



## **Manifesto for Chilterns Wildlife**

### **Guidance for Planning Field Officers**

The Chiltern Society published its 'Manifesto for Chilterns Wildlife' in May 2020, outlining its commitment to restore, enhance and protect Chilterns wildlife. It will form the basis for campaigning across many areas of the Society's work, including its role in influencing the planning system. The Manifesto is an online document which is published on the Chiltern Society website on the following link –

<https://chilternsociety.org.uk/chiltern-manifesto/>

The 5 purposes of the Manifesto are –

- Creating more space for nature
- Making the places we live and work wildlife friendly
- Ensuring that children grow up with wild green spaces to explore
- Restoring the network of wildlife habitats that the Chilterns is known for
- Creating a landscape that is resilient to the development pressure it faces

If you are commenting on a Local Plan or a planning application which has the potential to impact on wildlife or provides opportunities for habitat enhancements, then these purposes should be clearly set out in your response letter to set the context for more detailed comments on the specifics of the application.

More specific comments should be made where possible in relation to the 5 major goals of the Manifesto as follows –

#### **1. Restore wildlife across this unique landscape**

The key focus here is on restoring wildlife habitat connections across the Chilterns landscape to enhance wildlife and local character.

The main opportunities for our planning role are –

- **Campaign for wildlife friendly planning that ensures development leaves biodiversity better off.** This links in well with the Government's commitment to seeking biodiversity net gain as a result of new development. We will promote this through our Local Plans work and will also need to scrutinise planning applications for any impacts on biodiversity and assess what measures a developer is proposing as biodiversity enhancements. Most applications will be accompanied by an ecological survey and many of the significant ones will include an Environmental Statement.

If we consider that the measures proposed are insufficient, we need to make that clear at the consultation stage and encourage local planning authorities to request further information and habitat enhancement plans. For complex schemes, it is also good practice for the application to include a Management Plan to outline how habitats will be managed in the long term. Plans relating to wildlife should be agreed as part of the application and not be required later through a condition.

- **Lobby government on large infrastructure and planning projects to ensure that wildlife protection and enhancement measures are incorporated.** Consultations on HS2 and Heathrow and Luton Airport expansion will normally be dealt with by the office, but there may be other significant planning applications where we wish to lobby the government on biodiversity issues. Please contact Colin Blundel or Gavin Johnson to discuss this in the first instance.
- **Ensure that wildlife policies are incorporated into Local Plans.** We already comment on all Local Plans where there is likely to be an impact on the Chilterns. In addition to comments on AONB and Green Belt issues, we will be looking to provide stronger comments on Local Plans, with reference to the strategic approach to biodiversity and the priorities set out in the Manifesto.
- **Work with planning authorities and developers to seek to incorporate wildlife enhancement measures into planning applications.** It is our intention to develop some guidance on the Manifesto for use by local authority planning officers and developers. We need to encourage enhancements that are appropriate to the Chilterns in terms of landscape, habitats and species, rather than adopting standard approaches from elsewhere. In particular, we need to assess whether the habitat enhancements proposed are appropriate for the location and whether the applicant has justified their choice of species based on those typically found in the locality.

## 2. Protect the water in the chalk streams

- **Develop and support local projects to enhance chalk stream habitats and species.** If we are aware of local projects in the vicinity of Local Plan site allocations or planning application sites, we should ensure that we make the Local Planning Authority aware of this. In such cases, evidence needs to be provided by the applicant that the development would not cause harm to the chalk stream.
- **Ensure the impact of new developments on chalk streams are highlighted in Local Plans and planning applications.** There are 9 chalk streams in the Chilterns, as follows –
  - River Misbourne
  - River Wye
  - River Gade
  - River Chess
  - River Ver
  - River Bulbourne
  - Hughenden Stream
  - Hamble Brook
  - Ewelme Brook

When commenting on emerging Local Plans, we need to scrutinise policies that relate to these chalk streams and seek to ensure that policies make adequate provision for their conservation, particularly in terms of protecting and enhancing habitats; reducing water abstraction and maintaining and improving water quality.

If we are commenting on planning applications close to the chalk streams, we need to look at what impacts the development might have in terms of habitat degradation, increased water abstraction and water run-off. If possible, enhancements to the chalk stream should be sought as part of the application.

### 3. Prevent the loss of our woodland

- **Seek to ensure that policies in Local Plans and planning applications protect important woodland habitats.** Ecological surveys should identify whether any woodlands are likely to be affected and assess their conservation value. We should object to any development that would have a detrimental impact on an ancient woodland, and where these woodlands are to be retained within the development, a suitable buffer should be provided between the woodland and the development.

Where woodlands are not identified as ancient, we should still consider the contribution the woodland makes to the landscape and the impact on any wildlife species. Any loss of trees that is unavoidable should be compensated for by a larger area of trees elsewhere on the site to try to ensure that there is a biodiversity net gain. The species used should be appropriate to the locality and of local provenance wherever possible.

### 4. Enhance our open grassland sites

- **Support and facilitate local groups working to restore, enhance and protect local grassland sites.** Where major developments are proposed, we need to assess whether they would have a negative impact on grassland. The best place to start is with the ecological survey, which should assess the value of the grassland, including whether it is species-rich or semi-improved. If the grassland is assessed as having wildlife value, we should either be opposing the development or recommending that it is retained in the development.

### 5. Support landowners and farmers to conserve wildlife

- **Support ‘Farm Clusters’ across the Chilterns.** These are groups of farms working together to take a strategic approach to wildlife enhancements, particularly through grant programmes such as the Government’s Environmental Land Management scheme.

There may be scope to consider this when we are responding on significant applications and Local Plans.