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**The Chilterns Conservation Board**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**PRESS RELEASE**

LARGEST EVER CONSERVATION PROJECT IN THE CHILTERNS IS AWARDED NATIONAL LOTTERY FUNDING

An ambitious project to restore and enhance the wildlife habitats, landscape features and cultural heritage of the Central Chilterns has been awarded a National Lottery grant of £2 million. The Chalk, Cherries & Chairs Landscape Partnership Scheme, spearheaded by the Chilterns Conservation Board will also work to educate and inspire communities to become protectors of their local heritage and landscapes.

Thanks to National Lottery players the five-year scheme will encourage people to connect and reconnect to the wildlife and cultural heritage of the Central Chilterns through a number of individual but interweaving projects across three key themes: Wildlife & Landscape, Heritage & Landscape and People, Communities & Landscape.

Key aims of the scheme include:

* **Protecting declining wildlife –** The Central Chilterns is home to a wide range of wildlife such as butterfly species including the rare Chalk Hill Blue and the Duke of Burgundy, and strong populations of bird species including Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer and Marsh Tit. In the last 20 years Chalk Hill Blue populations have declined by 6% and the Duke of Burgundy by 20%, and since 1970 farmland bird populations have declined by over 50% and woodland birds by 25%. Chalk, Cherries and Chairs will support habitat management to protect the areas that these species rely on.
* **Reinvigorating Chilterns Orchards** – Once a mainstay of the Chilterns, providing vital seasonal work for locals, a supply of fresh fruit for nearby London and other surrounding towns and a beautiful tourist attraction, the once common cherry orchards have all but disappeared. The declining orchards will be rejuvenated and the annual cherry festival celebrating the area’s renowned produce will be revived through the scheme.
* **Solving the Mystery of Grim’s Ditch –** Presumed to be an ancient routeway spanning 30km, Grim’s Ditch is a real mystery. When was it built? What was it for? Why are there gaps in it? Pottery finds suggest that it dates from the Iron Age (c. 700BC to AD43), but we don’t know why – was it just a boundary, or did it have a defensive use? Was it originally all connected, or are the gaps deliberate? Further research will help to solve the mystery.
* **Uncovering the biodiversity in the headwaters of the Chilterns –** At first glance, the Central Chilterns appears to have a rather dry landscape, but it is home to a number of small streams and ponds that are yet to be fully investigated. The scheme will aim to identify and map the biodiversity of the freshwater features of the area.
* **Revealing the untold history of the Chilterns’ chair Bodgers** – Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the woods of the Central Chilterns provided vital resources for families within the area to make a living. The scheme will uncover what life was like to woodland wood-turners known as ‘Bodgers’, and also allow people to reconnect with their craft heritage through events, demonstrations and even trying it out for themselves.

Supported through the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), High Speed Two Ltd through the Community Environment Fund (CEF) and Wycombe District Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), the project will leave a lasting legacy of improved conservation and land management, partnership working, skills, volunteers, and engaged and aware communities caring for the future of wildlife and their heritage. Volunteering, learning, digital media and providing small grants to encourage community initiatives, will run across all the projects of the scheme.

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of HLF said: *“As well as being part of a nationally protected Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty –, the Central Chilterns has a wealth of heritage stories dating as far back as the Neanderthal hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic era and continuing right through to the present day. We are thrilled that with money from the National Lottery we are able to fund Chalk, Cherries and Chairs to preserve this important natural heritage for future generations, allowing them to forge stronger connections to the fascinating history of the area, and create their own stories through the scheme.”*

Commenting on the award, Kath Daly, Countryside Officer said: *“Over the last two years a strong partnership of organisations, ranging from UK-wide charities to local community groups, has united to help plan Chalk, Cherries and Chairs. We are absolutely delighted that we have received this support, thanks to National Lottery players. This major partnership will provide opportunities for people to get involved and volunteer; to increase and improve wildlife spaces; and for communities to learn, create and take action for heritage.”*

Recruitment of project staff has now started and work will commence in early summer. To find out more about the roles available and to apply please visit the Chilterns AONB website.

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**Notes to editors**

1. **About the Heritage Lottery Fund**

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLottery and #HLFsupported.

1. **About High Speed Two Ltd & the Community Environment Fund (CEF)**

CEF is designed to give local communities and businesses disrupted by the construction of Phase One of the scheme the opportunity to share in the benefits of HS2. To find out more about High Speed Two Ltd and the Community Environment Fund please visit: <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/hs2funds/pages/Category/about-hs2-funds>

1. More can be found out about the project at: <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/projects/landscape-partnership-scheme.html>
2. More information on the individual 18 projects planned can be viewed here: [https://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/Chalk,%20Cherries%20&%20Chairs/1.%20LCAP%20Part%202%20-%20All%20Project%20Summaries06.09.pdf](https://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/Chalk%2C%20Cherries%20%26%20Chairs/1.%20LCAP%20Part%202%20-%20All%20Project%20Summaries06.09.pdf)
3. To find out more about the roles available for the project, and to apply please visit: <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/vacancies.html>
4. The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1965 and covers 833 sq kms (326 sq miles) stretching from Goring, in Oxfordshire, to near Hitchin, in Hertfordshire. It has a resident population of 80,000.
5. The Conservation Board was set up following the passing of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and increase awareness and understanding of the Chilterns AONB. The Board, which also aims to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities, is supported by Defra and all local authorities in the area.

**Further information**

For further information, images and interviews please contact Vicki Pearce, Communications Officer at The Chilterns Conservation Board on 01844 355 521 or at vpearce@chilternsaonb.org.

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