

Annual Review

2025/26



Working together for a thriving Chilterns



Chilterns
National
Landscape

Welcome

A year of partnership, progress and lasting impact.



Louise Price

Chair's message

It has been another significant year for the Chilterns National Landscape, demonstrating what can be achieved when people and organisations work together towards a shared purpose. We have adopted a new Chilterns Management Plan, launched the Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan, continued to restore habitats, improve access to the countryside, and strengthen the partnerships that support our work.

These achievements reflect the dedication of our staff, Board members, volunteers, farmers, landowners, local authorities and partner organisations. This review highlights just some of the progress made over the past year and the collective effort behind it.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed their time, expertise and enthusiasm. Together, we are helping conserve and enhance the Chilterns' distinctive chalk landscapes, woodlands, rivers and heritage, ensuring this remarkable place continues to thrive for nature, people and future generations.



Dr Elaine King

CEO's message

Protected Landscapes have a vital role to play in tackling the nature and climate crises, and this review demonstrates the contribution the Chilterns National Landscape is making.

From restoring chalk grassland and chalk streams to supporting sustainable farming, improving access to nature and strengthening the evidence that informs better decision making, our work is delivering practical benefits for nature, people and place.

None of this happens in isolation. It depends on strong partnerships, shared ambition and the commitment of the many people who care for the Chilterns landscape.

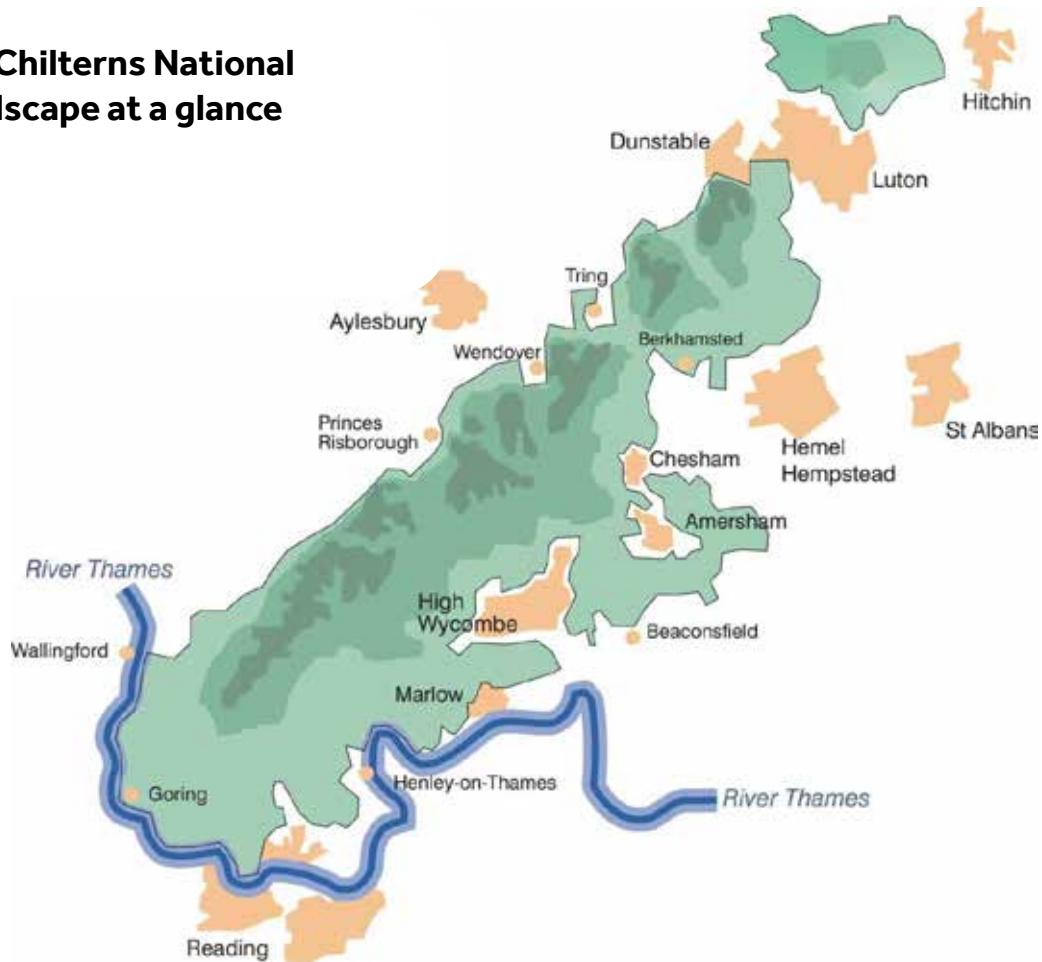
The work highlighted in this review shows what can be achieved when Protected Landscapes are trusted and supported to lead. I am confident that National Landscapes will continue to play a vital role in helping nature recover, adapting to climate change, and creating healthier places for future generations.

About Us

The Chilterns National Landscape is one of England's 34 National Landscapes, spanning 838 square kilometres across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. Shaped by rolling chalk hills, ancient beech woodlands, internationally important chalk streams and distinctive villages, it is a nationally protected landscape valued for its wildlife, heritage and natural beauty.

Working with farmers, landowners, local authorities, communities and partner organisations, we bring people together to conserve and enhance this special place, helping the Chilterns thrive for nature and for everyone.

The Chilterns National Landscape at a glance



838 km² – One National Landscape



4 counties – across 9 local authority areas



Thousands of years of history – A landscape of remarkable beauty and character that possesses unique geological, ecological and cultural heritage features.



One shared 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 impact in 2025/26

Every area of work featured in this report contributes to our shared vision: that the Chilterns will be cared for, forever and for everyone.

CONSERVING AND ENHANCING THE LANDSCAPE

Chilterns Management Plan 2025 - 2030



PUBLISHED

5 FARMER CLUSTERS

supported with over
100 members
covering
22,500 hectares



over
145 HECTARES
of wildlife-rich habitat
restored or created



252 LANDOWNERS
engaged

almost
123,000
HEDGEROW
plants in the ground
totalling over
21 KILOMETRES



responded to
OVER
60
planning
applications



ALMOST
26 HECTARES
of arable land
reverted to
grassland to
reduce water
run-off



9 PONDS
restored



2 CHALK
grassland
SSSIs in
restoration



7 catchment
PLANS being
delivered

WORKING TOGETHER FOR GREATER IMPACT

89 Mend
the Gap
delivery partners

& **237**
ORGANISATIONS
involved



6,085+
HOURS given by
VOLUNTEERS to
care for the Chilterns



More than 1 years' worth of full-time
work, contributed in a single year!

over
£1million
of project
funding
SECURED



237 PARTNERSHIPS
formed through our
FUNDING PROJECTS



CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH THE CHILTERNNS

107 community groups
ENGAGED



11,060

PEOPLE REACHED
through events &
community groups

1 **ACCESSIBILITY**
Hub launched

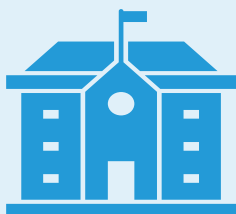


10%
increase in
WEBSITE VISITS
IN THE LAST YEAR



42%
increase in
LINKEDIN
followers

33
SCHOOL
PROJECTS
carried out



10,117
CHILDREN & YOUNG
PEOPLE INSPIRED

£429,000
FUNDING
awarded to
access projects



89 **ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS**
delivered

USING EVIDENCE TO DRIVE ACTION

29,277

WILDLIFE
RECORDS
collected



374

CITIZEN
SCIENTISTS
trained

ALMOST

26 tonnes

SUPPLEMENTARY FEED
provided



23
MONITORING
PROJECTS
carried out



4,214
BIRDS RECORDED
at feeding sites

Conserving & enhancing the landscape



This year, we made significant progress in conserving and enhancing the Chilterns National Landscape, combining strategic planning with practical action on the ground.

The adoption of the new Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape and launch of the Chilterns Nature Recovery Plan provide a clear framework for restoring nature and heritage, responding to climate change and supporting local Nature Recovery Strategies across the landscape.



Through programmes including Farming in Protected Landscapes and Mend the Gap, we worked with farmers, landowners and partners to restore habitats, improve rivers and strengthen ecological connections.

Alongside this practical action, we continued to influence how the Chilterns is managed beyond our own projects. New planning guidance on chalk streams and lighting guidance to protect our dark skies are helping shape better decisions, while targeted investment and partnership working are supporting landscape-scale conservation that will benefit wildlife and local communities.



FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES – INVESTING IN NATURE, ONE FARM AT A TIME

The Defra-funded Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme helps farmers and land managers deliver practical action for nature, climate resilience and communities.

Since 2021, we have used the fund to invest almost £3 million in more than 200 projects, supporting habitat restoration, improved water quality and new opportunities for people to connect with the landscape. Following the success of the first four years, the programme has been extended until 2029, giving land managers confidence to plan long-term environmental improvements.

FiPL shows the impact of combining investment, local knowledge and partnership working to deliver lasting benefits for nature and communities.



IMPACT

- Almost £3m invested in the first five years of FiPL (between April 2021 and March 2026)
- More than 200 projects supported
- Programme extended until 2029



NOT BOURNE YESTERDAY: CREATING A BETTER FUTURE FOR CHILTERN'S CHALK STREAMS

During its development phase, Not Bourne Yesterday has been building the foundations for a major programme to reconnect communities with the Chilterns' rare chalk streams. Supported by a £350,000 development grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project is building the relationships, knowledge and community support needed to protect these internationally important habitats for the future.

This year, the project developed a stronger understanding of local priorities and tested new ways to bring people closer to their rivers. Pilot activities including river dipping, creative workshops, community walks and river clean-ups helped people explore the wildlife, heritage and stories connected to chalk streams.



IMPACT

- £350,000 development grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Development phase progressing towards a five-year delivery programme
- Over 150 community responses gathered
- New audiences engaged through events and outreach
- New approaches tested for connecting communities with chalk streams

PLANNING CASEWORK

This year, our planning team continued to influence development across the Chilterns, responding to planning applications and appeals, contributing to emerging local plans and influencing national planning policy.

We engaged with emerging local plans in Buckinghamshire and Dacorum, including participating in the Dacorum local plan examination, and responded to consultations on design codes and neighbourhood plans.

Our casework supported proposals that align with our statutory purposes and Management Plan objectives, including the restoration of Pitstone Quarry, continued use and eventual restoration of Kensworth Quarry, improvements to the Chilterns Gateway Centre at Dunstable Downs and the creation of a (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) SANG at Potten End.

At a national level, we sought statutory consultee status within the planning system, responded to proposals for changes to planning consultation procedures and national design guidance, and worked with the National Landscapes Association on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

We also strengthened our planning capacity with the appointment of a second planning adviser in September 2025, enabling improvements to our internal planning processes and communication.



Also this year we ...

- ✓ Secured £1.7 million for the Mending the Misbourne programme, enabling river restoration, natural flood management and community engagement to begin.
- ✓ Progressed chalk stream and habitat restoration, including projects at Flaunden Brook and Dodds Mill, invasive species management and river health monitoring.
- ✓ Supported collaborative action through five farmer clusters, helping farmers work together to deliver nature recovery across the landscape.
- ✓ Delivered landscape-scale improvements through Mend the Gap, including more than 5km of hedgerow planting, the establishment of 720 trees, and enhancing more than 300 hectares for nature since the programme began.
- ✓ Established new Chilterns targets under the government's Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF), providing a baseline for tracking progress on nature recovery and landscape outcomes.
- ✓ Began developing the Climate Change Adaptation Plan, to help prepare the Chilterns for future environmental change.

Helping people connect with the Chilterns

Photo credit: Sue Lacey

The Chilterns is a landscape to be experienced, enjoyed and cared for.

This year, we helped more people build connections with the National Landscape through improved access, outdoor learning, volunteering and community projects. From ancient beech woods and chalk streams to historic commons, villages and the countryside in between, people of all ages discovered the places, stories and traditions that make the Chilterns special.

A key achievement was the launch of our new Accessibility Hub, making it easier for people to find accessible places to visit and plan time in the countryside. Through education programmes, community projects and events, we continued to create opportunities for people to explore, enjoy and care for the Chilterns.

FROM NATURE CALLING TO LUTON HENGE: CREATING A LASTING LEGACY

The Luton Henge story began through Nature Calling, a national, multimillion-pound arts programme funded by Arts Council England and Defra, which brought artists and communities together to explore connections with nature and heritage. In Luton, the year-long programme led to the creation of Luton Henge – a permanent outdoor community space inspired by the prehistoric henge monuments of the Chilterns, created with local communities and artists.

More than 1,000 people attended this year's Luton Henge Festival, while schools, families and local communities took part in creative workshops, volunteering, outdoor learning and heritage activities. Community-led projects, including bench-making, willow weaving and planting, have strengthened local ownership and connection with the site.

Building on the success of Nature Calling in Luton, Luton Henge has become a catalyst for further community projects, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Nature Towns and Cities programme. Working with partners including Revoluton Arts, Luton Borough Council and local organisations, the project shows how creative collaboration can create lasting benefits for people, nature and place.



IMPACT

- 1,000+ people attended Luton Henge Festival
- 36 participants took part in community workshops
- 58 pupils visited through guided school visits
- Legacy continuing through Nature Towns and Cities and local partnerships
- A permanent community asset created through Nature Calling



"Luton Henge and the partnership with CNL have been the gift we never could have imagined, thinking two (+) years back. The stars (and stones) totally aligned for us all, I think. Huge thanks for your enthusiasm and trust in the partnership."

**LINDSEY PUGH, CEO,
REVOLUTON ARTS.**

WELCOMING EVERYONE TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

Everyone should have the opportunity to experience the benefits of spending time in nature. This year, we launched our new Accessibility Hub, bringing together accessible countryside guides, videos, audio guides and practical information to help more people plan and enjoy visits to the Chilterns with confidence.

Alongside this, funding through the Defra Access for All programme supported a wide range of improvements across the National Landscape, helping remove barriers through accessible seating, improved paths, visitor facilities and interpretation.

One example is Dunstable Downs, where we contributed £110,000 towards a new accessible trail and sensory garden. The new 1.5km Access for All route provides wheelchair and mobility vehicle users with access to Chute Wood, its woodland setting and family-friendly nature play area, helping more people experience one of the Chilterns' most iconic landscapes.

By working with partners and land managers, we are helping make the Chilterns a more welcoming and inclusive National Landscape, enabling more people of all ages and abilities to connect with nature.



IMPACT

- £429,000 of Defra Access Funding allocated
- Accessibility Hub launched
- Accessible infrastructure delivered across multiple sites



"We're absolutely delighted to see this project completed. The new accessible path and sensory garden will help more people connect with nature and enjoy the outstanding landscape of Dunstable Downs, whatever their access needs. We're incredibly proud to be making the countryside more inclusive and accessible, and we're grateful to the Chilterns National Landscape for their support in helping bring this vision to life."

JOSHUA KYLE, VISITOR OPERATIONS & EXPERIENCES MANAGER, NATIONAL TRUST.

SLOW THE FLOW: HELPING COMMUNITIES PROTECT CHALK STREAMS



Through the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, we helped Chenies Primary School turn learning into action, delivering benefits for both people and nature. Supported by Affinity Water, a water audit identified savings of 137 litres of water per day, while new habitats and sustainable drainage features are helping to reduce flood risk and improve biodiversity.

Pupils took part in a six-week education programme, learning about the importance of the River Chess and the challenges facing chalk streams. Beyond the school grounds, the project has encouraged pupils and their families to adopt water-saving behaviours, helping to build a community committed to protecting their local chalk stream for the future.



IMPACT

- 137 litres of water saved daily
- New wildlife pond created
- Young people engaged in climate adaptation and water conservation



Also this year we ...

✓ Welcomed more than 400 people to 46 walks and events through the Chilterns Walking Festival, helping them discover the landscape, heritage and stories of the Chilterns.

✓ Supported more than 40 education sessions, guided walks and community activities, including Trout in the Classroom, Slow the Flow and new Chalk Stream Challenge Badges.

✓ Developed a new Youth Engagement Strategy and launched a Youth Hub on our website, bringing together work experience, volunteering and career opportunities and helping young people engage with the Chilterns.

✓ Commissioned the award-winning 'Walking with Dadima's' film, following an intergenerational walking group and exploring how sharing the countryside can help break down barriers to access and make the Chilterns feel more welcoming and inclusive. The film received three Awards of Merit at the IndieFEST Film Awards and the Audience Award at TMFF Festival.

✓ Created new ways for people to explore the Chilterns, including Mend the Gap's interactive StoryMap, helping more people discover the landscape's natural and cultural heritage.

Using evidence to drive action



Understanding how the Chilterns is changing is essential to protecting its future.

This year, we strengthened the evidence that underpins conservation, planning and land management across the National Landscape, helping ensure decisions are based on the best available knowledge.

Through species and habitat monitoring, citizen science, landscape-scale research and collaboration with universities, government bodies and national partners, we are building a clearer picture of the pressures facing the Chilterns and where action can make the greatest difference. Evidence gathered through these projects is helping guide investment, support nature recovery, influence decision-making and measure the long-term impact of conservation action.

TRACKING NATURE'S RECOVERY: EVIDENCE OF CHANGE ACROSS THE CHILTERNs

Long-term monitoring helps us understand how nature is responding to changes in land management – and whether conservation action is delivering results.

Through Tracking the Impact, volunteers, farmers and landowners are building a clearer picture of wildlife and habitats across the Chilterns. This year, 250 citizen scientists took part in 10 monitoring projects, generating more than 17,500 wildlife records. Alongside the three core Tracking the Impact surveys, they monitored farmland birds, beetles, pollinators, earthworms, hedgehogs, owl boxes and habitats.

The results are building an increasingly detailed picture of the Chilterns' wildlife. Citizen scientists recorded 102 bird species and 33 butterfly species this year – more than half of all UK butterfly species.

We are also exploring how this approach could be expanded. Working with partners including BBOWT through a Natural England-funded demonstration project, we are developing approaches to landscape-scale citizen science across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, helping inform Local Nature Recovery Strategy ambitions.

The programme is also building monitoring skills, with 31 volunteer training sessions delivered and 1,880 volunteer hours contributed. Together, this growing body of evidence is helping us understand nature recovery and guide future action across the landscape.



IMPACT

- 17,500+ wildlife records generated
- 250 citizen scientists involved
- 10 monitoring projects
- 102 bird species recorded
- 33 butterfly species recorded – more than half of all UK species



EVERY OBSERVATION TELLS A STORY

Ensuring healthy chalk streams depend on evidence, and some of the most valuable insights come from the people who know them best.

Through the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project and the Thames Water funded River Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project, citizen scientists have spent four years monitoring water quality, riverflies, habitats and wildlife, building a deeper understanding of one of the Chilterns' nine globally rare chalk streams.

This year, findings were brought together in the Citizen Science Report, demonstrating how community-led monitoring is helping identify pressures on the river and inform action. Evidence collected through monitoring identified emerging contaminants in the River Chess, prompting a public awareness campaign encouraging people to make simple changes to protect river health.

By combining local knowledge with scientific monitoring, citizen science is helping communities and partners understand challenges facing the river and take action to protect its future.



IMPACT

- Four years of volunteer monitoring brought together in one [report](#)
- Thousands of observations contributing to understanding river health
- Evidence informing action on emerging river contaminants
- Community-led monitoring supporting future restoration

Also this year we ...



Used evidence to understand pressures facing the Chilterns, including thermal drone surveys that provided new insight into deer populations and helped identify the need for a more coordinated approach to deer management.



Carried out archaeological investigations, heritage field schools and geophysical surveys revealing new insights into the Chilterns' historic environment.



Created new resources to support informed action, including a Deer Management Hub bringing together guidance and information for landowners and deer managers.



Continued developing evidence to support future planning, including the Climate Change Adaptation Plan, Nature Recovery Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.



Supported research into climate resilience, including the River Chess becoming a research site for the government's Flood and Drought Research Infrastructure (FDRI), helping improve understanding of how chalk streams respond to climate pressures.



Worked with partners including JNCC – the UK's statutory nature conservation adviser – and Natural England, testing new approaches to monitoring and data collection.



Working together for greater impact

Photo credit: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust

The challenges facing the Chilterns are too great for any one organisation to tackle alone.

By bringing together farmers, landowners, local authorities, charities, communities, businesses and government agencies, we combine expertise, resources and ambition to deliver improvements at a landscape scale.

Partnership is at the heart of everything we do. The Chilterns stretches across four counties and nine local authority areas, and protecting this nationally important landscape depends on organisations working together across boundaries. This year, we strengthened existing partnerships beyond the

Chilterns, collaborating with neighbouring National Landscapes and national programmes to share learning and deliver great impact.

A great example of this is Mend the Gap, which brings together 89 delivery partners and 237 organisations to restore chalk grassland, improve access, engage communities and connect nature across the southern Chilterns. Working at this scale enables partners to achieve far more than any organisation could deliver alone.

FARMERS WORKING TOGETHER FOR NATURE RECOVERY

Around 60% of the Chilterns is managed by farmers and landowners, making their involvement essential to delivering nature recovery at scale. Farmer clusters bring people together to share knowledge, identify priorities and deliver projects across farm boundaries.

This year, clusters across the Chilterns continued developing practical projects, including hedgerow restoration, pond creation, habitat improvements and farm environment planning.

IMPACT

- Multiple farmer clusters supporting action across the Chilterns
- £277,557 invested in North Chilterns projects with:
 - 6 ponds restored
 - 4.9km hedgerows improved
 - 38,820 hedge whips planted



In the North Chilterns Farmer Cluster, funding from FiPL, Affinity Water and other partners supported projects across member farms, including six pond restorations, 4.9km of hedgerows, 7.3km of fencing and almost 39,000 hedge whips planted.

By working together, farmers are helping create a more connected network of habitats across the Chilterns and supporting wider nature recovery goals.

Also this year we ...

- ✓ Supported the development of Nature Ridge, funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections programme, working with the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and The Ridgeway National Trail to explore opportunities for nature recovery, heritage conservation and community engagement across connected chalk landscapes.
- ✓ Continued bringing partners together through the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, supporting catchment planning across the Colne, Thames and South Chilterns catchments, alongside river restoration, habitat enhancement, invasive species management and monitoring projects.
- ✓ Played an active role in the North Chilterns Landscape Partnership, contributing expertise across nature recovery, heritage and community engagement while supporting partners to explore future opportunities for landscape-scale collaboration funding.
- ✓ Became a strategic partner in the £1m National Lottery Heritage Fund Nature Towns and Cities programme, bringing together partners across conservation, communities, health and access to help more people benefit from time in nature. This year, the programme began in Luton, building on the legacy of Nature Calling through school photography workshops and an accessibility workshop to help shape a more inclusive approach.
- ✓ Built on learning from the Next Generation project, using insights and experiences from young people to inform our new Youth Engagement Strategy and support new approaches to engaging young people with nature and heritage.
- ✓ Built the evidence with partners that helped secure the Environment Agency's decision to revoke Affinity Water's groundwater abstraction licence at Chesham Pumping Station, following 20 years of campaigning to support recovery of the River Chess.
- ✓ Strengthened collaboration across four Local Nature Recovery Strategy areas, helping align priorities and coordinate action for nature recovery across the Chilterns.
- ✓ Strengthened collaboration with National Landscapes across England and Wales, sharing expertise and contributing to national policy, programmes and best practice.



With thanks to our key funders



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



AffinityWater



Supported by the
HS2 Community & Environment Fund



Financial Summary

The figures below summarise our income and expenditure for 2025/26. By combining core government funding with contributions from local authorities, grant-making bodies, charities, businesses and other partners, we aim to maximise the impact of every pound invested in the Chilterns. In 2025/26, we invested almost £4 million in conserving and enhancing the landscape, connecting people with nature and delivering other practical action across the Chilterns. For every £1 of Defra funding, we secured a further £4.50 of external funding.

	2025/26	2024/25
	£'000s	£'000s
EXPENDITURE		
Corporate Management and Administration	276	271
Engagement & Partnerships	518	355
Planning & Communications	336	341
Landscape and Conservation	2,856	3,503
	3,986	4,470
INCOME		
Core funding:		
Core Defra Grant – Revenue	514	628
Core Defra Grant – Capital	236	114
Access for All	434	257
Farming in Protected Landscapes	787	1,102
Local Authority Contributions	130	127
Other income *	233	207
Project funding:		
Thames Water	464	698
Affinity Water	234	210
National Lottery Heritage Fund	143	563
Environment Agency	50	11
Rebel Restoration	-	105
Rothschild Foundation	90	-
Floods and Droughts Research Infrastructure (FDRI)	26	-
HS2 Ltd	64	62
National Landscapes Association	3	57
Project reserves	578	328
	3,986	4,470

*Other income includes interest income, advertising income and other match funding

THANK YOU

The impact highlighted in this report is only possible because of the shared commitment of the many people and organisations who care for the Chilterns.

From farmers and landowners managing land for nature and climate resilience, to volunteers, communities and partners helping us deliver change, every contribution plays a part in conserving and enhancing this nationally important landscape.

We thank our Board Members, staff team, volunteers, funders, local authorities, parish councils, community groups, businesses and partners for their continued support. Together, we are helping nature recover, conserving the Chilterns' distinctive landscapes and heritage, and creating more opportunities for people to enjoy and value this special place, now and for generations to come.

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Scan QR code to visit our website

Our Projects



CHILTERN
CHALK STREAMS
PROJECT



Not
Bourne
Yesterday



River Chess
Smarter Water
Catchment



**Chilterns
National
Landscape**