

Chair's SUMMARY REPORT

Creating a brighter future for the Chilterns

Last year I flagged that 2019/20 would be a year of change – what I couldn't have predicted was the scale and reasons for those changes, as we all now know.

The range of events offered last year, despite everyone's best intentions, have dwindled to a trickle, supported by a set of online presentations, as we endeavour to follow government guidance and good sense. This has also had an impact on our plans to grow our membership during the year.

At the first meeting of the Chiltern Society Executive Committee in 1966 it was agreed that the following committees should be established – Rights of Way, Commons and Open Spaces, Trees and Forestry, Mineral Workings, Social and Ancient Buildings. The bank balance was stated as £90. We've come a long way since those early days. Fifty-five years later we're still involved in creating a brighter future both for the landscape of the Chilterns and all the people who live, visit and work here.

I am, however, really pleased that we've secured a great team of staff to support a comprehensive set of objectives, developed and agreed by the trustees. To that end, I'm extremely grateful for the foresight of past Chairman, Michael Rush – now our President – in launching the Bluebell Guild some years ago. It has supported us financially and enabled us to take bold steps to recruit this team and invest in the future.

Since last year we've also taken forward the impetus gained from the debate regarding chalk streams led by Feargal Sharkey at the 2019 AGM, and there's definitely light at the end of the tunnel regarding our goal of achieving a sustainable future for the Chilterns in all aspects of water management and conservation.

I hope you saw our response to the Glover Review, which was featured in the magazine earlier in the year, and we're determined to work closely with Natural England and Defra in delivering many of the key aspects covered in that report. I'm particularly keen to support the Ranger Project, because this ties in with the work we do with schools, families and young people, as well as providing a great way to engage more

people in the work of the Society and in supporting its aims and objectives.

Development across the Chilterns remains a huge concern, with work on HS2 still progressing despite a number of challenges; Heathrow and Luton airport expansion on the horizon; and the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway heralding the potential building of a million new homes to the north of the Chilterns, as well as continued development across the rest of the region and surrounding areas. I'm delighted that we've invested more in our planning team, and with a raft of dedicated volunteers and closer links with other organisations we'll ensure that all planning proposals and developments are responded to appropriately and robustly.

It's only right and proper that I end this report by thanking the wider Chiltern Society team and my fellow trustees for all their hard work this year, despite challenging circumstances and in the face of very uncertain times.

We haven't been idle, as I hope you can tell, and I'm very pleased to say that along with the recruitment of some extremely able and fantastic new trustees whose details you may have seen in the magazine, we've been putting in place the building blocks necessary to deliver a brighter future for all in an expanded landscape. We've completed our recruitment to key posts, the infrastructure supporting our volunteer groups is being formalised, and with a new Customer Relationship Management System in place we've developed a far more efficient and effective way of engaging with our members and partners. Along with that we've upgraded to a state-of-the-art finance system, refurbished and revamped the offices at the White Hill Centre, and will soon be in a position to tell you about some exciting new projects currently being worked on with our partners.

2020/21 will definitely be a year to look forward to.



SIMON KEAREY AT THE SOCIETY'S FARM SHOP AWARDS

Financial facts and stats

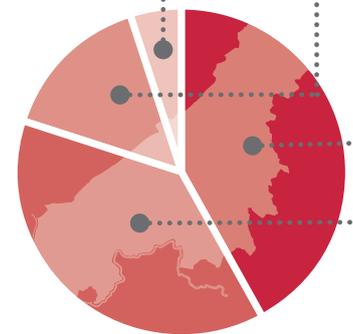
Where our income came from

42% Membership, Donations & Gift Aid

38% Legacy Income

15% Volunteer Activity & Grants

5% Investments & Retail Sales



How did we spend each £1 in 2019/20?

For each £1 we spend our volunteers contribute even more in the time they give.

- Maintaining and mapping hundreds of miles of footpaths, bridleways and cycleways each year
- Doing what we can to minimise the impacts of projects like HS2 and the Ox-Cam Expressway
- Lobbying government and industry at all levels to protect and revive our chalk streams
- Monitoring and campaigning for better planning across the region
- Maintaining our sites and beyond to help nature thrive across the Chilterns

Chief Officer's SUMMARY REPORT

An interesting year, with great things in prospect

With a new business plan in place 2019/20 was set to be a year of change, with plans to reorganise and streamline our central operations.

With the help of our great volunteers our aims were to:

- 1** Revamp our systems and processes, and move our computer system into the 'cloud'
- 2** Revamp the office to provide an improved working environment and to allow for an increased working capacity (staff and volunteers)
- 3** Build our fundraising capacity and implement plans to grow our membership base
- 4** Further develop our business plan to enable the delivery of the Chilterns we'd all like to see

5 Greatly improve our internal communications, to best help and guide over 40 volunteer groups working under our umbrella across the Chilterns

6 Help more volunteers get involved in making the Chilterns a better place to live and work.

Given the strangest year in my lifetime, achieving the first five, and having much in place to deliver number six, is great news. It makes me more than a little proud of our team, staff and all the volunteers who've helped make this happen.



TOM BEESTON



Membership

Tracey and Helen in the office have implemented a Customer Relationship Management System (CRMS) to help us communicate better with our members and volunteers, and deliver cost savings. They've also helped to hold our membership numbers at just under 7,000.

Heather (Bookkeeper), Dan (Vice Chair) and Luke (Treasurer) have completely revamped our accounts system, integrating it with the new CRM, retail and events systems, and we're already seeing cost and operational benefits.

Gavin (Head of Conservation), Fiona (Ranger) and our expert volunteers, have managed to get a great system in place to keep us in line with the ever-changing Covid-19 requirements. This means that, despite all that's happened, our volunteers have kept the footpaths across the Chilterns clear and our 12 sites still look

fantastic, although I must say we're more than a little concerned about ash dieback. We've even managed to get walks and some cycling events going.

Understanding Covid-19 has hit people's mental health hard. Gavin and Fiona have been strengthening our collaboration with partners like Lindengate, in order to explore ways of helping people improve their mental and physical health through nature-based activities.



Planning

Colin (Head of Planning) and our planning volunteers have stepped up a gear. We've responded to more planning applications and local plans than ever, and are looking forward to campaigning for more sustainable development in the future - I've been told to watch this space!

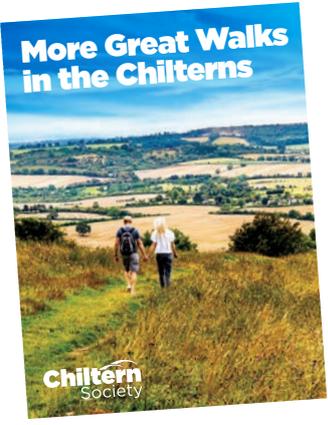
Progress on the Misbourne Greenway has slowed, but should recommence soon; our recent 'hot off the press' Chalk Rivers Action Group (CRAG) summit went with a bang - we now know our streams are

on the agenda in both Houses of Parliament, and in the boardrooms of both Affinity and Thames Water.



Fundraising

We've restructured the team and have a new fundraiser starting soon. We're already working on new funding bids with our partners to help our chalk streams and health and wellbeing initiatives, together with other things which I hope we can announce soon.



Lucy (Events and Marketing), with the help of Dan and volunteers across the organisation, has been delivering great things on our social media, and they're part way

through rebuilding our online operation. Disappointingly, after much hard work, we had to trim back the Heritage Festival, but what we did deliver went down fantastically, thanks to Steve and all on the Festival team.

strength. Our walk designers have released a new book, *More Great Walks in the Chilterns*, as well as lots of socially distanced walks. It's been great to see them being used by an even more diverse range of people across all walks of life.

Our business strategy of campaigning and promoting is now focused under four chapters, and we hope to be delivering campaigns covering all of them in the coming months.

So many great things are happening! I've only mentioned part of the story, but I want to express my sincere gratitude to all my team, trustees and volunteers for caring for the Chilterns, as together we strive to make them an even better, more sustainable and enjoyable place to live.

THANK YOU ALL.

Thanks to Richard (Editor) the members' magazine *Chiltern* goes from strength to



LAUNCH OF THE CLEANER GREENER CHILTERN CAMPAIGN



MANIFESTO FOR CHILTERN WILDLIFE



RIVER CHES

