

January - June 2025/Issue 52

FREE

Also available online at cotswolds-nl.org.uk

COTSWOLD LION

The magazine of the Cotswolds National Landscape



Spirit of Ingenuity
Opening up Tinkley Gate
Box: Lifting the Lid
Musical Landscapes
Giving a Hoot
The FiPL Ripple
...and more!



Cotswolds
National
Landscape

Contents

Welcome

Welcome to Cotswold Lion issue 52. This issue has a gentle emphasis on the more southern parts of the Cotswolds – where there is always lots happening. From practical access improvements at Tinkley Gate, to the team running Growing Places – a diverse and exciting arts project near Stroud, to the fascinating history in the village of Box, to celebrating the 250 years of Jane Austen in Bath... there's plenty to catch up on. We've also spoken to Dan Szor, from Cotswolds Distillery about their wonderful new wetlands project – a magnificent example of business working hand-in-hand with nature; to Matt Brierley, who has been finding out about the superpowers of owls; and to NC3 – a community choir working towards a concert which explores the links between music and landscape.



In this issue

03/News Bulletin

04/Spirit of Ingenuity

06/Opening up Tinkley Gate

08/Box: Lifting the Lid

10/Musical Landscapes

12/Giving a Hoot

14/The FiPL Ripple

16/Walking Highlights

18/Growing Places

20/Celebrating Jane Austen

22/Best Foot Forward

Produced by

Cotswolds National Landscape
Cotswold Business Centre
2 A P Ellis Road, Upper Rissington
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL54 2QB
07841 663607
info@cotswolds-nl.org.uk
cotswolds-nl.org.uk



The Cotswolds National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), managed and looked after by the Cotswolds Conservation Board. The two key purposes of the Board are to:

- conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB
- increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB

Words and visuals

Editor
Alana Hopkins
alana.hopkins@cotswolds-nl.org.uk

Writers
Matt Brierley, Maria Carter, Siân Ellis,
Alana Hopkins, Katie Jarvis,
Jacob Little.

Photography
As credited.

Design
Neil Morgan Design.

Sponsorship

If you are interested in sponsoring the Cotswold Lion, please contact alana.hopkins@cotswolds-nl.org.uk

Front cover:
A tawny owl peeping out from inside an oak.
Read more about owls on page 12.

Printed onto Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)
uncoated material, using vegetable based inks.

Bulletin

Top stories from the Cotswolds National Landscape team



Nina Stubbington

Farewell to Andy Parsons

In early November, we bid farewell to Andy Parsons. Andy took up the role as our Chief Executive in 2019, and made significant and very positive changes: bringing the team together, championing partnership working, improving finances and funding, and growing the team to be bigger, better, and stronger. Andy's five fantastic years with CNL have passed quickly, and we'll certainly miss him. We wish him every success in his new role as Chief Executive of The Heart of England Forest.



Tea Smart

Welcome to Becky Waite

Following Andy's departure, we welcomed Rebecca Waite as our new Chief Executive in early December. Rebecca brings a wealth of experience to the leading the team. Her most recent role was as Head of Design and Delivery, for the Nature for Climate Programme at Defra. Over a 30 year career in central government, she has held a variety of posts, primarily within Defra, including: Environment Bill Implementation Lead, Head of Local Delivery for 25 Year Environment Plan, Head of Protected Landscapes, and Head of Rural Economies.



Tea Smart

Record-breaking GCG summer harvest

The Glorious Cotswold Grasslands programme has broken its own record! Summer 2024 saw the team harvest nearly three tonnes of wildflower seeds from 30 donor sites. The team has since been sowing seed on over 70 hectares of recipient meadows, with enough seed for a further 30 hectares to be sown in spring on bare soil sites. As always, challenges through harvest (especially with the weather) were made easier with the dedication and reliability of the GCG volunteers, who put in a combined 800 hours of harvesting help. A massive thanks from the GCG team; the programme could not happen without valuable volunteer support.

FiPL nearly concluded

The Farming in protected Landscapes (FiPL) team is in the process wrapping up the distribution of £4.4 million in funding, benefitting 170 projects and over 700 farmers. The programme draws to a close in March 2025, and you can read more about some of the fantastic work supported by the funding on page 14.



SPIRIT

of ingenuity

Daniel Szor is buzzing. He's just come in from leading a team of senior execs (from a well-known supermarket) round the wetlands outside his Cotswolds Distillery. He talks to Katie Jarvis about why this has everyone so excited.

Freshly planted willows are thriving in the new wetlands at Cotswolds Distillery.

Two winters ago, these couple of acres – in the Cotswolds National Landscape just outside Shipston-on-Stour – were a barren mud-land: 'In fact, I described it to some people as looking like a World War 1 battlefield.' Today, the highly impressed group had to swipe back branches just to push their way through. 'It's gotten so overgrown that it's almost bushwhacking!'

Nor is Daniel the only one buzzing. Four hives of bees ensured last summer's glorious show in the distillery's own wildflower meadow. 'First to come out was the most amazing profusion of poppies and cornflowers: this one/two punch of red and blue all over the place.' And now the newly-created wetlands alongside are encouraging a whole raft of other fauna to the site: among them, dragonflies, newts and toads. 'We have a particular growth in the number of red kites circulating round, which is very cool.'

So what have wetlands to do with the award-winning Cotswolds Distillery?

Instead of paying for this rich 'waste' water to be taken away, it could benefit a biodiversity of wetland plants that would naturally break down the effluent.

To understand that, you need to go back four years.

In 2021, Daniel – a native New Yorker – was planning a new whisky distillery four times the size of the original, which he'd opened back in 2014. He and his team needed to keep on top of demand for the lovingly-crafted spirits – whisky, gin and liqueurs – that they create using the finest local produce.

'But we started to realise: we're going to need four times the barley, four times the water, four times the yeast...' Which meant, even more significantly, the processes would generate four times the amount of 'waste' effluent: mostly liquid left in the stills after alcohol has been taken off.

'It was already painful to see tanker-trucks pulling up every couple of days to take 30,000 litres a time off-site to anaerobic digester plants to be turned into biogas. Expensive, too.'

Could there be a different solution?

Enter Jane and David Shields of Living Water Ecosystems – pioneering solutions to waste-water issues – who work alongside clients from BP refineries to distillers such as Glengoyne. Taking a look round the parcel of

land the distillery owns, their vision was one of abundance; of symbiosis. Instead of paying for this rich 'waste' water to be taken away, it could benefit a biodiversity of wetland plants that would naturally break down the effluent. What's more, the clean water the system produced could irrigate a 2,000-strong willow coppice providing shelter and habitat for incoming wildlife.

All the plans needed was RHS Chelsea Flower Show gold-medal winner Rachael White to turn them into reality. ('Our brilliant landscape architect,' as Daniel calls her.)

The result is stunning: a cascading series of 'cells' – comprised of 14,000 wetland plants of more than 50 different species – down a hill created from spoil from the new distillery-build. Just as importantly, the Wetlands Ecological Treatment does exactly what it says on the tin: three-quarters of the waste water from whisky-making will be processed naturally as a result.

It's not a short-term cheap solution; and it's only been made possible by Berry Bros & Rudd who've invested in the distillery and its new wetlands process. 'A wine and spirits merchant, family-owned for over 300 years, they're exemplary when it comes to sustainability,' Daniel says.

Although he wouldn't say it himself, Daniel is pretty exemplary, too. A former Cotswolds National Landscape board member, he's also bought into CNL's Caring for the Cotswolds scheme, where businesses help support other conservation projects.



Elizabeth Rudd and Dan Szor at the official launch of the Wetlands Ecological Treatment System in summer 2024.

Perhaps it's not surprising. 'I'm looking out right now at beautiful Margetts Hill, which I insist my chair is always facing because it's the reason I built this distillery. It reminds me of why I go through some of the crazy things in this business.

'At the end of the day, there's nothing better than looking at that view, while enjoying a glass of our signature single malt made from the arables that grow here.'

Wonderful. And that's exactly how he intends to keep it.

More information:
cotswoldsdistillery.com



The wetlands treatment system from the air – showing the series of cells which break down the effluent.

Opening up Tinkley Gate

Now more than ever, it is vital for everyone to have the opportunity to experience the restorative powers of time in nature. The benefits of being in genuinely wild, natural landscapes, are plentiful – but for a lot of people, this isn't always easy. Jacob Little, from the National Trust, speaks to his colleague Max Biddlestone about how they're working to improve things.

"There's a bit of narrative behind it all", Max starts. "In 2022 we met with a number of partners to discuss access into nature, and it felt like it was the first time we all had the opportunity to do this," he continues. "We had the chance to meet with several people whose access issues come from a lived experience, and this was really important when it came to working with different organisations and coming up with real, effective solutions."

For many across the Cotswolds who have a variety of access needs, there are areas of land that are hard to get to. But change is happening. A big commitment for the National Trust and its National Landscape partners is to ensure improved access for all into our shared wild spaces. Woodchester Park, located near Nailsworth, is one area where recent work is

doing just that. The historic estate spans around 590 acres and offers a haven for wildlife. It features several trails around a 'lost landscape' – a hidden wooded valley with a chain of five lakes.

The terrain is steep, and this presents significant challenges for people with access needs, but also a great opportunity to improve things across some of the more

Max Biddlestone, Facilities Manager, National Trust (left); accessible picnic tables (right); and improved pathways (below).



Jacob Little



Jacob Little



Jacob Little

The Tinkley Gate cafe (right) now features a powered door (below).

challenging areas of ground. Max Biddlestone, Facilities Manager for National Trust Cotswold Countryside is the main driver of access work across the portfolio, and is leading a large body of new work that addresses accessibility head-on.

It becomes clear from speaking to Max that it was not only an informative process, but an inspiring one – and being able to see Woodchester Park and other Cotswold sites like Dover's Hill and Haresfield Beacon from a different perspective enabled a programme of works to be devised that would improve access. From levelling ground, removing obstacles and smoothing out steep paths to resurfacing work and installing disabled car parking spaces, this work ranges from small to large scale, but it all contributes to improving visitor experience for everyone.

"The initial Access for All: Removing Barriers funding allocated via the Cotswolds National Landscape team allowed us to complete the access audits and buy access-friendly furniture and benches" Max explains, "and we have continued this work by installing a powered door in the Tinkley Gate café and improving the path surfaces around the Tinkley Gate area." Recently acquired, Tinkley Gate and its cafe form a gateway into Woodchester Park, and are seen as an entrance point to nature for everyone. With large flat, green safe spaces and easy to follow trails, it is the perfect place to benefit from this funding.

"Although lots of the paths around Tinkley Gate are flat," Max explains, "we had lots of feedback, especially from wheelchair users, that they were quite bumpy and hard to negotiate. We've recently resurfaced these paths with compacted Cotswold stone that fits into the landscape – this is something that helps with the surface but also drainage – and it helps link our paths together by creating slightly wider, more obvious routes for people to follow."

Improving access in a sensitive way to the landscape is at the heart of this project, and it's a continual process. "One thing we've learnt is that designing for improved access needs to be done with people, not for people," Max explains, and "that one person can't really speak for everyone." "We've picked up on this requirement to consider the whole experience – it's not just the changes we've made to infrastructure, it's about getting to the site and the whole visitor experience while you're here," he continues.



"One thing we've learnt is that designing for improved access needs to be done with people, not for people."

Plans are underway to improve pre-visit information digitally, and to provide more information to people with access needs and hidden disabilities before they arrive.

Max is enthusiastic about the future of additional path work that will continue at Woodchester Park and help link up areas that are otherwise hard to get to. "People have different needs, different confidence levels, and different barriers to enjoying these spaces, and ultimately it's about enhancing this landscape in a collaborative way" he explains.

We finish our morning by taking a walk across some of the new pathways to a lookout that stretches across Woodchester Park and on to the Stroud Commons across the valley. It's a gloriously sunny day, and once here, it's easy to see why opening these spaces up so everyone can enjoy them is such an obvious thing to do.



More information:

On Tinkley Gate and Woodchester Park, visit the National Trust website or follow them @NTCotswolds on Facebook, Instagram and X.

Box: lifting the lid



Box Parish Council

Katie Jarvis discovers more about a hidden gem along the Great West Way touring route.

Two minutes from Dave Wright's front door in the Wiltshire village of Box, the By Brook Valley unfolds in all its lush loveliness. In summer, sheep and cattle graze along its 22-mile stretch. 'In autumn and early winter, you get a ribbon of mist cruising along the bottom. It's absolutely gorgeous.'

But – lovely though it is – it's not just the picturesque countryside that attracts a hearty group to the monthly walks Dave helps lead as a Cotswold Voluntary Warden. It's the fact that practically every square millimetre of the village and its surroundings is replete with history.

For music fans?

Peter Gabriel has run his Real World recording studios from historic Box Mill since the 1980s.

Into books?

The Rev W Awdry dreamed up beloved Thomas the Tank Engine while living in Box.

Fascinated by engineering feats?

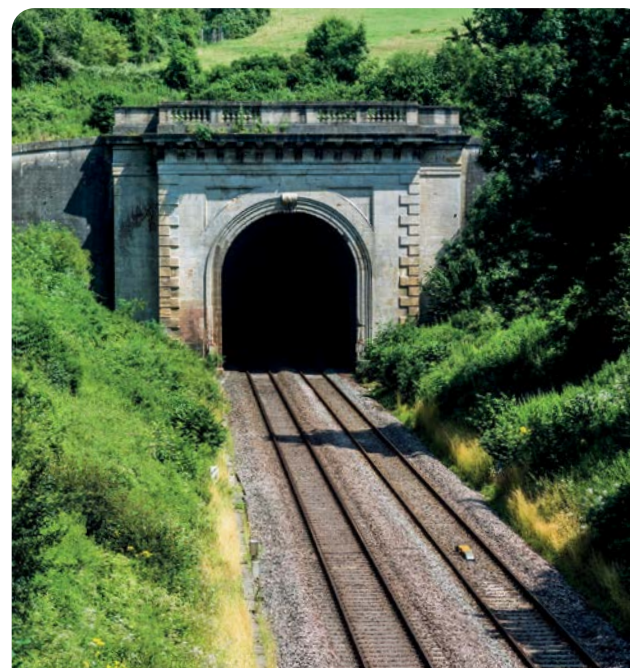
You can't get more impressive than Isambard Kingdom Brunel's railway tunnel through Box Hill – the longest in the world (at 1.83 miles) when completed in 1841.

'Sitting on top of [Box] hill is Rudloe Manor,

the headquarters of 10 Group RAF during the Second World War,' says Dave, who retired from the military himself some five years ago. 'They controlled all aircraft in the Battle of Britain for the south-west of England and south Wales.'

When Dave and two fellow wardens cleared the BOX29 footpath – grown jungle-like with trees and brambles – the added interest was the knowledge that, once, RAF airmen guarding the manor would use it as a through-route.

The innovative (for its time) railway tunnel by Isambard Kingdom Brunel.



You can't get more impressive than Isambard Kingdom Brunel's railway tunnel through Box Hill – the longest in the world (at 1.83 miles) when completed in 1841.

History feeds into history; the government of the day chose this particular operational location because of the labyrinth of ancient stone-quarrying tunnels that lie beneath: perfect for ammunition storage, as well as an alternative administrative seat in case of national emergency.

And there's more. Far more: the old Roman wall next to Box Recreation Ground car park, once the site of a villa, is now part of the old vicarage. At medieval Chapel Plaister atop Hazelbury Hill, notorious highwayman John Poulter would 'greet' unsuspecting travellers along the old London-to-Bath Road in the 1750s.

These are stories Dave loves to tell as he guides walkers along circular routes, following some of the 109 footpaths in and around Box.

They're also the stories – and the locations – that tourists and visitors are in danger of overlooking as they jaunt between London and Bristol. World Heritage gems Blenheim Palace and the Roman Baths are unmissable. But so, too, are the treasures in between.

Which is why Box has joined the Great West Way touring route as an 'ambassador': making sure its offerings as a parish are highlighted within this imaginative tourism initiative.

Via a fact-packed, itinerary-filled website, a 500-mile corridor follows ancient routes through a scenic and historic England full of lesser-known joys.

'It's not a set route,' explains Fiona Errington, head of marketing for the Great West Way. 'It's a means of getting off the beaten track. Places such as Windsor Castle, Stonehenge and Bath are included, and they're great: but we're also about digging down into the character of a region.'

What's more, it's ideal for slow travellers, who can meander its length via train, bus, cycle, footpaths; by boating along the River Thames and the Kennet and Avon Canal.

'It's very much for the curious visitor,' Fiona says. 'For instance, with international visitors, it's not going to be first-timers; it's going to be people who want to find out a bit more about England. Or perhaps holidaymakers from long-haul destinations like Australia: a once-in-a-lifetime trip that will last that little bit longer than usual.'



Courtesy of painter Alan Fearnley G.R.A.

Post Coach and Box Tunnel by Alan Fearnley G.R.A.

For villages such as Box, it's a chance to show off the cultural, historic and countryside heritage that lucky locals like Dave Wright appreciate and love on a daily basis.

So if there's one thing visitors shouldn't miss out on?

Dave doesn't hesitate.

'The view across the By Brook Valley,' he says.

And just like the wonderful walks he leads, we're back where we started: an Englishness of grazing cattle in summer, parcelled up with ribbon-mists in winter.



Box market place, looking up to Quarry Hill and the woods beyond.

More information:

The Great West Way® greatwestway.co.uk

Find self-guided routes around Box online at cotswolds-nl.org.uk – visit the self-guided walks page and search near Corsham.

Musical Landscapes

Kaupo Kikkas

There is much in the natural world that inspires music-making: from rustling woodlands and birdsong to the swell of rolling hills. Siân Ellis talks with George Parris (Principal Conductor) and Simon Mead (Bass) of North Cotswold Chamber Choir.

It is very well documented throughout history that composers have found inspiration in the countryside, George Parris says, highlighting as a notable example Beethoven, who “regularly went for walks and needed a sense of space and isolation to collect his thoughts”.

More locally, the Cotswolds “is incredibly rich” in having landscape-inspired composers, including Cheltenham-born Gustav Holst who wrote the romantic pastoral tribute,



Kai Backström

George Parris.

The Cotswolds: Symphony in F. “His vision [later] went far beyond that to The Planets [...] but it started in the Cotswolds,” George says. Herbert Howells, Gerald Finzi and Ivor Gurney: all in different ways found creative succour in Cotswolds landscapes, from Chosen Hill near Churchdown to the tranquility of Painswick.

George, a conductor, artistic director and singer grew up around Shipston-on-Stour, enjoyed an outdoors childhood amid hills,

(opposite): The Arvo Pärt Centre in Estonia houses the composer's personal archive in a building beautifully sited in pine forest surroundings.

woods and streams, and was drawn early on to the music of Elgar, who was born at Lower Broadheath in the Malverns. "You can see the Malvern Hills from some areas around Shipston. That local connection was quite compelling for me and led me to discover more about Elgar's music and life, and how landscape can play a part in music."

Today, George says, landscapes and forests "have become one of the central themes of why I make music," a passion he developed through academic studies, including at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, and acclaimed professional collaborations, not least as founder of The Carice Singers (named after Elgar's daughter). He has been Principal Conductor of North Cotswold Chamber Choir – NC3 – since summer 2023.

More locally, the Cotswolds "is incredibly rich" in having landscape-inspired composers, including Cheltenham-born Gustav Holst...

"There are [many] ways that composers have tried to give voice to landscape," George says. "When we hear for example the oboe in music by Sibelius, I always think of ducks and waterfowl: it has that quality to the sound." More generally, he reflects how slow passages of music can create a sense of space or standing still, while a sense of vertical spaces can be created by a mixture of very high pitches and very low pitches.

Simon Mead takes up the theme of how singers can emulate nature, recalling a piece based on the Edward Thomas poem 'Adlestrop' that NC3 performed in summer 2024 with music composed by George. It included an improvisatory birdsong section of "whistles and whoops – you would be amazed what some people think are decent bird noises!" Simon laughs.

NC3, formed in 1992, draws singers from north Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, and performs a wide repertoire. Its 'Forest Silence' concert and event planned for June 2025, developing connections between music and landscapes, promises a stimulating experience. Simon explains: "It will be a combination of music by well-established English composers like Elgar and Vaughan Williams, who wrote music very much in the



Santeri Levas

Jean Sibelius, Finnish composer.

pastoral, folk-inspired idiom, and a range of composers from Scandinavia and some of Europe's most densely forested areas."

George, deeply steeped in experiences of the latter from his time in Helsinki, highlights the (at least) double meaning of 'Forest Silence' – conjuring up solitude and escape, but also a desire that we don't want any more of our magical treescapes to fall silent through deforestation.

Simon volunteers with Wychwood Forest Trust and is a voluntary warden with Cotswolds National Landscape, and had the idea of involving both organisations in the event: as a catalyst to explore, discuss and link aspects of landscape and conservation with music (and vice versa). The venue – FarmED at Shipton-under-Wychwood – will provide an unusual yet apt context for all-comers to interact with the music in a novel way.

"We are very excited to see what people will take from the event," George says.



Courtesy of Simon Mead

The North Cotswold Chamber Choir in action.

More information

North Cotswold Chamber Choir and 'Forest Silence', 7 June 2025, at nc3.org.uk

GIVING A

HOOOT

They can find prey without ever seeing it. They can fly with ghostly silence. They can even hunt in the dark. Matt Brierley investigates the awesome superpowers of owls.

In the Cotswolds we have three regularly breeding owl species: tawny, barn and little. We also have two “eared” owls. In winter and early spring, short-eared owls frequent the Severn Vale and the Hawling-Brockhampton area east of Cheltenham. These long-distance nomads are migratory, unfazed even by the open ocean. Birds seen in the UK have shown up in Malta, Iceland and Russia. Shorties don’t breed in the Cotswolds. Long-eared owls might, although

the last Gloucestershire record was 2002. But never say never when it comes to our most secretive owl – that “squeaky gate” in deep woodland might just be their begging young.

Confusingly, the “ears” on these owls aren’t ears at all, they’re mood expressers and camouflage aiders. An owl’s ears are complex, and hearing is an owl’s first superpower.

Take the barn owl. Even under snow they’ll find food. Their faces are satellite dish shaped to detect sound. A ring of stiff feathers channel rustles to true ears, hidden at the side of the face. The left ear is lower than the right to detect height as well as direction. This gives the barn owl pinpoint accuracy. In total darkness, at five metres per second, it smashes into a vole with a force 12 times its body weight. In human terms that’s like an 80kg person getting pummeled by a 12 tonne truck.

There is an ironic sadness to this comparison. In a typical year Britain’s 4,000 pairs of barn owls produce roughly 12,000 young. 3,000-5,000 of these are killed on roads, with 90% of fatalities on major roads.

Barn owls often come out of nowhere, for an owl’s second superpower is silent flight. Its flight feathers have noise-reducing fringes on the leading and trailing edges, and a velvety top, minimising sound. For a rodent-hunter, stealth is crucial. When the BBC Earth team flew a barn owl over hypersensitive microphones they detected nothing.

The superpowers of silent flight and world-class hearing do, however, have a kryptonite. Rain. Prolonged wet weather can be fatal. Their feathers aren’t waterproof and owls can’t hear prey over driving rain. During chick season, asynchronous hatching helps owls to weather the storm. Whereas some birds wait until all



*Above: Long-eared owl.
Right: Short-eared owl.*



Left and above: Barn owls.

Barn owls often come out of nowhere, for an owl's second superpower is silent flight. Its flight feathers have noise-reducing fringes on the leading and trailing edges, and a velvety top, minimising sound.

their eggs are laid before incubating, UK owls incubate from the off. With chicks resembling Russian dolls in terms of size, food demand gradually increases but never surges. For barn owls the analogy doesn't end there. Big chicks will quaff little chicks. However, there is a less grizzly side to barn owl behaviour too. In Somerset, footage showed a male sibling from a previous year bringing prey into a nest to help out his single dad after his partner disappeared.

Let's turn to the tawny owl for the final owl superpower. Eyesight. A tawny owl's eyes are huge. They take up 70% of its skull, compared to our 5%. At the back of the eye there is a high density of rods. These cells are extremely sensitive in low light. Tawny owls can see an image 2.5 times brighter than what we see.

Although owls have binocular vision, their forward-facing eyes cannot move in their sockets. Instead, owls like the tawny can turn their head through 270 degrees. If we did that, we'd pass out! As they look behind them, wide spaces in their neck vertebrae make sure the blood vessels don't get crushed. Enlarged arteries at the top of the neck create a blood reservoir, ensuring a constant flow of blood to the brain.

They may be seldom-seen but owls truly are magical marvels, well worth giving a hoot about.

Left and below: Tawny owls.



The FiPL Ripple:

a funding programme with lasting impact.

Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is in its final stages, set to conclude in March 2025. Maria Carter looks back at some of its many success stories in the Cotswolds.

The Cotswolds National Landscape team is wrapping up the distribution of £4.4 million in funding, benefiting 170 projects and over 700 farmers. FiPL funding has helped successful applicants deliver projects which bring benefits for nature, climate, communities, and the landscape itself – aligned with the principles of CNL Management Plan. Remarkably, more than half of the Cotswolds area has been impacted by FiPL funding.

Programme summary

Grants awarded through FiPL range from £1,500 to £250,000, with many small-scale projects receiving less than £10,000. The funding has facilitated:

- Improved accessibility across 22 projects.
- Wetland creation at eight sites.
- Protection of important species through nine targeted projects.
- Support for local heritage and the preservation of Cotswolds buildings.

Common project themes include the restoration of grasslands, regenerative agriculture, local food initiatives, and collaborative efforts among farmers.



Russell Sach

Embracing regenerative agriculture

A notable trend is the shift towards regenerative agriculture among Cotswolds farmers, who seek to improve ecosystem health while producing food. Many have required new equipment or infrastructure to implement these practices. Macaroni Farm, for instance, used a FiPL grant to purchase a seed drill that allows for poly-cropping – sowing different crops simultaneously with minimal soil disturbance. This approach enhances both soil health and biodiversity. Collectively, over 3,500 hectares of land are now undergoing soil health improvements thanks to FiPL projects.

Market gardens and local food initiatives

Small-scale fruit and vegetable production, and local food supply are gaining momentum in the Cotswolds, supported by FiPL funding. Community farms like Common Soil, located on the outskirts of Stroud, received grants for new infrastructure to meet growing demand for their vegetable boxes. Over 25 projects like this have been supported by FiPL, signifying a growing trend of community connection to local food production and sustainability.

Peer-to-peer collaboration

Navigating the complexities of food production, new policies, and climate challenges is no small feat for farmers. However, many are finding strength in numbers by joining farmer-led groups that promote coordinated conservation efforts and knowledge sharing. FiPL grants have supported five different farmer clusters and established a new cluster in the southern Cotswolds, fostering collaboration on a landscape scale.



Anna Field

Wildflower grasslands: booming and blooming

Since the 1930s, the Cotswolds has lost much of its species-rich grasslands, which are crucial for supporting a wide range of plant and insect life. FiPL has encouraged numerous farmers and land managers to apply for grants aimed at restoring these habitats across 50 projects. For example, Pitt Farm near Bath received funding to revert a four-hectare arable field back to permanent, species-rich grassland using locally sourced seed.



James Farm

A notable trend is the shift towards regenerative agriculture among Cotswolds farmers, who seek to improve ecosystem health while producing food.

- **Chipping Camden (north):** A river project involved creating leaky dams, sluices, and attenuation ponds to slow water flow, reduce flooding, and support wildlife recovery, as seen with the return of kingfishers and dragonflies.
- **Eastleach (east):** Restoration of two historic Cotswold stone bridges was funded to rebuild the locally-known structures, and allow livestock to cross safely between grazing areas during high water levels.
- **Ditteridge, Box (south):** Jamie's Farm, a charity providing vulnerable young people therapeutic experiences in a farm setting, received a FiPL grant to develop further accommodation for 450 children a year.
- **Near Stroud (west):** Painswick House Farm used funding to restore historic hedgerows, plant new hedgerows, and create a pasture woodland.

And the future?

FiPL funding has left a significant legacy in the Cotswolds. Over the course of the programme, applicants in the Cotswolds have continued to impress with considered, creative, and innovative projects working to enhance ecological health, support local communities, and foster collaborative approaches to sustainable farming.

Farmers and land managers play a vital role in shaping the landscape, and the CNL team hopes to continue to support them beyond the end of the funding programme.



Courtesy of Thomas Smith, Campden House Estates

Wetland and river improvement at Campden House Estate. The project has far-reaching benefits for the landscape and local community

More information

Case studies are available at www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk. A detailed report on the final outcomes of the FiPL programme is expected later this year.

Guided Walk Highlights

Check out our website for all the current guided walks at www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk. Visit the Walking and Exploring section to find a guided walk for you, as well as a huge selection of self-guided routes.

All guided walks are free, but we welcome small donations to cover costs.

Start the new year off with some 'outdoorsing'! We spend so much of our time indoors, why not make a little promise to yourself to increase your time outdoors in 2025? Guided walks led by our fully trained voluntary wardens are an ideal way to go about it. Good for mind, body and spirit!

To build anticipation, details of a few guided walk highlights in 2025 are below. And remember – the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens add to the online guided walk listings all year round, so do keep checking back!

JANUARY

Saturday 4 January • Start: 10:00am

Around Minchinhampton Commons

No Booking Required

Difficulty: Easy
Duration: 3 hours
Distance: 5 miles

Start point: Opposite the Amberley Inn, Amberley. (Please do not use the Inn car park).

A bracing morning walk on upland commons to celebrate the new year. Fairly flat terrain and no stiles. Glorious views of the surrounding valleys and beyond (weather permitting). Refreshments available locally after the walk, if required. Suitable for families, but not buggies or pushchairs.



Tuesday 7 January • Start: 10:00am

A Withington wander – river, rail & runway

No Booking Required

Difficulty: Moderate
Duration: 3.5 hours
Distance: 5.5 miles

Start point: Village Hall, Main Road, Withington, for a small donation right turn 100m beyond the pub. Can park at the Mill Inn if you are eating/drinking there.

Join walk leaders Steve and Lynne on a favourite walk around Withington that takes in part of the River Coln trail, glorious woodlands which are great for wildlife, classic Cotswold views, and some WW2 history. Back in time for a New Year drink and bite at the Mill Inn, for those who wish to partake.

FEBRUARY

Thursday 13 February • Start: 11:00am

A Snowdrop Walk

No Booking Required

Difficulty: Easy
Duration: 1 hour
Distance: 2 miles

Start point: The Fox at Barrington, OX18 4TB.

Join Rosemary and Clare for a charming short walk along a section of the Windrush Valley. Here the snowdrops flourish, just waiting to be admired. There are other points of interest too in this quiet corner of the Cotswolds, just a stone's throw from bustling Burford. Arrive early for a coffee and perhaps even a lunch afterwards. Please note, there is some unavoidable road walking and also parts which might be damp or muddy. Please wear appropriate footwear.



Neil Morgan

MARCH

Friday 7 March • Start: 10:00am

Shorter and Steadier at Crickley Hill

No booking required

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 2 hours

Distance: 3 miles

Start point: Crickley Hill Country Park Café GL4 8JY. Please note there is a £2.00 car parking charge.

Led by Nick and Lynne, this is another of the quarterly walks around Crickley Hill Country Park, taking in the magnificent views and searching out the wildlife. Shorter and Steadier walks are designed to introduce new walkers to the splendour of our glorious countryside and the joy of exploring it. These shorter walks are at a gentler pace for those who worry that most Wardens' Guided Walks may be a bit challenging. They may also be ideal for anyone wanting to regain fitness after a health setback, and for families (although no pushchairs, sorry). All children must be under adult supervision at all times.

MAY

Saturday 10 May • Start: 10:00am

Circuit of Bath – Hills and Views

No Booking Required

Difficulty: Strenuous

Duration: 6 hours

Distance: 11 miles

Start point: Batheaston car park.

Day 1 of a two-day Circuit of Bath route from Batheaston via Solsbury Hill, Lansdown, Weston and Englishcombe ending at Odd Down. Please bring snacks and a packed lunch. This is the first of two walks, over a weekend, to walk the whole

of the Circuit of Bath route. At Batheaston you will need to park on local roads as the car park has a three-hour limit and the walk will be longer than this. We start from Batheaston and climb to Little Solsbury Hill with magnificent views towards Bath then descend to Upper Swainswick and the Wooley Valley before climbing to the Lansdown plateau, again with views across the countryside. We then descend to Weston and the River Avon with a short climb to Carr's Wood before dropping down to Bath Mill to follow the Newton Brook. We then walk along quiet country lanes to reach Englishcombe. From Englishcombe we make our way to the Odd Down Park and Ride site, our end point for the day. Guided by your walk leaders, we will return to the start point using public transport. Please bring snacks and a packed lunch.



Sunday 11 May • Start: 10:00am

Circuit of Bath – Canals, Railways and History

No Booking Required

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 5 hours

Distance: 9.5 miles

Start point: Odd Down Park and Ride – near the toilets.

Day 2 of the Circuit of Bath from Odd Down Park and Ride (parking fees payable). A walk along the ridge before descending to the route of the Somerset Coal Canal, from there along the Kennet and Avon canal to Bathampton before crossing the Meadows to Batheaston. Please bring snacks and packed lunch. This is the second of two walks, over a weekend, to walk the whole of the Circuit of Bath route. We start from the Odd Down Park and Ride.

Regular monthly walks! Colerne Tuesday Tramp, and Box Tramp. Details online.

Search for all guided walks and self-guided routes online at www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk

GROWING PLACES

An exciting project has been using art to link people with food, farming, wellbeing, nature and landscape. Siân Ellis finds out more.



Deborah Roberts

Artist Bart Sabel has focused on mycelium.

Compost may not be the first subject that springs to mind as a topic for poetry and song, but it was the lively focus of a creative celebration in September at the launch of a new composting facility at Stroud Community Agriculture. Performers included Stroud Folk Choir, and poet Adam Horowitz reading from his soil and compost works, also leading a writing workshop that explored links between soil, landscape and food. Everyone tucked into scrumptious soup made using ingredients from the farm, which practices organic and biodynamic agriculture.

The event was just one of many initiatives organised through Growing Places: a project that has been using art to get people thinking about local food production, farming, wellbeing, nature and landscape. "People really enjoyed singing and talking about the value of caring for the soil," says Richard Keating, co-lead artist for Growing Places and co-founder of Stroud-based artist collective Walking the Land which has been running the project.

Funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (which has been delivered locally by the Cotswolds National Landscape team), Growing Places has been engaging people especially with environmentally friendly, sustainable practices at project partners Stroud Community Agriculture, Oakbrook Community Farm, Hawkwood Centre for Future Thinking and Stroud Woodland Co-operative (larch from the latter's Folly

Wood built the compost facility's bays).

Using art to get people involved in discussions of weighty topics like climate change and growing healthy food offers "a different way of observing and understanding," Richard says. "Because art often involves doing or making, there is a [direct] creative engagement and emotional relationship with a place and the environment, rather than just swimming around [abstractly] in huge issues."

Activities across partners' land have ranged from tree-planting to artist-led workshops in a marquee designed to look like a gingerbread house and furnished using larch from Folly Wood. Youth and school groups have come and studied *mycelia*, exploring ideas of connectivity with and within nature; they have woven stories responding to their surroundings; and they have drawn the very oak tree from which the oak gall ink they use has been made.

Workshops and walks to see and hear about regenerative farming, involving partners and adjacent landowners, have sometimes been wet and muddy, but that has made outings all the more memorable, Richard says. "You get that real connection with nature, which isn't necessarily always nice, cosy and cuddly. It's wet and spiky too. Groups have taken it on – it's about resilience – and they've enjoyed it."

Ramblers, community farm members, mental health groups,

"Because art often involves doing or making, there is a [direct] creative engagement and emotional relationship with a place and the environment, rather than just swimming around [abstractly] in huge issues."



Deborah Roberts

The Gingerbread House has hosted workshops and artist residencies.



food hubs, socially excluded groups, old and young: all have been drawn into activities. Some have recorded words about specific places on walks through woods and farmland – a sort of what3words – that will be plotted onto a map to express what is valued about the landscape. Artworks are being incorporated into The Loom Wall which, made of stone, timber and corrugated material, channels links to Stroud’s textile industry, the richness of the natural world and the challenges of farming in protected landscapes. The wall also softens a meeting-point between Hawkwood’s gardens and Stroud Community Agriculture’s operations.

“People have said how recuperating and refreshing they have found [their experiences],” Richard says. “Some have signed up to become members or volunteer with partner organisations that grow food, and a primary school hub really wants to build [activities] into their curriculum in the future.”

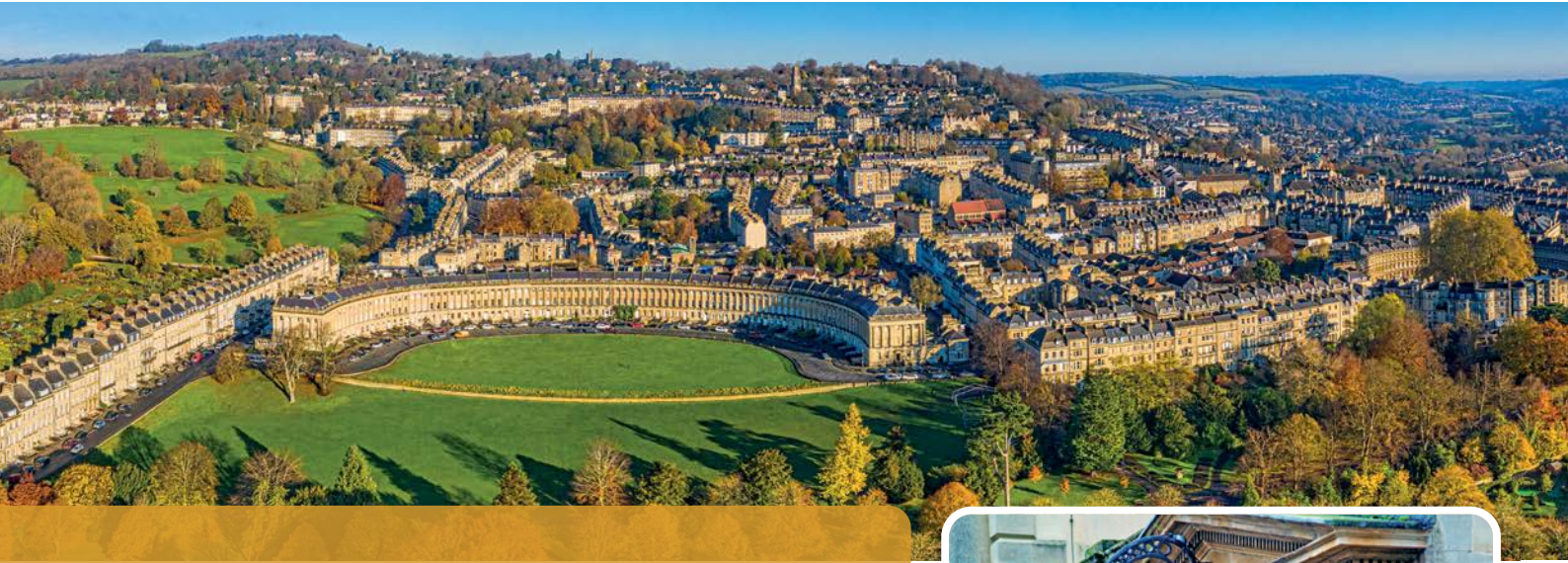
A conference, planned for 1 February 2025, and an exhibition throughout February at Stroud’s Museum in the Park will celebrate outcomes from the project, with walks and talks, and partners on hand for discussions. Momentum will then continue through a Growing Places Directory featuring partner contacts and people’s stories, taking ideas forward to strengthen links and inspire new ones.

More information:

Growing Places Festival, Conference and Exhibition at walkingtheland.org.uk/growing-places

Artist Tara Downs has said it has been “lovely” to share joy, inspiration, and new knowledge within the community.

Celebrating Jane Austen



“Oh! Who can ever be tired of Bath?” asks an eager young Catherine Morland in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. Siân Ellis agrees, as the World Heritage City prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Austen’s birth.

Jane Austen, born in 1775, has many associations with Bath, visiting twice, in 1797 and 1799, and living here with her parents and beloved sister Cassandra from 1801 to 1806. Famed for her dry wit and sharp observations of contemporary society in her writing, Austen made the city a major backdrop for *Northanger Abbey* in which Catherine Morland comes for the season, and in *Persuasion* in which Anne Elliot, after numerous twists, gets a second chance at happiness with Captain Wentworth.



The Circus in Bath with its famous architecture.



The historic Pump Room in Bath

Jane’s parents were married in Bath, at St Swithin’s, Walcot, in 1764, and her father would be buried there on his death in 1805. At the time of the family’s visits from their Hampshire home in the 1790s, the city was renowned as a spa, attracting crowds of fashionable clientele, and Jane, who was already working on the story that became *Northanger Abbey*, depicts her heroine Catherine full of “eager delight” to be there.

But when Jane’s father retired in 1801 and her parents decided it would benefit their health to live in Bath, uprooting their two daughters in the process, the inescapable social round of balls and concerts palled for the author. She would

The Assembly Rooms, where polite society danced and Jane watched with amusement as a drunken wife (rather less politely) chased her drunken husband

complain of “another stupid party last night” – yet all the while she was squirreling away scenes in her mind to reproduce in her writing.

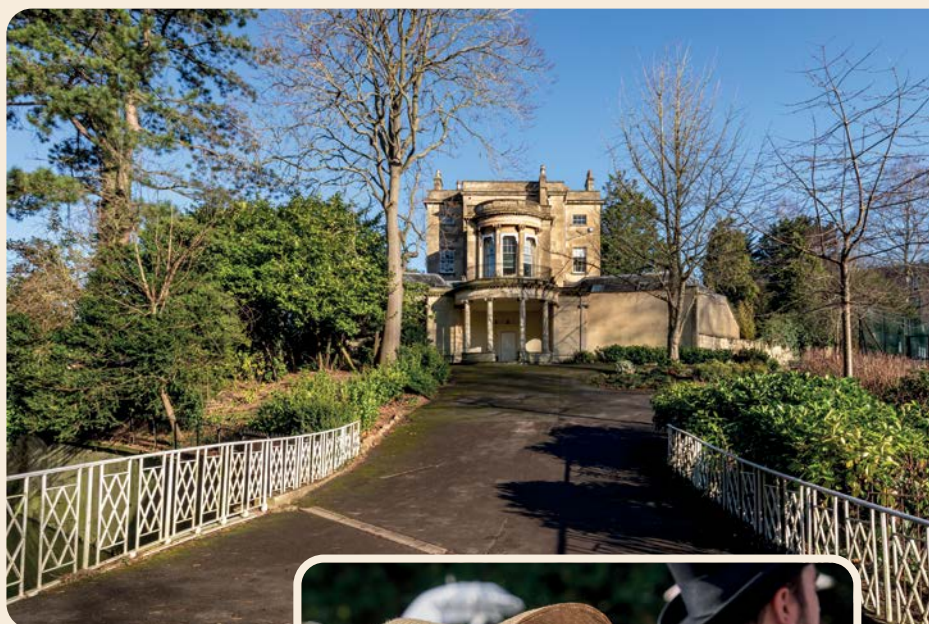
Today, numerous tours and trails help you to follow in Jane’s footsteps all around the Georgian streets she knew: the iconic Royal Crescent and Circus; The Assembly Rooms, where polite society danced and Jane watched with amusement as a drunken wife (rather less politely) chased her drunken husband; The Pump Room, where folk ‘took the waters’ and “Every creature in Bath... was to be seen in the room at different periods of the fashionable hours” (*Northanger Abbey*). The Pump Room Restaurant is now an elegant venue for high tea, or drop into the Jane Austen Centre for insights into the author’s life and works and maybe indulge in Afternoon Tea with Mr Darcy. You can even stay in 4 Sydney Place where the Austens mainly lived.

...drop into the Jane Austen Centre for insights into the author’s life and works and maybe indulge in Afternoon Tea with Mr Darcy.

Jane may have tired of Bath’s social scene, but she was a keen walker, enjoyed Sydney Gardens and rambles into the countryside, and admired the beauty of the surrounding landscape. It’s no surprise, then, that recently created Bathscape self-guided walking trails include a few Austen gems: wheel-friendly ‘Royal Victoria Park Highlights’, for example, takes in the Gravel Walk where Anne and Captain Wentworth touchingly find themselves reunited in love in *Persuasion*. ‘Walk To Bath’s Best View’ climbs like Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney to Beechen Cliff and



Self guided routes around Bath take in locations including Victoria Park (above).



Sydney Gardens – still somewhere to enjoy scenery and a stroll.

views over the city (*Northanger Abbey*).

TV and film adaptations of Jane’s novels have made frequent use of Bath’s streetscapes (including the 2022 Netflix version of *Persuasion*) and also the wider Cotswolds: from Dyrham Park cast as Sanditon House from Austen’s unfinished novel *Sanditon* (ITV, 2019), to Chavenage House featuring as Randalls, home of Mr and Mrs Weston in *Emma*, with the eponymous meddling matchmaker played by Anya Taylor-Joy (Universal Pictures, 2020). Who could ever tire of exploring with Jane Austen?



Bath will celebrate Jane Austen 250 throughout 2025.

Cotswold Literary Inspirations

- Wander Bath’s Royal Crescent, setting for the “extraordinary calamity” suffered by Nathaniel Winkle in Charles Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers*
- Enjoy hilltop vistas of “the coloured counties” of AE Housman’s bittersweet poem ‘Bredon Hill’
- Admire the architecture of Broadway and Burford, affectionately recalled in John Betjeman’s poem, ‘The Town Clerk’s Views’
- Walk the Laurie Lee Wildlife Way around the Slad Valley immortalised in *Cider with Rosie*, gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk

More information:

Jane Austen’s Bath and Austen 250 celebrations at visitbath.co.uk
Bathscape self-guided walking trails at bathscape.co.uk

Best foot forward

Towns in and around the Cotswolds are as keen as mustard for a walking festival. Here's our selection of walking festivals for 2025 – and don't forget to check online – new dates and details are confirmed all year round!

Winchcombe Walking Festival

16 – 18 May 2025

Running for over 15 years, Winchcombe Walking Festival is a popular event – and rightly so: the routes and countryside around the town are spectacular. Winchcombe is an ancient Anglo-Saxon market town with a reputation for its hiking trails, and their three-day walking festival every May. Winchcombe has become a favourite for walking, and the festival attracts people from around the world. In 2024 festival-goers walked over 3,770 miles over three days, the equivalent of walking from London to Detroit, or Bristol to Dubai!

With around 22 walks for all abilities including a challenge walk and evening events, full details will be published at the end of January 2025.

www.winchcombewelcomeswalkers.com

Corsham Walking Festival

13 – 15 June 2025

Although on the fringe of the Cotswolds, this walking festival takes in plenty of routes within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

www.corshamwalkingfestival.org.uk

Evesham Walking Festival

25 – 29 June 2025

Don't take our word for it! Last year, feedback from Evesham included the most resounding recommendations, including: "a fantastic walking festival as you'd expect with an accredited Walkers are Welcome town. Friendly walk leaders who introduced us to places that are not always accessible to the public. We loved it and will definitely return", and "loved the choice of distance, time of day, day of the week and most importantly the range of walks in terms of easy to difficult". Say no more.

www.eveshamwalkfest.org.uk

Wotton Walking Festival

No dates available at the time of going to press: but listen out for early summer 2025 dates being announced soon.

www.wottonwalkingfestival.com



The countryside around Winchcombe offers spectacular views.

Bathscape Walking Festival

September 2025 – exact dates tbc.

A wonderful walking festival, designed to offer as wide a range of walks as possible in this beautiful area of England. Soundscape walks, nature trails, walks with spectacular views, sensory trails – Bathscape walking festival really does try to offer something for everyone.

www.bathscape.co.uk/walking-festival

Bradford-on-Avon Walking Festival

No dates confirmed yet for autumn 2025, but check online for updates.

www.walkbradfordonavon.org/bradford-on-avon-walking-festival

Stonehouse Walking Festival

5 – 14 September 2025

Nestling against the CNL boundary sits Stonehouse. In 2025 the town will be celebrating its sixth walking festival, with a rich variety of scenic walks around the Stonehouse area. The festival offers free, guided group walks, including: level field and woodland footpaths, gently rolling fields, scenic views, canal, river and rail trails, walks for restricted mobility, family fun walks, history walks, tree walks, picnics, pub and cafe stops. Many walks aim to highlight the canal restoration works to restore the missing mile. The 2025 schedule will be announced in July.

www.stonehousewalkfest.wixsite.com/walkstonehouse

Dursley Walking Festival

1 – 5 October 2025

Another popular walking festival, in another Walkers are Welcome town! Join an enthusiastic and energetic community of local walkers to enjoy a host of free guided walks in the local area.

www.festival.dursleywelcomeswalkers.org.uk



Cotswolds
National
Landscape

Glorious Cotswold Grasslands

Our Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team is on a mission to restore as much wildflower grassland as possible, right across the Cotswolds!

This vital work is improving biodiversity, and helping wildlife – from beetles and butterflies, to birds and bats. It's great for livestock too!

If you are a landowner, land manager, parish or town council, school, farm, or conservation project, and you're interested to know how the GCG team could work with you, take a look online to find out more, or email: grasslands@cotswolds-nl.org.uk





**Cotswolds
National
Landscape**

HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE COTSWOLDS

The **Caring for the Cotswolds** grants scheme is a way for businesses and their customers to give something back to the environment in the Cotswolds. We use donations to support projects that conserve vital habitats, preserve our heritage, and improve access to the countryside for everyone.

The more contributions we receive, the more we can do. Want to get involved? Being a member boosts green credentials with customers, and shows that your organisation cares for the environment. Donating as a customer is a great way of helping us look after the Cotswolds National Landscape now – and into the future.

**Funding applications
open in summer 2025**

For more information, please see
the Grants & Funding pages online at
cotswolds-nl.org.uk