

# OUTSTANDING CHILTERNNS

Explore & enjoy in 2020/21

**Iron Age Hillfort  
DISCOVERED**  
in the Chilterns

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**A day out you'll  
NEVER FORGET:**  
exciting itineraries with  
something for everyone

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**CHALK STREAMS**  
receive boost as water  
companies turn off  
the pumps

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**KEEPING ACTIVE:**  
Walks & rides for all

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**Should the  
Chilterns become  
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Interview with our  
Chief Executive



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# WELCOME

## A note from the Editor

Welcome to the latest edition of Outstanding Chilterns, the annual magazine bringing you the latest news and best of what's on offer to explore and enjoy the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2020 has been an unprecedented year and one that has impacted every one of us with lasting and – for many – devastating effects. Businesses are doing all they can to stay open in a safe and secure way and in this edition, we focus on some of the local attractions who are pulling out all the stops to provide leisure facilities and experiences throughout the seasons. We also look at the community shops who are going above and beyond to serve local people during these worrying times.

The Chilterns provides a haven for wildlife and with so many walks, paths, trails and hidden gems to discover, I hope you have – and will continue to – visit the Chilterns safely, get out into the countryside and find some solace and tranquillity during this unusual time. Spending time in nature has been proven to improve mental wellbeing, so if you haven't already discovered the beauty on your doorstep, I recommend taking a look at some of the social distance friendly walks we've put together on page 8.

I hope you are inspired by some of the topics covered in this edition of the magazine, if you have any ideas or comments for future editions please contact me at [vpearce@chilternsaonb.org](mailto:vpearce@chilternsaonb.org).



*Vicki*  
Victoria Pearce  
Editor

Sign up to our monthly e-newsletter for the latest news and events happening across the Chilterns AONB: [bit.ly/CCBsignup](https://bit.ly/CCBsignup)

## ABOUT THE CHILTERN'S 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 purposes, the board also seeks to foster social and economic wellbeing in local communities. It has 27 members drawn from across the Chilterns and a staff team of 20 based in Chinnor.

### Chilterns Conservation Board:

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## CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S LETTER

Welcome to Outstanding Magazine, an opportunity for us to share with you some of our achievements and to celebrate the nature, heritage and people of the wonderful Chilterns landscape.

## A YEAR OF TWO HALVES

When I joined as Chief Executive in July 2019, I knew it would be a busy and eventful year – and so it proved to be! It began with the launch of an ambitious new five-year AONB management plan and publication of the much-anticipated Landscapes Review, led by Julian Glover.

Published in September 2019, the Glover Review recognised that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks achieve a great deal but more must be done for nature, for natural beauty, and for the people who live in and visit our landscapes. The report also recommended that the Chilterns be designated a National Park, due to the huge development pressures, for example HS2 and the Oxford-Cambridge growth arc, and also the fantastic opportunities for people to enjoy our beautiful landscape, for example walking and cycling on our extensive network of footpaths and bridleways.

We welcomed the Review's recommendations and are very excited about the prospect of being better equipped to protect the Chilterns' landscape, cultural heritage, wildlife, communities and businesses. 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 and an announcement is expected by the end of 2020.

In the meantime, no one could have anticipated the huge impact of Covid-19 on all our lives. The past few months have been challenging for everyone and I would like to thank the staff team for their flexibility and 'can-do' approach. They rose to the challenge magnificently – working from home, resetting priorities, showing huge resilience and innovation in a time of great uncertainty and worry. They've also embraced the opportunities provided by Covid-19 and we ran our first ever "Chilterns Celebration" during October 2020, incorporating our ever-popular Walking Festival, an online Citizen Science Conference, family-friendly events and much more.

We are proud to be able to support many Chilterns businesses through our activities, including communications campaigns, networking events, Extending the Season initiatives and new social distance friendly walks taking in pubs, shops and attractions. Many businesses and communities went above and beyond to help people during lockdown and in the months since and we've supported them as best we can during these unusual times.

The Chilterns Pass is on hold for now due to Covid-19 but we're determined to relaunch this explorer pass as soon as we can in 2021, which will save visitors money at local businesses and help build resilient and vibrant communities.

"Lockdown showed just how much the nation needs nature – and many people discovered wonders on their doorsteps during their daily exercise."

We were already talking with our partners on how best to collaborate to build resilience in the Chilterns, so Covid-19 has strengthened our resolve and created an even greater urgency to protect our special landscape for people and nature now and in the future.

Everyone has a part to play and I hope our magazine will inspire and give you ideas on how to get involved and enjoy all that the Chilterns has to offer.

Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive  
Chilterns Conservation Board

# CHALK STREAMS

receive boost as water companies turn off the pumps

BY ALLEN BEECHEY

On 27th September, World Rivers Day, Affinity Water, which provides water to homes and businesses throughout the central and northern Chilterns, announced that it had voluntarily switched off its groundwater pumping stations in the upper Chess catchment to better sustain flows in the river.

Years of investigation, trials and collaborative efforts by Affinity Water, the Environment Agency and Thames Water supported by the River Chess Association and the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP), had concluded that the amount of water being taken from the chalk aquifer was having a detrimental impact on flows in the river.

This action marks the culmination of efforts by local community groups in the valley and the CCSP in calling for more to be done to improve flows in the river, and follows on from the impact of last year's drought and the "Chalk Streams in Crisis" campaign that highlighted the plight of England's

in the Wye Valley revealed that abstraction had risen to environmentally unsustainable levels that were adversely affecting the health of the river. By importing water into the valley from boreholes at Medmenham, where there is more water available, Thames Water will ensure the demand for water in the High Wycombe area is met, whilst helping the Wye to recover.

Thames Water also plans to cease abstraction at its pumping station in the upper Chess catchment by the end of 2024. Combined with Affinity Water's recent switch-off, this would be the first case in the Chilterns where a river has had all of the multiple abstractions in its headwaters turned off.

**Historically, small abstraction reductions in the Chilterns have been hard-won and have taken many years of investigation and campaigning by local groups. This move towards more significant, strategic abstraction reductions therefore represents a real change in strategy by the water companies in terms of how they value chalk stream environments.**

Cessation of abstraction in the headwater catchments of chalk streams is seen by many as critical for the future survival of the Chilterns chalk streams, as it is the headwaters that are suffering most from the combined impacts of climate change and abstraction for public water supply.

Allen Beechey, CCSP Project Officer, said: "Just last summer, more than 60% of the total length of chalk stream habitat in the Chilterns AONB was dry. The effects of climate change on the health of chalk streams are as undeniable as the impact



River Chess at Latimer in August 2020: A vision of what Chilterns chalk streams could look like in future

of our high water use. It is clear that, if we are to protect the chalk streams that we cherish, we need to leave more water in the environment than ever before."

The water companies are also asking customers to reduce their water use to help protect all rivers and wetlands, whilst ensuring there's enough water available for future generations. In the Chilterns, average daily water use is around 173 litres per person. This is 30 litres more than the national average and much higher than in countries like Germany, where residents use just 121 litres each, per day. Reducing our profligate water consumption will decrease the volumes that water companies have to supply.

In the meantime, the significant reductions in abstraction that Affinity and Thames Water have committed to, and their desire to move towards more environmentally sustainable sources of water, represent a step change in the way in which streams like the Chess, Ver and Mimram are valued and will go a long way towards reversing the decline of these truly special streams.

Top image from L to R: Allen Beechey, Project Manager, Chilterns Chalk Streams Project; Elaine King, CEO Chilterns Conservation Board; Jake Rigg, Director of Corporate Affairs, Affinity Water; Pauline Walsh, CEO, Affinity Water; Paul Jennings, Chairman, River Chess Association; Tony Cocker, Chairman, Affinity Water.



River Ver near Redbourn in August 2020, desperately in need of water

Chalk Rivers. There are just 260 chalk streams to be found on the planet and those that flow through the Chilterns are widely regarded as the most threatened of all.

According to Affinity Water, the announcement of reductions to abstraction in the Chess valley, and its commitment to end abstraction from the Ver catchment upstream of St. Albans and from the whole of the River Mimram catchment in 2024, mark the start of the company's ambition to restore to health the globally rare chalk streams in its supply area.

Affinity Water is not the only water company that has committed to reducing abstraction in Chilterns chalk stream catchments. In July, Thames Water announced that it had reduced the amount of water that it abstracts from its groundwater sources in High Wycombe by more than seven million litres per day. Similarly to the Chess, investigations

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The Barn Cafe at Turville Heath



Chenies Manor

# ENJOY A DAY OUT YOU'LL REMEMBER FOREVER

BY FRAN MOMEN

The Chilterns is blessed with a huge number of attractions like Whipsnade Zoo and Waddesdon Manor. But we've selected some less well-known gems, many inexpensive or free, that you can visit and enjoy at a safe distance whilst following Government guidelines. There's something for everyone, so we've put together itineraries for different types of visitors that are possible to do in a day. Choose from alternatives so the day's not too full-on!

## SPEND A FABULOUS DAY IN THE CHILTERNs ...

### WITH THE FAMILY

A good dose of fresh air and a scenic walk suitable for all ages – it's a great way to energise and kick off your day, before visiting one of our unique attractions. Please don't attempt to do all these activities in one day – just pick your favourites!

- Start at Brush Hill Wildlife Walks if you're looking for pushchair-friendly trails, or choose a Misbourne Valley Walk for a slightly longer hike (3 miles) and a chance to view the river and look down on Great Missenden.
- Stop for lunch at one of several cafes in Great Missenden, or head up the road to the new 'Strawberry Shack' at Peterley Manor Farm selling take away food, with picnic gardens and seating available outdoors or inside their yurt.
- Try a relaxing cruise along the canal from Aylesbury Basin aboard The Little Trip Boat.
- Visit the pigs down on Orchard View farm near Little Meadle, and round off the day with tea in their Trough Café serving freshly prepared food.

### FOR FOODIES

The Chilterns is a magnet for foodies with a range of restaurants from gourmet options like The Mash Inn at Radnage, to farmshop cafes like The Barn at Turville Heath and handy pit stops like the Air Raid Shelter Café in High Wycombe. All over the Chilterns, producers are proud to boast of their locally produced foods; let us tempt you with this tasty tour...

- You're off to Henley. Enjoy some breakfast riverside, at The Chocolate Café by the Henley Rowing Museum, before heading for the Thames Path to Shiplake (1.5 miles each way on level ground or catch the train back). For other local walks, choose one of the Brakspears Pub Trails in this area; self-guide along some fabulous footpaths with attractive pubs, offering well-earned rewards!
- If you've chosen the Thames Path walk, visit The Little Angel pub by the river in Henley; there's a lovely terrace and great food.
- After lunch, stroll around Henley, celebrating its brewing heritage. Visit local shops like Gorvett & Stone, creators of delicious chocolate, or stop by Gabriel Machin's butchers, selling the finest locally produced meat.
- If wine is more your tittle, drive the short distance to Chiltern Valley Winery in pretty Hambleton Valley and experience a tasting-tour.

### FOR ADVENTURERS

We know you love a challenge! Try this 16 mile hike with dramatic scenery...

- Visit Ashridge Estate and hike the Boundary Trail Walk, which takes approximately 7 hours across grassland and through ancient woodland. There are amazing views and you can take your four-legged friends along too. Enjoy this haven for wildlife and flora and discover burial mounds, the ancient Ivinghoe Beacon and Bridgewater Monument.
- You may fancy a snack at the Brownloe Café on the Ashridge Estate or visit one of the local pubs in Aldbury: the Valiant Trooper is a quintessential English pub serving great food and a variety of ales. There's also a cyclist-friendly café, The Musette, set in former stables in Aldbury.
- Fancy an even longer trek? Peruse the National Trails website for hikes along The Ridgeway - 68km and 3 days later, you'll have witnessed a prehistoric trail at least 5,000 years old!
- If you're up for some competition, look out for events held throughout the year in the Chilterns including the annual Chilterns 3 Peaks, and the world famous Etape organised by the Tour de France. Bonne route!



Part of the Ridgeway National Trail

### FOR SCREEN BUFFS

Outdoor cinema is a great opportunity for friends and family to get together – especially if the venue is world-class! In the Chilterns we have some amazing locations that host professional pop up screens during summer, including Waddesdon Manor and Stonor Park. Rex cinema offers year-round vintage glamour in Berkhamsted, with a stunning interior and a well-stocked bar. Blessed with stunning film locations, follow in the footsteps of global stars that have walked our landscapes, posed in our stately homes and sipped tea in our cafes...

- Pick a typical Chilterns market town – Henley, Wallingford or Thame – and slaughter a Midsomer Murder tour! Some tours are accompanied whilst others are self-guided.
- Whichever location you choose, you'll find plenty of pubs, cafes and restaurants – named after the famous detective, try the 'Barnaby' bun from Rumsey's chocolatier.
- Or take a short drive to Hambleton Valley for lunch – Skirmett, Turville and Fingest all have great pubs. Enjoy an afternoon walk in beautiful scenery, viewing locations like Cobstone Mill which featured in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, or Turville parish church in The Vicar of Dibley.

### FOR CULTURE VILTURES

With such a large number of cultural festivals throughout the year, it's hard to choose the ultimate day out. In addition to our larger events, during summer months Chilterns churches host cream teas, a great way of visiting ancient buildings, meeting locals and even climbing one or two steeples. We think the Chess Valley is hard to beat to appreciate local gems:

- Start in Chenies Village – follow the path for a mile along the Chess Valley to the picturesque village of Latimer. Latimer House is now a hotel which can be visited for lunch and refreshments; it also has an intriguing story as a secret intelligence centre during WWII.
- Cross the river for a pleasant walk back to Chenies and a tour of Chenies Manor (usually Wednesday and Thursday afternoons during the summer) followed by a cream tea.
- Good food is also available at the Cock Inn at Sarratt in their 17th century traditional bar or on the patio; walkers and four-legged friends welcome.
- After lunch visit nearby Amersham: soak up the atmosphere of its old buildings and explore its history and heritage at the Amersham Museum.

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

During the pandemic and whilst the situation is still changing, please check details of all these venues before you visit, to confirm opening hours and latest recommendations and always follow the latest government guidelines.

For walking routes and to discover more about these attractions and many more in the Chilterns visit:

<https://www.chilternsaonb.org/explore-enjoy>

# KEEPING ACTIVE OUTDOORS: WALKS & RIDES FOR ALL

BY ANNETTE VENTERS

During lockdown the Chilterns countryside was enjoyed as never before for walking, cycling, exercising, appreciating nature and simply to get away from it all. A free and accessible feel-good fix! Many more people discovered new walks, rides and paths close to home and there was a rekindled interest in the simple joy of stepping outside and exploring local green spaces. With more than 2,000km of rights of way in the Chilterns and dozens of promoted routes, there is no shortage of opportunities to keep exploring and enjoying your Chilterns right through the winter. Here are some ideas to get you going:



## SOCIAL DISTANCE FRIENDLY WALKS

We have developed a series of 23 social distance friendly walks across the Chilterns which avoid the crowded honey-pot locations, instead following some of the quieter but equally beautiful paths.

- **Family-friendly walks.** The tiny medieval village of West Wycombe is owned by the National Trust and sits above a network of chalk caves. The village is lined with old coaching inns and independent shops and cafes. There is a 2.5 mile woodland walk from West Wycombe with beautiful views across adjacent countryside. Kids will love running down West Wycombe hill at the end of the walk and seeking out hot chocolate and cake at one of the wonderful cafés. A couple of miles away, the Downley Common & Hunts Hill walk is a 2.8 mile scenic and gently undulating route which takes you through a variety of habitats. It passes through an historic Chilterns common, ancient woodlands and the Le De Spencer country pub tucked away. Part way through the walk Hughenden Manor can be seen in the distance. This is Echo Valley. If you shout then listen you can hear an echo. See our website for other stile-free, family-friendly walks that are under four miles.
- **Big open views to blow the cobwebs away...** the northern Chilterns is an open landscape of rolling chalk grassland with spectacular views. Head to the Pegsdon and Deacon Hills for a 3.5 mile walk taking in Deacon Hill with its ancient earthworks and Knocking Hoe nature reserve. There is a longer 5 mile Warden Hills route starting from the historic village of Lilley. It passes through farmland and chalk downland to the summit of Warden Hill with far reaching views in all directions. In the central Chilterns the 6 mile Pitstone Hill route takes you along the ancient Ridgeway with stunning views from the top of Pitstone Hill

before returning through the woodland of the National Trust's Ashridge Estate.

- **Walks from foodie market towns.** A 4 mile walk from the old market town of Tring takes you past the famous Tring Natural History Museum and on to Tring Park with its majestic rides, follies and fabulous views. Tring is blessed with an excellent range of fresh local produce. Tring Farmers Markets takes place on 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month, whilst Tring brewery shop stocks a wide range of beer. Beechwood Fine Foods in the centre of Tring offers a range of local Chilterns specialities as well as their own jams and pickles. There are two walk options from the small market town of Watlington in Oxfordshire, a 4 mile and a 6 mile option. Both take in rolling chalk downland, beech woodlands and ancient pathways including a stretch of the Ridgeway National Trail. Head to the High Street for a fabulous range of independent shops and cafes. The Granary delicatessen has a good selection of local cheeses, beer and other specialities, with the Orange bakery, Calnan's Butcher and Tutu chocolates adding to Watlington's reputation as a foodie destination.
- **Woodland walks.** The southern Chilterns is densely wooded and sparsely populated, making for some wonderfully tranquil walks. The village of Nettlebed is a great start point, with a café, pub and a cheese hatch to explore on your return! There are two route options, a 4.5 mile Woodland & Wildlife walk taking in two wooded commons and the Warburg Nature Reserve, and a similar but longer 6 mile route. There is a shorter and gentler 2 mile woodland walk in the nearby village of Peppard, starting from the Red Lion pub which is nestled on the edge of the Common.

## PATHS, PIES AND PINTS



Brakspear's The Fox and Hounds Pub on Christmas Common

What could be better than a country walk to get the blood pumping and some fresh air in your lungs before retreating to a pub or café for a well-deserved drink and a bite to eat? There is a series of Country Ale Trails in the southern Chilterns <https://www.pub-trails.co.uk/> developed by Brakspear, the Henley-based brewer and pub operator. The routes include some beautiful off-the-beaten-track pubs down country lanes and on village commons, many of them with large gardens.

Or for those walking their four-legged friends, see a guide to dog-friendly pubs...<https://www.visitchilterns.co.uk/food-and-drink/countryside-pubs-inns.html>

## LONGER ROUTES AND CHALLENGES

Whether you're looking for a physical challenge or are interested in exploring the wider landscape in stages, a long-distance trail is the way to go! The Chiltern Way is a 134 mile walking route weaving its way around the AONB taking in some of the best scenery including picturesque villages, nature reserves, viewpoints, historic buildings, heritage sites and country pubs.

For a shorter option try the 52 mile Chiltern Heritage Trail which takes in many historic and scenic highlights. It is split into eight easy to follow sections, enabling you to walk one section and take public transport back to your starting point.



West Wycombe House from top of Wycombe hill

# THE CHILTERNNS

## FROM A TO Z

BY JOE STEWART

It can be difficult to articulate what makes a place truly unique, special, and different to other places. However, doing so is becoming increasingly important in helping us to understand and protect the places we live in and visit, as townscapes, landscapes and culture become increasingly homogenised.

Sue Clifford and Angela King, from the charity Common Ground, took up this very cause with their promotion of 'local distinctiveness': the visual features, history and identity of a place, and our relationship to them. One engaging way of articulating the local distinctiveness of a place is to try and make an A to Z listing of something that you associate with each letter. Taken together, they provide a mini encyclopedia, helping you to look at – and feel – the place more closely.

The Chilterns make an interesting case for an A to Z – recognised and protected as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, they nonetheless cross five counties and are less than an hour from the UK's largest city. The region has many distinctive and some unique features which add up to a truly outstanding whole.

**A. AONB:** as hinted by the name of this magazine, the Chilterns is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, reflecting its nationally significant landscape value and affording it a protection on par with National Parks. The designation was made in 1965, and it reflects all of the locally distinctive features to follow.

**B. Beechwoods:** if any tree defines the Chilterns it is the beech tree: silvery, smooth, and tall, with a habit of shading out the forest floor below to create what many describe as an underwater effect. The Chilterns' extensive beechwoods typically grow on hilltops, and are not entirely natural, many having been planted to serve the furniture making industry in High Wycombe.

**C. Chalk:** the stuff that the Chilterns are (mostly) made of plays more of a role in shaping the landscape than any other factor, affecting topography, flora, and fauna. The Chilterns are not alone in their chalkiness, but rather are part of the long band of the stuff that stretches up from Southern Central England through to the fringes of East Anglia.

**D. Downland:** more specifically, we can say the Chilterns are chalk downland: open, grassy hills, typically with poor soil. Chalk downland is an increasingly rare habitat as ancient land management techniques have been replaced with mechanised farming. Thankfully, the Chilterns AONB retains areas in which downland species, and communities, continue to thrive.

**E. Escarpment:** the Chiltern escarpment, or scarp slope, is the 'steep' northwest edge of the hills. It offers spectacular viewpoints over the Vale of Aylesbury, a sense of space that is hard to come by in the crowded South East, and unrivalled kite-flying opportunities.

**F. Flint:** visit almost any Chilterns village and you'll see flint in the walls of houses, old and new, reflecting the prominence of this sedimentary rock throughout the region.

**G. Gentian:** we are lucky here in the Chilterns to boast the only UK population of *Gentianella germanica*, or German gentian, known here as Chiltern gentian. This rare and captivating lilac flower is the county flower of Bucks.

**H. Hillforts:** the Chilterns has a long human history stretching back to the Bronze Age, which has left its mark in the form of over 20 hillforts – large, earthwork enclosures built for defensive, ceremonial, and agricultural purposes. To visit a hillfort, such as Cholesbury Camp, is to connect with our ancestors in the places that kept them safe and brought them together.

**I. Ivinghoe Beacon:** itself hosting a hillfort, the 233m Ivinghoe Beacon is one of the Chilterns' most iconic and dramatic sites that stands proudly in the landscape. It is also a confluence of ancient tracks, representing the starting point for both the Ridgeway (see below) and the Icknield Way.

**J. Jerome K. Jerome:** One author whose stories seem to inhabit the landscape more than most is Jerome K. Jerome. His tales of lazy afternoons on the Thames reflect the serene atmosphere of the river and its laid-back inhabitants. Further into the hills is Ewelme, where he spent his later years enjoying this tranquility.

**K. Kites:** not the one on a string (although the Chilterns is prime kite-flying country) but rather the majestic Red Kite, a once-persecuted bird of prey that can be seen soaring over the hills following one of the UK's most successful wildlife re-introduction programmes. They may look fearsome but tend to eat carrion, and are often heard first with their distinctive mewling cry.



**L. Larks:** less majestic but no less wonderful, larks used to be a common sight and sound in the Chilterns – so much so that Robert Louis Stevenson decreed it the 'country of larks' following a walking tour in 1874. Sadly, they have declined a great deal since then, reflecting changes in the landscape and increasing urbanisation.

**M. MPs:** our Members of Parliament may represent every nook and cranny of the land, but the Chilterns might boast the most due to the archaic legal fiction of 'taking the Chiltern Hundreds' which allows MPs to resign by being appointed to the Crown Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds. As this represents an office of profit under the Crown, the MP must resign since they technically cannot remain impartial. Who says our democracy is peculiar!

**N. Nettlebed Common:** this large area of common land outside the south Chilterns village of Nettlebed is one of a network of ancient commons in the Chilterns: areas of land ranging from small strips to extensive greens and woodlands that have been used for grazing and foraging for centuries. They represent an invaluable cultural, environmental, and recreational resource as open access land.

**O. Orchids:** they may be a challenge to grow at home, but orchids are right at home on the Chilterns' unimproved grasslands where their statuesque stems and flowers stand tall during Summer. Over 14 species grow in the region and while in decline, retain a strong foothold in remote reserves such as Warburg Nature Reserve.

**P. Pottery:** the Chilterns' history of pottery, brick and tile making makes itself known today through clay pits, local vernacular architecture and, in Nettlebed, a towering brick kiln. If you look carefully, you'll also find many houses bearing the name of Kiln Cottage or Kiln House.

**Q. Quarries:** chalk and flint have been extracted from the Chilterns for centuries as building materials, to make cement, and as whiting. Although many quarries have ceased to be used, haunting the landscape in the form of pits and depressions, some continue to be operated including the largest chalk quarry in the UK at Kensworth.

**R. Ridgeway:** often called Britain's oldest road, the Chilterns section of the Ridgeway runs from Goring to its end point, Ivinghoe Beacon. This magnificent path has been in use for over 5,000 years and, as expected, passes numerous hillforts, barrows and earthworks. It is now a designated National Trail.

**S. Strip parishes:** the Chilterns play host to one of the UK's highest concentrations of strip parishes: long, rectangular parishes that comprise land at the foot of the escarpment as well as woodland and grazing up the hillside. Their shape and siting furnished ancient communities with access to fertile land as well as summer grazing and timber.

**T. Thames:** Old Father Thames pays more than a passing visit to the Chilterns, running along its southern and western edges and forming the boundary – in magnificent style – between the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs at the Goring Gap. Elegant towns like Henley and Marlow, and remote seeming characterful villages like South Stoke and Medmenham, watch the lazy water flow by as it plays host to boats, swimmers, and the occasional electric blue dart of a kingfisher.

**U. Underground:** Mind the Gap – the Chilterns can, surprisingly, be reached on the London Underground! The Metropolitan line stretches far from the capital out to the pretty market towns of Chesham and Amersham, ferrying commuters and weekend walkers alike to the hills. The line was immortalised in Betjeman's 'Metroland' – the mock Tudor-heavy communities that developed as it extended into the countryside, providing a semi-rural life for London's white-collar workers within easy reach of their desks.

**V. Valleys:** where there are hills there are valleys, and the Chilterns in particular has a series of picturesque parallel valleys including Stonor, Hambleden and Hughenden. Many of these are 'dry' valleys, bearing no trace of the streams that once carved them from the chalk. Today, they bear a growing resemblance to Bordeaux as vineyards are planted to take advantage of the favourable terroir and warming climate.

**W. Windsor chairs:** furniture, and particularly chair, making was arguably the Chilterns' most significant industry. Centered on the town of High Wycombe, it employed thousands of skilled 'bodgers', who made chair legs on pole lathes in their woodland workshops. The industry's most well-known product, still sitting in many homes today, is the classic Windsor Chair.

**X. X marks the spot:**



**Y. Yews:** the Chilterns enjoy the wise company of a number of ancient yew trees, at Nettlebed, Ibstone and Medmenham, amongst other places. Although aging the trees is difficult, there is agreement that some specimens date to at the least the time of the Black Death in 1348.

**Z. ZSL:** and finally, for something very uncommon to the Chilterns! The Zoological Society of London's out of town location, at Whipsnade near Dunstable, has housed animals from around the world since 1931, including elephants, giraffes, chimpanzees, and penguins. It is regarded as the first truly 'public' zoo in Europe and used to feature an exhibit designed by renowned modernist architect Berthold Lubetkin.

# CHALK, CHERRIES & CHAIRS

Connecting the communities of the Central Chilterns with local heritage, wildlife and amazing volunteering opportunities

Have you noticed the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs projects breaking new ground, running events and engaging new audiences across the Chilterns? Although only one year into this five-year National Lottery funded scheme, there's already much to celebrate and get involved with, through the 18 interweaving projects across themes of wildlife, heritage and community.



## OUR FIRST YEAR

The Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Scheme has ambitious targets to engage key audiences with the heritage and wildlife of the Chilterns and we are pleased to say this is going well! Despite Covid-19 and lockdown, we were able to work with our delivery partners, local artists and our wider network to bring a variety of free workshops and training sessions, colouring sheets and volunteering opportunities online during this time, for everyone to access safely from home. Although we missed getting out on site, many of our citizen scientists were still able to continue their vital work while social distancing and gathered key data about the state of nature in the Chilterns during the spring/summer of 2020.

During lockdown, we also worked on several initiatives that were not part of the original project plan, including new signage for the Chilterns countryside and a series of farmer cluster videos. In 2021, we hope to offer an extended series of videos about local crafts and heritage research, a lecture series with expert speakers and much more.

## WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

### Landscape Connections

We set ourselves the ambitious target of working with 50 landowners over this five-year scheme, but we've already worked with 58! Our farmers have been creating new habitats and conserving existing ones – they are passionate about protecting local wildlife. That's why we worked with them to deliver nine tonnes of supplementary feed in the winter of 2019-2020 to support wild birds on their land, dedicated over 2km of farmland to new field margins (which support a variety of local species) and recently created new signage to inform walkers about the unique habitats located in the Central Chilterns.

### Woodlanders Lives' and Landscapes

This project has really hit the ground running, recruiting over 20 volunteers who are busy at work revealing long-lost stories of the Chilterns and the people who lived and worked in the landscape. Several of the stories have been published as blogs on the project's website and been featured in the local press. What's coming next? A series of heritage craft videos and traditional skills workshops, to give people a chance to experience lace making, straw plaiting, scything and more.



New signage created for our farmer cluster members, by artist Livi Gosling

## A Chilterns Celebration



Children from Crownhouse school explore a new heritage trail on Wycombe Rye

Despite lockdown and having to revise the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs festival in 2020, the team were determined to bring a range of smaller scale in-person and online events to life. With an aim to celebrate what makes the Chilterns a special and unique place to live, the schedule of events for 2020 included guided walks, heritage workshops, a conference celebrating citizen science, with a keynote speech by Chris Packham, family-friendly events, conservation skills workshops and much more. This annual festival hopes to grow year on year, and will involve even more local community groups, artists and businesses in 2021.

Learn more at [www.chilternsaonb.org/ccc-fest](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/ccc-fest)

## Become a Chilterns Champion

Want to gain new skills, meet new people and explore this amazing region? Become a Chilterns Champion and volunteer with us on one of our 18 projects! You could become a sonic map superstar, a nature champion, a citizen scientist, a heritage researcher and so much more through this scheme. There are plenty of training opportunities and our aim is to empower local volunteers and community groups to protect, enhance and conserve the heritage, wildlife and landscape of the Chilterns.



We welcome volunteers from all ages and backgrounds and have been proud to offer several young students a chance to become our photographer, videographer, social media guru or graphic designer in our first year.

Learn more and get involved at [www.chilternsaonb.org/chilterns-champions](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/chilterns-champions)

## Enjoying the Fruits of our Labour... Donkey Lane Community Orchard, part of the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Scheme

The fruit trees on this triangular patch of land on the outskirts of Chinnor village once belonged to the cottages that stood there in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "Greening Chinnor" began work in early 2019 to clear the site, remove the accumulated rubble and restore the orchard. Initially the team believed there was just a single Chinnor plum tree in the site, the only one known still to exist. Clearing work has revealed two further specimens. The orchard has already hosted a "blossom day" and the hope is to hold an apple festival later in the year.



<https://greeningchinnor.blogspot.com/>



# WATLINGTON CLIMATE ACTION GROUP

## THINKING GLOBAL, ACTING LOCAL

Across the Chilterns, people are taking positive action at a local level to help tackle the global challenge of climate change. Through individual or collective effort, they are raising awareness of the risks associated with a warming world and helping their communities become more resilient.



Communities

Many people tackle climate change in a professional capacity, but many others are volunteers – enthusiastically dedicating their spare time to activities that not only protect and enhance the green spaces in their neighbourhood but also help reduce carbon in the atmosphere.

To get a flavour of what can be achieved through local voluntary action, Outstanding Chilterns Magazine has been talking to Nicola Schafer of the Watlington Climate Action Group (WCAG), part of the wider Community Action Groups network in Oxfordshire.

Nicola set up WCAG with friend and neighbour Kate Brown in early 2019 to address the Climate Emergency through community initiatives and by supporting individual actions. Since then, this community-based voluntary organisation has gone from strength to strength.

The WCAG vision is certainly inspiring. The group is seeking nothing less than to ensure that Watlington becomes climate neutral over the next decade, in line with South Oxfordshire District Council's aim

for a "Carbon neutral district" by 2030.

Although WCAG is still quite young and finding its feet to some extent, it has an ambitious activity programme and there are already more than a dozen volunteers in the core team. These volunteers bring with them a range of complementary



skills – something that is vital for the successful development of any community organisation.

As you might expect, there are a number of environmental specialists in the core team but there are also people who are active in other fields too – for example IT and accountancy. Nicola herself is an experienced marketer who is now a professional photographer and videographer. Her lovely images of the Watlington area adorn the group's professional-looking website [www.watlingtonclimateaction.org.uk](http://www.watlingtonclimateaction.org.uk)

Several of the volunteers in the core team are artists, and "Art" is a theme in WCAG's Nature Festival 2020, along with "Nature", "Local Food and Drink" and "Sport and Health". The festival is a natural progression from last year's Eco Fair run by Icknield Community College and also a direct response to the Covid-19 situation which has heightened people's awareness and appreciation of the natural world around them. A host of activities and experiences are planned for the autumn (subject to Covid-19 restrictions) including apple pressing, themed-trail walks, and art and bushcraft workshops.

Although not long established, WCAG has already developed a sizeable following within the local community. Indeed, membership of the WCAG Facebook group is now approaching 250 – not bad at all for a settlement the size of Watlington.

Nicola has been greatly encouraged by Watlington's response to the climate emergency and the willingness of local people to engage in the issue, with different people getting involved in different ways. In this context, she is very keen to highlight the concept of "bite-size volunteering" whereby people are free to choose the extent to which they engage in WCAG-related activities. No one need fear that by volunteering for WCAG they will unwittingly sign-away all their spare time!

As part of its activity programme, WCAG is working in partnership with the Watlington Environment Group and other local groups to develop a "Green Plan". This key exercise started in spring 2020 and has inevitably been slowed by the Covid-19 pandemic. But good progress has been made nevertheless. The plan aims to improve and protect biodiversity in and around Watlington, and manage habitats better for carbon sequestration.

Enhancing and connecting the varied and special habitats around Watlington is seen as vital to the Green Plan's success. The Watlington area lies within the Chiltern AONB and supports a wide range of habitats: chalk grassland with scrub, woodlands, road verges, hedgerows and chalk streams are obvious examples but the list also includes small ponds and gardens. Indeed, given that much of the green space within the town itself comprises gardens, this is where many local people can make their own personal contribution to tackling climate change – by planting for biodiversity, drought resilience and of course carbon sequestration.

WCAG also has plans to tackle "energy poverty" in Watlington where many of the houses are old and therefore difficult to keep warm without using a lot of energy. And the group also has single use plastics in its sights, promoting and supporting the Plastic Free Watlington initiative. So WCAG has plenty of work to be getting on with, all supported of course by the willing efforts of volunteers.

Nicola is very aware that WCAG can't do everything it would like to do all at once, and the group must develop a clear strategy that focuses on what can realistically be achieved without over-stretching its members. She hopes that the group can attract more people who – much like

herself – haven't previously been involved with local committees, community forums and such like.

Nicola is very keen to see the continuation of close cooperation with other local voluntary groups plus environmental bodies such as the Chilterns Conservation Board. Working collaboratively enables WCAG to achieve its objectives much more effectively, engaging people in specific projects whether they are members of WCAG or not.

Nicola recognises the importance of WCAG clearly communicating what it is doing – to maintain momentum and ensure that there is a coordinated approach to tackling the climate emergency. We wish her and her fellow volunteers the very best of luck in their future endeavours.



### GET INVOLVED

WCAG is just one of the many voluntary groups working in the Chilterns AONB to protect and enhance the natural or historic environment. There are volunteering opportunities available for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. Volunteering not only allows you to contribute as an individual to positive collective outcomes, it is also a great way to:

- meet like-minded people
- make new friends
- learn new skills
- increase self-confidence
- improve mental and physical wellbeing
- give something back to society

If you are interested in volunteering, check out CCB's new volunteering hub at: <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/about-chilterns/volunteering> to see what opportunities are available where you live.

Photos: Nicola Schafer

## HYPNOS sows the seed of conservation



Individuals aren't the only ones taking social responsibility seriously. We're seeing more and more businesses taking action, like Award-winning British bed manufacturer and Royal Warrant holder, Hypnos Beds, who donated and planted 200 tree saplings to Castlefield Wood in partnership with Chiltern Rangers, a Buckinghamshire based social enterprise committed to protecting the Chilterns landscape with the community.

As part of its decade-long commitment to supporting the environment and boosting sustainability within the industry, the company's donation is a part of its carbon offsetting programme, to support carbon neutrality. To date, the bedmaker has gifted over 1,500 trees since November 2014, and there are plans to donate even more in the future.

By donating and helping to plant the trees, Hypnos is hoping to encourage other manufacturers to invest in the physical landscapes

surrounding them and take an interest in the importance and upkeep of local biodiversity as part of their community.

Hypnos' commitment to sustainable and ethical manufacturing hasn't gone unnoticed, as it received the prestigious *Queen's Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development* earlier this year.

For more information about Hypnos' commitment to the environment, please visit [www.hypnosbeds.com](http://www.hypnosbeds.com)



# HILLFORT

## DISCOVERY IN THE CHILTERN

BY WENDY MORRISON,  
Project Manager, Beacons of the Past

Hillforts in the Chilterns seem to have a fairly regular distribution, with a few notable gaps. One of the things we had really hoped to discover through the Beacons of the Past project was an undiscovered hillfort. Early on in the project, Ed and I discussed the likelihood of this, and it did seem a remote possibility.

The Chilterns Hills are and have been for some time a highly attractive place for walkers—surely any earthworks not on the maps would be noticed. And the antiquarians who documented so many of our British hillforts surely would not have missed anything so obvious as a hillfort.

Indeed, in our conversations, we decided that the only chance for a 'new' hillfort would be spotting a subtle one that had been mostly ploughed out, and thus had gone unnoticed—but also nearly destroyed. So imagine our delight when one autumnal day, after poring over countless square kilometres of LiDAR visualisations, Ed turned to me in the office and said, 'How do you like this for a hillfort, then?'

First spotted by Ed, an earthwork in the southern Chilterns was then subsequently and completely independently identified as a potential hillfort by several of our amazing Citizen Scientists.

It took some time to get in touch with the landowner, but once we did, they were very helpful. But alas, with lockdown looming, we were unable to conduct a site visit until finally, in early August, Ed and I were able to complete an extensive walkover survey.

The surviving earthwork consists of a bank nine metres wide and an external ditch seven metres wide. Running over 500 metres in perimeter, it would have enclosed an area of about 3 hectares (7.5 acres). Although one can never be certain of the age of a prehistoric earthwork without excavating for dating evidence, visual inspection of the rampart and ditch, paired with its location, dominating views in the landscape, make it very likely to be an Early Iron Age univallate hillfort. (c.800-500 BC)

There is no public access to the site, and the exact location of the hillfort is currently being withheld to protect sensitive archaeology and the landowner's privacy. We are now actively engaged with the landowner to protect and preserve what remains.



Who is that masked man? Our very own Dr Peveler acting as human scale on the eastern rampart of the hillfort



View across the rampart, ditch, and counterscarp of the newly identified hillfort.

The confirmation of a new hillfort in the Chilterns AONB coincides with the Online LiDAR Portal's one-year anniversary, and we can't think of a better way to celebrate. Our Citizen Science LiDAR portal has now been up and running for one year! It was at the time, the first of its kind in terms of making LiDAR data easily accessible for users to view and interpret. Since then just under 3,000 members of the public have registered on the website; 10,000 Citizen Science Records have been created, and our Portal Reviewers have done a sterling job to date, having turned those into over 3,000 records in the Master Database. In total our volunteers have, as of 1 September 2020, spent well over 2,000 hours working on the portals! There's still plenty of work to do though, and features to discover.

Learn more about the project at <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/about-chilterns/beacons-of-the-past.html> and join the fun!

# COMMUNITY

## HUBS ARE HITTING THE RIGHT NOTE

BY MARY TEBJE

Where can you buy milk from Lacey's Family Farm at Bolter End, Sarratt local ale, bread from Darvell's of Chesham, Beechdean ice cream or meat from Kings Farm in Wendover? ... IN SOME OF THE 10 COMMUNITY SHOPS IN THE CHILTERN, THAT'S WHERE!

These valuable community hubs are businesses owned and managed by a large number of people from within a community for the benefit of their community. Run and staffed by unsung heroes, they have really come into their own this year, demonstrating how vital they are for a healthy and connected community, not least of all during the Covid-19 pandemic, something that has tested us all in 2020.

If I had a pound for each time I was told by a local of "not knowing there was an excellent shop nearby selling beautiful local produce, fresh vegetables and amazing baked goods", I'd be a wealthy person!

To find out more about community shops, I spoke to Cara Chapman, vice-chair and accountant for the Ewelme Village Store, located in the beautiful village of Ewelme, 4 km north-east of Wallingford. Cara has been involved since the beginning, some 12 years ago.

She started off by saying what a mixed blessing this year has been; it has meant they have re-engaged with their community, developed new services and found new local suppliers.

Cara is modest talking about the achievement of the team and how they managed to serve their community in so many ways during the Covid-19 crisis. She says they managed to keep the services running, sales of fresh produce rocketed and customer accounts increased from 20 to 150. Between two members of staff, they juggled increased sales demand, taking orders by phone, and managed a new same-day delivery service for the more vulnerable community members. During this time, they struggled, however, to source supplies from the national chains, and that is where many local business stepped in and essential new relationships were formed. Cara tells me their challenge now is to maintain these new customers, encourage word of mouth and widen their appeal.

Another Covid-19 phenomenon is that many locals discovered community (and farm shops), and began shopping for essential supplies during lockdown. For them it was the convenience; shorter driving or walking distance, coupled with the ability of some stores to source scarce items – such as flour – that were in short supply.

**How can community shops build on this silver lining? How can they attract new customers and new Chilterns suppliers?**

Keep engaging with their local and wider community, reminding us they are there.

They are a key part of our visitor offer and welcome, staffed by locals keen to share their tips and Chilterns knowledge.

Some stores are working with the Chilterns Tourism Network to build awareness amongst visitors to the Chilterns, to tell them about the local services they can enjoy when they visit.

By working with the other regional community shops to secure local suppliers, negotiate competitive prices and keep up to date with new product lines and seasonal foods.

Of course we can all support them, shop there, have our small business meetings there, buy gifts and even volunteer.

### KEY FACTS

According to the Plunkett Foundation, there were 363 community shops trading in the UK in 2019. Between them they employ 160 full-time and 860 part-time staff with on average 20 volunteers per shop. The long term survival rate of community shops is 94%.

Many community shops have a tea-room attached, serving freshly baked goods with a pot of tea or ice cream. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, not all of them have re-opened fully, some offer a take-away only service. Please check their websites or Facebook pages before you head out.



# SHOULD THE CHILTERN BECOME A NATIONAL PARK?

Interview with Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive of the Chilterns Conservation Board

In September 2019, an independent Government review proposed big changes to the way protected landscapes – including the Chilterns – are managed in future. One year on, Outstanding Chilterns Magazine spoke with the Chilterns Conservation Board's Chief Executive to get her personal perspective on the Review's recommendations.

Elaine became Chief Executive of the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) in July 2019. An experienced leader in the environment sector who has lived in the Chilterns for over 20 years, she was previously Director at Wildlife and Countryside Link and before that Chief Executive of The Badger Trust. Elaine wasn't entirely new to the CCB, having served as a Defra-appointed Board Member since the summer of 2018.

Elaine took up the CEO role two months before the publication of the Government's independent Landscapes Review report. Chaired by journalist Julian Glover, the expert review team took a detailed look at the challenges and opportunities facing England's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – seventy years after the Designated Landscapes system was first established in 1949.

Elaine's love of the outdoors and great enthusiasm for partnership working come across clearly in conversation, as does her determination to ensure that CCB has the support and resources it needs to properly fulfil its mission to conserve and enhance the Chilterns AONB.



**OCM: What do you see as the major challenges facing the Chilterns over the next 25 years and how is the CCB currently positioned to respond to these?**

**EK:** New housing and infrastructure development within and close to the Chilterns is already having a very significant impact. It's not just the development itself but also the knock-on effects: more traffic, noise, light pollution, demand for water, and so on. And of course the adverse effects of climate change must be factored in too. We will need to work even harder to preserve the unique character of the Chilterns. As things stand, the CCB works hard to influence planning decisions, but we are not statutory consultees, so it can be difficult to have influence for example to reduce the impacts of major infrastructure projects such as HS2 and the expansion of Heathrow and Luton airports.

**OCM: Is the Landscapes Review a genuine 'game-changer'?**

**EK:** Yes, definitely. It's a breath of fresh air, very bold in its recommendations, going further than perhaps many of us dared hope. I really welcome the proposals because, if adopted, they would greatly assist us in being able to properly meet our statutory duty to conserve and enhance the Chilterns. For example, the proposal for a single statutory Local Plan for the Chilterns would help to ensure the cumulative effect of new development is taken into account in planning

decisions. The Review also provides the perfect platform for a green recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring that the Chilterns are accessible and welcoming to everyone, with thriving businesses and resilient communities.

**OCM: From a Chilterns viewpoint, the most eye-catching recommendation in the Review is that the Chilterns AONB should become a National Park. Do you support that notion and if so, why?**

**EK:** Yes, absolutely. National Park status would undoubtedly give greater protection to this unique and very special landscape. It would also help to underline the importance of the Chilterns as a landscape with huge opportunities for recreation and leisure. Covid-19 has shown how the nation needs connection with nature and the great outdoors, and we know it brings benefits to people's health and well-being. In that context it's worth remembering that the Chilterns would be the only National Park directly accessible from Central London by tube!

**OCM: What would you say to local people who may have concerns that National Park status could have some adverse effects on their current way of life or livelihood?**

**EK:** I do understand there will be concerns, and any changes to our designation will involve extensive consultation. I genuinely believe the positives far outweigh the negatives. Obviously

hosting more visitors in the landscape will require some careful management to limit disturbance and damage, particularly in the most sensitive areas. But the additional income for local businesses – breweries, vineyards, farm shops, cafes and restaurants, B&Bs, campsites, cycle hirers and so on – would be very significant. Being a National Park would also give us a statutory duty to support the provision of recreational opportunities, and of course we would receive additional resources to be able to do that.

**"National Park status would undoubtedly give greater protection to this unique and very special landscape and also help to underline the importance of the Chilterns for recreation and leisure, which Covid-19 has shown brings benefits to people's health and well-being"**

I know some people are concerned at how we would deal with planning, but the rules for managing development in National Parks are actually the same as in AONBs. The important difference is that a single planning authority would be created for the National Park, leading to a consistent and strategic approach on planning for the whole Chilterns area. And as a National Park Authority, we'd still work closely with the county, district and unitary councils that provide other services across the Chilterns.

**OCM: How are you working with Government to implement the Review's recommendations?**

**EK:** We are expecting the Government to respond to the Review by the end of this year. I'm part of a Defra group, involving AONBs, National Parks, and Natural England, that meets regularly to advise and share ideas with Defra. We're also contributing to the conversation with Government through our parent body, the National Association of AONBs. Defra's Landscapes Team also visited us in March, which was a great opportunity to showcase the work we do and discuss our priorities and ambitions for the future.

**OCM: Is there a 'Plan B' if NP status isn't granted?**

**EK:** The Review recommended that all AONBs be given additional resources, enhanced planning powers, and new purposes to address the key issues highlighted in the Review. However, it singled out three of the larger AONBs: the Chilterns, Cotswolds and Dorset AONBs as strong candidates for being National Parks. It also made clear that National Park status offers the best way to protect the Chilterns and maximise opportunities for people to access and enjoy the Chilterns. Whether a National Park or not, a 'Plan B' has to include the better funding and tools that Julian Glover recommends to enable us to do more for nature, natural beauty and for the people that live in, work in and visit this special landscape.

**OCM: How optimistic are you that the Chilterns will remain a special place in future?**

**EK:** Very optimistic! A huge number of people care about the Chilterns and are working very hard to ensure that its unique character is preserved. But we do need the extra help highlighted in the Landscapes Review to give this collective effort the best chance of future success.

**OCM: And finally, is there a particular place you would advise someone who is unfamiliar with the Chilterns to visit to get a true sense of what makes the area so special?**

**EK:** That's a tough question – there are so many places to choose from! I guess a good starting point might be Ivinghoe Beacon, offering that wonderful view of the escarpment rising dramatically from the Vale of Aylesbury. And it's culturally significant too – it has an Iron Age hillfort, and of course it's the start point for both the Icknield Way and the Ridgeway National Trail, thought to be Britain's oldest road.

I would also suggest that people visit one of our nine chalk streams, as these are one of the reasons why the Chilterns is a protected landscape. Chalk streams are home to a huge variety of plants and animals but are globally threatened – and we have 85% of them in the UK! The Chess Valley Walk is one of our most popular, and the 10 mile circular route gives a really good sense of what's special about our chalk streams and the Chilterns landscape. You can get to it by train and tube from London too.

**OCM: Thanks for chatting with us.**

**EK:** You're very welcome!

# A SPOTLIGHT ON GORING & STREATLEY

BY MARY TEBJE

Like twins, the villages of Goring and Streatley face off across the River Thames, but one outdid the other when William Turner painted Goring Mill and church. The Chilterns is not short of pretty villages surrounded by beautiful undulating countryside. Add far-reaching views and the Goring Gap – a stone’s throw from Reading – must rank near the top.



I recommend starting your visit from the National Trust car park at Lardon Chase, above Streatley. The views are glorious, the walk down into Streatley easy, although steep. It’s from up here that you can enjoy the dramatic backdrop of two villages clustered around the Goring lock and weir, the playing fields, leisure boats and island; to then cross over the Thames and wander through Goring village on the other shore and into the patchwork of the Chiltern Hills beyond. I can see as far as Pangbourne to the north east and know that the views from Hartslock reserve on the hillside opposite, looking back to the Gap are just as dramatic.

## NATURALLY OUTSTANDING

The villages of Goring and Streatley have a long and sweeping history (at least 10,000 years), nestled in the gap that the Thames has carved between two impressive chalk hillsides. They sit right in the centre of two designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: to the south west, the north Wessex Downs in Berkshire, to the north east, the Chilterns in Oxfordshire.

Not always good neighbours, their fortunes have ebbed and flowed. Streatley was once the larger and more important village because it was on the turnpike road to Reading. The Bull Inn at the top of the high street was a 15th century coaching inn and I expect a welcome sight on the dusty road. With the arrival of the railway in 1840, Goring reasserted itself having more usable land for the many new homes. The geography has, however, contained much of the growth.

Along the river, you get a real sense of space, somewhere to pause, listen and enjoy this special place. There are plenty of eateries to tempt you to do just that; the Bull Inn, the Swan at Streatley, Pierrepoints Cafe, the Miller of Mansfield and Catherine Wheel pub in Goring. Wandering down the high street, it is obvious that many businesses have a long association with the area.



Headley Thorne

## NATIONAL TREASURES AND TRAILS

The weirs still control the level of water for navigation, water supply, and land drainage. It’s not hard to imagine the bustle of boats, traders, soldiers and drovers, who used the three ancient trade routes that span southern England from Dorset to East Anglia. Converging too at this lovely spot, are the Thames Path National Trail, Ridgeway National Trail. Icknield Way and new King Alfred’s Way long distance cycling route, all could easily tempt you off the road and onto the trail.

## I'M YOUR MAN!

The village is not short of famous residents and visitors. At the end of Ferry Lane is the original river crossing and Ferry house, where Oscar Wilde stayed during the summer of 1893 and began work on An Ideal Husband. Fans of George Michael regularly visit the village where he lived in his riverside cottage for over 17 years.

As you walk back up the hill, make sure to look back and enjoy the views that will now feel more familiar, having explored and experienced the best of both villages.

Plan your visit: <http://www.visitgoringandstreatley.co.uk> to download the heritage trail and ensure the places you intend to visit are open, and what social distancing measures are in place.

For information on the wider Chilterns area, accommodation, places to eat and drink, visit [www.visitchilterns.co.uk](http://www.visitchilterns.co.uk)

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# THE CHILTERNs

## A FOUR SEASON DESTINATION

BY ANNETTE VENTERS AND MARY TEBJE

The seasonal changes in the Chilterns bring their own delights and variety for those exploring the landscape.



As the nights start to draw in and the beech woodlands turn to molten gold, you might expect life in the Chilterns to start slowing down. But there is no hibernation for the pubs, farm and community shops, visitor attractions, outdoor markets and communities in the Chilterns. The Chilterns is a four-season destination, with so much on offer throughout the year. Here we share our winter favourites.

Pubs are part and parcel of our Chilterns experience; situated in beautiful locations with large gardens, next to commons, in the woods or perched on a hillside with sweeping views. Family-friendly and increasingly dog-friendly, a walk is never really complete without somewhere warm to refresh and enjoy a hearty meal.

We have published a set of social distance-friendly walks on the website, featuring some wonderful country pubs to enjoy at the end of the walk. Le De Spencer Arms on Downley

Common, the Red Lion on Peppard Common, the Full Moon at Cholesbury and the Cock and Rabbit on Lee Common are amongst the pubs on our routes offering a warm welcome and good food.

If you fancy a night under the stars with a touch of luxury, then glamping is the way to go. Chadwell Hill Farm just outside Princes Risborough offers self-catering in their shepherds hut or glamping bell tents. With wood burning stoves in situ, you will be super-snug. Wildlife abounds and it is a great base for exploring the local area. In nearby Wendover the Chiltern Yurt Retreat is a woodland oasis just a few minutes walk from the High Street. Choose from the Hazel Tree Cabin or Turkoman yurt. There are walks and rides from the doorstep or you can hole up and enjoy watching the kingfishers, ducks and birdlife down by the stream which brings chalk-laden water down from the Chiltern Hills.

There's a warm welcome from Ted at Cholsey Farm Riding, where you can park your box or trailer securely, and discuss which of the 15 circular riding routes will be suitable for you and your horse. Stay in the Old Piggery accommodation or, in the summer, camp in the field beside your steed.

Turville Studios is a collection of individual units designed specifically with the artist in mind. Built on the site of an old barn in Turville village, it offers the artists fantastic views and a tranquil location conducive to producing work including paintings, photography and ceramics amongst others and is situated opposite the Bull & Butcher pub garden.

Spending time in the woods is good for the soul; if it involves rustling up tasty meals on a campfire whilst learning new skills then all the better! David Willis is a teacher of Bushcraft and Wilderness Living Skills in the Chilterns. He offers a series of day courses including whittling spoons, foraging for edibles and outdoor cooking – all accompanied with mugs of hot tea and good old yarn!



**WINTER WILDLIFE:** visit Whipsnade Zoo for a safe outdoor experience where you can see amazing animals and reconnect with nature.

Kew Little Pigs in Amersham is a must for pig lovers. They breed miniature pigs and you can book 'Pet and Play' and experiences enabling you to get inside the petting pens, groom and interact with the pigs. Odds Park Farm near Beaconsfield is another popular all-year day out with the family.



Great Missenden will be forever associated with the author Roald Dahl, who drew on his surroundings in the Chilterns for many features of his characters and their stories.

His final resting place is beside the church of Saints Peter and Paul. Now children draw their inspiration from creative activities at the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre. You can download two local walks from the museum's website that tour the places where Dahl took his inspiration.



Go Ape at Wendover Woods has plenty of thrills at their tree-top adventure with intricate crossings, wobbly bridges and zip wire rides, all designed with the younger family in mind. There is a challenging tree-top challenge too with high rope crossings and a cracking 85-metre zip wire finale!



If the weather is really bad, curl up with a copy of The Country of Larks – and immerse yourself (without getting wet!) in a walk across the Chiltern Hills from High Wycombe to Tring in the footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Please check websites or Facebook pages before you head out to visit any businesses or place where other people could be. Services are subject to change. To comply with Covid-19 regulations please don't forget to take your mask and hand sanitiser, take all litter home and be considerate of others.

# ASH DIEBACK IN THE CHILTERN

BY JOHN MORRIS

Healthy ash leaves and seeds (keys)

Ash is the second most common woodland tree in the Chilterns AONB after beech. It is probably the commonest tree outside woods and is found growing in many hedges and gardens. Sadly many of these ash are now being affected by a fungal disease known as ash dieback, caused by *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (formerly known as *Chalara*). Its fungal spores are spread in the air. The impact of this disease has become a lot more noticeable locally in the last couple of years.

Ash is probably the commonest young tree in Chiltern woods. It has regenerated well from its wind dispersed seeds in clearings after the 1987 and 1990 storms and through planting, so its loss is even more important. Ash has been favoured because it is fast growing and useful for firewood and timber. It is rarely damaged by bark stripping by grey squirrels, unlike most other native broadleaved

trees, so had an advantage. Unfortunately many of these young trees, saplings and pole stage trees, are being killed by Ash dieback. It seems to take longer to affect mature trees and not all of them will necessarily die. It is hoped that a proportion of these ash trees will be tolerant. Ash are prolific seeders, producing bunches of seeds known as keys, so it is possible that ash populations could recover, but this may take many years.

Ash dieback was first identified as a disease in England in 2012, but is now thought to have been in the east of the country since about 2006. It originated in Eastern Europe and has gradually spread west. Many millions of ash are affected. Safety is the key concern with this tree disease. Dead branches in the canopy can become brittle and fall, the trees lose strength and split, they may be affected by other fungi, such as honey fungus, causing the roots and base of the trees to decay so they collapse. Risk assessment is needed and trees close to buildings, roads, overhead wires and other infrastructure may well have to be felled on safety grounds. Those felling trees will be at greatest risk.

If you need to fell live ash trees you may require a felling licence from the Forestry Commission. You should also check to see if you need permission from the local council if the trees are in a Conservation Area or covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Tree surgery is thought to have little benefit in the long run for trees suffering from ash dieback. Ash coppice regrowth is frequently killed quickly by this disease, as there are more spores close to the ground – they are produced from small toadstools on the leaf stalks that fell the previous autumn. A worst case is that we might lose 90% of our ash over the next ten years or so. However some ash may prove resistant or tolerant to this disease, so it is important to retain healthy ash as a seed source for the future, which will aid their recovery in woods.

Woodland owners with larger areas suffering from dieback can apply for a Plant Health Grant to replant under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The rapidly changing climate and impact of other pests and diseases on other species of trees adds to the problem. Deer browsing is a concern for natural regeneration, there are now many more deer in

the Chilterns than there were just 20 or so years ago. There is hope, but the woods and wider landscape are unlikely to be the same in future.

What is needed now is for alternative trees to ash, such as small leaved lime, English oak, field maple, walnut and wild cherry, (depending on soil conditions) to be planted or nurtured in woods and hedges, starting this winter.

With almost 24% woodland cover, the Chilterns AONB is well above the national average. However, due to the increase in threats to our trees and woodlands – pests and diseases, including Ash Dieback, and the impacts of climate change – the Chilterns Conservation Board is exploring opportunities to expand our woodland cover through new planting schemes and natural regeneration, alongside encouraging effective management of our existing woodlands. Key to improving the resilience of trees and woodlands in the Chilterns will be to ensure diversity of tree age, height and species, and to identify funding mechanisms to help woodland owners and communities within the AONB manage and expand their woodland through working with experienced consultants like John.



Classic sign of dieback, brown twigs on a sapling



Ash dieback thinning the canopy of the central tree, showing lots of dead twigs

For more information on Ash dieback please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-ash-trees-affected-by-ash-dieback-operations-note-46a>

Managing ash dieback case studies 2019 by the Royal Forestry Society:

<https://rfs.org.uk/media/598372/rfs-managing-ash-dieback-case-studies-2019.pdf>

Common Sense risk management of trees by National Tree Safety Group:

<http://ntsgroup.org.uk/>

Felling licences – from the Forestry Commission:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tree-felling-getting-permission>

John Morris worked for the Chiltern Woodlands Project until it closed in March 2020. He is now working part time for the Small Woods Association and as a self employed woodland consultant.

Contact:  
email [johnkmorris0@gmail.com](mailto:johnkmorris0@gmail.com)

All photos copyright  
John Morris

# CHILTERN'S YOUNG EXPLORERS

BY HELEN VALVONA



## BEES ARE IN DANGER, BUT YOU CAN HELP THEM!



### HOW CAN I HELP?

Did you know that bees are in danger and if we don't save them, 75% of crops worldwide would not be pollinated? If you've been learning about MRS GREN/MRS NERG at school you'll know that reproduction is one of the key parts of any living thing's lifecycle – and bee pollination enables this to happen for many of our flowers and crops. Can you imagine a world without strawberries? That could be a reality if we don't act now. Sadly more than ten species of bees have become extinct in the last 120 years and many more are on the danger list. A combination of climate change and not having anywhere to feed and live are causing the problem.

There are many "easy-beesy" things we can all do to help. Planting a pot of bee-friendly flowers on a patio or balcony can help them find food and shelter as well as brightening up your house or garden. If you have a bit more space you could plant a flower garden and some fruit or vegetables to provide a food source – which have the added bonus of being healthy for you and delicious! Don't forget that bees need water too – a pond or bird bath will help. Ask your parents for some ideas or your local garden centre will be able to help.

The best thing about bees is Pooh Bear's favourite snack – there are many Chilterns-based honey producers so you don't have to travel far to find something sweet to spread on your toast...yum! Locally produced honey has even been shown to help those suffering from hayfever.



## MAKE YOUR OWN BEE HOTEL

You may have made a bee/bug hotel already – it was a favourite activity during lockdown. If not, don't panic, it's never too late. You may be lucky enough to get a visit from solitary mason, leafcutter or yellow-faced bees, who like to nest in hollow stems or banks of earth. Here's how to make a small bee hotel.

### What you'll need

Making a bee hotel is really simple! All you need is a large empty plastic bottle with the ends cut off and some nesting materials – think dried grass, twigs, bamboo or hollow plant stems in a variety of diameters (for different sized bees).

**Make sure you ask an adult to help you with any cutting that's needed. You could even use rolled up pieces of craft paper.**

You'll also need a craft or Stanley knife (and an adult to supervise), sandpaper, secateurs and garden string or twine and some modelling clay or wax if you have completely hollow canes.

### Grand design

If you haven't already, with the help of an adult, cut off the narrow end of the plastic bottle and sand the edges so there are no sharp bits. Also sand down any sharp edges on your bamboo canes or plant stems so the bees don't hurt themselves.

Pack some dark coloured tissue paper into the bottom of the bottle so any hatchlings don't try and come out that way come springtime and get stuck. Alternatively you could cut both ends off the bottle.

Bees like to go a long way inside the stems so make sure they're long enough – 10-15cm should do it, but the ends must be sheltered from the rain by making them shorter than the bottle.

Thread a couple of lengths of twine around the bottle, so you can hang up the finished hotel.

Pack in more hollow stems, bamboo, twigs and reeds (or paper rolls) until the hotel is tightly packed and secure.

### Location, location, location!

Your bee hotel needs to be warm and dry so south facing is best, at least a metre off the ground so it's out of reach of curious animals like foxes/household pets.

Make sure it's firmly tied down to a wall or fence and can't blow about in the wind. Any bees that nest in your hotel will block up the ends of the holes with mud to protect the eggs.

From October to February, you need to protect the hotel by putting it somewhere dry, like a shed. Bring it outside again in March.

Have a look after a few weeks to see if anything has hatched – you'll see that the mud seals have been broken.

You'll be providing a valuable habitat for many species, not just bees, and helping to ensure the continued biodiversity of the Chilterns AONB and bee-yond.

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Wonderful local artist Livi Gosling has created this super "spot the difference" for us. There are 10 DIFFERENCES between these two Chilterns-inspired pictures – can you find them all?



## LOOK TO THE SKIES

If you can persuade mum or dad to let you stay up a bit late, why not try a spot of star/planet gazing? Tell them it's educational and that might help! You don't need much kit, although a good pair of binoculars can help, plus a star map, warm clothes and a blanket. Allow half an hour for your eyes to adjust to the dark before you try looking.

There are plenty of apps that can help you too – we love SkyView Lite but there are many others available. Have a look online for star charts – and the lovely folks at Chilterns Space and Astronomy Alerts (search for them on Facebook with a parent's permission) are very helpful at telling you what to look out for both in the Chilterns and globally.

The moon is the most obvious starting point, although bright moonlight will make it harder to see other stars so you may have to try a different night. If you have binoculars try and see if you can spot any of the huge craters (the diameter of one is the same as the distance from London to Athens!) or shadows from the enormous mountain ranges.

You should be able to see up to five planets – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn – with the naked eye on evenings and early mornings throughout the year. Jupiter, the brightest, is creamy-white; Saturn is golden-yellow; and Mars is a faint orange-red because of the rust-filled dust covering its surface.

There's a whole universe out there, ready to be explored with relative ease!

So before the weather turns really wintry, why not grab a blanket and head to a clear spot (your back garden is absolutely fine if you have one) and educate your parents about the night sky with the help of a little technology!

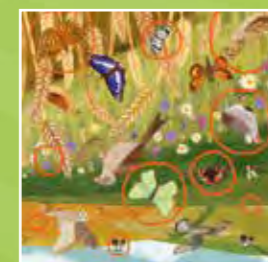
You can find more information online, especially: <https://www.amnh.org/explore/ology/astronomy/a-kid-s-guide-to-stargazing> and <https://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-care-about/nature-and-landscapes/dark-skies/>

## Chilterns Minibeasts Wordsearch

- Beetle
- Butterfly
- Caterpillar
- Earwig
- Gloworm
- Millipede
- Mite
- Moth
- Snail
- Spider
- Wasp
- Woodlouse

E	S	M	U	P	A	Z	B	B	Z
A	Y	I	M	H	C	Q	E	U	R
R	Y	L	O	H	A	R	E	T	M
W	A	L	T	A	T	E	T	T	R
I	Z	I	H	P	E	D	L	E	O
G	C	P	X	X	R	I	E	R	W
Y	R	E	K	G	P	P	Z	F	O
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T	W	O	O	D	L	O	U	S	E
E	I	J	S	N	A	I	L	P	H
I	P	S	A	W	R	Q	M	D	Y

## Answers



A	C	H	O	S	E	S	A	I	
H	E	I	V	B	S	C	I	E	
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C	E	Z	E	W	D	A	X	E	A
M	E	L	I	V	K	X	A	O	D
M	E	L	I	V	K	X	A	O	D
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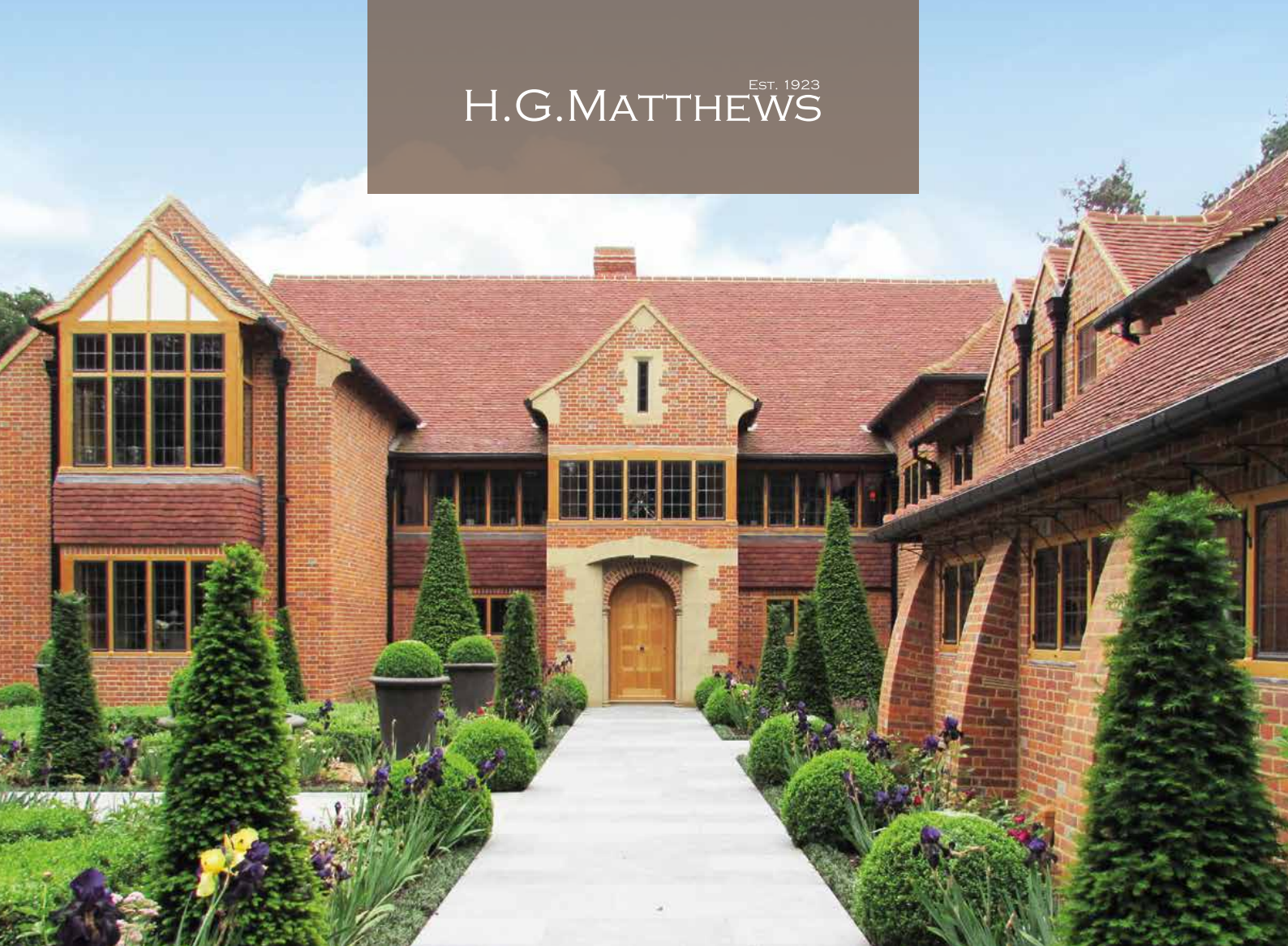
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