



Chilterns National Landscape

Nestled in the heart of England, the Chilterns National Landscape is an area of remarkable beauty and distinctive character with a unique interaction of geological, ecological and cultural heritage features. It is now one of the 34 National Landscapes in England having equal status to a National Park.

Designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1965, the region boasts a rich tapestry of diverse habitats, with ancient beech woodlands, chalk grasslands, and globally rare chalk streams offering a haven for a variety of wildlife. Spanning over 833 square kilometres from the River Thames in Oxfordshire to Hitchin in Hertfordshire, this picturesque landscape with its rolling chalk hills, ancient woodlands and historic towns and villages provides numerous opportunities for outdoor activities, connection with nature or simply enjoying some fresh air and relaxation.

The Chilterns provides precious habitats for wildlife, including many protected and notable species. More than 11% of the Chilterns National Landscape is designated and protected for its wildlife. Many of the [habitats](#) now associated with the Chilterns are a by-product of centuries of traditional management, such as grazing, coppicing and quarrying. We work with many different partners to help protect and enhance the Chilterns as detailed in our [Chilterns AONB Management Plan](#).

The Chilterns has a rich history of human settlement and land use, with a diverse [archaeological landscape](#) including iron age hillforts, ancient parish boundaries, medieval field patterns and bronze age barrows. It is this relationship between people and place which makes the area distinctive and special.

There is a wide array of outdoor activities for visitors of all ages and interests. Walkers can explore the extensive network of well-maintained trails, including the Ridgeway National Trail, which meanders through the Chilterns for 87 miles, offering panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. For more information see www.chilterns.org.uk

At the northern end of the Chilterns, the rapidly growing conurbation of Luton is surrounded by rolling chalk hills with some of the finest countryside sites and viewpoints. These are nationally important chalk grassland sites home to many scarce species including the Chiltern gentian, wild candytuft, pasque flower, silver spotted skipper and glo-worm. It is an historic landscape, with ancient hillforts and routeways criss-crossing the countryside.

There are several countryside sites and nature reserves in Luton, such as [Blow's Downs](#), [Galley and Warden Hills](#), [Dallow Downs](#) and Legrave Common, source of the River Lea, as well as seven landscaped parks. Yet a large proportion of the population in Luton is disconnected from their local greenspaces and Chilterns countryside. A recent study by the University of Bedfordshire on how diverse communities engage with greenspaces and the countryside, found that only around 33% of participants in the Luton/Dunstable area visited greenspaces weekly, with older individuals, those facing various challenges, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds being the least frequent users.

Luton has a population of 225,261 and is super-diverse with over 50% of the population identifying as Asian, Asian British and Black. Over 150 languages and dialects are spoken in the town. Many people face barriers to accessing greenspaces and the countryside.

It is our aspiration that everyone should feel welcome, confident and safe to participate in activities in the Chilterns landscape. Our [EDI Ambition statement](#) sets out our core values, including our aspirations in relation to our engagement work. Through Nature calling our ambition is to engage with communities we haven't worked with before and to support more inclusive access to the countryside. We are keen to connect with communities in Bury Park, Farley Hill and Marsh Farm. Revoluton Arts is already actively working with these communities and Nature Calling provides an exciting opportunity to build on these relationships. Arts projects will allow people to explore their own personal connections with green spaces and new ways to relate to the countryside and heritage on their doorstep. We expect to focus activity locally, connecting participants with their local greenspaces and heritage, but hope as part of the creative process and engagement to arrange visits to some iconic Chilterns landmarks such as Barton Hills to provide inspiration and connection. However we have an open mind and will be guided by the communities and advisory group. Public transport within Luton is good, including the Luton Busway, but there is very limited bus service to the wider Chilterns countryside sites which is a consideration.

To deliver Nature Calling we will be working in partnership with Revoluton Arts who will facilitate the production of the artists commissions and engage with the local community. Revoluton Arts is a Luton-based arts organisation. They work with artists and communities - across a range of art forms and disciplines - to produce creative work that promotes positive futures for people and place. Their work is deeply rooted in Luton and their creative programme is co-created with communities. They facilitate pathways for people to engage with creativity, as professional practitioners, participants, and as audience members.

See www.revolutonarts.com

A project advisory group is being established to help steer the project locally within Luton. Members of this group are likely to include youth ambassadors, representative local community groups, Luton Borough Council, the University of Bedfordshire, the River Lea Partnership, Marsh Farm Outreach, BCN Wildlife Trust and Luton Youth Network. We will have a flexible approach to membership, as things progress there may be opportunities to involve new members on to the Advisory group who will benefit and add value to the project. Contact: aweiss@chilterns.org.uk



Galley & Warden Hills on the edge of Luton ©Chris Smith

Warden and Galley Hills was Luton's first nature reserve. The chalk downland supports a huge variety of wild flowers and these attract rare insects and over 20 species of butterflies. "Drays ditches" run along the base of Warden Hill which were originally dug in the Bronze Age as boundaries to separate tribal groups. Near the top of Galley Hill two Bronze Age barrows can be found. These were excavated in the 1960s and the remains of 14 burials were found in the largest barrow. In the Middle Ages a gallows was built on top of one of the barrows to be used for public executions.

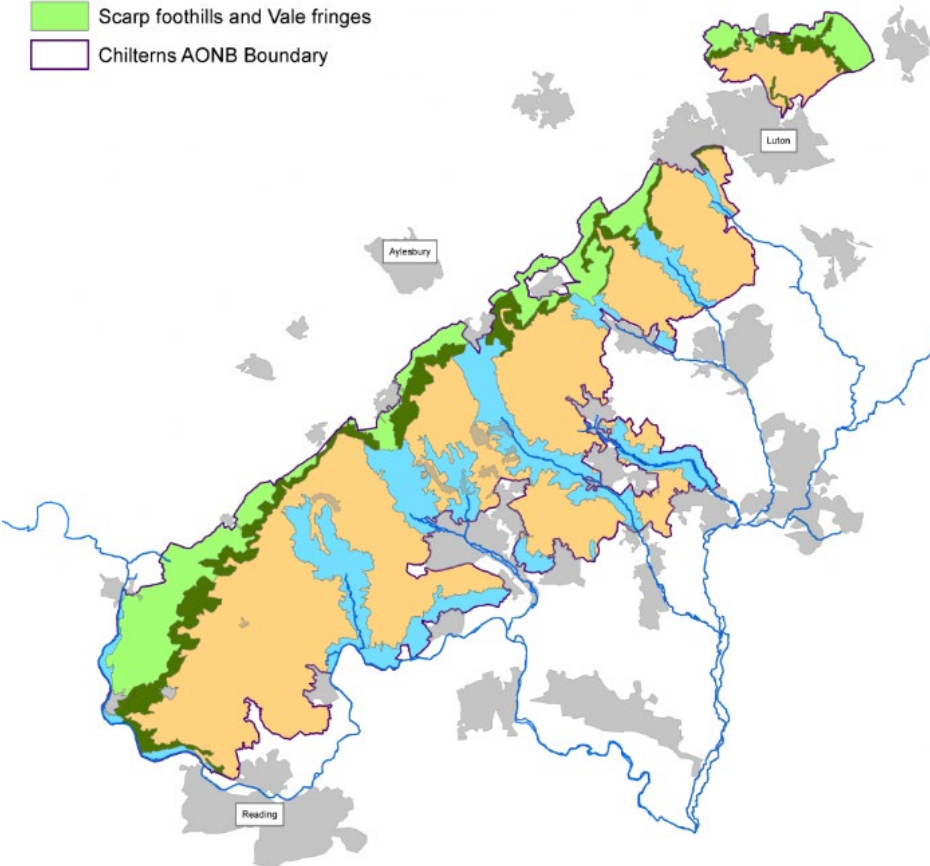


The chalk meadows of the Barton Hills National Nature Reserve are amongst the finest in the country, famous for their spring display of pasque flowers and home to many butterflies. At one time the Hills were heavily used by local graziers and Barton Brook was known as 'Washbrook'- it was used for washing sheep before they went to market in nearby towns. Barton brook is one of the Chilterns precious chalk springs.

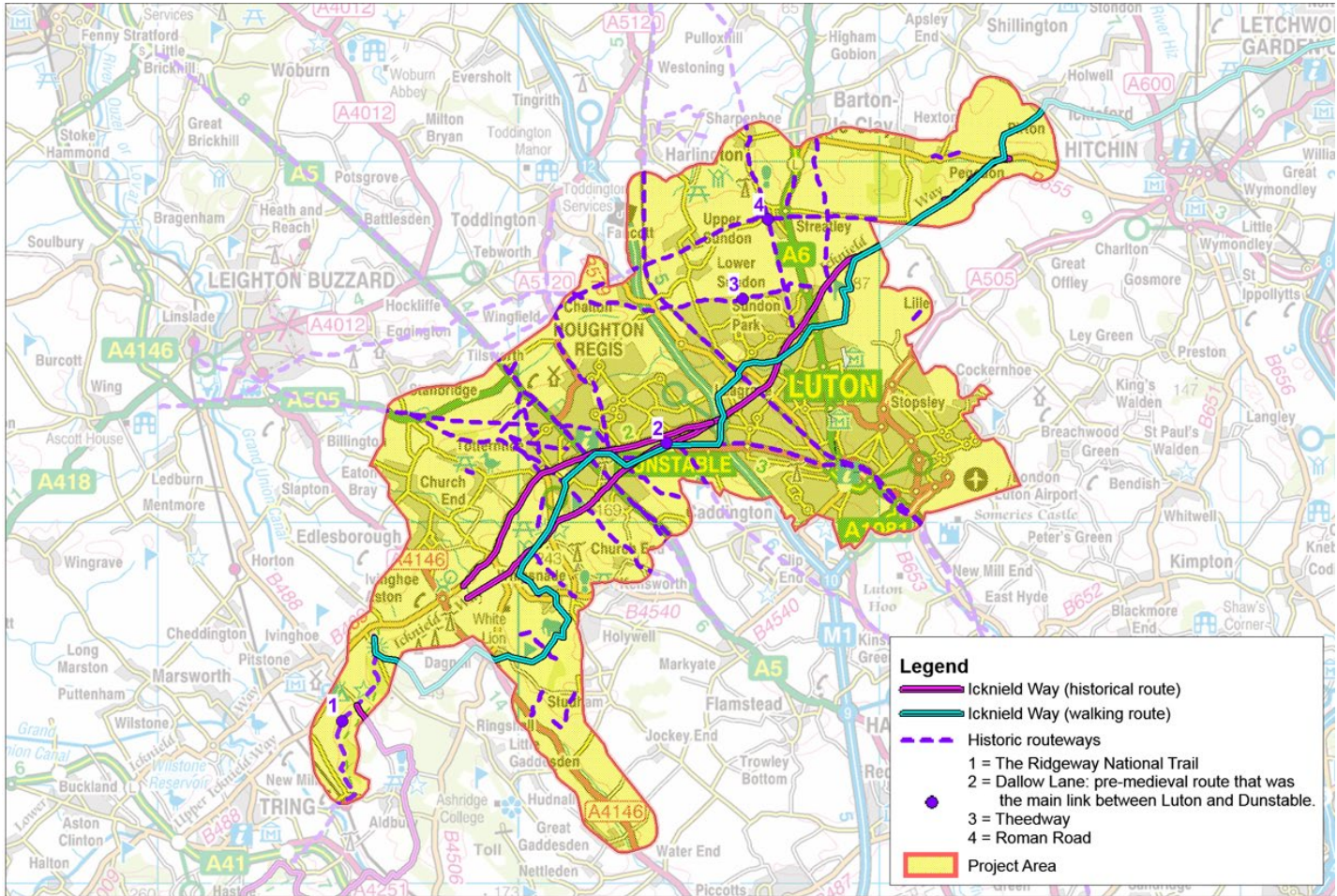
Barton Hills National Nature Reserve ©Colin Drake

Chilterns National Landscape
Landscape Character

- Chalk Scarp
- Plateau and Dipslope
- River Valleys
- Scarp foothills and Vale fringes
- Chilterns AONB Boundary



There are many historic routeways in the Luton area, connecting urban communities with the Chilterns landscape, including the Icknield Way, considered to be Britain's oldest road.



North Chilterns Community Landscape Initiative - Routeways

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Local groups participated in Walk the Plank's outdoor arts experience, [Green Space Dark Skies](#) at Dunstable Downs in 2022, which whetted local people's appetites for outdoor arts. The event brought together South Asian music and dance and people participated in geo light choreography at Dunstable Downs.

Green Space, Dark Skies event, Dunstable Downs ©Phil Young