

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD

2017/18

## BACKGROUND

The Chilterns is a beautiful area of rolling chalk hills, woodlands, streams and quiet valleys with brick and flint cottages. In 1965 it was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), in recognition that it is one of the finest landscapes in the country. The Chilterns Conservation Board is the public body with responsibility for protecting and enhancing the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It was established by Parliamentary Order in 2004, following national legislation to improve the protection and management of AONBs: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB; and to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities. In addition, the Conservation Board has a secondary duty to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities, where that is compatible with its primary duties.

The Chilterns AONB is one of 46 AONBs in UK. AONBs belong to the same family as National Parks which is recognised as containing the finest countryside in the UK. The Chilterns AONB covers 833 square kilometres. Its landscapes have been shaped by the activities of farmers and foresters over hundreds of years and many ancient countryside features can still be found. It is also a haven for wildlife such as the spectacular red kite and the endangered water vole. The Chilterns AONB has a resident population of 80,000 and attracts millions of visits every year by people who come to enjoy its landscapes and recreational opportunities.

## MEMBERSHIP

The Conservation Board has 27 members, drawn from a wide range of communities across the Chilterns. Each member is independent and does not represent any other organisation. Thirteen members are nominated by the local authorities in the Chilterns, 8 are appointed by the Secretary of State from applications by the public and 6 are elected by parish councils.

The work of the Conservation Board is guided by the Management Plan for the Chilterns AONB, which was produced in 2002 and is regularly reviewed.

(see [http://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/files/ConservationBoard/ManagementPlan/Management%20Plan%202014-19/chilterns\\_management\\_plan\\_2014-19\\_final.pdf](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/files/ConservationBoard/ManagementPlan/Management%20Plan%202014-19/chilterns_management_plan_2014-19_final.pdf) )

The Plan provides a framework for the actions of the Board, its partner organisations and local communities across the whole Chilterns. Four fifths of the Conservation Board's core funding is supplied by central government and the remaining fifth comes from local authorities. The Board also makes bids to other sources of funding to raise support for individual projects.

## CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Over the past year, the Chilterns Conservation Board has had huge success securing grants for projects and running innovative food and drink and walking festivals. For every £1 received from Local Authorities the CCB has generated a further £9 and is currently working on projects worth £4million to protect or enhance the Chilterns landscape, enable healthy lifestyles, or support the local economy. Project funding is ring-fenced, so the CCB relies on and appreciates the support from Defra and Local Authorities to support its core functions which then enable this exponential benefit to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## **First Food and Drink Festival**

Defra funding was secured in 2017 to promote the Chilterns as a food and drink destination and increase tourism to the area. The project included a 7-day food and drink festival, new vineyard and brewery guides, a *Taste of the Chilterns* video and the first print edition of Chilterns Food Magazine. The CCB received fantastic national media coverage for the festival and for the Chilterns.

## **Chilterns Walking Festival**

The CCB secured LEADER funding for a 3-year programme of walking festivals, promoting walks and events throughout the Chilterns. The project aims to attract visitors and increase overnight stays as well as appeal to local audiences of all levels. There will be 6 walking festivals from May 2017 to October 2019, promoting the Chilterns as a superb walking destination.

## **Chilterns Hillforts**

In September 2017, the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded nearly £770k to the CCB to discover more about ancient hillforts and Chilterns history. The whole of the AONB will be surveyed using LIDAR technology to uncover hidden archaeological features using aircraft-mounted lasers. Alongside practical conservation work, education and interpretation there will be lots of opportunity for people to get involved!

## **Central Chilterns Landscape Project**

The CCB received a development grant of £185,000 to develop plans for what will be the biggest conservation and engagement project in the Central Chilterns. The project is being developed with over 30 partners and, if the bid is successful, will bring a total partnership income of around £2.8 million to the area for practical conservation and enhancement, developing a network of stewards and champions and ensuring long-term benefits.

There will be many opportunities for people to have a role in protecting this beautiful area. The name of the Scheme is "Chalk, Cherries and Chairs" to reflect the landscape, land use and industrial heritage of the Chilterns. Following an online survey in December 2017, the team has been on the road, holding public meetings to talk to local people, gain input and feedback. The strength of connection many people have to the Chilterns landscape came across loud and clear. The real challenge now is to design activities for people who haven't yet made that connection. Lots of exciting projects are coming together, from exploring ancient routeways, giving wildlife more space, planting orchards, to helping uncover the mystery of Grim's Ditch or interpreting the landscape through sound and arts.

## **CCB Management**

The CCB owes a huge debt to the Chief Executive, Sue Holden, who has set a strong and robust agenda for taking the CCB forward. This includes visiting local authority Leaders and Chief Executives as well as setting up meetings with government ministers and officers.

**BILL BENDYSHE-BROWN**

**THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD REPRESENTATIVE**