

The Chilterns stretches from the River Thames in south Oxfordshire through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire to Hitchin in Hertfordshire. It contains some of the finest countryside in the UK, which is recognised by its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. From quiet valleys to dramatic viewpoints, leafy green woodlands to flower-covered meadows, the Chilterns has beautiful countryside to enjoy.



This leaflet helps you to explore access land in the Chilterns and gives advice on where to find essential up to date information.



With rights come responsibilities....

You have the legal right to explore access land in the Chilterns but please remember that most of the area is privately owned, it is internationally important for some of its plants and animals and is a home and place of work for many people.

Please be considerate in the countryside and follow the new Countryside Code

- Be safe plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people

What is Access Land?

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 gives people a right to walk and enjoy informal recreation on designated open access land. These are places where you are allowed to walk, sightsee, picnic, bird-watch and run.

Walking on this land is different to walking on public rights of way as you don't have to stick to a defined line. You are free to explore interesting features and can decide your own route.

There is no new right to cycle or horse-ride (except on bridleways, restricted byways and byways crossing access land), drive vehicles (except on byways open to all traffic or other legal routes crossing access land), camp, hang-glide, paraglide, use a metal detector or light fires. Existing access rights are unaffected; if for example you have always enjoyed the right to cycle or ride in an area, this will continue.



When you see this symbol it shows you are entering open access land.

Dogs on Access Land

Rights on access land extend to walking with dogs. However, dogs must be kept on a fixed lead of no more than 2 metres in length whenever livestock are present, and on all areas of access land between March 1st and July 31st. Dogs may be excluded for up to 6 weeks a year on land used for lambing and where other restrictions apply. Please follow local information signs and check the Countryside Agency's access website and helpline before you set out. A free publication 'You and your dog in the countryside' can be downloaded from www.countryside.gov.uk

Some areas are restricted

Most of the access land in the Chilterns is open at all times. However there may be occasional restrictions; farmers and land owners are entitled to close access land or restrict certain types of activities for 28 days a year for any reason. They may also apply for long-term restrictions or closures where necessary for nature conservation, land management and public safety reasons. Where possible, restrictions and closures will be shown on www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk or call 0845 1003298. There should also be site notices locally.



Open Access Landscapes

In the Chilterns there are two types of access land, **Registered Common Land** (accounting for two thirds of access land) and **Chalk Downland**.

The majority of **Chalk Downland** is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is nationally important for the conservation of flowers and insects which live on unimproved chalk grassland. The flowers provide a riot of colour in spring and early summer. The grass has to be grazed by animals during the autumn and winter to keep it short, otherwise delicate plants are shaded out by more aggressive plants and grasses.

Commons are an important feature of the Chilterns. There are 213 commons in the Chilterns with a wide range of different landscapes from ancient woodlands and rolling chalk hills to small pockets of open heath. For further information and to download maps of the larger commons see www.chilternsaonb.org/CaringfortheChilterns/Commons

Large areas of **woodland** in the Chilterns have been dedicated as open access land by the Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust, offering the same access rights as downland and commons. To find a wood near you see www.woodland-trust.org.uk or www.forestry.gov.uk

How to find out more

Access land will be shown on the new Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps and can also be viewed on www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

The National Access Helpline gives current information, including any restrictions, tel 0845 100 3298

The four Access Authorities in the Chilterns can provide additional information on Open Access in their areas:

Bedfordshire Countryside Access Service,
Tel 01234 408071
www.bedfordshire.gov.uk/rightsofway

Buckinghamshire County Council Rights of Way,
Tel 01296 382171
www.buckscc.gov.uk/rightsofway

Hertfordshire County Council,
Tel 01992 555262
www.hertsdirect.org/row

Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Service,
Tel 01865 810226
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside

The new rights described in this leaflet are in addition to a vast array of other rights whether formal or informal to enjoy the countryside, parks, woodland and open space across the Chilterns.

To find out more about the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, including walks and activities in the area, look at our website www.chilternsaonb.org or call 01844 355508



Open Access in the Chilterns



Open Access sites in the Chilterns

Here is a selection of sites to get you started, there are many more which are featured on www.chilternsaonb.org

1 Pegsdon Hills

With stunning views this is one of the most spectacular reserves owned by the Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust. The valley slopes and chalk grasslands are home to many rare and beautiful wildflowers.

Visit www.wildlifebcnp.org for more information.

2 Barton Hills National Nature Reserve

The chalk meadows of the reserve are amongst the finest in the country, famous for their spring display of pasque flowers and home to many butterflies. The clear chalk stream running through the reserve provides a tranquil setting.

There is a circular trail to follow, visitor leaflets and information panels.

www.english-nature.org.uk Tel 01844 351833

3 Sharpenhoe Clappers and Sundon Hills Country Park

This is an area of gently rolling downland with wide open views and beautiful chalk meadows at the very northern end of the Chiltern Hills. Sharpenhoe Clappers is an ancient beech wood perched at the top of a steep hill. If you like a challenge you can climb up the hill from the pub below (worth it for the views!), or there is a car park at the top of the hill for easy access. Site is owned and managed by Bedfordshire County Council and the National Trust.

A circular walk for this area is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.

4 Warden and Galley Hills

Just a few miles north of Luton, Warden and Galley Hills are some of the most important areas of chalk downland in Bedfordshire. The hills are home to a wide range of wild flowers, many of which will only live on the thin, poor soils of the chalk downland. Close to the top of Galley Hill there are two Bronze Age burial mounds, known as barrows. The site is owned and managed by Luton Borough Council.

A circular walk taking in Galley and Warden Hills is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.

6 Ashridge Estate

Ashridge is a magnificent and varied estate which runs along the main ridge of the Chiltern Hills. There are ancient woodlands, commons and chalk downland supporting a rich variety of wildlife and offering splendid walking through outstanding scenery. Visitors can climb the Bridgewater Monument and Ivinghoe Beacon for the best views in the Chilterns. There are a number of waymarked trails walks in the area and a visitor centre with toilets and café.

Visitors with disabilities are able to borrow self-drive powered vehicles and manual wheelchairs from the visitor centre (booking advisable).

Managed by The National Trust visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk Tel 01442 851227

There is a circular walk starting at Tring Station and taking you into the heart of the Ashridge Estate.

This is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.

7 Coombe Hill, Wendover

Coombe Hill offers amazing views of the Vale of Aylesbury and Chequers, the Prime Minister's country home. There are ancient beech woods with carpets of bluebells in the Spring, and sweeping wildflower meadows.

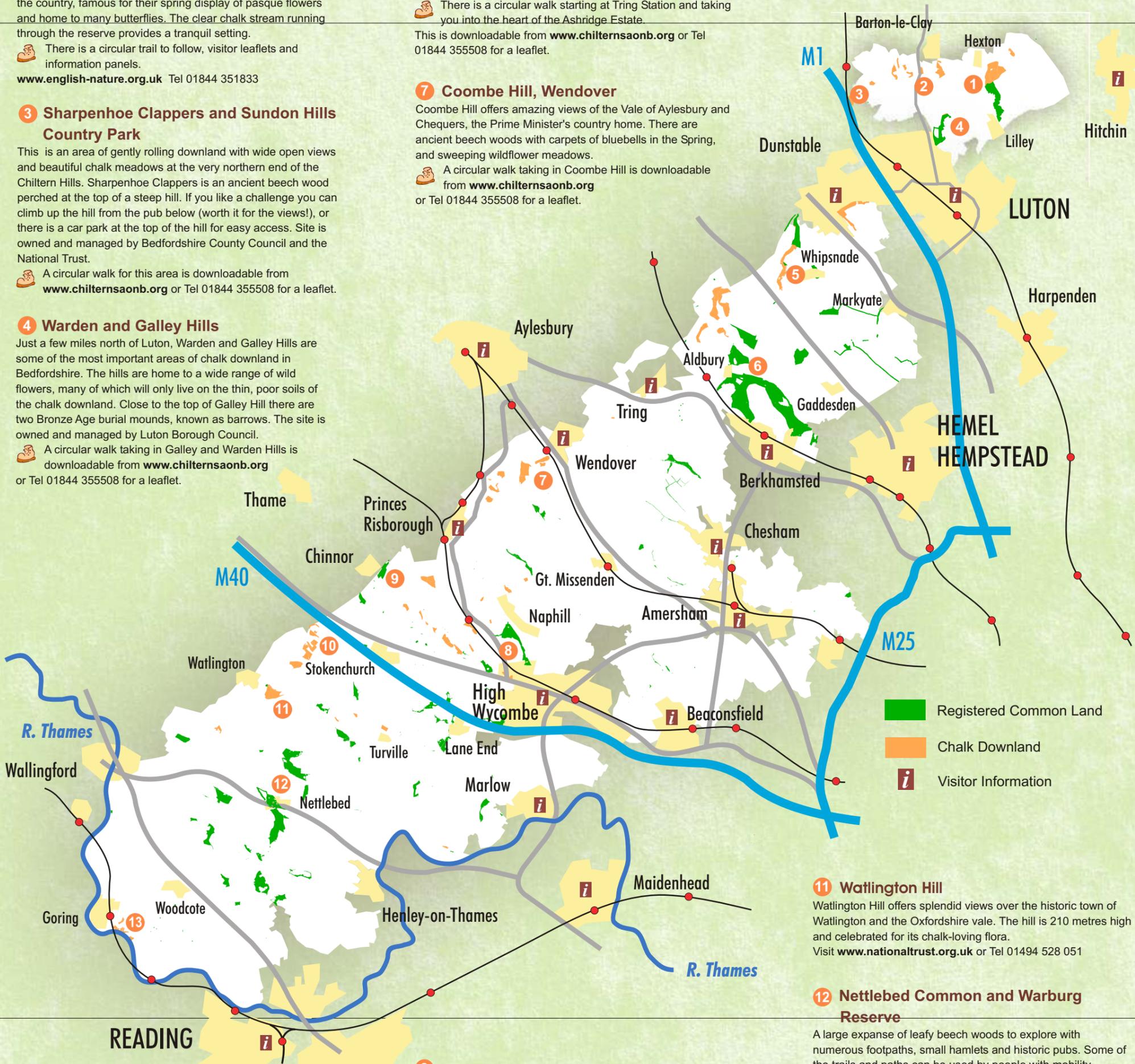
A circular walk taking in Coombe Hill is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.

10 Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve

This is one of English Nature's flagship National Nature Reserves. It is special for its chalk downland, beech woodland and carpets of scented wildflowers in the summer. It is one of the best places to see red kites and offers dramatic views.

There are several trails through the Reserve, including one suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs. This is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.

English Nature www.english-nature.org.uk tel 01844 351833



5 Dunstable Downs

This is one of the best-known viewpoints in the Chilterns. The chalk grasslands of the Downs have miles of footpaths and circular walks. You can see 5000 year old burial mounds and the site of a medieval rabbit warren and, if you look up, you may spot gliders and paragliders making full use of the updrafts. Why not bring a kite to fly and have a picnic on the grass. There is a shop, refreshment kiosk and toilets and work has started on a new visitor centre with additional facilities, due to open autumn 2006.

The Site is owned and managed by Bedfordshire County Council and the National Trust www.nationaltrust.org.uk or tel 01582 608489.

8 West Wycombe, Downley and Naphill

There are fine areas of countryside just a stone's throw from High Wycombe with magnificent beech woods and beautiful views.

A circular walk taking in Naphill and Downley Common is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.

9 Chinnor Hill Reserve

This mixed grassland and woodland reserve offers striking views over the vale. The grassland supports lots of rare and interesting species including pyramidal and bee orchids and juniper shrubs with their gin-flavouring berries. Visit www.bbwt.org.uk for further information.

A circular walk taking in Chinnor Hill Reserve is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.

11 Watlington Hill

Watlington Hill offers splendid views over the historic town of Watlington and the Oxfordshire vale. The hill is 210 metres high and celebrated for its chalk-loving flora.

Visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk or Tel 01494 528 051

12 Nettlebed Common and Warburg Reserve

A large expanse of leafy beech woods to explore with numerous footpaths, small hamlets and historic pubs. Some of the trails and paths can be used by people with mobility restrictions as can the open grassy areas.

Warburg visitor centre is a good base for exploring the many commons in the area.

Visit www.bbwt.org.uk or Tel 01491 642001

13 Hartslock Nature Reserve

Hartslock nature reserve is an area of chalk downland overlooking the Thames near Goring, at the very southern tip of the Chilterns. The wildflower meadows provide a blaze of colour in spring and early summer, a tranquil place to enjoy the views and watch river-life go by. It is managed by the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, www.bbwt.org.uk tel 01865 775476

A circular walk starting from Goring and taking in the Hartslock Nature Reserve is downloadable from www.chilternsaonb.org or Tel 01844 355508 for a leaflet.