Largest Chilterns conservation project awarded



An Adonis Blue butterfly Allen Beechey

A scheme to restore and enhance the wildlife habitats, landscapes and cultural heritage of the Central Chilterns has been awarded a National Lottery grant of £2million.

The Chilterns Conservation Board is spearheading Chalk, Cherries and Chairs, named after the famous features and history of the area. It is the largest-ever conservation project in the Chilterns.

Protecting wildlife

Chalk, Cherries and Chairs will work to protect declining wildlife in the Central Chilterns. This includes butterflies such as the rare Chalk Hill Blue and the Duke of Burgundy, and birds including Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers and Marsh Tits.

The scheme will reinvigorate the Chilterns Orchards, which have almost disappeared. Once common in the area, cherry orchards provided vital seasonal work, a supply of fresh fruit, and were a popular tourist attraction. The scheme will also revive the annual cherry festival, celebrating the local produce.

Uncovering untold histories

History will be at the heart of many of the scheme's projects. Research will be undertaken to try and solve the mystery of Grim's Ditch. Thought to be an ancient routeway measuring around 30km, no one knows what it was for.

Ros Kerslake, former Chief Executive of The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: “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.”

Other projects within the scheme will uncover the stories of the woodland wood-turners of the area, known as chair bodgers. Visitors to the Central Chilterns will have the chance to try 'bodging' for themselves.

Recruitment of project staff has begun and work for the five-year scheme will start in early summer.



The view from in Ivinghoe Beacon in Hertfordshire Chris Smith / Chilterns AONB



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Cholesbury Camp hillfort in Buckinghamshire

National Lottery grant will help reveal prehistoric secrets of the Chilterns