very special event, you could charter a traditional steamer, the Alaska which was built in 1883 and was chosen to act as the 'Royal Barge' when the Queen witnessed the 2009 swan upping – an annual ceremonial event which takes place on the Thames in July each year.

For short trips you can hire a narrowboat for the day from Cow Roast Marina, or for longer holidays on the Grand Union Canal the Wyvern Shipping Co Ltd hires narrow boats from 2-berth to 8-berth – a lovely, leisurely way to spend a few days.



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► Bashing scrub and other volunteering opportunities!



Volunteers at annual scrub bash 2017, Whiteleaf Hill

Our new Development Officer, Claire Readey, takes part in her first scrub bash

Standing on top of Whiteleaf for the first time on a cold, crisp January morning was my first real introduction to the breathtaking Chilterns landscape. Just a few weeks into my new role as Development Officer for the Chilterns Conservation Board, having relocated from Durham, in the North East of England, and I was ready to get stuck into my first ever scrub-bashing.

I was immediately struck by the number and range of people who amassed on the frosty hillside ready to help in any way they could: an army of high-viz helpers wielding scythes, chopping overgrowth, tending fires and cooking hearty food for the hungry volunteers. It was inspiring to observe so many coming together to preserve and steward our beautiful countryside, and seeing at first-hand one of the threats to the landscape – ash dieback – was a sobering reminder of the scale and extent of work to be done.

Although we have a clear and ongoing role in conservation, we would welcome volunteer help in other ways. The Conservation Board is currently inviting applications for a number of administrative positions to support the work we do.

If you have, or would like to gain, real experience in an office environment, we need passionate people who can help us with administration, research, web and graphic design, social media campaigns, photography and written work.

Whether you're starting your journey into work, or perhaps you're retired with valuable skills which could help us, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Claire Readey, email creadey@chilternsaonb.org, or telephone 01844 355506 to find out more.



Leaf loss

Leaf loss caused by ash dieback in a young sapling in the Chilterns – also known as Chalara, this is a fungal disease affecting ash trees. According to the Forestry Commission:

“We don't yet know what the full impact of Chalara will be in Britain. Evidence from continental Europe suggests that older, mature ash trees can survive infection and continue to provide their landscape and wildlife benefits for some time.”

For more information and reporting visit www.forestry.gov.uk/ashdieback

Outstanding Chilterns INTERVIEW

John Morris

John Morris is Project Director of the Chilterns Woodlands Project, an independent charity based in the AONB office, which promotes and encourages the sensitive and sustainable management of woods in the Chilterns. The Chilterns Woodlands Project offers services to woodland owners and managers, including management advice and surveys, along with support with felling license and grant applications.



If you weren't talking to Outstanding Chilterns right now, what would you be doing?

During the week, I spend around half my time out in the woods advising woodland owners and half my time in the office on follow up admin, publicity, planning work and applications. Yesterday I visited two sites to review seasonal work and take photographs and to make a grant claim to the Forestry Commission. At other times, I might be running training sessions – most recently on charcoal burning with Natural England and soon on ancient woodland flora.

What are the biggest issues facing Chilterns Woodlands in the long-term?

There are multiple issues and the real problem is the cumulative impact of them all together. One of the main challenges is the lack of active management in many woods, along with serious pest and disease problems that have increased in recent years. For example, American grey squirrels damage the bark of native broadleaf trees and increasing numbers of deer browse off young tree saplings and ground flora (muntjac favour orchids and bluebells). At the same time, we are starting to see Ash Dieback in the Chilterns area which could affect millions of ash trees and of course the changing climate has an impact. If it was just one of these things affecting a few trees it wouldn't be a problem, but taken all together the quality of the woodland, and our ancient woodland, risks being degraded.

What is your vision for Chilterns woodland in the long-term?

It would be nice to see a wider range of ages and possibly species of trees and a lot more care given to the woodland in general. On a smaller scale, no fly-tipping, which is a growing problem. I would love to see more people enjoying and cherishing these special woodlands, but also respecting them, sticking to paths etc and taking litter home.

Do you have a favourite tree or wood?

I have a long involvement with Bottom Wood near Studley Green, which is managed by the Chiltern Society, so that is close to my heart. There is also a beautiful large hornbeam in Pigotts Wood that stands at the junction of three ancient ownership boundaries.



Fine hornbeam

How can people care for Chilterns woodlands?

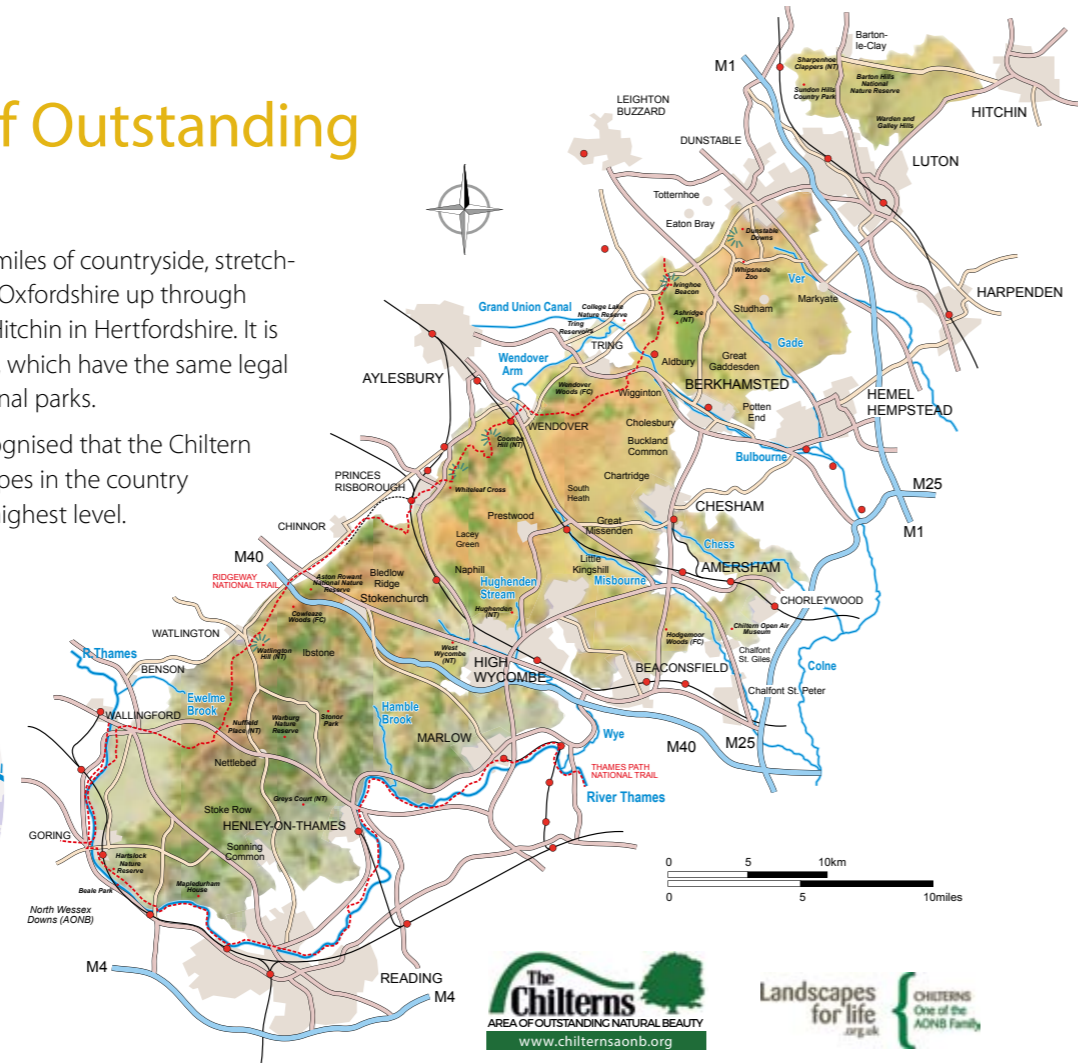
If you have time to spare, why not consider supporting our woodland in one of the following ways:

1. Work as a volunteer – there are opportunities to volunteer with a number of different organisations including the Chiltern Society, National Trust, Chiltern Rangers and The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust.
2. Report fly-tipping to the local Council.
3. Support the Chiltern Society's woodland campaign which is running until the end of 2017. You could even sponsor an acre of ancient woodland! chilternsociety.org.uk/product/sponsor-an-acre/
4. Respect other people's property and woodland – keep to the footpaths .
5. Get out and enjoy the countryside!

► Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Chilterns AONB covers 324 square miles of countryside, stretching from the River Thames in southern Oxfordshire up through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire to Hitchin in Hertfordshire. It is one of 38 AONBs in England and Wales, which have the same legal protection for their landscapes as national parks.

Its designation as an AONB in 1965 recognised that the Chiltern Hills contain some of the finest landscapes in the country which are worthy of protection at the highest level.



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Take a walk in the Chilterns Countryside

From the chalk grassland of Coombe Hill, to the vast woodland estate at Bradenham, the National Trust cares for sites throughout the Chilterns. Visit the Chilterns Countryside website to discover a whole host of walks to download. Whether a gentle stroll or an invigorating hike, you'll find great views along the way.

Call 01494 755573 for details
nationaltrust.org.uk/chilterns-countryside

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