



Chilterns National Landscape

Caring for the Chilterns forever & for everyone:

The area of outstanding natural beauty management plan for the Chilterns National Landscape, 2025-2030

Report of the Review

1. The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is required under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare a management plan which formulates its policy for the management of the landscape and its functions in relation to it, and to review that plan every five years.
2. The current “Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024” was approved by the Board in February 2019, with its fully designed version published in XXXX. The Plan was formally launched at a partnership event in October that year.

“Light-Touch Review” – extending the Plan to 2025

3. In July 2022, then Defra minister the Rt Hon Lord Benyon wrote to all Protected Landscapes advising that those who were required by s.89 of the CROW Act to review their Management Plans during 2023 and 2024 would have the option to delay the publication of their reviewed Plan by up to one year, following a process described as a “light-touch review”.
4. The option to delay publication of the Plan was offered in the context of a range of issues affected by ongoing reforms to Protected Landscapes, including:
 - a) The proposed introduction of what is now the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOFs – then planned for January 2023);
 - b) Publication of new guidance on the preparation and review of Management Plans (planned for Spring 2023);
 - c) Uncertainty around other reforms relating to and going beyond the outcomes of the Glover Landscapes Review.
5. The delay would give Protected Landscapes the opportunity to digest and incorporate these reforms. For the Chilterns, this would also enable the next review to take greater account of other significant projects, including the review of the area’s boundaries and another Natural England project to explore ‘enhanced management and governance arrangements’ for the area, both of which had been announced in 2021.
6. The CCB undertook the “light-touch review”, which was approved by the Board and confirmed by Natural England as meeting the requirements of Lord Benyon’s letter, both in March 2024, extending the application of the existing Plan to the end of March 2025. (See the [“Light-Touch Review” statement](#).)
7. Work could then continue on a review of the Plan for the period 2025-2030. However, it should be noted that:
 - a) The PLTOFs were introduced a year later than planned in January 2024, but much of the detail of their implementation was not resolved until Spring 2025.
 - b) New guidance on the preparation and review of Management Plans was not published in Spring 2023, and was only [published on 12 June 2025](#), two years

later than planned, and 7 days before the approval of the reviewed Management Plan for the Chilterns.

- c) Uncertainty about other reforms, including the recommendations of the Glover Landscapes Review was not resolved (although government had published its response to the review in January 2022).
- d) Further uncertainty was added in December 2023 when the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act was passed, including strengthening the duty under s.85 of the CROW Act, promising guidance and regulations to support this unexpected development (the guidance was not issued until December 2024) and enhancing the role and status of Management Plans (unpublished at Summer 2025).

Management Plan ‘Refresh’ – reviewing the Plan for 2025-2030

8. In the context of the above ongoing uncertainty, and of Natural England’s ongoing review of the boundaries of the Chilterns National Landscape, the CCB, advised by its Management Plan Task and Finish Group (TFG) chaired by Board member Gemma Harper, continued the review of the Plan in accordance with the “Light-Touch Review” statement.
9. The Board determined that the review should take the form of a ‘refresh’ of the current plan, with changes limited to factual updates, reflections of amended legislation and guidance (especially references to the new PLTOFs), and enhanced references to priority areas of activity, including nature recovery, climate adaptation, and diversity and inclusion.
10. This approach was intended to save resources for CCB and its partners for a comprehensive new plan, including a new long-term vision, when there was greater clarity (a) about the future extent of the National Landscape arising from Natural England’s boundary review, and (b) about the status of and processes for preparing Management Plans resulting from various reforms (still incomplete).
11. In December 2024, the Board approved a schedule of proposed changes to the Plan, which were subsequently published for public consultation, ending on 3rd February.
12. Responses to the public consultation were received from:
 - Three individuals, two of whom (including a Board member) offered general support for the Plan.
 - Three charities (Butterfly Conservation, Canal & River Trust and CPRE Oxfordshire).
 - Ten responses from ‘relevant authorities’ as defined by s.85 of the CROW Act (i.e. key delivery partners), as follows:
 - Three parish councils: Chalfont St Peter, Ellesborough and Swyncombe.
 - Five responses from four local authorities: Hertfordshire County (two different departments), Luton Borough Council, Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council
 - Forestry Commission
 - Natural England
13. The Board determined that the quality, in terms of breadth and depth, of the responses received to the consultation justified seeking additional time to work on amendments to the Plan, and sought Natural England’s support for deferring approval of the amended Plan from March 2025 to June that year. Natural England’s support was secured.
14. The additional time also enabled:
 - a) Further alignment of the content of the Management Plan with the CCB’s emerging Nature Recovery Plan

- b) Incorporation of additional understanding of and updates to other policy contexts (e.g. the strengthened s.85 duty)
 - c) Inclusion of enhanced detail in the Management Plan on the PLTOFs, including apportionment of targets/indicators to the Chilterns
 - d) Further engagement with consultation respondents
 - e) Engagement with the statutory consultees (local authorities) including those that had not responded during the consultation period
 - f) Deeper engagement with the Management Plan TFG and other Board members.
15. The outcome of these activities was the Schedule of Amendments approved by the Board on 19 June 2025.

Environmental Assessments

16. The production of plans and programmes with environmental impacts should be informed where appropriate by certain environmental assessments. Protected Landscapes Management Plans are subject to both Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Regulations (HRA).
17. The Management Plan review was 'screened' against both requirements, and reports produced demonstrating that full assessments were not required under either SEA or HRA. The SEA screening report was checked and approved by statutory consultees Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England, and the HRA by Natural England. All relevant correspondents agreed with the conclusions of each assessment screening report.