

# **FORMAL REQUEST TO NATURAL ENGLAND to commit to undertake a designation assessment of land within the parish of Chalfont St Peter for inclusion in (i) the existing Chilterns AONB and (ii) any future Chilterns National Park**

## **INTRO**

Were you to view Chalfont St Peter from the air (as you might by satellite image), it might strike you just how much this village is surrounded by so much countryside – from meadows along the Misbourne, on which origins of the village grew more than one thousand years ago, to the steep hills immediately to the East which offer far reaching open views, and to the West village common lands, woodlands and farmland

It may seem surprising that the village was overlooked, and so omitted from the 1965 designation of the Chilterns AONB, but it was, by just a mile or so; yet Chalfont St Peter is an integral part of the Chilterns

Known for a hundred years or more as the '***Gateway to the Chilterns***' the village boasts a remarkably rich history and is famed for its idyllic position amongst rolling fields, woodland and several commons

## **1 DEFINITIONS & ABBREVIATIONS**

BC	Buckinghamshire Council
CCB	Chiltern Conservation Board
COAM	Chiltern Open Air Museum
CR	Chiltern Rangers
CSP	Chalfont St Peter
CSPPC	Chalfont St Peter Parish Council
CVRP	Colne Valley Regional Park
EH	English Heritage
GXTC	Gerrards Cross Town Council
HAL	Heritage Asset List (part of new NHP)
HTA	Historic Towns Assessment
LP	Local Plan
LOTM	Lord of the Manor
MRA	Misbourne River Action Group
MSA	Motorway Service Area (M25)
NE	Natural England
NHP	Neighbourhood Plan (existing + emerging v2)
TRDC	Three Rivers District Council

- 2 This a Request** that Natural England assess the parish for suitable addition to the existing AONB and that given the opportunities for outdoor Recreation, is also fit to be included in any future National Park

- 2.2 Three maps are annexed (i) a map showing the location of the village within the Chiltern Hills (ii) a 'parish wards' map denoting the boundaries of the parish (iii) Footpaths map (App 1). Copies of the footpaths map are very popular and available free of charge at the parish council office and community library
- 3 **CHALFONT ST PETER** – is one of the oldest settlements in the Chilterns with written records going back to the Saxon Charter of 949, as well as having later been listed in the Domesday Book 1086. App. 2 is a copy of the Historic Towns Assessment of Chalfont St Peter (HTA), drawn up by the Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Project sponsored by English Heritage (EH) in 2011. It contains a wealth of historical detail
- 3.2 Chalfont St Peter is now a large village, with a population approaching 14,000 (from 6,000 in the 1950's) (2021 census population results are not yet in the public domain); nonetheless its single main, elegant and tree lined shopping street, sitting shoulder to shoulder with open areas such as Gold Hill Common, Mill Meadow, and Austenwood, justify the title 'Village' rather than town. There is no railway, there are no high rise buildings in the village centre. Villages are not defined by population size
- 3.3 The HTA describes the village as **"significant for the setting of its village environment, a series of commons with historic settlements clustered around the edges"**
- 3.4 Notwithstanding the poor design and quality of some development between the 1960' and 1980's. not to mention questionable planning decisions at that time, new tools such as a NHP have enabled the village to take better control of its development
- 3.5 The attractive 1923 'mock tudor/arts & crafts style' street of shops now called Market Place (formerly Gold Hill Lane) remains a much admired feature of the village centre. It benefits from well matured trees and shrubs immediately on the opposite side of the street, so lending a rural feeling to the thoroughfare. In fact it appears just as it did in a series of picture postcards from the 1920's onwards (eg Friths etc) see photos (App 3)
- 3.6 The Historic Towns Assessment (App 2) offers copious details of the long history and it's assessment of notable buildings. Natural England are referred also to the Heritage Asset List (at App 4) which is currently under review for publication with a replacement NHP which is being prepared by planning consultant Troy Hayes
- 3.7 The village was formally granted status as a civil parish in 1894. (In 1859 the new ecclesiastical parish of Gerrards Cross had been formed around a small hamlet to the south of Chalfont St Peter, made up from parts of Chalfont St Peter, Fulmer, Stoke Poges and Upton cum Chalvey). Gerrards Cross became a town council in 2016.

- 3.8 From its historic core along Market Place, to its community facilities and open spaces, the parish encapsulates wildlife environment Green spaces and good local facilities alike. It benefits from the surrounding countryside which includes a strong Public Rights of Way Network, scenic views and bio-diverse habitat
- 3.9 Chalfont St Peter is inset within the Green Belt and therefore surrounded by natural landscapes with limited development. The numerous rights of way routes referred to in 3.8 above are highly valued by ramblers and dog walkers as they provide undisturbed views across the wider landscape setting
- 3.10 To the North the parish abuts the boundary with Chalfont St Giles (much of which lies within the existing AONB); the parish boundary then runs NE of Chalfont St Giles to take in Newlands Park (listed) and the Chiltern Open Air Museum (COAM) (both are part of Chalfont St Peter).

From Newlands Park the parish boundary turns more or less South. It borders Three Rivers DC and the Colne Valley Regional Park (CVRP) , the latter along the ridge of hills before the fields drop away East to the Colne Valley. Within the parish are farmland and woods. Following Old Shire Lane, South and taking in Horn Hill, CVRP and CSP continue to share this boundary for almost 4km; oddly the boundary of CSP with neighbouring Three Rivers DC runs briefly to the East of the M25 (along Old Shire Lane) before turning South West around Mopes Farm which is a listed building

- 3.11 The views and landscapes surrounding Mopes farm became a subject of intense discussion before the planning inspector at the recent enquiry (2021) into proposals to build an M25 MSA on CSP, TRDC and CVRP land which would have encroached on the wide open views enjoyed by CSP. The M25 development has been refused by the inspector. An extract of his findings relating to this part of his enquiry appears at App.5
- 3.12 After taking in the wide vistas and wooded backdrop of Gerrards Cross Golf Club and Chalfont Park, the 'southern' leg of the parish boundary turns West to Potkiln Lane near Beaconsfield. Typical of most parish boundaries it does not follow a road (in this case the A40) but crosses and re-crosses that road where it nears the entrance to Bulstrode Manor
- 3.13 The great majority of open and wooded land within the parish is subject to Green Belt status
- 3.14 The 'wards' map of the parish (App 1) identifies eleven distinct woodlands, and 11 farms within its boundaries. Some of the woods include 'ancient woodland' and veteran trees

- 3.15 The parish council employs a team of haywardens who look after the commons and public areas of the village, some on behalf of the Lord of the Manor (LOTM). Currently they are working in partnership with Chiltern Rangers on a project termed Big Biodiversity Battle, funded in part by Buckinghamshire Council, part by parish. An explanation of the project appears at App 6
- 3.16 The Misbourne River Action group (MRA) is one of many volunteer organisations in the village. MRA volunteers work regularly on maintaining the Misbourne up to Chalfont St Giles, clearing vegetation as necessary to help keep it flowing Photos at App 3
- 3.17 At the end of June an annual fair takes place on Gold Hill Common; The right to hold an annual market and fair dates from 1229, when it was granted to the LOTM, and so the tradition continues. It attracts up to 5,000 visitors on the day. Aside from stage and arena displays (much of which is provided by local schools, choirs and other groups) it is a natural backdrop for local organisations to reach out to the village. Save for small crafts displays it is not commercial in the retail sense, and voluntary groups occupy well over a hundred stalls (see Village Guide p.20 App 7)

## **Boundaries**

- 4.1 The PC recognise this is largely a matter for Natural England. The PC is liaising with local government at their boundaries, eg Gerrards Cross TC, Beaconsfield TC, Seer Green PC, Chalfont St Giles PC, and the CVRP. This request merely presses the case for at least the CSP parish lands to become part of the AONB, without exclusion of its neighbours should they wish to make a similar request
- 4.2 Should NE proceed to an assessment the PC will be happy to offer suggestions for extended delineation

## **Landscapes and Natural Beauty**

- 5 Three distinct landscapes inform the natural beauty of the parish lands: (i) to the West a mixture of fields and woodland; (ii) North to South a river valley with meadows, (iii) to the East a rolling landscape giving open views dotted with woodland
- 5.1 The village lies within the Chiltern Hills, and straddles the **Misbourne**, one of the famous chalk streams for which the Chilterns are known world wide. Running more or less parallel to the Misbourne, (East to West) to the South is the Alderbourne, and to the North the River Chess. The Misbourne is an integral part of the Chilterns' chalk stream network
- 5.2 The Misbourne is an important feature of the village. As the chalk stream runs South from Chalfont St Giles through generous meadows, so as it reaches

Chalfont St Peter, the valley sides converge. (for example side turnings off the A413 road, which is gently stepped into the hillside at one point near Gravel Hill, run up steep inclines to the East); thus much of the village lies on hillsides, especially to the East of the A413

- 5.3 Part of Chalfont St Peter lies within the Lower Misbourne Settled Valley Landscape Character Area. The Misbourne supports a diverse array of flora and fauna. The valley also benefits from a path along its length which offers local residents access to natural scenery

- 5.4 Mill Meadow (to the immediate North of the village centre) used to sustain water mills, and watercress beds. The valley narrows considerably where the Misbourne flows through the village centre. The Greyhound Inn (a former coaching inn) sits on the very edge of the Misbourne which was not bridged over by the adjacent High Street until the early C20th.

The Misbourne flows South out of the village into Chalfont Park, (where there is an attractive natural lake which can be viewed from a footpath on the side opposite the Listed Chalfont Park House) before wending its way to Denham and the River Colne

- 5.5 **Common and public access land** – best known is probably Gold Hill Common, (another popular picture postcard scene from the early 1900s). Historically it took its name from the proliferation of gorse which grew there. The visitor emerges from the top of Market Place directly onto the slopes of the common. Here it is grass (much popularised with photos of sledging in winter); uphill, it becomes wooded, and at the top of the hill open common land, which within living memory supported grazing rights.

Prominent at the bottom of Goldhill Common, close to the shops in Market Place, is the Coronation clock erected in 1953; towards the top of the common is a Beacon installed in 2003 to celebrate the Queen's jubilee, and which will be lit this year on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June at the request of the Queen's pageant master on the occasion of the Platinum jubilee

It is a highly popular area for recreational walking. Facing the common in Gold Hill West is the Jolly Farmer PH. Hugely popular with cycling clubs and early motorists, it became especially famous from the 1930's for its vast range of sandwiches (one hundred!)

- 5.6 Within 2 mins. walk of the village centre lies St Peter's Field, a closed burial ground (now memorial garden) off Church Lane. It now belongs to the parish council. Headstones had been relocated several decades ago to the edges of this area and a major restoration has been under way within the last six months. Stage 1, now complete, offers the visitor a series of walkways around borders to be planted up in the spring, and a central and raised feature (see photo).

Accessed through an avenue of newly planted cherry trees it is a major amenity within the village, with plenty of benches to sit and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of this small 'park' at the centre of the community

- 5.7 Also just minutes away, is the entrance to Mill Meadow. Here, beyond a community centre and football club, are open meadow areas where cricket is played, and the local lawn tennis club is based. The meadows and riverside walks continue past these North to Chalfont St Giles. Allotments lie off two sides of Mill Meadow
- 5.8 On the East side of the valley are Chalfont Common, and Cheena Meadow, two other recreational areas. The area to the East of the village is criss-crossed by footpaths leading past historic Gotts Monument (at Epilepsy Society) and St Paul's church, Horn Hill, towards the CVRP
- 5.9 Gold Hill Common, Mill Meadow and Cheena Meadow contain childrens' playgrounds. There is also a smaller one on Boundary Rd and a new one within the Grange Rd housing development
- 5.10 The road from Gold Hill to Gerrards Cross runs through another common area, mainly wooded. This is Austenwood Common, which forms a natural break between CSP and GX
- 5.11 These highly popular walking areas offer quite different views and landscapes; to the East, rolling fields which reach towards Colne Valley Park, to the North the rich meadow scenes along the Misbourne, to the West a mixture of common land, woods, paddocks then, agricultural landscape

### **Summary of Landscapes and Natural Beauty**

- 6.1 Landscape Quality: the landscape is in good condition and there is little incongruous development of a visually intrusive nature. See especially the Historic Town Assessment for historic landscape characterisation
- 6.2 Three distinctive landscapes lie within this parish (ie open view/valley & meadow/farm and wooded land)
- 6.3 Tranquillity is easily found within a few minutes walk of the village centre including Gold Hill Common, St Peter's Field
- 6.4 For cultural heritage see Historic Towns Assessment
- 6.5 Five minutes walk from the village centre, alongside the Misbourne, are the Lady Gibb Millenium Wood, and adjacent a dedicated nature reserve complete with pond, created by the parish council. Both offer peace and quiet in natural surroundings

### **Opportunities for open air recreation**

- 7.1 There exists a good range of organised sport such as the local football, cricket and hockey clubs and teams, tennis, and others; but many other activities take place and there is ample space for those to expand
- 7.2 There are numerous opportunities across a range of horse riding and equitation related interests
- 7.3 The village is home to several groups of keen amateur cyclists but also many solo cyclists; the route from the Community College south towards Gerrards Cross and beyond is especially popular. From the college northwards is a dedicated cycle path leading to Chalfont St Giles. Proposals have been mooted for a cycle path North from the Mill Meadow parallel to footpaths alongside the Misbourne linking with cycle routes further up the valley at Missenden
- 7.4 The footpath map at App 1 informs the walker, from casual user to keen Rambler, of the many routes they can take across the parish. The casual visitor will find two heritage walks using a printed guide (App 8). Each point of historical interest is marked by a dedicated sign on a building, boundary post, or bridge railing using vintage photographs for comparison with the current view. These are very popular
- 7.5 Informal walking groups are often seen congregating in the village centre to begin their ramble. PACCAR International scout camp (in Denham Lane Chalfont St Peter, and founded in 1938 for scouts and guides) is used by some 40,000 scouts from worldwide. Groups of them are frequently to be seen setting out for a day's hiking
- 7.6 Goldhill Common is a favourite location for running and personal training routines. It is also midway for many runners using the North South axis between Chalfont St Giles and Gerrards Cross, or doing circuits round the village, and runners will be found at most times of the day, and in proliferation at weekends
- 7.7 Other current activities include:
- |                        |                 |             |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| eg Archeologist,       | Simply Walks    | Bee keeping |
| Skatepark              | Fishing         |             |
| Orienteering & Running | Tobogganing etc |             |
| Allotments             | Ornithology,    |             |
- 7.8 **SUMMARY OF RECREATION**  
 These outdoor activities are popular here. It is fair to say that nowhere in the village is more than fifteen minutes walk from the countryside that surrounds the village, and for many less than ten minutes. It is accessibility to the country that appeals to so many residents of Chalfont St Peter.

APP 1 maps  
APP 2 historic towns assessment  
APP 3 photos  
APP 4 heritage asset list  
APP 5 Planning inspectors findings  
APP 6 BBB project description  
APP 7 Village Guide  
APP 8 Heritage Trail map

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