



# **Guidance notes: Big Chalk and Local Nature Recovery Strategies Jan 2024**

# Guidance note: BIG CHALK and Local Nature Recovery Strategies

## 1. What is Big Chalk?

BIG CHALK (see map, p.4) is the greatest opportunity to restore nature across the most species rich landscapes of southern England, allowing the most wildlife to thrive and adapt to climate change. Our chalk landscapes are culturally important and globally significant for their value to wildlife. They are central to the UK's pledge to protect 30% of land for biodiversity and halt the decline of species by 2030. Thriving chalk landscapes protect historic heritage and water supplies, store carbon, conserve natural beauty and help improve people's health and wellbeing.

See Annexe I for more information on the BIG CHALK Programme, and Annexe II for its vision.

## 2. The role of Big Chalk in a LNRS

The LNRS programme is one of the most important strategic opportunities to secure the BIG CHALK vision and programme. If each relevant LNRS partnership prioritises the BIG CHALK geography, the LNRSs could together create something of global as well as local significance.

BIG CHALK is founded on ecological principles and evidence. It:

- links 26 of 48 LNRS areas, showing how landscape connectivity is possible at a scale that enables wildlife to respond to climate change, facilitating population and range recovery
- provides an ecological lens for considering conservation priorities and associated delivery actions both within a LNRS area and at scale, across neighbouring LNRS areas
- identifies strategic habitat linkages between existing conservation activities, giving life to the Lawton principles of more, bigger, better and joined-up spaces for nature
- supports the prioritisation of the most species rich habitats and landscapes, helping protect and conserve the most important places for nature by 2030.

## 3. Recommendations for developing a LNRS, helping meet Defra statutory guidance

- Reference the BIG CHALK geography:
  - as important context for the LNRS and include the BIG CHALK map in the LNRS evidence base (shapefile available – see further information, p.2)
  - when prioritising areas of opportunity for restoring biodiversity
  - when recognising existing conservation activity and when prioritising new areas of activity, including strategic habitat linkages
  - when identifying linkages across the LNRS boundary.
- Prioritise calcareous grasslands<sup>1</sup>, mosaic habitats and woodlands on calcareous soils, and chalk streams and chalk aquifer-fed wetlands, for which the UK is internationally important.
- Map and buffer these habitats to promote ecological integrity and resilience, particularly for the purpose of facilitating species movements in response to climate change.
- Prioritise species dependent on these habitats for conservation action, particularly those with an unfavourable status and whose range is predicted to shift with climate change.
- Establish a dialogue with neighbouring LNRS teams with the aim of ensuring sufficient consistency of approach to enable sharing of data and priorities across LNRS boundaries.

---

<sup>1</sup> Utilise the data and opportunity mapping from '[Definition of Favourable Conservation Status for Lowland Calcareous Grassland](#)'

## Annexe I

### What is the BIG CHALK programme?

The BIG CHALK programme exists to amplify the efforts of partner organisations delivering thriving chalk landscapes. It does this in four main ways:

- Championing and connecting the contributions of partners across administrative and institutional boundaries.
- Defining priorities, influencing funders to secure resources for new activities, and providing assurance that these are contributing to nature's recovery and other public goods.
- Planning and securing resources for new activity in the places that link existing chalk initiatives.
- Making real connections for wildlife and people and helping create both a resilient ecological network and a collaborative ecosystem of delivery partners.

### What does success look like for the programme over the next 2 years?

- BIG CHALK is recognised as a vital super nature recovery network in relevant central and local government plans/policies (e.g. Defra 30x30 map).
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Protected Landscape Nature Recovery Plans support the BIG CHALK ambition and help catalyse and deliver relevant priorities.
- Location of most important connections between existing delivery partnerships identified and new partnerships/mechanisms mobilised.
- All relevant significant funding mechanisms support the BIG CHALK ambition, including CSS/Landscape Recovery, Biodiversity Net Gain and National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- BIG CHALK evidence gathering informs investment case through Comprehensive Spending Review and Protected Landscape funding formula review.

### For further help, information or to provide feedback on this guidance, please contact:

We hope that this guidance is helpful to you when preparing your LNRS. Natural England and Defra are supporting the BIG CHALK programme and further help and support is therefore available to you with integrating the BIG CHALK vision into your LNRS:

#### The BIG CHALK Partnership

Chair: Nick Johannsen FLI

Programme lead: David Hoccom      Email: [david.hoccom@national-landscapes.org.uk](mailto:david.hoccom@national-landscapes.org.uk)

Secretary: Simon Smith      Email: [Simon.Smith@cotswolds-nl.org.uk](mailto:Simon.Smith@cotswolds-nl.org.uk)

LNRS lead: Bruce Winney      Email: [bruce.winney@national-landscapes.org.uk](mailto:bruce.winney@national-landscapes.org.uk)

## **Annexe II**

### **BIG CHALK Vision**

Calcareous (chalk and limestone) landscapes in the south of England are the most species-rich habitats within the UK. When combined across the whole landscape, these habitats make it the best place to allow wildlife to recover and adapt to climate change.

BIG CHALK is a big idea, aiming to realise one of the best opportunities to achieve nature recovery and help wildlife adapt to climate change offered by the English landscape. It will also deliver an array of public goods including sustainable employment and products, carbon sequestration, water quality, flood management, soil stabilisation and public health and wellbeing.

Covering 19% of England, BIG CHALK has the primary objective of building a robust nature recovery network on a vast geographical scale, linking 26 of the 48 Local Nature Recovery Strategy areas. This will be achieved by identifying opportunities to transform these landscapes by the application of the Lawton principles at a hitherto unimagined scale. This is also about securing our valued characteristic calcareous species and assemblages and increasing their abundance.

BIG CHALK has the potential to attract private finance at scale by allowing opportunities to be aggregated across the whole landscape. Add this to a wide uptake of Environmental Land Management schemes, Farming in the Protected Landscape funding in 14 Protected Landscapes and Biodiversity Net Gain opportunities, and BIG CHALK can deliver at scale.

Success will mean that BIG CHALK will contribute significantly to many of the targets in the Environmental Improvement Plan, particularly the apex goal of reversing the decline of species abundance. BIG CHALK will also make a big contribution to the UK Government's commitment that 30% of land and sea will be managed for nature by 2030.

The BIG CHALK vision is one of a wildlife rich landscape where grassland, arable and woodland areas are knitted together in a landscape scale mosaic. New and restored wildflower grasslands, scrub, small naturally regenerating woodland and marginal habitats, all link existing habitats that are well managed, extended and in good condition. This will be achieved through strong partnerships across the whole region, working with all who have a stake or interest in the calcareous landscape.

BIG CHALK landscapes will be places where the human and natural elements are both valued and mutually beneficial. In addition to creating a super nature recovery network, management activity will protect and enhance landscape character and historical and cultural heritage. In turn, this will benefit local economies and enable widespread health and wellbeing benefits.

These landscapes will facilitate opportunities for deep engagement with local people and visitors. Opportunities for people to support these landscapes will include through purchasing goods and services and volunteering their time, such as through citizen science initiatives.

