



# Chilterns National Landscape

## The Chilterns Conservation Board

### Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members

May 2025

#### 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide information for new and prospective Board Members of the Conservation Board for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – largely referred to as the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) – and for all those bodies appointing or electing members to the Board.

The Chilterns Conservation Board was created in 2004 by Parliamentary Order to manage the Chilterns National Landscape, then known as the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Board Members are appointed to the CCB's Board in three ways:

1. Appointments made by the **Defra Secretary of State** (eight members)
2. Appointments of local authority Councillors made by the **local authority** (13 members)
3. Appointments made through the election to the Board of **Parish Councillors** (six members)

Section 6.0 below provides more detail on the composition of the Board and the process by which Members are appointed.

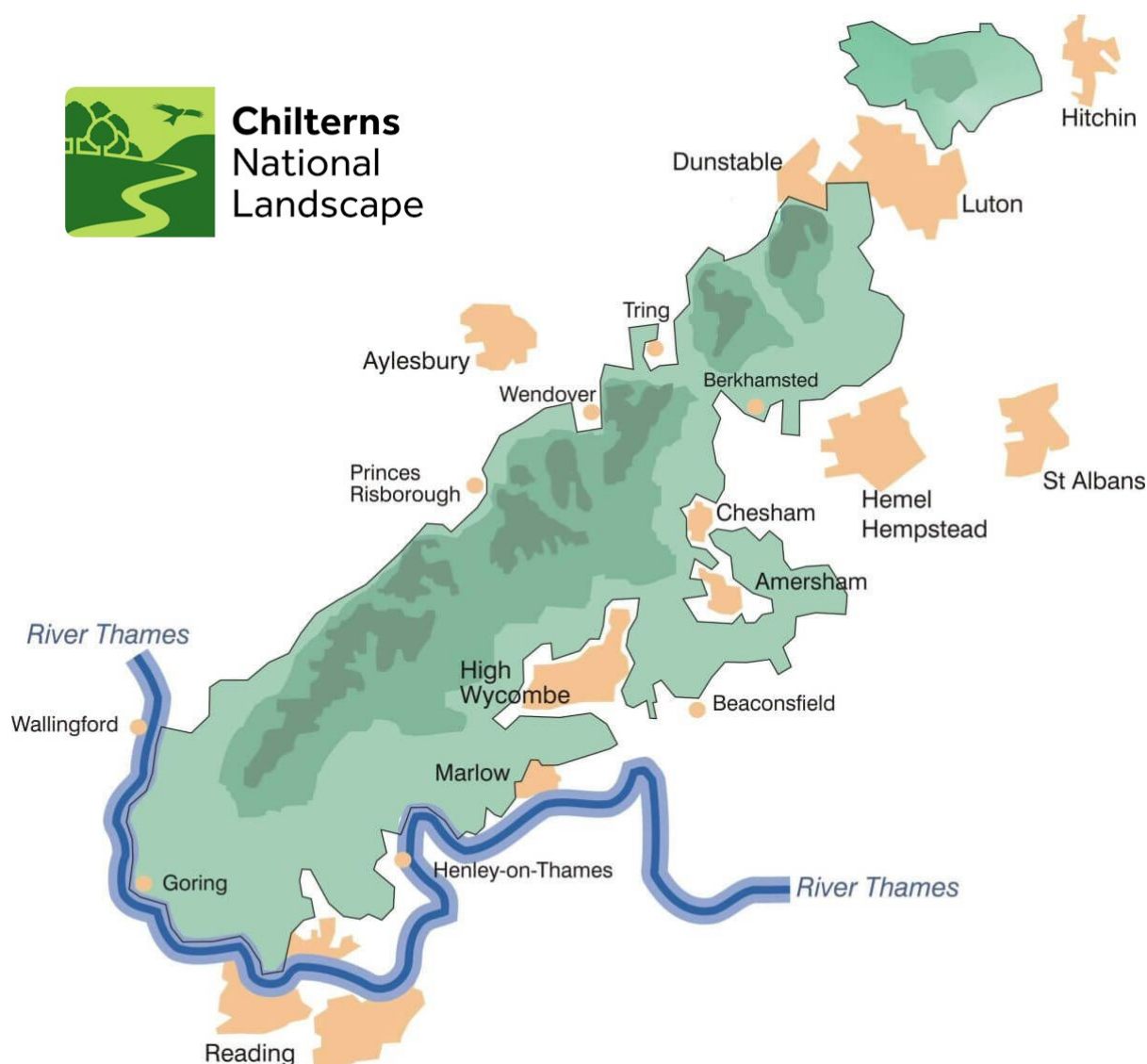
This document also sets out the reason for the CCB being established, the CCB's statutory purposes, the roles and responsibilities of Members appointed to the Board, the level of commitment required and the potential benefits of being a Board Member.

#### 2.0 What is the Chilterns National Landscape?

The Chilterns National Landscape covers over 838km<sup>2</sup> (324 square miles) across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire. It was originally designated as an AONB in 1965 and subsequently extended slightly in 1990. It is one of 34 National Landscapes in England, which are designated on the basis that their area is of such outstanding natural beauty that steps should be taken to conserve and enhance that natural beauty. In relation to natural beauty, the criteria for designation are the same as for England's 10 National Parks (including the Broads).



## Chilterns National Landscape



*Map of the Chilterns National Landscape*

National Landscapes are also known as ‘Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ (AONB). In November 2023, all AONBs were renamed National Landscapes, to make clear their national significance, though AONB remains the legal definition and term used in most areas of legislation, policy and guidance.

AONBs are designated by the government, on the recommendation of Natural England, under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. Prior to 2000, designation was under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

### **3.0 How are National Landscapes managed?**

The primary purpose of designating all National Landscapes is to conserve and enhance their natural beauty. Achieving this purpose requires concerted effort from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. To facilitate this, all public bodies and all individuals holding public office undertaking functions that might affect land in a National Landscape must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area. This derives from section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended by section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) and is known as “the section 85 (or s.85) duty”.

Achieving the primary purpose is coordinated through a statutory Management Plan (see section 5.0 below), and led by a local authority, group of local authorities, or a Conservation Board.

- Most National Landscapes are managed by a single local authority or a joint committee or similar arrangement between authorities, and usually supported by a National Landscape Partnership including a range of relevant local stakeholders.
- The Chilterns and Cotswolds National Landscapes are each administered by a Conservation Board.

Both Conservation Boards were created in 2004 following the introduction of The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which enabled local authorities to request that Parliament establish a Conservation Board in cases where AONBs cross several administrative boundaries.

The Chilterns Conservation Board is managed by a staff team of 34 people, and is based in offices in Chinnor, Oxfordshire.

#### 4.0 The role of the Chilterns Conservation Board

At the request of the four County Councils whose administrative boundaries included the designated area (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire), a joint body - the Chilterns Standing Conference - was created in 1967 to ensure a consistent approach to the adoption and review of policies relating to the conservation and enhancement of what was then the AONB.

The local authorities subsequently sought to create an independent, legally constituted body and, in July 2004, the **Chilterns Conservation Board** was established by **Parliamentary Order**. The Conservation Board was tasked with delivering statutory purposes and duties to help conserve and enhance the Chilterns AONB and, of particular importance, was the transfer of the statutory duty to prepare and review a Management Plan from the local authorities to the Conservation Board.

In 2024 AONBs were rebranded as National Landscapes, but the role of the Conservation Board and the purpose of the designation remains unchanged.

In summary, the CCB's statutory purposes, under s.87 of the CRoW Act, are as follows:

- a) *The CCB's key responsibility is to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Chilterns, i.e. the purpose of the designation.*
- b) *In addition, where doing so would not conflict with that key responsibility, the CCB will:*
  - *Promote the understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns' special qualities.*
  - *Seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities by working with local authorities and other relevant organisations.*
  - *Consider the needs of agriculture, forestry, and the local economy.*
  - *Ensure water resources, both surface and underground, are protected from pollution, especially in coordination with the Environment Agency and water companies.*

The CCB now serves nine local authorities: Buckinghamshire Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Dacorum Borough Council, Luton Borough Council, North Hertfordshire Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Three Rivers District Council.

In the two-tier areas of Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire, the county council areas overlap with district/borough council areas. Each local authority appoints one member to the Board. However, Buckinghamshire Council has retained its appointment of five members since it became unitary, reflecting the significant proportion of the AONB covered by that authority.

Working in partnership with our Local Authorities is of mutual benefit and is crucial to delivering the CCB's statutory obligations for this special landscape. Having been established at the request of our Local Authorities, the CCB's statutory purposes mean that we deliver many of their key priorities, such as restoring nature, supporting sustainable agriculture, reducing flood risks, creating more inclusive communities, improving people's health and wellbeing, preserving our cultural heritage and supporting tourism and the local economy.

One of the benefits of the CCB is to provide a space in which to develop areas of expertise on environmental matters that cross administrative boundaries. A key example of this is hosting the team that protects and enhances the Chilterns' nine globally rare and threatened chalk streams - integral features of the Chilterns and much valued by local communities.

#### **4.1 How does the CCB operate?**

The CCB operates in the context of the primary legislation (Part IV of the CROW Act 2000 and schedule 13 to that Act), the Establishment Order (the Parliamentary order which set the Board up in 2004, subsequently amended) and our own Constitution.

The Act and the Establishment Order draw heavily on local government legislation, especially the Local Government Act 1972. As a result, the operation of the Board and its Committees, and the relationship between members and officers, is similar to the operation of a local authority, but on a smaller scale.

The Board meets in full four times a year, one meeting of which is also the Annual General Meeting. There are two standing committees: Executive Committee and Planning Committee, which also meet three to four times a year. As for local authorities, Board and Committee meetings are held in person, and members attending online cannot vote and do not contribute towards being quorate. The Board and its committees may co-opt (non-voting) members to supplement the range of skills, experience and backgrounds provided by Board member

In addition, the Board operates a variety of advisory and working groups which operate on a less formal basis, but which may not themselves discharge any Board functions; rather they advise officers, committees and the Board on matters of detail.

#### **5.0 The Chilterns AONB Management Plan**

The CCB is required by law to develop and publish a Management Plan for the Chilterns AONB, though it is delivered in partnership with relevant stakeholders, including – and especially - our local authorities (in National Landscapes other than the Chilterns and Cotswolds the Management Plan is prepared by the relevant local authorities). The significance of the Management Plan increased in late 2023 when the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 strengthened the existing duty on 'relevant authorities' (all public bodies, including local authorities) under s.85 of the CROW Act to now 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area'. Local authority members on the Board therefore provide an important connection between the CCB and its Local Authorities, especially in contributing to the development and delivery of the Management Plan.

#### **6.0 Becoming a Board Member**

The CCB's Establishment Order sets out the composition of the Board, which comprises 27 members.

- Members appointed by the **Secretary of State** apply through a formal application and selection process and are appointed for a period of three years. With approval from the Secretary of State, the appointment can be extended to a maximum of 10 years.

- **Parish Council** members are elected by the parish councils in each county within the Chilterns AONB: two from Buckinghamshire, two from Oxfordshire, one from Hertfordshire and one from Bedfordshire.
- **Local Authority** members are appointed by their local authority (how appointees are selected is for each local authority to determine). This normally takes place following local elections, usually in May, but a local authority may appoint a new member at any time. Appointments should reflect the political balance of the appointing local authority.

Parish Council and Local Authority members do not serve a fixed term, and the length of their appointment is determined by the appointing body in question, and by the outcome of local elections.

Where a Parish Council or Local Authority Board member is elected out of their council position, they remain appointed to the Board until (a) their replacement is notified to the Board, (b) a period of three months has elapsed, or (c) they independently resign from the Board. This enables the Board to continue to function following significant elections and reflects the role of Board members as *appointees* by rather than *representatives* of their council.

## 7.0 The role of Board Members

Board members contribute to the leadership, scrutiny and direction of the Conservation Board and further the CCB's statutory purposes. All Board members are appointees, not representatives, of their appointing body whether it be a local authority, a parish council or the Secretary of State. An appointee is expected to participate in Board activities, take part in debates, contribute to decisions and support decisions once made. Whilst considering both local and national interests throughout their appointment, members should bear in mind the functions and purposes of the Conservation Board, and champion these accordingly.

A Local Authority or Parish Council appointee, whilst taking into account their local government or parish perspective, must nonetheless give primacy to the interests of the National Landscape and its status as a national designation. Similarly, although Secretary of State appointees are chosen primarily for their ability to represent the national interest, when making decisions as a member of the Board they must bear in mind the interests of local communities.

The key functions of a Board member are to:

- Ensure that the CCB furthers its statutory purposes
- Agree plans that ensure the Chilterns National Landscape is accessible to all parts of society, is relevant and is valued as a national asset for its special qualities
- Represent the CCB through collaborative working with external stakeholders at a national and local level, including other National Landscape/Conservation Board teams
- Agree appropriate policies to meet statutory duties and participate in collective decision making
- Encourage a creative, experimental and innovative culture, where risks are appropriately managed
- Guide the development of policy and business plans by participating in activities as required including meetings, committees and working groups
- Scrutinise and monitor performance, including providing constructive challenge and oversight of governance
- Ensure there is effective and efficient governance and management in place
- Provide leadership and strategic direction towards local, regional and national priorities
- Utilise broad knowledge and skills, to manage local and national interests, ensuring the national interest is taken fully into account.

## **8.0 Time commitment**

We understand existing demands on our Board Members, so set out below the minimum level of engagement which is needed to discharge their functions effectively. Involvement beyond the minimum is warmly welcomed and is pivotal to the CCB's success.

### **8.1 The minimum level of engagement**

All Board members:

- Attend four Board meetings per year, normally held in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. Board Members are expected to attend in person to ensure the meeting complies with relevant legislation and is quorate. Members are also expected to have read the papers in advance and contribute to the discussions.
- Attend and contribute to meetings of any committees, task groups, advisory groups or similar, to which Members have been appointed.
  - Executive Committee members and Planning Committee members are expected to attend meetings in person, to ensure the meeting complies with relevant legislation and is quorate. Other groups tend to meet online.
- Respond to requests for information and help on an ad hoc basis throughout the year.

For local authority Board Members:

- Provide a conduit between the CCB and the local Authority, consulting and informing Council colleagues on emerging CCB strategies and championing them once agreed. This role includes advocating for the Local Authority's endorsement of the Management Plan, which is a key element of discharging their duty under s.85 of the CROW Act.
- Champion within the Local Authority the full payment of its financial contribution to the CCB's running costs, as stipulated by Defra.
- Seek to ensure that the National Landscape receives appropriate priority in Local Authority resourcing decisions, for example in deploying Biodiversity Net Gain contributions.

### **8.2 Further levels of involvement**

- Board Members are especially welcome to contribute to the CCB's two standing committees: the Executive Committee and the Planning Committee, which each meet three or four times a year.
- While the Board approves the CCB's strategies, budget and business plan, the Executive Committee oversees their development and implementation and so plays a key role in managing the organisation and its activities.
- The Planning Committee advises officers on CCB's submissions on planning and related consultations, determines positions on key proposals, and defines planning policies to influence both its own responses and local authority decisions.
- Ad hoc Task and Finish and Advisory Groups operate on a variety of topics (such as Governance, EDI and Human Resources).
- To ensure that the range of Board skills is fully used and to make membership as interesting and rewarding as possible, new members are asked to complete a skills survey, relating both to the CCB's wide subject range and to its operational and strategic work.

## **7.0 Remuneration and time-commitment**

All Board Members are entitled to claim travel and subsistence expenses incurred in respect of their role as Board Members and may also be eligible to receive an allowance. Further details of allowances and expenses are set out in the Members' Allowances Scheme in the CCB's Constitution.

## **8.0 Conduct**

All Board Members are expected to adhere to the Cabinet Office's Seven Principles of Public Life and to the Board's Member Code of Conduct, as set out in the Constitution.

Further information on the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chilterns National Landscape can be found on our [website](#).

**Individuals who are considering joining the Board, or appointing people to the Board, are most welcome to have a discussion with the Chair or the Chief Executive. Please call us on 01844 355500 or email: [office@chilterns.org.uk](mailto:office@chilterns.org.uk).**