

Annual Review 2024/25



Contents

Letter from the Chair	3
Letter from the Chief Executive	4
About us	5
Our vision and purposes	6
Our team	7
Management Plan update	10
Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Chilterns	11
• Strategic direction and planning	11
◦ Chilterns Boundary Review	
◦ Planning casework	
• Nature recovery and landscape enhancement	14
◦ Nature recovery in the Chilterns	
◦ Supporting farmers and land managers	
◦ Tracking the Impact	
◦ Farming in Protected Landscapes	
◦ Mend the Gap	
◦ Future Treescapes	
• Water and chalk streams initiatives	20
◦ Chilterns Chalk Streams Project	
◦ River Chess Smarter Water Catchment	
◦ Not Bourne Yesterday	
• Heritage and cultural landscape	23
◦ Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership	
• External influences	24
Increasing public understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns' special qualities	25
• Events and festivals	25
◦ Chilterns Walking Festival	
• Access and inclusion	26
◦ Access for All	
◦ Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement	
• Landscape and community projects	28
◦ Chalkscapes	
◦ New Shoots	
◦ Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership	
• Arts and culture in the landscape	31
◦ Nature Calling	
Financial year 2024/25	32
Contact us	33



Letter from the Chair

As I reflect on the past year – my last on the Board of the Chilterns National Landscape – I feel extremely proud of what the organisation has achieved during a year marked by uncertainty and change. Amidst a shifting political landscape and concerns around the future of Protected Landscapes, our team has remained dedicated in its commitment to nature, climate change adaptation, people and place.

Our statutes set out what we are required to deliver, and government sets our all-too-modest funding accordingly. But the real source of pride is that we do so much more than that. With ingenuity and a great deal of hard work, our excellent team has drawn in resources which multiply our funding six-fold and has delivered projects on the ground which extend hugely beyond our core remit: to conserve and enhance this precious landscape and benefit those who live, work and visit it.

The conclusion of our five-year Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership Scheme, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is a testament to what collaboration and passion can achieve, with over 3,000 hectares of habitat restored, 21 years' worth of volunteer support, and 16,000 people engaged.

I'm also delighted to highlight the £350,000 National Lottery Heritage Fund award for the development of Not Bourne Yesterday – a new chapter in our mission to protect the Chilterns' chalk streams and connect local communities to these rare and beautiful habitats.

This year, our Management Plan was significantly refreshed, embedding Defra's targets for reversing declines in nature and aligning with our current priorities: nature recovery, climate adaptation, and equity, diversity and inclusion.

We also saw progress through projects like the Hamble Brook restoration and new funding, including £200,000 from the Rothschild Foundation to support farmers in adapting to climate change and improving nature recovery.

I must also acknowledge the deep disappointment felt by all of us at Natural England cancelling its review of the Chilterns boundary. The hundreds of hours of work invested by our team, partners and communities will not be forgotten. We remain committed to holding Natural England and ministers to their promises, and to press for the project's completion.

As I conclude my term as Chair, my heartfelt thanks go to the entire team, our Board members, partners and volunteers. The scale of work and impact is truly commendable – the Chilterns is in good hands.

JOHN NICHOLLS

CHAIR 2024/25



Letter from the Chief Executive

2024/25 has been a year of transition – politically, financially, and organisationally. The election of a new government brought renewed focus on national priorities, but also a period of uncertainty, particularly around future funding for Protected Landscapes. Media reports of potential cuts, including a proposed 12% reduction in core budgets, highlighted just how vulnerable the sector remains.



In spite of the uncertainty, our approach has been focussed and purposeful, delivering a huge amount with limited time and even more limited resources. It's a credit to our brilliant team, as well as the partners, communities, and volunteers who collectively help ensure that we make a difference for the Chilterns' landscape and local communities.

Looking ahead, we will continue to focus on building influence. The announcement in December 2024 that the government will work towards strengthened legislation for National Parks and National Landscapes provides a glimmer of hope. This is a real opportunity to secure meaningful reform and long-overdue investment in Protected Landscapes, especially National Landscapes, which remain chronically under-resourced.

We are not waiting for change – we are preparing for it. Over the past year, we have been developing a Nature Recovery Plan: a strategic and collaborative approach to conserving and enhancing the Chilterns' natural and historic environment. Due to be published in autumn 2025, it includes our ambition to achieve nature recovery at a landscape scale.

We're also proud to work with our partners and others to improve access and inclusion. Our involvement in the Nature Calling project, delivered in partnership with the National Landscapes Association and in the Chilterns focussed on supporting communities in Luton, reflects our commitment to making the Chilterns more welcoming and relevant to more people. And through our Access for All programme, we distributed £261,480 to a wide range of local organisations across the region, supporting projects that break down barriers and open up the landscapes to more people.

Much of what we do couldn't be done if it were not for working in partnership. We are grateful to the many partners, groups, communities, and, of course, our funders for their support, advice, and practical help.

Despite the challenges, our ambition has never been greater. This is a moment for government to match that ambition – not just in words but in policy and funding. Protected Landscapes are a national asset and we want them recognised and resourced as such.

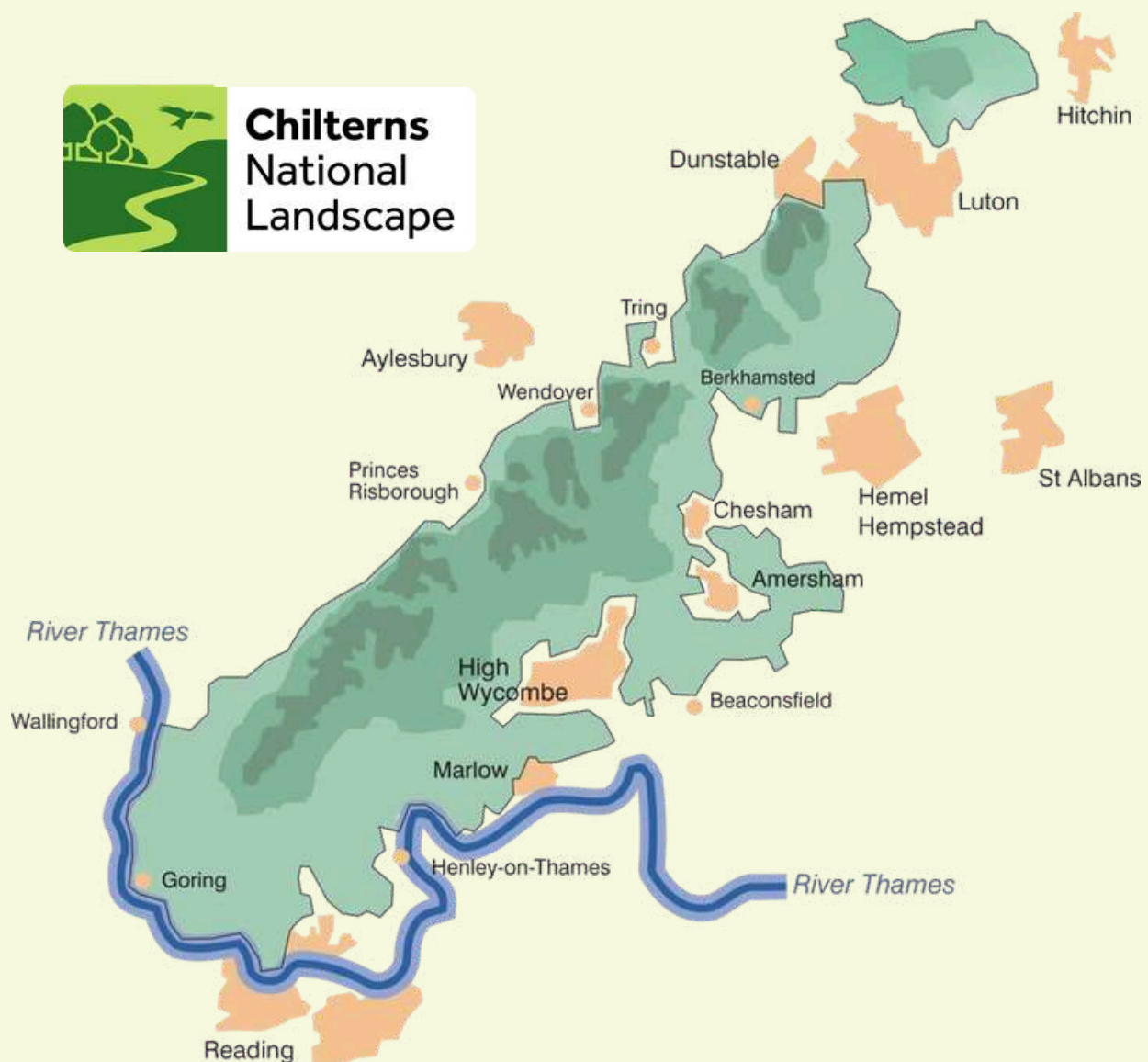
DR ELAINE KING
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



About us

The Chilterns National Landscape covers over 838km² (324 square miles) across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire. It was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (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).

The Chilterns National Landscape is managed by the Chilterns Conservation Board, an independent public body established by Parliamentary Order in 2004 under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Its purpose is to conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty, promote understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities, and support the social and economic wellbeing of local communities. A dedicated staff team work in partnership with local authorities, communities, businesses and voluntary organisations across the region.



Our vision

Our vision is that the Chilterns will be cared for, forever and for everyone. A place where people are inspired by its distinctive natural beauty, space and tranquillity, to enjoy and care for the landscape. A place where natural beauty and cultural heritage is celebrated and enhanced. A place which gives space for nature to flourish and which provides us with the ingredients for healthy living, such as clean water, healthy soils and thriving wildlife. A place where communities live, work and breathe. A haven for people and wildlife.

Our purposes

The Conservation Board's purposes are given in Section 87 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000:

It is the duty of a conservation board established in relation to an area in England, in the exercise of their functions, to seek to further –

(a) the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and

(b) the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty,

but if it appears to the board that there is a conflict between those purposes, they are to attach greater weight to the purpose mentioned in paragraph (a).

A conservation board, while fulfilling their duties under subsection 1 (above), shall seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities within the area of outstanding natural beauty and shall, for that purpose, co-operate with local authorities and public bodies whose functions include the promotion of economic or social development within the area of outstanding natural beauty.



Our team



Dr Elaine King

Chief Executive Officer



Dr Matt Thomson

Head of Strategy & Planning



Annette Weiss

Head of Engagement & Partnerships



Dr Kate Heppell

Head of Landscape



Andy Brock-Doyle

Head of Operations



Neil Jackson

Conservation & Landscape Officer



Gareth Clay

Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer



Dr Wendy Morrison

Heritage & Archaeology Manager



Nick Marriner

Nature Recovery Manager



Kathryn Foster

Senior Finance Manager



Vicki Pearce

Communications Manager



Helen Valvona

Communications Officer



Fiona Skeggs

Communications Officer



Lynne Cordice

Senior Administration Officer



Eloise Small

Administration Officer



**Melinda
Dresser**

Landowner &
Farming
Engagement
Advisor



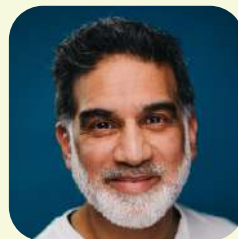
**Harriet
Bennett**

Landowner &
Farming
Engagement
Advisor



**Dr Mike
Stubbs**

Planning
Advisor



**Raheed
Salam**

North Chilterns
Engagement &
Partnerships
Officer



**David
Willis**

Citizen Science
Coordinator

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project



**Allen
Beechey**

Project Manager



**Ceri
Groves**

Education &
Engagement
Officer



**Laura
Silverstone**

Education &
Engagement
Officer



**Adrian
Porter**

Rivers Officer

River Chess Smarter Water Catchment



**Steph
Horn**

Project
Coordinator



**Hannah
Parry-Wilson**

Citizen Science
Coordinator



**Dr Claudia
Bernardini**

Project Support
Officer



Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership (to November 2024)



Anna Foster

Project Manager



Fran Crowther

Assistant Project Manager



Nick Marriner

Nature Recovery Manager



Harriet Bennett

Landowner & Farming Engagement Advisor

Mend the Gap



Ruth Staples-Rolfe

Programme Manager



Sarah Hebbes

Project Support Officer



Janet Tuppen

Project Support Officer

Not Bourne Yesterday (from December 2024)



Fran Crowther

Development Manager



Martha Glennon

Engagement Coordinator



Chilterns Management Plan update

The management plan is the strategic foundation for how the Chilterns National Landscape is managed, setting out the agreed policies for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area, and promoting the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.

In 2024/25, we reviewed and refreshed the current plan, aligning it with emerging national priorities and continuing to deliver on its existing objectives with our partners.

Highlights:

- Continued to deliver against the plan's objectives in collaboration with stakeholders.
- Reviewed and updated the plan to reflect key priorities including climate adaptation, nature recovery, and inclusive access, as well as embedding the government's new Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework.
- Ran a public consultation on the proposed changes from December 2024 to February 2025, receiving responses from 17 organisations.
- Following the public consultation, Natural England and the Board agreed to delay final approval to June 2025 to allow us to further engagement with more key partners.

"Refreshing the plan has allowed us to respond to new challenges while building on what works. It's about continuity and ambition."

Dr Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy & Planning



Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Chilterns National Landscape

This year has been an important one for the Chilterns, with work continuing across a wide range of areas to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of our landscapes, support local communities, and respond to environmental and development pressures. From updating our Management Plan and advising on planning casework, to delivering a nature recovery plan, supporting farmers, and celebrating our rich heritage, we have made significant progress. The following sections highlight the key strands of our work and the projects that are shaping the future of the Chilterns.

Strategic direction and planning

Chilterns Boundary Review cancelled

The cancellation of the Chilterns boundary review by Natural England was a major setback this year. The project had strong public and stakeholder support, and would have delivered tangible environmental and social benefits, directly supporting national goals including the 30x30 target to protect land for nature and improve access to green spaces.

Update

- Review halted due to cuts to Natural England's budgets by Defra.
- Evidence gathered is still valuable and, if published by Natural England, could support conservation activities across the wider Chilterns landscape.
- We remain committed to pressing for funding and political support to complete the project.

"This is a devastating decision. We were on the cusp of supporting Natural England with its public consultation on an extended boundary, with all landscape assessments completed and strong support across our local authorities, partner organisations and local residents. The time, effort, and hope invested by so many people has simply been swept away."

Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer



Planning casework

One of our key roles is to advise on planning policies and development proposals that affect the Chilterns National Landscape.

We do this by responding to planning consultations, publishing guidance and working directly with planning authorities. Despite limited resources, our evidence-based approach and the expertise of our Planning Committee mean we continue to make real impact.

As national planning policy undergoes rapid reform, we also play an active role in supporting the wider National Landscapes family to navigate and respond to these changes.



“Through clear guidance and practical support, we’re helping to shape development that conserves and enhances the Chilterns’ natural beauty. Every planning response is an opportunity to influence positive change.”

Dr Matt Thomson, Head of Strategy & Planning



Highlights:

- Provided 57 formal responses to planning applications, appeals, pre-application enquiries and national infrastructure projects.
- Engaged in four principal local policy submissions (Vale and South Oxfordshire Joint Local Plan, Dacorum Local Plan, RAF Halton Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and Barton-le-Clay Neighbourhood Plan).
- Continued to support applications that align with our statutory purposes and management plan objectives. This year, these included:
 - Restoration of Pitstone Quarry, bringing public access and landscape recovery to a degraded area.
 - Design improvements to HS2's Amersham Headhouse, blending innovation with traditional Chilterns flintwork.
 - The National Trust's proposals at Ashridge Estate to mitigate visitor impacts on the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
 - Projects that promote enjoyment of the landscape, such as a new vineyard at Russell's Water and luxury camping at Stonor.
- Engaged with seven Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) applications to protect sensitive natural sites like the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. We continue to advocate for more coordinated, strategically located green spaces through local plans.
- Welcomed the groundbreaking policies in the new Vale and South Oxfordshire Joint Local Plan 2041, which recognises the value of tranquillity, dark skies, lighting and the wider countryside setting of the National Landscape.
- Published two new planning guidance documents to support better decision-making:
 - Chilterns Lighting Guidance (approved September 2024)
 - Chilterns Chalk Streams Planning Guidance (approved March 2025), funded through the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project and River Chess Smarter Water Catchment project.

Design details promoted by the Chilterns National Landscape Lighting Policy



The consequences of internal light spills from residential development can intrude on a national landscape/AONB. Glazing of poor design, such as gable glazing, rooflights and roof lanterns can dramatically diminish dark skies and create a discordant, harmful feature in the landscape.

Nature recovery and landscape enhancement



Nature recovery in the Chilterns

This year, we brought together partners to shape a new Nature Recovery Plan for the Chilterns. The plan supports the statutory Management Plan and four Local Nature Recovery Strategies being developed across the region. It focuses on a habitat-led approach to describing nature while recognising the need to integrate priority species throughout.

The plan also highlights the importance of monitoring the state of nature and evaluating the success of our actions and sets out Chilterns-specific targets aligned with the national Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF).

Highlights:

- Consulted on the draft Nature Recovery Plan, with positive feedback from stakeholders.
- Agreed two Chilterns-specific nature recovery targets as part of PLTOF.
- Nature Recovery Plan scheduled for publication in winter 2025.

“We are delighted to have finalised our Chilterns National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and look forward to working with the four Local Nature Recovery Strategy teams across the National Landscape to support delivery of nature recovery actions.”

Dr Kate Heppell, Head of Landscape



Supporting farmers and land managers

The nature recovery team works with farmers and land managers across the Chilterns to deliver large-scale nature recovery and climate adaptation initiatives. The network now covers over 90 farmers and 20,000 hectares through five farmer cluster groups: South Chilterns, Christmas Common, Central Chilterns, Chess Valley, and North Chilterns, ensuring Chilterns-wide coverage.

Each cluster works to its own specific objectives and priorities, offering a farmer-led approach to nature recovery and climate adaptation. By embedding expertise in the landscape and supporting these locally driven approaches, the team helps farmers create connected, wildlife-rich habitats while monitoring and understanding the impacts of their work.

This year, we were excited to welcome Melinda Dresser to the team to facilitate the North Chilterns Farmer Cluster, a role made possible thanks to the support of Affinity Water.



Sifting wildflower seeds as part of the Farming Insects project at Manor Farm, Bradenham

Highlights:

- Delivered hands-on activities to connect farmers with wildlife, including installing Barn Owl boxes and surveying winter farm bird species.
- Funded deer impact drone surveys for the Christmas Common Farmer Cluster – helping farmers to determine baseline deer populations, create deer management plans, and support habitat creation projects on their farms.
- Secured significant investment from Affinity Water, Thames Water, the Rothschild Foundation, Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, Mend the Gap, and Defra's Facilitation Fund.
- Delivered large-scale projects, including planting and coppicing 16.5km of hedgerow in the north Chilterns, 27 hectares of cover crops in the Chess Valley, and 20 new Agri-Environment Scheme agreements in the central Chilterns.
- Supported farmers with winter and spring farmland bird surveys, annual Rapid Habitat Assessments and new monitoring projects for moths, earthworms, and hedgehogs.
- Published a new [case study](#) showcasing practical approaches and measurable outcomes in the farmer cluster model.



"We're at a real tipping point. As National Lottery Heritage Fund support for the Central Chilterns cluster comes to an end and new funding from the Rothschild Foundation is secured, our farmers are going from strength to strength. Two new clusters have formed in the Chess Valley and North Chilterns, marking a shift from set up to delivery on the ground. It's been inspiring to see these groups grow in confidence and form their own identities. After five years of hard work, positive results are evident – from stronger collaboration to a notable increase of species like yellowhammers. With continued support from our funders, there's even more we can achieve together."

Nick Marriner, Nature Recovery Manager

Tracking the Impact

Wildlife survey programme

2024/25 marked a turning point for Tracking the Impact, a project established in 2020 through the five-year Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership (CCC), funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Since then, it has grown into a robust model for citizen science and data collection.

After the CCC project ended in November 2024, we were committed to ensuring that Tracking the Impact would become a lasting legacy – and secured additional funding to take the project forward.

This year, thanks to support from Rebel Restoration, we recruited David Willis as Citizen Science Coordinator to enable further development and long-term management of the project.

Highlights:

- Tracking the Impact completed its fifth year, recording 504 species and 20,000 records across 78 survey squares, achieving 75% coverage – the largest season yet.
- Delivered survey methodology and species ID training courses for over 120 volunteers, helping them develop skills in identifying birds, butterflies and plants.
- Published a new [case study](#) to celebrate the dedication of volunteers and provide a model to inspire similar landscape-scale conservation projects across the UK.



Analysis of five years of Breeding Bird Survey data by the British Trust for Ornithology shows a **30% increase in Yellowhammer populations**, a red-listed farmland species, highlighting the value of farmers delivering high-quality, connected habitats across the landscape.

"This season has been the best yet. Our brilliant surveyors continue to develop their knowledge and skills, and there is a real team spirit. We have organised some events over the winter, and we are already looking forward to getting out and doing it again next year!"

David Willis, Citizen Science Coordinator



Farming in Protected Landscapes

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

chilterns.org.uk/fipl

The Defra-funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL) continues to be a vital source of funding. In 2024/25, we allocated £1 million to 61 projects, supporting everything from orchard planting and deer surveys, to guided walks, educational visits and chalk grassland restoration. Projects ranged in value from £900 to £35,000, and averaged £16,129.

Over 50 landowners took part in a coordinated drone survey across 16,500 hectares in the southern Chilterns to assess deer populations. High numbers, especially fallow deer, are threatening woodland regeneration by over-browsing young trees and shrubs. The report provides essential data to understand the scale of the issue and will inform collaborative action to restore healthy woodland ecosystems.

Highlights:

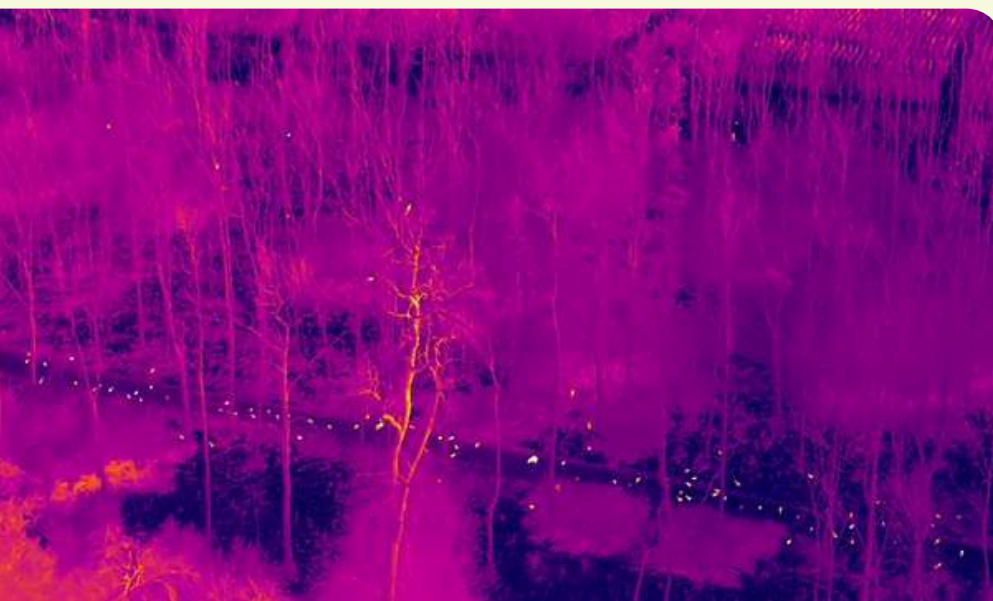
- Funded 61 projects across the Chilterns.
- Supported farm clusters, traditional orchards, and priority species such as the Duke of Burgundy butterfly.
- Drone survey covering 16,500 hectares of the southern Chilterns recorded nearly 5,000 deer – data now being used to coordinate next steps with stakeholders.

“It’s a privilege to meet and help so many land managers in the Chilterns. Their vision and commitment is having positive impacts for nature recovery, climate change resilience, and people’s connection to the landscape. Having this funding has allowed us to focus on strategic objectives such as supporting farm clusters, conserving specialist species and investing in nature-friendly, traditional land uses such as orchards.”

Gareth Clay, FiPL Officer



Planting a 5 hectare heritage fruit tree orchard at Micklefield Hall, Chorleywood. The orchard will be grazed by livestock, bringing benefits for wildlife, building climate change resilience, and supporting a nature-friendly farm business.



A thermal drone survey of 16,500 hectares in the southern Chilterns provided details on the number and distribution of deer. Fallow deer were recorded at a density of over 16 per km². This is considered high and well above the threshold after which natural regeneration of woodland is affected.

Mend the Gap

mendthegap.uk



The Mend the Gap programme works to enhance and enrich the landscape that links the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes, helping to heal and soften the scars left by the electrification of the Great Western Main Line.

Mend the Gap is a great example of two neighbouring National Landscapes working in partnership with local residents, landowners, two National Trails, and other environment organisations.

In 2024/5 the programme worked with over 100 delivery partners to deliver and complete 23 projects on both sides of the line – from restoring rare habitats to improving access for all.

Highlights:

- Re-seeded and restored 84 ha of chalk grassland.
- Created a two-hectare wetland at Sulham Woodmeadows in partnership with The Sulham Estate, Partnerships for Nature, Biocap, and Action for the River Kennet.
- Supported several projects to enable better access to the Thames Valley in the Goring and Streatley area. These included funding a new wheelchair-accessible boardwalk at Withymead Nature Reserve, accessible signage at Goring Station, and better pedestrian access by The Bull pub, taking people away from a dangerous road junction.



New boardwalk at Withymead Nature Reserve, Goring



Chalk grassland at Rectory Farm, Streatley

Key statistics:

- Over 4km of hedge and more than 600 trees planted.
- 283.18 hectares of land under enhancement.
- 103 landowners engaged.
- 898 people attended events.
- 362 people engaged in activities linked to health and wellbeing.
- 6,000 children benefitted from school ground updates to enable outdoor learning.
- 171 partnerships across all projects.

“Mend the Gap is now working at full pace to deliver the first round of larger projects, while we are also developing the next round of outcomes. I’m proud to be working with so many passionate people in this community, and I hope that Mend the Gap will leave a lasting legacy on this landscape.”

Ruth Staples-Rolfe, Programme Manager

Future Treescapes

We were pleased to contribute to the Future Treescapes in National Landscapes Project with the University of Reading and the Tree Council. Two workshops helped us explore the latest research into woodland resilience, agro-forestry and deer management – all vital for the future of the Chilterns' woodlands.

Highlights:

- Contributed data to the national [guidance hub](#), designed by Dr Katherine Clark from Reading University, to help landowners and communities plant the right trees in the right places.
- Resources are now available on the guidance hub, hosted by The Tree Council, for schools, farmers, and woodland managers to help anyone growing, planting or managing trees and treescapes, and to support getting the right type of tree in the right place to maintain a National Landscape's character.



"The Future Treescapes project provided a great opportunity to learn about current research and how this might be applied in both the Chilterns and other National Landscapes."

Neil Jackson, Conservation & Landscape Officer



Tree planting at South Stoke Community Garden



Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

Chalk streams are globally rare and a defining feature of the Chilterns. The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) continues to deliver impactful restoration, education, and engagement across the region, including long-awaited improvements to the River Chess and Chesham Moor.

Key statistics 2020-2025:

- Delivered 126 school visits and workshops, engaging 3,500 children in learning about local chalk streams.
- Held 51 events and guided walks.
- Restored 4.15km of chalk stream.
- Co-hosted delivery of the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment Initiative, which invested £6.9 million into restoration in the Chess catchment.
- Secured £3 million income



Team members building a berm on the River Chess, Sarratt

Highlights:



- Carried out river restoration at Chesham Moor, removing over 80 tonnes of concrete bank, creating a new gravel beach, installing a new footbridge, and adding a reed-bed sustainable drainage system.
- Published a catchment plan for the River Misbourne following consultation with over 30 stakeholders, and submitted an application to the HS2 Additional Projects fund for £1 million towards a five-year "Mending the Misbourne" project.
- Launched the new "Chalk Stream Challenge" badge for uniformed groups, schools, and individuals – made possible thanks to funding from the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment project.
- Completed an assessment of river restoration options for the Hughenden Stream on behalf of Affinity Water. This will be used by Affinity Water's River Restoration Team to guide their investment in the river from 2025-2030.
- Delivered additional river restoration projects at Sarratt Watercress Beds and Mill Farm Meadow (Chess), and with Chiltern Rangers CIC at Bois Mill (Chess) and Edgewood (Wye).
- Published a new five-year CCSP Business Plan (2025-2030).

"2025 promises to be another busy year! We plan to deliver restoration projects on two rivers, develop a catchment plan for the Hughenden Stream, and expand our volunteer, and education and engagement programmes."

Allen Beechey, Project Manager

River Chess Smarter Water Catchment

chesssmarterwatercatchment.org

Now in its fifth year, the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment project, funded by Thames Water, continues to bring together farmers, scientists, and local communities to improve water quality and restore biodiversity across the River Chess catchment.

Highlights

- Secured staff funding for 2025/26 to continue delivery across river restoration, education and engagement, and citizen science.
- Hosted an annual stakeholder event in March 2025 and launched "Citizen Science on the River Chess, a report on our findings from 2021 to 2025" an overview of the learning and understanding gathered by citizen scientists.
- Published the Chilterns' Chalk Streams Planning Guidance in March 2025, providing advice and best practice guidance for planning authorities and local communities to help shape local plans and planning submissions/objections.
- Created a new catchment plan and commenced setting a new vision and objectives from 2025-2035.



Citizen Science on the River Chess

A report on our findings from 2021 to 2025



Key statistics:

- Over 200 events delivered.
- 33% of catchment land is now in the farmer cluster.
- Over £290,000 awarded in landowner grants.
- 42 milestones delivered and over £1 million spent.
- Three short films created by schoolchildren across the Chess catchment.

"2024/25 was our most ambitious year yet, with 10 partners funded to deliver projects across the catchment. Collaborating with new organisations, like the Freshwater Habitats Trust on the Priority Ponds Assessments, has deepened our understanding of the area. As we finalise a new 10-year catchment plan for 2025-35, the key challenge ahead will be securing the funding needed to bring the plan to life."

Steph Horn, Project Coordinator



Last year, the Chilterns National Landscape received a £351,083 grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for Not Bourne Yesterday: Chalk Stream Communities of the Chilterns, an exciting programme that will restore and protect the Chilterns' chalk streams.

Made possible by National Lottery players, the programme aims to restore and rejuvenate the Chilterns' fragile chalk streams and promote a deeper connection with communities through art, archaeology, citizen science, and habitat restoration.

The grant of £351,083 is to support development of the programme, after which the Chilterns National Landscape will apply for a full National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £2.8 million for the delivery phase.



Development Manager Fran Crowther (left) and Engagement Coordinator Martha Glennon (right)

Highlights

- Secured a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop the Not Bourne Yesterday programme.
- Appointed a development team, consisting of a Development Manager and Engagement Coordinator.
- Collaborated with partners and stakeholders to start creating a logical framework – a methodology that ensures Not Bourne Yesterday has clear objectives and measurable outputs.
- Contracted an external evaluator to evaluate the development phase and create a monitoring and evaluation toolkit for delivery.

"It has been fantastic to start developing Not Bourne Yesterday. The team is excited to involve organisations and communities and help shape the programme to ensure our local chalk streams are enjoyed, understood, and cared for in the future. Chalk streams are, and should be, for everyone, and Not Bourne Yesterday intends to leave a lasting legacy of environmental protection and community-driven resilience."

Fran Crowther, Development Manager



Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Project

Now in its second year, the Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership (CHAP) is the first of its kind in a National Landscape – the “voice for heritage and archaeology” in the Chilterns. CHAP works with landowners, communities and partners to protect and manage historic assets while inspiring more people to get involved in discovering the past. With an experienced archaeologist embedded in the Chilterns National Landscape team, landowners receive expert advice that safeguards heritage as an integral part of the landscape.

In 2024/25, CHAP expanded its outreach, building on investment from various funding bodies.

Highlights

- Volunteer training and community excavation: nearly 30 volunteers trained in geophysical survey techniques across several sites in the Chess Valley. CHAP ran its first community excavation at Sarratt – over 100 volunteers took part and nearly 250 visitors experienced archaeology in action. The excavation focused on agricultural terraces, or lynchets, helping the team gather evidence to better understand the historic landscape, including possible Roman road remains and prehistoric finds.
- Advice and partnerships: CHAP continued to provide expert archaeological and heritage advice to landowners, project partners, local societies, and even the film industry (The Marlow Murder Club). Several collaborative projects were delivered with Chiltern Rangers and the Chiltern Society, including the launch of a new heritage trail at Bledlow Ridge.
- Sharing knowledge and innovation: CHAP presented on citizen science and LiDAR at the international Aerial Archaeology Research Group annual conference, highlighting how local volunteers can contribute to high-quality archaeological research.
- Education and public engagement: daily guided tours during the Sarratt excavation allowed the local community to learn about archaeological practice and the history of the area. CHAP’s work continues to inspire people of all ages, from new to seasoned volunteers, to explore and protect the heritage of the Chilterns.



Community excavation of lynchets, Sarratt



“Working with hundreds of volunteers – from first-time diggers to experienced enthusiasts, has been a highlight this year. Being able to offer expert advice to landowners ensures heritage remains at the heart of the Chilterns National Landscape, while inspiring more people to discover and care for our past.”

Dr Wendy Morrison, Heritage & Archaeology Manager

External influences

High Speed 2 (HS2)

As construction of HS2 progresses, the Chilterns National Landscape continues to experience significant and often damaging impacts. Despite widespread criticism of the project's cost and pace, the environmental consequences locally are stark – drone footage shared by HS2 Ltd reveals the extent of disruption across this protected landscape.



Leather Lane overbridge looking north, June 2024 ([Chiltern Society HS2 Photo Diary](#))

But, over the years, there have been hard-won successes. The original tunnel would have emerged near Old Amersham, cutting through five Ancient Woodlands and a historic Repton-designed parkland. Thanks to the tireless efforts of local campaigners, the tunnel was extended to South Heath – saving four of the woodlands. Sadly, Jones's Hill Wood still suffered major loss and now sits on the edge of a deep construction cutting at Wendover Dean.

Collaborative working has brought further improvements. We were proud to support the Leather Lane Conservation Group, whose work helped protect ancient oak trees and vital bat habitats. Additionally, in partnership with HS2 contractors Align, Buckinghamshire Council, local parishes, the Chiltern Society, the Leather Lane Conservation group and others, we helped secure a far better bridge and green corridor design, significantly reducing the number of mature oaks lost.

We continue to work with farmers and landowners along the route through the HS2 Additional Projects Fund, supporting nature recovery and connectivity. As construction nears completion, we are pressing HS2 and its contractors for a detailed and joined-up landscape restoration strategy to repair the corridor and minimise long-term harm.



Wendover Dean viaduct looking south, June 2024 ([Chiltern Society HS2 Photo Diary](#))

Highlights

- Improved bridge and green corridor design at Leather Lane.
- Ongoing biodiversity projects along the route.
- Advocating for a unified landscape restoration plan.

"The success of local people in securing the re-design of Leather Lane, shows how greater collaborative working between HS2 and local stakeholders can secure better restoration of the Chilterns landscape as construction progresses towards completion."

Neil Jackson, Conservation & Landscape Officer

Increasing public understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns' special qualities

This year, we have focused on helping more people connect with and enjoy the special qualities of the Chilterns – the distinctive features of the landscape that make the Chilterns unique. Through festivals, inclusive access initiatives, community projects, creative partnerships, and youth programmes like New Shoots, we are widening participation and celebrating what makes the Chilterns special.

The Defra Access for All fund has enabled us to support and deliver projects that make the countryside more inclusive, while Nature Calling and the Chilterns Walking Festival have encouraged thousands to explore and engage with nature. A dedicated North Chilterns Engagement & Partnerships Officer has strengthened relationships and boosted impact where it matters most.

Events and festivals

Chilterns Walking Festival

The 13th Chilterns Walking Festival took place in May 2024, working with over 45 organisations and volunteer walk leaders to offer a diverse range of walks, attracting more than 500 participants. About 68% of participants also contributed to the local economy by using a local business before or after their walk.

Highlights:

- Farm walks with Wessex Farm Wildlife showcased nature-friendly farming practices while producing high quality food.
- Chalk stream walks with the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project.
- Walks followed by hands-on lace-making demonstrations in collaboration with the Salaam Seekers walking group.
- Health and wellbeing walks to highlight Mental Health Awareness Week.

"I've always loved themed walks that combine exploring nature with learning about history and culture, and this one struck a perfect balance. The route was scenic and well-paced, and the stories shared along the way made it all the more memorable."

Participant, Midsomer Murders Walk



Access for All

Access for All programme

chilterns.org.uk/accessforall

The Chilterns National Landscape received £261,480 from Defra as part of its Access for All programme, which has enabled us to fund and support a range of projects across the Chilterns, helping to make the Chilterns more accessible.

We funded 14 partner and community organisations to support their accessibility ambitions, as well as delivering some of our own access and inclusion projects.

Highlights

- Chilterns Countryside Access Visitor Guide.
- Accessibility guides and videos for eight countryside sites.
- Grim's Ditch Virtual Tour with captions, audio and BSL.
- Changing Places toilet at Chiltern Open Air Museum.
- Boardwalk and accessible seating at Withymead Nature Reserve.
- Access infrastructure, such as path surfacing, ramps, interpretation boards, accessible gates, and seating, at several locations including Woodoaks Farm, National Trust Whipsnade Estate and countryside sites in and around Luton and High Wycombe.
- Digital information and accessible visitor itineraries developed with Visit Herts.



"The Tramper has been a complete game-changer for us – especially for Gary and Sally. It's given people the freedom to explore parts of the farm they haven't seen in years, visit loved ones' resting places, and experience the beauty of the countryside up close. Watching someone feel that burst of independence and joy, while their friends and family can finally relax knowing everyone is safe, is incredibly moving. It's more than just access – it's connection, equality, and freedom.."

Sue Lacey, Woodoaks Farm

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The Chilterns National Landscape is committed to ensuring that the natural beauty, culture, and health benefits of the Chilterns are available and accessible to everyone. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are core to our values, our day-to-day work, and our strategic goals.

Despite being surrounded by diverse urban centres – such as Luton, High Wycombe, Aylesbury, Chesham, Reading, and Dunstable – the current demographic of visitors to the Chilterns does not reflect this diversity. The people that could benefit most from the Chilterns landscape are those facing the greatest barriers and those who are the most disconnected.

We are working to change this. By proactively engaging underrepresented communities we can unlock new perspectives and encourage more people to experience, value, and care for their local greenspaces and wider Chilterns countryside.



Highlights

- Appointed a North Chilterns Engagement & Partnerships Officer, based in Luton, to develop EDI projects in the north Chilterns.
- Allocated £261,000 of Defra Access funding to support projects aimed at making the Chilterns more accessible to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
- Helped secure substantial investment in building partnerships and engagement in the north Chilterns, including delivery of the successful multi-million-pound Nature Calling project and contributing to Luton Council's £1 million Nature Towns and Cities bid.
- Commissioned two pieces of EDI-focused research – one into underserved audiences in High Wycombe, and the other into increasing diversity in citizen science.
- Updated organisational HR policies on EDI.
- Embedded EDI in the Chilterns Management Plan 2025-2030.



"EDI is becoming increasingly embedded within our organisation – in the way we plan, partner, and deliver our work across the Chilterns. It is a central part of the new Chilterns National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30, and we are working with different partners and organisations to support and promote more inclusive access to the countryside".

Annette Weiss, Head of Engagement & Partnerships

Landscape and community projects

Chalkscapes

As part of the development phase of the Chalkscapes project, we commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to undertake a study looking at how diverse communities engage with greenspaces and the countryside.

The groundbreaking research was published in March 2024, and, following its launch, we promoted and disseminated it widely to local and national partners, stakeholders, and media.



A major recommendation of the study was to develop and deliver a Collaborative Targeted Outreach Programme (CTOP), working with diverse communities and religious organisations to co-create countryside access opportunities for underrepresented groups. We have been collaborating with partners in Luton to secure support for CTOP.

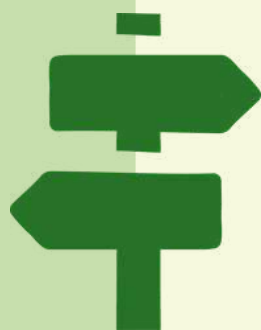


Highlights

- The study, focussing on Luton and Dunstable, found that only 33% of participants visited greenspaces weekly, with older individuals, those facing deprivation, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds being the least frequent users.
- Key findings included a limited awareness of greenspaces and the countryside, and barriers including a lack of essential facilities, concerns about racism, discrimination, and safety, anxieties about unleashed dogs, and worries about the costs and availability of transport.
- The CTOP will be included as part of a major funding application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund by Luton Borough Council.

"The Chilterns is a very special landscape and everyone should be able to access and enjoy all that it has to offer. At a time when so many inequalities exist in society, the results of this study provide an opportunity to improve both people's enjoyment of the countryside, and the positive effects it can have on their health and wellbeing."

Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer



New Shoots

Youth conservation programme

Delivered in partnership with Chiltern Rangers, 20 young people between 14 and 18 years of age attended 11 monthly sessions on a range of nature-based topics including; bushcraft skills, bird and butterfly identification, riverfly surveying, chalk stream management, hedge planting, chalk grassland scrub clearing, woodland management, fungi identification, bird ringing, and a behind-the-scenes tour of RSPB Otmoor Nature Reserve. The 2024-25 cohort of New Shoots was the fourth group to have gone through the programme.

The sessions were led and supported by the RSPB, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), the Chiltern Society, Bucks Bird Club, Butterfly Conservation, the National Trust and Tring Ringing Group.

Over £15,000 of funding was provided by Buckinghamshire Council Community Boards, the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment, the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).



Riverfly survey

Highlights

- Secured £15,000 funding from Buckinghamshire Community Boards.
- 20 young people attended 11 monthly sessions.
- Opitcron provided a 50% discount on binoculars for each participant.



Woodland management

“It’s amazing to think that New Shoots has completed its fourth year and over 60 young people have experienced nature, learned new skills, and discovered the rewards of practical conservation. What’s even more special, is seeing how they’ve taken that spark and turned it into something real. One of the first cohort is now working with the Cumbria Wildlife Trust, and another has joined the RSPB’s Youth Council.

Watching that passion grow and knowing this programme has helped to inspire it is incredibly heart-warming. It gives me real hope for the future. We’re delighted that the River Thames Conservation Trust will be taking New Shoots forward next year, so more young people can experience this life-changing opportunity.”

Nick Marriner, Nature Recovery Manager



Community
Boards

chilterns.org.uk/newshoots

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership

The Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership (CCC) concluded after five transformative years, leaving a lasting legacy of community engagement, heritage projects, and volunteer participation across the central Chilterns.

Although the formal National Lottery Heritage Fund scheme ended in November 2024, a small amount of remaining funds will allow the partnership to continue meeting for another year, to support a final youth-focused project, and continued partnership work.



End of project celebration for partners at Collings Hangar Farm

Key statistics:

- 20,000+ wildlife records collected across 75 sites.
- Nine themed festivals celebrating Chilterns nature, heritage, and culture.
- 140+ pieces of interpretation created.
- 16,500+ people engaged at 316 events.
- 2,600+ children and young people involved in activities.
- 10 new heritage trails created.
- Volunteering effort worth over £600,000.

Highlights: CCC's Legacy

Many of the areas of work established within CCC will continue and be built upon over the years to come, here are a few examples:

- Secured funding for the continuation of Chilterns New Shoots, a youth conservation programme.
- Secured new support to expand farmer clusters and nature recovery work.
- Created a Community Network Officer role (BBOWT) to connect local groups.
- Extended wildlife monitoring into the River Chess with long-term funding.
- The Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership hosted heritage project outputs for ongoing access and use.
- Created a virtual tour of Grim's Ditch to improve accessibility.
- Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit continues to help communities influence local planning.
- Wycombe Museum continues to deliver prehistory sessions for schools.

"The project has made a difference to so many people, from all walks of life, ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Planting a new hedgerow on one of the cluster farms included two brand new volunteers who had never volunteered in the Chilterns prior to the day and two long term Chilterns Rangers volunteers who have special needs."

John Shaw, Managing Director, Chiltern Rangers





Nature Calling

chilterns.org.uk/naturecalling

The Nature Calling: Art in the Landscape programme has been a springboard for building community and stakeholder partnerships in Luton and the North Chilterns.

As one of six national hubs, the Chilterns' project focused on engaging diverse audiences in Luton. Renowned artist Matthew Rosier was commissioned to develop his vision for Luton Henge – a chalk stone circle launching in summer 2025 – and Lee Nelson was commissioned to capture the essence of the Chilterns in words.



Highlights

- Published writing commission, a series of poems by Lee Nelson – inspired by the Chilterns landscape and local heritage.
- Guided walks and community workshops led by Matthew Rosier and Revolution Arts.
- Founded the Luton Henge Collective – a group of local stakeholders ensuring the community remains central to event planning and decision-making – in response to strong community support for Luton Henge to be a permanent installation.

At Sharpenhoe - Begin

Lee Nelson

Take the slow track
loaded with sloes, track
the track less travelled
up the hill's back
up the Clappers

Up to the space on top
warren'd beneath and
honeycombed with tunnels in the air
passages from here to there

Look down and look across
the troughs
of the town now gone
now all there is
up here for us
is
secret and time
perspective and time

time-wind-stretched sun-seeking branches reach
out
for Barton, Shillington, Silsoe
and beyond to Clophill, even Wixams, Bedford

A touch of class
to measure ourselves against
to keep our working anger sharp

"Connecting people to nature and heritage is important to the Chilterns National Landscape. Greenspaces are vital for our health and wellbeing and should be open, welcoming, and meaningful for everyone. We are so thrilled to have commissioned this work, which is being delivered with such passion and creativity by artist Matthew Rosier, writer Lee Nelson, an incredible team of producers and creatives, and, most importantly, the communities of Luton. It's a wonderful celebration of people, place, and shared history."

Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer

Financial Year 2024/25

We have continued to use our Defra core grant to leverage additional funding which, this year, has resulted in securing over £6 for every £1 from Defra. Through taking this approach, and with additional funding from Defra programmes like Farming in Protected Landscapes and Access for All, partner contributions, and the careful use of project reserves, total income reached £4,755,740.

As a Conservation Board, we also carry full employment-related and administrative costs and are not eligible to reclaim VAT. We are advocating for a funding model that reflects these challenges and, in the meantime, the commitment and resourcefulness of our staff team enables us to make the best use of opportunities to deliver benefit to the landscape and communities of the Chilterns National Landscape.



Income (£)	2023/24	2024/25
Defra Core Grant	513,896	628,145
Defra Capital Grant	-	114,249
Farming in Protected Landscapes	802,824	1,101,882
Access for All	53,908	256,531
Local Authority Funding	124,448	127,442
Project & Other Income	2,334,979	2,199,291
Project reserves	-	328,200
Total income	3,830,055	4,755,740

Expenditure (£)	2023/24	2024/25
Overheads	223,723	271,122
Engagement & Partnerships	286,663	355,042
Landscape & Conservation	3,017,960	3,788,866
Planning & Development	301,709	340,709
Total expenditure	3,830,055	4,755,740



Contact us



Please contact us if you would like further information about any of our work. Contact details for all of our staff and project teams are on our [website](#), where you can also sign up to our [newsletter](#) for news and ideas for getting out and about in the Chilterns countryside.

Browse the [Visit](#) section of our website for ideas and inspiration, from gentle strolls and picnic sites, to local attractions and cycle routes. There are so many memories to be made in the Chilterns National Landscape.



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