

Big Chalk

A LIFE Environment (water) Integrated Project

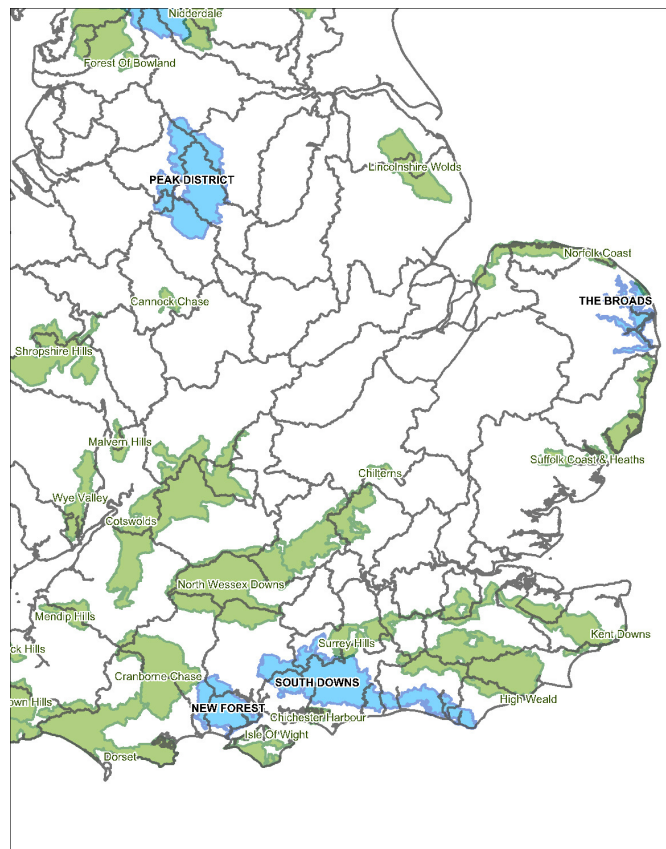
The Big Chalk is a proposal to deliver the Water Framework Directive (WFD) over 37 river catchments that share a chalk geology. In order to make such a great stride forward, we will have to achieve greater coherence and collaboration across government bodies, the charitable and the public sectors. Ten protected landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks) have come together to provide leadership and support for Big Chalk.

In addition to all the benefits of WFD delivery, it is envisaged that Big Chalk would bring substantial and significant benefit to sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and social cohesion across southern England.

The rationale for the involvement and leadership of protected landscapes

For some years, there has been a shared understanding amongst the protected areas that sit upon the Cretaceous chalk that they are faced with similar challenges and presented with similar opportunities. There is a clear logic in greater collaboration on this basis. One of the objectives of Big Chalk is to pilot the utilisation of protected landscapes in the delivery of EU strategies by creating better collaboration and coherence, not just between the protected area teams, but between all bodies involved in the environmental, social and economic management of the areas.

Each Integrated Project proposal must be based on a high quality multi-purpose delivery mechanism that achieves wins in other policy areas and creates synergy and stakeholder involvement while delivering core project objectives. The Management Plans of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Park Authorities (NPAs) are ideal for this purpose; being statutory, fully 'signed off', integrated documents that are created by their stakeholders.



Map of protected landscapes and river catchments

The aims of the protected landscapes involved in Big Chalk are:

- Delivery of Water Framework Directive and other EU strategies (such as Habitats Directive) in river basins across the extent of the English chalk (and associated) landscapes through the removal of barriers to progress, greater collaboration and cooperation between actors and stakeholders.
- Considering river basins with a predominantly chalk geology, we want greater resource efficiency through the effective conservation and enhancement of ecosystem services provided by chalk landscapes; in particular, sustainable growth within environmental limits, protecting biodiversity assets such as chalk streams, grasslands and species that are indicators of environmental thresholds.
- Produce threshold / environmental limit data that can be fed into NPA and AONB Management Plans, Local Plans and other strategic plans.
- Demonstrate the collective power of protected landscapes to convene disparate bodies and deliver effectively at national, regional and local levels.

Why a LIFE Integrated Project is a suitable vehicle for these ambitions.

Correct orientation of the desired outcomes and the funding mechanism is a crucial first step. Big Chalk fits with LIFE Integrated Project very well, but does not fit any other part of LIFE. There are no national or international funding mechanisms that offer the same opportunities. The following are the reasons why Big Chalk is a suitable LIFE Integrated Project:

- Big Chalk is designed to catalyse full implementation of EU-specified plans and strategies in the LIFE MAWP 2014-2017

The Big Chalk partners want to see more rapid and complete implementation of WFD in key River Basins. Secondly, Big Chalk would create synergy and integration; it will have many elements that deliver on Habitats Directive, bolstering the Natura 2000 network, Biodiversity 2020 and some climate change elements such as carbon sequestration. To do these things coherently will advance the Management Plans immeasurably.

- Big Chalk will create a new foundation for more efficient delivery of strategies at a national scale.

Testing the use of protected landscapes. While LIFE Integrated Projects are expected to be lead by the Competent Authority, this is not necessary if a more suitable Coordinating Beneficiary applies. This approach is replicable and transferable within UK and EU.

- Big Chalk will facilitate easier utilization of EU Structure Funds, Euro Agric Fund for Rural Development and EU Maritime & Fisheries Fund to implement River Basin Management Plans in and around the ten protected landscapes.

Association with a LIFE Integrated Project adds points to an application for EU funds.

- Financial scale

The size of this project is beyond most other funding programmes that have an environmental objective. LIFE Integrated Projects are expected to have an average EUR 10 million award, giving a total project spend of about EUR 17 million.

- Geographical scale

There are nine AONBs and one national park (South Downs) interested in moving this forward.

- Big Chalk will mobilise EU, national or private resources for the implementation of complimentary activity.

For activity that is on the same scale but of a different nature, or of a similar nature on a different scale, Big Chalk will attract funding from Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Authorities, Lottery, charities and the private sector.

- Big Chalk involves stakeholders

Stakeholders make up the governing bodies of AONBs and National Parks and are involved in the direction and delivery of the Delivery Plans.

- Long time scale (6+ years)

Application for Technical Assistance Sept 2015

Technical Assistance Project produces an Integrated Project application for May 2016 deadline

Big Chalk Integrated Project starts in January 2017

- Big Chalk seeks to create long-term capacity building

The outcomes and outputs of Big Chalk, apart from the gains on the ground, would be embedded in protected area planning (all ten plans would be revised during the course of the Integrated Project), Local Plans, any reform of Agri-environment schemes and River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs). This would serve to create greater future capacity locally, regionally and nationally.

- Big Chalk will be a combination of pilot, demonstration, information, awareness raising and dissemination activity.

For instance, if a RBMP would be functionally delivered by the removal of impoundments in the main channel from source to sea, then Big Chalk would provide 120% more funding than is in existing budgets for those actions in order to complete the work. This demonstrates the efficacy of the approach and inform the revision of all other RBMP. There would be an undertaking at the outset to revise RBMP in the light of lessons learned in Big Chalk.

