

# Farming for the Nation: AONBs as test beds for a new Environmental Land Management Scheme

A NAAONB Proposal  
on behalf of  
England's AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards

**The National Association for  
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Belmont House, Shrewsbury Business Park  
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6LG

07576 321614

[howard.davies@landscapesforlife.org.uk](mailto:howard.davies@landscapesforlife.org.uk)

Twitter @NAAONB

A company limited by guarantee no: 4729800

Charity Number: 1158871

Registered office as above

## Index

1. Executive Summary.....	3
2. The AONB Family proposals and farming.....	4
3. The Offer from the AONB Family in detail.....	5
4. Proposals from the AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards.....	9
Appendix A. Examples of AONB proposals.....	12
Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONB Partnerships.....	12
Cornwall AONB Partnership.....	15
Cotswolds Conservation Board.....	20
Dorset AONB Partnership.....	27
Forest of Bowland, Nidderdale and North Pennines AONB Partnerships...	32
Kent Downs AONB Partnership.....	36
Quantocks AONB Partnership.....	39
Surrey Hills AONB Partnership.....	43
Tamar Valley AONB Partnership.....	45

## Farming for the Nation: AONBs as test beds for ELMS (Environmental Land Management Scheme)

“Environment is – at its roots – another word for nature, for the planet that sustains us, the life on earth that inspires wonder and reverence, the places dear to us we wish to protect and preserve. We value those landscapes and coastlines as goods in themselves, places of beauty which nurture and support all forms of wildlife”.

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2018

### 1. Executive Summary

As the United Kingdom enters a period of unprecedented change and opportunity, it is vital that every level of government, private industry and the third sector has a clear vision of the role they can play in maximising future opportunities. The Government’s *“A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment”* lays out the goals that Defra seeks to achieve, the policies that will be put in place and the actions that will flow from them, to leave the environment in a better state and ensure that this country is recognised as the leading global champion of a greener, healthier, more sustainable future for the next generation.

England’s 34 AONBs cover nearly 7,000 square miles of the countryside. From the open moorlands of the North Pennines, Nidderdale, and the Forest of Bowland, through the undulating grasslands of the Chilterns and Cotswolds, to the more intimate wooded landscapes of the High Weald and Kent Downs. Each AONB is the product of farming practices, and its value to the whole nation is largely dependent on sympathetic future land management practices. It is a legal requirement that public bodies have regard to the purpose of AONB designation (CRoW Act Section 85). Any future land management scheme must, therefore, do likewise. This proposal will help facilitate this.

The AONB Management Plan is the mechanism by which the future of each AONB is discussed, determined, and delivered. It is a locally-designed, nationally-relevant plan that depends on the collaborative activity of multiple stakeholders for delivery. The majority of AONB Management Plans are currently being reviewed and new plans will be in place to take these areas forward once the UK leaves the European Union. The Plans will act as a catalyst for new thinking and positive action that will sustain and improve the flow of public goods from the UK’s outstanding landscapes.

At the same time, Government is reviewing the AONB designation with the intention of exploring what might be done better and what changes could help their management.

The AONB Family shares the Government’s ambition to help the natural world regain and maintain good health. This proposal allows, for the first time, a clear way of aligning land management with the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of our landscapes. By developing new approaches, we aim to deliver across all the goals and policies in the 25 YEP. We want to test new ways of working with land managers that will put the environment first and fully utilise the opportunities afforded by the AONB designation to deliver integrated, place-based solutions. New approaches require new thinking and new partners. AONB

partnerships<sup>1</sup> have universal interests in their localities, so are ideally placed to ensure that health and wellbeing interests, the private sector, cultural and heritage organisations and economic partnerships can get the most from an improved environment and can participate fully in both its conservation and enhancement. AONBs are a key national asset that can unlock these opportunities and realise the Government's high ambitions for the future.

### **The AONB Family Proposal in brief**

The NAAONB will deliver a programme of projects that will test new ideas and trial new approaches in the delivery of a future environmental land management scheme designed to fit local conditions while reflecting national priorities. Once the UK has left the European Union, the British public will want to see that public money invested in environmental gains is money well spent. Through the network of AONB teams, we will work with current agri-environment partners such as farmers, agricultural contractors, rural estates, land agents, foresters and riparian owners. We will also bring new participants to environmental land management, such as universities, voluntary community groups, health and well-being organisations, groups with access, heritage and sporting interests, who will add new dimensions to land management and ensure that public benefits flow directly from a funded activity or project to local beneficiaries.

The outcomes of the programme will inform the development of rural and protected landscape policy at national and local levels, such that the UK's landscapes can be managed in a truly sustainable manner, taking into account the special qualities that characterise the area and the needs of those who live and work there.

## **2. The AONB Family proposals and farming**

AONB partnerships have worked collaboratively with farmers since their creation. Through projects such as the Cranborne Chase *Farmland Conservation Project* and the North Pennines *Hay Time*, AONB teams have continued to build on the quality of this relationship and maintain a close and practical working relationship with farmers.

UK agriculture is of national and international strategic importance with a wide range of ancillary sectors that support farming. Farming is a multi-layered industry that includes primary production through processing to retail; sometimes on one farm, sometimes on cooperatives. Farms covers 70% of the UK land surface and are as diverse as the landscapes and families which they comprise: with 180,000 UK holdings there are 180,000 different ways of farming. This complexity presents a great challenge for future policy development and delivery. Not least of these is the fact that many people in the United Kingdom do not understand farming and are divorced from the countryside where, and the methods by which, their food is produced.

Farming has an impact, both positive and negative, on key natural resources and processes such as water and its quantity, soil and its productivity, and the type of wildlife we, as society, enjoy and need to thrive. It both reflects the local landscape and creates and shapes it. It can produce places of distinctive character, and places devoid of character. Farming is one of the central contributors to landscape character and quality.

---

<sup>1</sup> The NAAONB uses the generic AONB partnerships to describe the organisations that guide the work of the AONB Teams. This includes AONB Partnerships, Conservation Boards, Joint Advisory Committees and Joint Committees.

The UK's withdrawal from the European Union provides a range of specific challenges and opportunities for Government, land managers, AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards. These include

- reaction to the sharpened interest of domestic taxpayers in how the public benefits that flow from the environment are protected, conserved and enhanced,
- working with a greater diversity of environmental stakeholders, including farmers and the wider agricultural sector, ensuring that agricultural and landscape policies are fully integrated and designed to complement each other in the delivery of a broader vision for sustainable land management,
- adopting a more integrated approach to sustainable land management and recasting our ambition for the environment - an ambition that is more inclusive and accessible,
- putting in place a more environmentally responsible approach to land use and reversing the decline in the environmental quality of our land, rivers, and seas,
- adapting the way in which government at all levels supports and interacts with farming, working in partnership to meet the challenge of climate change, scarce natural resources, pressure on public finance and rural issues, and
- work together to reconcile the demands of food production and environmental regeneration.

The AONB Family supports the development of a new overarching UK agricultural policy framework within which devolved policies tailored to local needs can be designed. On account of the disproportionately high level of public goods provided by designated landscapes, we assert the view that these landscapes should have the highest priority for agri-environment and rural development spend within any new scheme.

### **3. The Offer from the AONB Family in detail**

The following offer is based on our collective experience of working at local and national levels. It builds on the AONB partnerships' exceptional power to convene, the trust that they have developed at the local level with a wide range of local interests, and the insight they have in relation to issues of local importance. This offer represents a natural evolution of the role of the AONB designation.

#### **3.1 We propose that**

- AONB Management Plans should provide the framework for the development of a post Brexit environmental land management scheme in and around AONBs,
- In regions that have high coverage of designated landscapes, schemes could include more than one AONB or National Park working in partnership,
- In some AONBs, schemes would be trialled in small parts of the designated area,
- The integrated nature of AONB Management Plans ensures that agricultural policy is cross referenced to wider environmental, social, and economic outcomes, and
- Integrated delivery at the local level will improve opportunities for simpler, cheaper, more effective delivery

The following principles underpin our proposal:

- Sustainable land management is an imperative,
- Public money should pay for public goods,
- Scheme design will conserve and enhance the natural capital of AONBs, ensuring flows of ecosystem services are identified, maintained and protected,

- A healthy functioning environment underpins a strong economy and a healthy society,
- Any new approach to agricultural support should be reformative and restorative and be above all an environmental scheme, not just a way of subsidising farming,
- Outcomes must mitigate the impact of climate change,
- Decisions must be based on evidence and cost effectiveness,
- Delivery must be through collaboration, and
- Any scheme will increase equity within and between land management sectors and create a better return for the public investment.

### **3.2 AONB Management Plans**

AONB Management Plans provide a locally led, strategic assessment of the character and special qualities of places recognised as national assets. The plans articulate what constitutes valued and valuable landscape, endorsed by expert input and public opinion. Where high quality landscape is coincidental with sustainable land management, this provides an ideal framework within which to invest agri-environment and rural-development funding.

Positive action, not supported in other ways, should be paid for and monitored; such as the management of characteristic boundary features, linking high nature value sites across the landscape, woodland management, tree planting and conservation of veteran trees, and the conservation of traditional farm buildings. The plan-making process includes active public engagement in, and gaining public support for, directed landscape change where this is necessary.

Placing AONB Management Plans at the heart of a new scheme for the environment and rural development would have multiple benefits.

### **3.3 The AONB Family (AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards)**

- The resilience and flexibility of the organisations with the AONB Family make them ideal test-beds for new environmental thinking and experimentation,
- The AONB Family will
  - work closely with Defra in advance of March 2019 to achieve day-one readiness,
  - mobilise existing networks to support the needs of farmers in less favoured areas, specifically identifying how we can help the sector adjust and adapt to changes in trade agreements and the regulatory regime,
  - use their ability to be fleet of foot to allow rapid deployment of new approaches to environmental delivery,
  - support the development of markets for local products and services by utilising existing experience in business to business networking and product development,
  - use its power to convene and build consensus to allow new ideas and thinking to be tested, new partners and stakeholders engaged and the flow of public benefit from the environment maximised,
  - utilise their networks locally, and through the NAAONB nationally, to test thinking on the best use of funding to 2020, in order to create a solid base for rural development funding beyond 2020
- Recognising that the UK is a key market for the EU, the NAAONB will develop thinking around improving environmental standards linked to place-based environmental management.

### **3.4. How it will work**

The NAAONB will bring together a number of different trials and tests across the AONB Family in England. The NAAONB will centrally coordinate the individual AONB projects, monitor and provide administration for them.

#### **3.4.1 A simple, two-component offer based on the 'natural capital opportunities' within an area.**

Both components will generate bespoke agreements that will be agreed with individual land managers, ensuring that the land manager understands what is required, that the tax payer makes a worthwhile investment and that the agreement can be monitored and assessed according to agreed criteria. Agreements with groups of land managers working at landscape-scale will be encouraged and prioritised over a multiplicity of individual agreements.

In each AONB where there is a test or trial, a targeting statement will be developed that describes what outcomes are needed to conserve and enhance the characteristics and special qualities of the landscape and the natural resources and processes upon which they depend. Land managers and other environmental stakeholders can then work up proposals, with the benefit of advice and support, for how they will deliver those outcomes on their land. They will also propose how much they need to be paid to carry out the activity and where those costs are incurred.

#### **Component 1**

Component 1 will incentivise farming and forestry and other environmental activity that delivers public benefit. It will focus on the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, including wildlife and cultural features, and the prevention of harm to the special qualities of the landscape.

Whilst recognising that the primary purpose of Component 1 support is to generate improvements to air, soil, water, biodiversity, and natural beauty, other social and economic contributions will be recognised.

Payments will be made for maintaining the most valuable land in environmental terms, as well as providing capital grants for specific conservation projects. Participants will sign up to a simple set of 'rules' designed to give improvements over and above the regulatory baseline.

#### **Component 2**

Component 2 will be based on a landscape-scale approach to delivery, where appropriate utilising a 'cluster' approach. It will be open to all kinds of landowners, environmental stakeholders and occupiers to incentivise the right people to undertake actions to which they are best suited to deliver. It will cover any kind of land, not just agricultural land; so will include dune systems and salt marsh, inter-tidal land, woodland and wild land in nature reserves. It will support multi-objective programmes over multi-year contracts.

Payments under component 2 will be objective-led. Objectives will be defined locally and the process for generating these objectives will be underpinned by principles of good governance and integrated within the AONB Management Planning process, namely

- Legitimacy, participation and voice
- Effective performance management
- Accountability and transparency
- Fairness and rights

These objectives will be delivered through the co-ordinated activity of many actors working across farm clusters and will deliver multiple benefits at different scales. By their nature, these high-level objectives will be strategic, and integrative.

The integrated nature of work under component 2 will necessarily require support across numerous areas, including training and development, business development, specialist support and advice, knowledge sharing, and behavioural change.

### **3.4.2 Targeting statements**

The type of activity supported within an AONB under both components will be defined in a locally devised targeting statement, which will link clearly to Management Plan objectives. This targeting statement will include a register of natural and cultural capital, and outline opportunities for their conservation and enhancement.

Payments will be made on a whole farm basis for both components and include land within holdings beyond the AONB boundary.

### **3.4.3 Scheme implementation and administration**

We would like to test different scales and administration methods. We envisage that each test or trial would be over three years. Some AONB teams could increase their capacity, as they have done to deliver EU Leader funding, other AONB units would not have that capacity, but could partner with a competent authority locally to do so. Farmers have liked the idea of having a scheme administration that is local, approachable and accessible, based within an organisation, their local AONB Partnership or Conservation Board, that has decades of trusted delivery behind it.

#### **Component 1**

Component 1 scheme agreements will be light touch, comparable with the requirements of AONB Sustainable Development Funds. A natural capital 'map' will support opportunities set out in the AONB targeting statement linked, in turn, to the delivery of AONB objectives set out in the Management Plan. Applicants will choose whether they wish to develop any of the opportunities on offer. If they want to opt in, they will be able to do so up to the financial capacity of the scheme in any one year.

Applicants will notify a liaison officer, employed through the AONB partnership, of their intentions, such as the area of land to be managed or length of hedgerow restored.

The liaison officer will check on delivery through an annual self-certification scheme.

#### **Component 2**

Component 2 scheme agreements will demand higher thresholds of evidence, participation and commitment. Delivery will be based on area wide action plans for the delivery of objectives, with payment mechanisms appropriate to the activity. This may include challenge funds, loans or PES contracts, for instance. The liaison officer will formulate a result based, outcome focused agreement with the participant landowners and scheme partners. Agreements will be brokered over outcome/output balance and length of contract, for instance. AONB liaison officers will meet regionally and nationally to scope opportunities for collaboration, learning and knowledge exchange.

## 4. Proposals from the AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards

Seventeen organisations have expressed an interest in being involved in testing and trialling either whole schemes or elements of schemes. AONB teams are adept at linking highly strategic, over-arching policies with practical action on the ground. All the proposals are a mix of “bottom up” approaches to local conditions and need and “top down” innovations that come from the broad landscape perspective. Together, the programme provided by the AONB Family combines strategic vision with the on-the-ground pragmatic common sense of farmers who know their land.

There are six Policies in *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*. The AONB Family will address these comprehensively, for example:

### 4.1 Using and managing land sustainably.

**Cornwall AONB Partnership** has presented a comprehensive proposal that would deliver across the six 25 YEP policies, but primarily on the sustainable use of land. The Partnership will use an adaptive learning approach to build on a previous analysis of the natural capital of the Lizard Peninsula. Over three years, they will test and trial a variety of ways in which sustainable land management can be incentivised and delivered to produce the most public benefit.

**Quantock Hills AONB Partnership** has similarly proposed a comprehensive scheme that would also deliver across all the six policies. They will cover a geographical area larger than the AONB, taking in the setting of the designated landscape so that the benefits of the designation spill over into the surrounding communities. This scheme would aspire to bring together landscape, biodiversity, ecosystem and cultural benefits with economic business sustainability. The land management agreements will be genuinely “whole unit” not simply geographically but in respect of land management activity, achievable through liaison and coordination at a local level the agreements will be bespoke and flexible, empowering the land management community rather than imposing top-down prescriptions.

### 4.2 Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes

**Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONB Partnerships** will work together to trial an innovative and targeted approach to re-creating a connected landscape based on an analysis of the National Character Area to produce a Nature Recovery Network that will be then delivered, through a reverse-auction to a locally administered fund, by groups of farmers and other partners.

**Cranborne Chase AONB Partnership** proposes to build on ten years of experience in bringing landowners together to work in concert for the environment. Their proposal is a locally administered scheme that would work with ‘clusters’ of farms to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the landscape; such as the chalk streams, archaeological assets, ancient woodlands and wildlife.

**Forest of Bowland, Nidderdale and North Pennines AONB Partnerships** propose to deliver a comprehensive scheme that combines agri-environment support and rural growth funding across 340,000 hectares of the English uplands. By building on their long experience of working with upland livestock farmers, the three AONB teams will focus on securing a future for this traditional activity that sustains the landscapes of the northern uplands. They will concentrate on engaging new audiences, addressing issues such as natural flood management and peatland restoration.

### 4.3 Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing

**Kent Downs AONB Partnership** proposes to trial a scheme that will address local health and wellbeing needs in particularly disadvantaged areas. They will work with farmers and landowners, in groups as well as individually, to understand the barriers to promoting and enhancing access to the landscape that previous agri-environment schemes have invested in. They will create new ways to manage the enhancement of access opportunities, for instance contracting farmers to manage access routes to National Trail standards where there is clearly an opportunity for frequent use. This will provide safe, easy-to-follow routes with support, promotion and the provision of facilities in certain circumstances. We would also test and trial the barriers to nearby urban and deprived communities to connecting the landscape in sustainable ways; we think that the access trial could seek to establish new ways to get people to the landscape so that the public are demonstrably the beneficiaries of the 'public good' that comes from the public investment.

#### 4.4 Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste

The **Cotswolds Conservation Board** has offered a proposal that will combine incentives for more sustainable land management and support for rural development. By removing the artificial barrier between these activities, they will be able to offer more comprehensive support to landowners. The Conservation Board will trial a locally-tailored scheme, informed by the Management Plan and local cost values, that will act at Component 1 and 2 levels. It will develop a much more efficient system, based on decades of direct engagement with landowners and communities, that

- Rewards farmers for the environmental and cultural products that farming can provide, as well as the food we need,
- Engages and empowers the farming community in the design and delivery of innovative and locally responsive new schemes,
- Steers the farming sector in a more sustainable direction: working with nature for mutual benefit,
- Provides a greatly enhanced range of public benefits,
- Integrates environment, economy and community to demonstrate the <sup>[[SEP]]</sup>integrated delivery that the Government seeks,
- Is prepared to take calculated risks to drive forward innovation, develop <sup>[[SEP]]</sup>new businesses and create and/or sustain jobs,
- Supports appropriate rural business growth and jobs,
- Is clearer and easier to understand and removes duplication between <sup>[[SEP]]</sup>separate strands of funding and is therefore more efficient, and
- Helps farmers and rural business take full advantage of future opportunities.

**Kent Downs AONB Partnership** proposes to run a trial at Component 2 level to better conserve water resources in the Kent Chalk Aquifer that supplies 75% of Kent's drinking water and is becoming increasingly over-drawn and affected by human impact. There have been a number of initiatives and studies done on this urgent environmental issue. The trial would test ways in which the learning from these disparate studies can be pulled together and delivered on the ground by farmers. This learning would be applicable to all the chalk landscapes of the UK, particularly around Greater London and the South / South-East.

#### 4.5 Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans.

Sixteen of the thirty-four AONBs are on the coast. Coastal environments have not figured highly in previous agri-environment schemes because much of the coast is not agricultural land (there was a requirement, emanating from the European Commission, that spending on agri-

environment was for farming and therefore could not be spent on anything but productive farmland), so the schemes could not operate on them. There is no need for the new Environmental Scheme to be limited in this way; we have the opportunity to spend our own money on our own priorities.

Many of our most uniquely British and endangered habitats can be found on the coast and their conservation was often unfunded. The AONB Family will propose new ways in which an Environmental Land Management Scheme could improve the management of salt marches, coastal lagoons, beaches, dune systems and rocky shores. These natural areas provide some of our most urgently needed and irreplaceable ecosystem services such as protection from storm and flood, reduced coastal erosion and nursery areas for the fish species our fishing industry relies upon.

The coastal AONB Partnerships are already working with a broad range of coastal stakeholders, such as tourism, local authorities, recreational sailing, in-shore fishing and marine conservationists. These long-standing relationships, built on many years of collaboration and trust, will be activated to deliver this vital policy on our most beautiful coast lines and in-shore waters.

#### **4.6 Protecting and improving the global environment.**

As new trade agreements develop and UK products are able to find new markets, producers and businesses in the deeply rural parts of England may be disadvantaged. The blending of agri-environment and rural development support proposed by several members of the AONB Family will help businesses old and new take advantage of these opportunities. Businesses may also be able to import ingredients, goods and services from abroad with greater freedom. AONB-based businesses will have to trade with the highest possible environmental credentials. Exporting products from our outstanding landscapes, while working with suppliers to meet the same exacting standards, will be the clearest possible signal that the Government is committed to sustainable international trade.

## Appendix A. Examples of AONB proposals

### Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONB Partnerships

#### Key objective(s)

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONBS
- Develop a Nature Recovery Network

#### Background

Dominating the Blackdowns National Character Area (NCA) and covering a combined area of 630 square kilometres, the two contiguous AONBs (Blackdown Hills and East Devon) provide a rich tapestry of small fields with medieval boundaries, copses and small woodlands, many of which are small family-run farms.

These farms, many marginal, are increasingly under threat from challenging market conditions and are vulnerable to changes in agricultural policy. They experience difficulties accessing agri-environment and rural development **schemes due to their small size, scale, or capacity to expand business operations**. This can impact on farm resilience and viability. Size matters in current schemes.

The small family farms often support important natural heritage features (such as species rich grasslands) as well as historic and cultural heritage features. As a result of this synergy of heritage value, the farms all host natural capital potential with tangible benefits to society, such as a rich and varied landscape, improved water quality, healthy soils, public access and pollinator services. This in part is because many have remained unchanged for many years and the rate of change is slower than on larger and more agriculturally productive farms.

#### Proposal

Across the NCA landscape, within a 2-3 year timeframe, trial an innovative and targeted approach to re-creating a connected landscape, rich in natural capital that delivers a range of tangible benefits to society.

Achieve this by supporting **groups of farms** (with fragmented but natural capital rich heritage features) to collaborate, in order to deliver a NCA natural capital/ Nature Recovery Network Master Plan.

#### Evidence

- Support from Farm Facilitation Groups operating across the AONBs
- Mapped research into Strategic Nature Area opportunity mapping
- AONB track record of delivery

#### Other Options

- Small scale interventions driven through other project funding – short term in nature

#### What innovation does the proposal/ideas bring to the new Environmental Land Management system?

**Evidence** - The two (Countryside Stewardship) farmer-led Facilitation Groups operating in the area have collaborative themes focussing around re-connecting fragmented habitat, farm resilience and collective approaches to land management. Farmer members of these groups (over 100 strong) see the need to embrace and align with the emerging new direction for farm

support due to their marginal farming operations and their potential to deliver public benefit for public investment.

This pilot would use the facilitation groups and draw on the existing expertise within these partnerships and other tried and tested approaches (see evidence in Q1) as a platform, to build collaborations and test new ways to administer, deliver and monitor farm support schemes.

### **Costs**

- Time in developing farmer trust/understanding and buy in for proposed approaches
- Developing the model/network for delivery
- Delivery costs – project staff / facilitation

### **Benefits**

- Better connected, conserved and enhanced landscapes
- Farmer led collaboration schemes

### **Why this pilot**

- Outside commons agreements, there are no current ELM processes enabling small pockets of high nature conservation value landscape to be collectively supported
- Can replicate across different geographies/habitats
- Links with catchment scale working and existing farm advisor networks
- Building on existing partnerships and farmer clusters

### **What would happen if not supported**

- Risk of irreversible loss of nature conservation/biodiverse habitat
- Failure to capitalise on opportunity presented through established 2x farm facilitation group working
- Disillusion amongst marginalised family farms

### **How does your proposal/idea(s) link in with the 25 year environment plan objectives?**

It is anticipated that 2-4 priority areas would be identified and would form the focus for the pilot. Each priority area would include a number of farm clusters.

### **Approach**

1. Working within Partnerships and NE/Defra partners, set desired outcomes for the NCA level Natural Capital/ **Nature Recovery Network Master Plan** drawing on NCA priorities, AONB Management Plans, NE focus areas and other rural strategies and plans e.g. Catchment Partnership Action Plan, Leader Local Development Strategy)
2. Using these tools, identify priority areas and determine overlap with current agri-environment and rural development grant take-up amongst farmers.
3. Within priority areas, identify those farms that are 'clean' (with no live grant support schemes) and farms already in farm support schemes. For the latter, determine end date of schemes.

4. 'Clean' farms of those coming out of a current agri-environment or rural development scheme would be eligible for a new form of farm support grant based on public benefit for public money.
5. Through 1:1 advice and group approaches, work with farmers in priority areas to trial new approaches to farm support and delivery.
6. These new approaches would take the form of
  - A group approach to application, delivery and monitoring
  - Within priority areas, trial a competitive approach to rural support<sup>2</sup> grant delivery- and invite applications/ tenders from collaborations of farmers, landowners and rural businesses to deliver these outcomes<sup>3</sup>
  - Administer funds and undertake decision making via a Local Action Group (LAG) type approach including the Defra family, hosted by the AONB Partnerships, similar to that delivered effectively through the *Making it Local* Leader approach.

**Specific risks with the proposal/idea(s) and plans to control or mitigate against these**

Much of the mitigation will be around securing understanding, agreement and confidence in engagement in any pilot given the uncertainties in the current system. We have been careful not to raise any expectations to date.

Risk area	Risk	Mitigation options
Develop consensus for NCA natural capital/ Nature Recovery Network Master Plan and delivery mechanism	Inertia in developing shared understanding, resourcing, decision timescales and setting up wider partnership	Secure timely pilot support, use Farm Facilitation and AONB Partnership and Defra partner priority area models to encourage buy in
Pilot collaborative/joint/group applications	No buy in within proposed/identified group pilot areas	Use Farm Facilitation groups and partners to support farm advice/demonstrate value of engagement
Competitive approach to rural support	No buy in from farmer groups or rural businesses	Use Farm Facilitation, LEADER, AONB Partnership and wider Defra/partners to encourage buy in
Local and national reputation	Scheme poorly thought through and no land based interest	Take time and progress only when there is confidence in the model

It is assumed that the proposed pilot as described would be underpinned by a 'broad and shallow' type support scheme (outside the scope of this pilot)

<sup>2</sup> Agri-environment and Rural Development combined

<sup>3</sup> In effect, this extrapolates the NIA/ facilitation fund/ Leader type approach

## **Cornwall AONB Partnership**

### **Proposal/idea(s) and its key objective(s)**

The Cornwall AONB Partnership will lead a ‘trial’ on behalf of Defra that makes use of forward thinking work already carried out by the Partnership to map and describe natural capital and ecosystem services. The Lizard Peninsula in the AONB will be the perfect place to test how we set objectives for the provision of public goods in a rural farming landscape and how groups of farmers and land managers can be supported to deliver on those objectives in a collaborative way. The proposal delivers on the objectives set out in the 25 YEP. In taking an approach based upon natural capital and ecosystem services, the trial is expected to tick multiple boxes, putting the Lizard area on a firm footing to deliver more effectively on biodiversity, clean air, clean water, natural beauty, engagement and the mitigation of climate change. The latter is especially relevant to the Lizard whose coastal communities have been particularly impacted by flash floods over the last few years. The Lizard is highly designated for its biodiversity and historic value with large parts being covered by SSSI and Goonhilly National Nature Reserve sitting at its heart and a very high number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The area has seen significant investment in land management advice and yet both its heritage features and biodiversity are in declining condition. This project would examine how a new Land Management Scheme based on a full understanding of the natural capital and ecosystem services of the Lizard can make a step change for biodiversity and heritage whilst also delivering wider multiple benefits for local communities and ultimately the taxpayer. The proposal would primarily deliver on Chapter 1 of the 25 YEP, using and managing land on the Lizard more sustainably, whilst ensuring sustainable farm businesses. 

### **What innovation does the proposal/idea(s) bring(s) to the new Environmental Land Management system?**

The trial is an ‘adaptive learning’ project which will establish objectives for public goods at a landscape scale, within an AONB. Despite its beauty, biodiversity and heritage on the Lizard remains depleted and the economy remains fragile. We will set the objectives required to raise the bar. Learning will be gained through continuous 360 degree feedback between Defra, agencies and farmers. Since 2006, the Cornwall AONB Partnership has been part of the ‘The Linking the Lizard Partnership’ with the National Trust, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, The NFU, Natural England, and The University of Exeter in Cornwall. The LtL Partnership was established to improve, link and better co-ordinate the management of the Lizard landscape in ways which are both profitable and sustainable, working with owners and land managers on the Lizard, including the Estates and individual farmers. The LtL Partnership is committed to delivering this trial.

Since 2016, The Cornwall AONB Partnership has worked with the University of Exeter and engaged with Lizard farmers through our ‘Farms for AONBees’ project; helping farmers to benefit pollinators. Farmers have found the project extremely beneficial and are keen to continue testing new approaches.

We already have much work carried out in the trial area to determine future objectives. In 2016, the Partnership carried out mapping and assessment of 5 key natural capital types and the ecosystem services flowing from them. We assessed condition of the services, undertook a pilot valuing exercise and mapped natural capital hotspots and opportunities. The trial will take forward this research into practical application.

### **How does the proposal/idea(s) link in with the 25 year environment plan objectives?**

The trial supports the key aim set out within Defra’s 25 YEP to improve how we manage and incentivise land management. The trial will deliver on a key action under the aim, to “*Work... with land managers and others to consider the role of a new environmental land management scheme that encourages broad participation and secures environmental improvements.*” The trial delivers on a number of aims and policies set out within the Cornwall AONB Management Plan, specifically those on our ‘Investing in Nature’ theme **Cornwall AONB Management Plan Aim: Investing in Nature** “*The principle of ‘environmental growth’ is embedded within decision making and a step change is taken to invest in Natural Capital, taking an ecosystems approach to conserve and enhance natural resources and reverse current declines in habitats and species*” **Cornwall AONB Management Plan Policy IN4** “*Support landowners, land managers and local communities in the delivery of land management initiatives to increase natural capital, ecosystem services and biodiversity, using appropriate mechanisms such as direct project funding, on-farm advice and the focused targeting of agri-payments*”

**Specific risks with the proposal/idea(s) and plans to control or mitigate against these?**

• Risk	• Likelihood	• Impact	• Mitigation
Low engagement from farmers	• Low	• High	Farmers have been engaged already and willingness within the project area to participate. Discussions already held - Trelowarren estate Large area of trial grazed on behalf of Linking the Lizard partners
Lack of capacity of the agencies	• Low	• High	The trial already discussed with the Linking the Lizard partnership who are all supportive. Opportunity for agencies to deliver on their objectives. Capacity via a project officer •
Lack of data for the project area	• Low	• High	Expectation of a new 2018 land cover map for Cornwall at a high resolution. University of Exeter due to deliver on satellite environmental monitoring platform
Lack of understanding from landowners and farmers	• Medium	• High	Landowners already show a level of understanding. Training and development
Lack of willingness to engage in alternative farming methods	• Low	• High	Training programme, advisory body support and peer support
Lack of willingness to offer information	• Low	• Medium	Individual farms plans produced with advisor and confidential audit of

about current farm management			management.
Lack of willingness of farmers to co-operate with other farmers	• Medium	• Medium	Development of shared objectives and a regular forum for communication
Difficulty in applying values to ecosystem services	• High	• Medium	Budget built in for consultancy advice. Standard values for e.g. carbon. Matrices approach taken to avoid double counting. Analysis of value vs income foregone
Farmers unwilling to transition/ come out of farming	• Low	• High	Support from agencies to transition. Access to business support signposted through the process.

## Objectives

The trial would expect to run for three years 2019-2021 with the following objectives  
Recommendations for structuring and delivering the new UK agri-environment scheme are communicated to Defra at regular, frequent intervals across the trial.

### By Year 1 (focusing on establishing objectives)

Understanding what we've got, what the opportunities are and the desired outcomes for natural capital and public services in the trial area.

Understanding the value of achieving the desired outcome.

- The baseline natural capital of the trial area is defined and understood, gaps in data/evidence are identified and measures to fill these gaps are established.
- Clarity is provided around an appropriate spatial framework over which to set public good objectives.
- The relationships between ecosystem processes, natural capital and landscape character is better defined and understood.
- A better understanding is achieved in terms of how management for natural capital/ ecosystem services can contribute to a more resilient and sustainable farming system.
- Opportunities to enhance, extend and join up ecosystem services across the landscape are identified.
- Natural capital/ ecosystems services opportunities and wider benefits to people (such as health) of the Lizard landscape are understood and agreed.
- Short and longer-term objectives for enhancing natural capital are defined for the Lizard through landowner involvement at the outset.
- Success measures and methods of monitoring and an adaptive learning/management approach are established.

### By Year 2 (focusing on the collaboration and communication required to deliver objectives)

Understanding the collaboration, communication, skills and knowledge required to deliver the objectives. It will also focus on the level of change and risk posed to the farm business based on current land management and the land management required to achieve future objectives

- Farmers are working together to achieve agreed, shared objectives and which are integrated

into their own individual farm plans.

- Co-operative working and lines of communication within and between groups of landowners and other stakeholders established.
- The level of advice and input needed from agencies established and optimal ways of working agreed and pilot in place.
- Method of continuous 360degree feedback loops and continuous improvement established.
- Review of progress in filling data/evidence gaps.
- Level of incentivisations established based on values of ecosystem goods and services and assessment of value versus income foregone

Year 3 (moving towards transition) Understanding the practical complexities and requirements for farmers in high quality rural landscapes, of transitioning away from the basic payment and into a new 'public services' scheme

- Existing management audited and the scale of 'transition' assessed.
- New management regimes and scheme delivery trialled on farms and adaptive management is in place that provided regular feedback and learning opportunities for all stakeholders.
- Training needs assessment completed with farmers.
- Training delivered.
- Infrastructure needs assessment.
- Review of progress on monitoring and filling data/evidence gaps and recommendations for the future.
- Review of baseline and progress towards achieving an enhancement of natural capital and recommendations for the future.

### **Outputs**

- Monthly report with recommendations based on 360 degree feedback
- Farmers' working group established
- Multi agency advisory group established
- Lizard Natural Capital Prospectus published
- Landscape Scale Plan produced
- Farmer's charter published
- Audit report on the required 'transition' for farmers on the Lizard
- Individual farm action plans

### **Outcomes**

- Farmers involved and awareness raised
- Advisory bodies co-ordinated
- Clear way forward for ecosystem services delivery on the Lizard established and agreed
- Farmer led development of processes
- Confidence improved in new scheme
- Local landscape scale delivery trialled and methods tested
- Learning

### **Trial Management and timescales**

We would require a full time project manager and admin support for the three years of the trial. Day to day project management would be with the Cornwall AONB Partnership. An

executive committee would be established, representing the users of the trial, Defra, Local Agencies, landowners and local community.

### **Budget**

The approximate budget would be around £300K.

C 50K PA for staff and on-costs = £150K.

80K for consultancy costs and data capture.

60K for logistics and reports.

Match funding contribution, Cornwall AONB = £22k

### **Potential Phase 2, Post 2021**

#### **Implementing the new payments scheme**

To use structures established to enable farmers to make a quick transition to the new scheme

- Monitoring and 360 feedback
- Snagging and improvement
- Support to develop new ways of farming/ farming for ecosystem services
- Investment support
- Branding scheme established

## Cotswolds Conservation Board

### Summary

A single menu of agri-environment and rural development grants delivered locally, informed by local evidence and investing in the special qualities of the protected landscape.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board has been discussing the future of farming after Brexit with representatives of the farming community. These discussions have concluded:

- There is support for a Cotswold agri-environment and rural development scheme designed and delivered locally and supported by advisers working with farmers and local businesses delivering outcomes on the ground.
- The scheme needs to be an enabler, not an enforcer and demonstrate that it supports landscape, biodiversity, resource protection and good quality food production whilst achieving value for money.
- Local people will need to understand and support the scheme.

### Our vision

Our vision for the Cotswolds AONB by 2038 is a

- Distinctive, unique living landscape treasured for its diversity which is recognised by all for its wide open views, dry stone walls, intimate valleys, flower rich grasslands, ancient woodlands and distinctive Cotswold stone architecture.
- A thriving collaborative, pioneering, proactive place, sustained by the passions of residents, visitors and businesses alike where rural communities and the local economy are grounded in its special qualities.

One of the Board's over-arching ambitions in its current draft Management Plan is for the local delivery of a Cotswolds package of agri-environment and rural development support post Brexit. We aim to proactively pursue the development of a Cotswolds specific menu of grants and incentives to reinforce the special qualities of the Cotswolds landscape, delivered locally. The Board believes that those opportunities will be best provided through

- agri-environment and land management schemes that encourage and enable farmers to be effective stewards or custodians of the landscape – harnessing their expertise so that the environment and cultural heritage is as much a part of their farm businesses as high quality food production.
- rural development schemes that encourage and enable rural businesses to become productive, efficient, resilient and to adapt and rise to the challenge of a post Brexit economy.

These will encourage farming and rural businesses in the Cotswolds AONB to continue to support jobs and growth in the broader rural and visitor economy.

The Board is well placed to play a central role in shaping the future of farming and land management and to do this in ways that lead to a 'triple dividend': enhanced environment, improved productivity and more vibrant communities.

We believe that there is a need for a local menu for the Cotswolds, a menu informed by and based upon

- the AONB Management Plan & Landscape Strategy & Guidelines
- a locally tailored, informed, owned and evidenced approach
- local payment rates to reflect local costs
- local advice and local delivery

- outcomes based, with payment by results
- A combined environmental and socio economic menu, for example, merging the separate Countryside Stewardship, Countryside Productivity, LEADER and Growth Programmes into one integrated programme.

Our proposals are based upon the Board’s experience of

- delivering the Cotswolds LEADER programme as an Accountable Body and co-ordinating its associated Local Development Strategy
- delivering a Sustainable Development Fund, investing in local projects contributing to rural society
- delivering a range of other grant schemes e.g. funding over and above normal mitigation measures linked to a National Grid gas pipeline, a £1m additional landscape investment
- helping the Countryside Agency / Natural England to meet agri – environment contract targets by allocating staff resources to aid local delivery
- facilitating partnerships to agree a vision for the AONB and a management plan to deliver that vision, demonstrating the value of networked rural partnerships
- developing an AONB wide landscape character assessment and associated landscape and strategy guidelines, essential tools in the targeting of any future policies and investments.

These demonstrate that the Board is well placed to facilitate local development programmes that link and support environment, economy and community.

Current programmes are often in danger of being in silos and failing to deliver a joined-up approach. We believe that there is significant scope to merge LEADER, Countryside Productivity, the Growth Programme and Countryside Stewardship into one integrated programme. They can often overlap or duplicate each other and paint a confusing picture for the applicant. These programmes can include grants but should also include loans i.e. a revolving fund rather than one-off injections of capital. There should also be greater opportunity for revenue spend.

### **Farming and forestry in the Cotswolds AONB**

Most of the land in the Cotswolds AONB is used for farming<sup>4</sup>. Over the centuries, agriculture and woodland management have shaped the landscape and contributed to cultural heritage through features such as dry stone walls and traditional farm buildings. These factors led to its designation as an AONB in 1966 and helped create many of its celebrated qualities appreciated by many people today.

There are about 1600 commercial farm holdings in the Cotswolds AONB covering 87% of its total area. 67% of holdings are owner occupied and 33% rented; contractors also have significant influence. Almost half the farms are livestock-based with pasture accounting for 43% of the farmed area although this proportion is reducing; cattle in particular are increasingly held in buildings rather than being visible in the landscape. One in five farms are cereal dominated, and 49% of the farmed land is in arable cultivation. In the Cotswolds landscape arable farming is a key element.

We estimate that public expenditure on farm support within the Cotswolds AONB is worth in excess of £47m per annum: agri-environment scheme payments account for £9m and the Basic Payment Scheme for £38m (based on 2015/16 figures).

---

<sup>4</sup> We have used the phrase farming but in so doing are cognisant that we are talking about land management by land owners and farmers (who might be tenants, owner occupiers and/or commoners)

Woodland cover in the Cotswolds is around 26,370ha, accounts for 13% of the AONB area and includes 9,485ha of ancient woodland. The type, location and scale of woodland varies across the Cotswolds and is an important element of landscape character. Ancient woodland, especially beech, is a particularly distinctive feature of the AONB being prominent on the escarpment and the incised valleys. The value of woodland in the Cotswolds to the rural economy is variable. Income from timber is unpredictable and dictated by timber prices as well as quantity and quality. Some estates harvest timber from their woodlands but most woodland across the Cotswolds is undermanaged and under-utilised, but has potential to be more productive. Firewood production has increased in recent years and non-timber income, particularly shooting is a valuable part of the woodland and rural economy.

Agri-environment schemes have been a particularly important tool for conserving and enhancing the AONB's landscape. In 2015 over 70% of the utilisable agricultural land area in the Cotswolds AONB was in an Environmental Stewardship agreement. This figure does not include agreements under the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Public investment in farming is essential for the economic sustainability of many Cotswold farms. Basic Payment Scheme and agri-environment agreement payments amount to between 50% and 60% of farm business income. Despite this investment many farmers in the Cotswolds AONB only just break even. This is not sustainable in the medium to long term. Farm operation requires continual re-investment to remain viable.

Farming is an important part of the local rural economy. Agriculture and forestry account for around 15% of all businesses and nearly 7% of total employment in the Cotswolds AONB, supporting around 4000 FTE jobs. Through the management of the Cotswolds landscape, farming also contributes to the culture and traditions of our communities and thus to the wider visitor economy, which employs 6,720 people and is worth in excess of £1bn per annum. Farming is critical to the management of the high quality Cotswolds AONB landscape, a designation which is worth £337m to the local economy and supports 9,720 jobs.

History tells us that more recent farming systems can be negative, as well as positive, for the environment. It is important that the policy and financial framework within which farming operates is clearly focused on sustainability in environmental, economic and social terms. Significant public investment in farming and agri-environment support has been an essential ingredient in helping to sustain the celebrated Cotswold landscapes, but there are opportunities for improvement to address such issues as

- Degraded soils
- Falling biodiversity
- Lower resilience to flood and drought
- Marginal returns for traditional farm systems
- Farming areas of natural constraint such as the steep Cotswold escarpment and valley slopes.
- Increasing disconnect between 'town' and 'country' / 'people' and 'nature' – especially driven by the proximity of the AONB to London, the Midlands and Bristol and the increasing freedom to adopt home-based working.

Current systems of incentivising the delivery of such public goods are

- *Silo-based* - with different funding streams poorly integrated. The architecture of the Common Agricultural Policy and its two 'Pillars' has shaped our delivery arrangements: environmental payments separate from farm productivity and rural development.
- *Management by prescription rather than empowerment* – too often our agri-environment

schemes seek to impose management ‘by prescription’ rather than empowering the farming community to deliver the environmental and cultural products that society seeks.

- *Risk adverse rather than stimulating innovation and productivity* – we focus on processes that are designed to minimise risk rather than on delivering outcomes and promoting innovation and productivity.
- *Based on compensation for income foregone rather than payment for outcomes* – resulting in a failure to reflect the emerging thinking on the themes of natural capital and valuing ecosystems services.
- *Insufficiently monitored* – with any monitoring failing to feed back fully into policy and delivery, the current agri-environment scheme is also unpopular with farmers due to its nationally prescriptive approach, the sometimes aggressive line taken by the RPA over enforcement, payment rates based on an out-dated income lost basis and heavy bureaucracy. The current scheme is also struggling to compete with the economics of farming and land management, particularly with increasing costs of production, commodity prices and the drive for efficiency. Agri-environment is increasingly being seen as irrelevant to the core business of farming and as something that can ‘get in the way’.

## Proposals

Our proposals are for two linked components delivered locally:

- A Cotswolds FARM (Farming & Rural Management) Scheme: to provide a base or foundation level of good environmental husbandry and public goods.
- FARMRD (Farming, Rural Management & Rural Development) Scheme: a locally designed and led enhanced agri-environment, public goods and rural development programme.

We recognise that this is not a complete description of an English replacement of the Common Agricultural Policy. Other important elements such as volatility measures will need to be addressed at a national level, whilst tariff and non-tariff trade issues and gaining a ‘level playing field’ will be at least as important to the future viability of farming systems and rural business in the Cotswolds.

Our proposals build on the practical experience of the Board in working with landowners, managers, farmers and rural businesses. They compliment the emerging national public policies for farming, food, forestry, rural development and the environment.

The schemes would seek to develop the Cotswold brand (i.e. those signing up could use the Cotswold Choice sheep’s head logo) to symbolise that they are contributing to the management of a special landscape; building a link between the farmers who manage the land and the millions who enjoy the landscape. The FARMRD Scheme in particular could help develop the local economy, supporting those who produce local food and other products such as charcoal, firewood and hay. This would encourage local product chains and enhance the ‘sense of place’ for both producers, consumers and visitors.

There is an opportunity to promote the FARM and FARMRD scheme through the Cotswolds AONB public engagement work. It would help to ensure that the 150,000 residents, 2 million people living on the doorstep of the AONB and 23 million day visitors each year understand the role that the farming community play in managing the landscape and natural resources such as water and in creating access for the benefit of all. It would build a renewed relationship between those who manage the landscape and those who live within it, enjoy it and rely upon it.

### **Cotswolds FARM (Farming & Rural Management) Scheme**

The basic level of environmental management demanded by the Cotswolds AONB landscape relies critically on retaining and developing the skills of the farming and business community. We envisage a 'Cotswolds FARM Scheme' in the form of a 'certification scheme', a voluntary scheme for farmers to sign up to. In return for a base level payment there would be certain management obligations tailored to the distinctive landscape types in the Cotswolds and elements of cross compliance e.g. continuing to require maintenance of public rights of way. People who enter into this scheme would also be eligible for farm business advice to produce an integrated farm plan (linking environment and business) and to act as a baseline for the scheme. It would integrate economy and environment and therefore address one of the weaknesses of the current delivery system. We believe that there is a business approach that can deliver improved productivity of both environmental outcomes and high quality food and fibre as well as contribute to farm profitability, business growth and development. This remains a key challenge for many farms and rural businesses, especially those on the thin Cotswold brash soils and areas with challenging terrain such as the escarpment and valley sides.

### **Cotswolds FARMRD (Farming, Rural Management & Rural Development) Scheme**

As part of the FARMRD Scheme we propose a higher level, locally-led agri- environment and rural development scheme. The foundation level FARM scheme would be open to all and ensure good environmental management, husbandry and rural development. FARMRD would be focused on *enhanced* levels of environmental management and rural development to deliver public goods and rural business growth.

A FARMRD scheme would be focused on delivering multiple benefits with options that support the delivery of

- Landscape
- Biodiversity and geodiversity
- Carbon management
- Water and flood management
- Woodland management and creation
- Biomass energy
- Historic environment
- Access
- Education
- Rural business growth and development

The aim would be to maximise delivery across these benefits rather than to focus narrowly on one or two and to allow local flexibility in setting priorities.

- The scheme should
- Focus on local needs and opportunities whilst recognising national priorities.
- Encourage collaboration between farmers or within farm clusters.
- Encourage farm business innovation groups, bringing together farm businesses, research institutions and other businesses;
- Be outcome focused, engaging with farmers to involve them in agreeing environmental outcomes that they will deliver and monitor.
- Be evidence-based, ensuring that monitoring results are understood and used to inform management in a virtuous circle of innovation and learning and offering reassurance that they are delivering agreed outcomes.

- Be proportionate, easy to understand and to sign up to, with common sense flexibility on measurement and reporting, as light touch as possible.
- Offer multi-year agreements, with the length of agreements related to the outcomes e.g. long-term complex landscape-scale delivery.
- Include capital and revenue payments for key landscape features e.g. stone walls or investment in natural flood management.
- Provide the opportunity to integrate private sector payments for natural capital/ecosystem services alongside public payments, following the Natural Capital Committee's recommendations.
- Encourage and develop farm and rural businesses efficiency, productivity and innovation.
- Develop the connection between farmers providing services for communities beyond the farm or even the AONB boundary e.g. flood management.
- Add value to farm and woodland produce.
- Maximise the local economic impact e.g. programmes for the restoration of landscape features linked to local apprenticeship/skills programmes.
- Encourage healthy livestock initiatives that improve the quality of the livestock and help address wider health concerns.

Information from the integrated farm plans and FARM and FARMRD agreements would be collated to identify collective business support and skill needs across the Protected Landscape. From this information, training events and seminars can be organised and potential rural development applications identified to grow the rural economy and help farm businesses to adapt, become more efficient and sustainable. It may also identify new business opportunities and provide a gateway for new entrants into the sector.

In developing our ideas, we recognise that there is a real challenge: to sustain the farming systems and local businesses that help deliver the outstanding landscapes that millions enjoy and cherish will require sustained funding. The local approach provides an opportunity for savings and efficiencies through

- Greater 'ownership' of schemes by farmers and businesses, delivered with agreed progress reviews to ensure that targets are achieved and there is a reduced risk of failing agreements.
- A more clearly targeted focus on public payments for public benefits, locally communicated and understood, leading to greater public understanding and support for the policy.
- Linking rural development options to develop sustainable farming businesses.
- Innovation and learning in delivery of environmental and other outcomes.
- Greater transparency.
- Potentially lower administration costs.

Within this locally led approach there is the opportunity to evaluate new systems:

- environmental contracts – whereby farmers and other land managers bid to deliver rather than sign up for certain management options, this could help reduce costs and reward collective or landscape-scale action;
- payment by results; and
- private payments alongside public investment.

### **Farming and rural development nationwide**

Any national scheme applying outside the AONB could be delivered by the Defra agencies or by a local delivery organisation e.g. Wildlife Trust or Rivers Trust. Perhaps a basic scheme with some capital grants for Government priorities such as SSSIs, flood management and rural

business development.

### **Next steps**

The Board is keen to work with Government to realise the opportunities that will arise as the UK leaves the EU, to use our expertise, experience and passion to design and implement a more holistic and effective approach to environmental management and rural development. We have developed a deep understanding and close working relationship with the farming and wider land management community locally over many years. We would like to help develop a system that

- Rewards farmers for the environmental and cultural products that farming can provide, as well as the food we need.
- Engages and empowers the farming community in the design and delivery of innovative and locally responsive new schemes.
- Steers the farming sector in a more sustainable direction: working with nature for mutual benefit.
- Provides a greatly enhanced range of public benefits.
- Integrates environment, economy and community to demonstrate the integrated delivery that the Government seeks.
- Is prepared to take calculated risks to drive forward innovation, develop new businesses and create and/or sustain jobs.
- Supports appropriate rural business growth and jobs.
- Is clearer and easier to understand and removes duplication between separate strands of funding and is therefore more efficient.
- Helps farmers and rural business adapt to the post-Brexit economy.

We are ready and able to help the Government achieve its challenging environmental and rural development ambitions:

- To integrate farming and environmental policy, enhancing the environment and improving rural productivity
- To leave the environment in a better state for future generations
- To conserve and enhance our England's extensive designated outstanding landscapes.

## **Dorset AONB Partnership (Purbeck ridge)**

### **Proposal/idea(s) and its key objective(s)**

This field trial will consider the effectiveness of gorse control on the Purbeck chalk ridge's important species-rich chalk grassland (AONB, NIA, SAC, SSSI, SNCI), and consider future options for its ongoing management.

The Purbeck ridge has benefitted from substantial grant investment during the last 20 years to help address the persistent problem of gorse encroachment on species-rich calcareous grassland priority habitat. The success of these interventions has varied.

There is currently a break in capital funding investment, and this gives an opportunity to review the outcomes of previous investment to inform how future resources are best utilised.

The field trial will run in two parts.

### **Part one, Dorset AONB and FWAG SW**

- Activity: Through workshops and one-to-one interviews, the views of local farmers, landowners and contractors will be collated on gorse management.
- Timescale: Completed by March 2019.
- Budget: £2,500 (secured)

**Part two** (delivered by a combination of conservation organisations, academia and records centres).

- Activity: Building on the lessons from Part 1, trial and assess the impacts of various gorse-management and grazing techniques on the biodiversity and landscape of the ridge.
- Timescale: Three years.
- Budget: £TBC (unsecured). £40,000 would deliver a meaningful trial.

### **Objectives**

- Test potential management techniques for gorse-control effectiveness
- Monitor the impacts of these various techniques on the biodiversity and landscape of the ridge
- Refine the development of future funding applications and feedback to consultations on a future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) in the area post-Brexit.
- Inform management for the coastal grasslands in south Purbeck and further west, and other inland chalk hills to the west.
- Maintain and increase engagement in the management of gorse on the Purbeck ridge. The field trial links to Defra's 25 year environment plan objectives through the development of sustainable land management options (Chapter 1) and recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes (Chapter 2).

### **What innovation does the proposal/idea(s) bring to the new Environmental Land Management system?**

The field trial is looking at develop innovative ways of delivering effective management of gorse on chalk downland, with lessons applicable to other difficult to manage sites where gorse control is key. Stage One of the trial will draw on the expertise of the land managers who have historically implemented techniques. Stage two will use these lessons and develop new

techniques for trialling along with detailed monitoring of the effectiveness of the interventions on biodiversity and landscape. This approach is supported by the Wild Purbeck NIA Partnership.

The rationale for the trial is that over the past 20 years and through various funding mechanisms, many attempts have been made to control gorse along the ridge with varying levels of long-term success and unknown impacts on biodiversity and landscape. The objective is to define management techniques that effectively control gorse for the benefit of biodiversity and landscape in the long-term.

The trial would be relatively low-cost, requiring capital support for intervention techniques, and revenue support for development and monitoring. The lessons learned could be applied to all difficult to manage sites where gorse is impacting the special qualities.

It is appropriate to trial new techniques based on the lessons learned from land managers. The scale of the ridge and the make-up of the owners and tenants make it appropriate for a specific time-limited trial.

If the trial was not adopted by Defra, we would seek alternative mechanisms for delivering it, but outside of the timescale that would influence future ELMS.

### **How does the proposal/idea(s) link in with the 25 year environment plan objectives?**

The field trial will help deliver the 25 year goals of: thriving plants and animals, and; enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

Specifically, for **'Thriving plants and wildlife'**, it will help restore protected sites to favourable condition and ensure this is sustainable; it will also help create wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network.

Specifically, for **'Enhancing beauty...'**, it will help safeguard and enhance natural scenery and improved environmental value.

The outcomes of the trial will help inform future Environment Land Management Schemes, thereby helping to improve how we manage and incentivise land management. The specific practices that we would use are not yet defined, as these will require State One to be completed first. The fact that we are developing alternatives with the land management community will ensure that they are reasonable and practical.

We know that the downland of the Purbeck ridge is valued by residents and visitors alike, and part of the monitoring will include how the activities and outcomes are perceived and valued by users of the footpaths and open access land.

### **Specific risks with the proposal/idea(s) and plans to control or mitigate against these?**

1. Risk: Match funding is not obtained (in full/part)  
Mitigation: Partner engagement and commitment; Memorandum of Agreement; delivery will not start without match funding confirmed.
2. Risk: Lack of interest from landowners  
Mitigation: Ensure that bid is a unique offer; early stakeholder engagement and sign-up; 'Holding Hands' approach with the landowners; ensure that joined up solution with other current offers
3. Risk: Loss of key delivery staff (illness/injury/moving on)  
Mitigation: Maintain high reputation of organisations as good employers; Partner engagement and commitment; Memorandum of Agreement; knowledge sharing within and amongst delivery organisations

4. Risk: Partners fail to deliver what they say they will deliver  
Mitigation: Memorandum of Agreement; partnership engagement and briefings; ensure that all partners engage with senior management; robust governance structures; identify capacity requirements
5. Risk: Project/work stream slippage or failure  
Mitigation: Project management; quarterly returns to AONB; early engagement with landowners; build resources for additional support within the bid; flexibility within the programme team to ensure shared knowledge; Memorandum of Agreement.

## **Dorset AONB Partnership (River Brit Catchment)**

The trial will test community interest in natural capital, ecosystem services and encourage ownership and accountability of communities at a catchment scale.

1. Residents in the urban areas will be consulted on proposed areas of public access, ecological networks and natural flood management.
2. Farmers within the catchment will be involved in forecasting natural capital land management options for the case study farms.

The objectives, linked to the 25 YEP, are to test delivery of the Ecosystem Approach for conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

The proposed trial will be part of a larger project in the River Brit catchment in West Dorset which will model future land management options that deliver benefits for Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services. This project has 3 main elements:

1. **Activity:** Mapping Ecosystem Services for the River Brit catchment. Services will fall in to the following categories: archaeology, public access, biodiversity, carbon storage, natural flood management, soil management and water quality.  
**Objective:** To better understand the extent of existing Ecosystem Services and present this information in a user-friendly way.
2. **Activity:** Valuation of public goods using ONS, and other methods, and comparing this to existing values for managing the natural capital through open markets or agri-environment schemes.  
**Objective:** To improve understanding of the costs of delivering ecosystem services and to allow a dialogue on Ecosystem Service delivery priorities with land owners, managers and communities.
3. **Activity:** Create case studies for three types of farm that demonstrate land management options that deliver priority Ecosystem Services  
**Objective:** To help communicate the required management to deliver Ecosystem Services and to demonstrate the trade-offs in delivery of differing services.

The overall objective is to influence the development of future funding applications and Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) in the area.

### **What innovation does the proposal/idea(s) bring to the new Environmental Land Management system?**

This approach is innovative in its alliance with communities and land owners within the catchment area; rural and urban resident communities will be involved prioritising the Ecosystem Services and locating the potential new Natural Capital options. The involvement of community will foster ownership and accountability of these Ecosystem Services supplied through the ELM options. Involving all stakeholders in the catchment will aid decentralised management and add value through community ownership and participation.

This proposal has been developed in partnership with the Dorset Wildlife Trust and Dorset Environmental Records Centre. DWT have over 30 years of landowner liaison experience within this area and co-host an existing facilitation fund, which will provide value for money when discussing natural capital management options. DERC are the experts on biological monitoring in the county.

The AONB team have experience and expertise in running community led projects and workshops, and were a pilot for Defra's Ecosystem Accounts for Protected Areas project.

This idea is suitable for a trial as it is at an appropriate scale to ensure full engagement of all stakeholders and therefore delivering the Ecosystem Approach. The co-development of priorities and solutions is innovative, and will create wider ownership of the management and benefits derived from a healthy countryside.

### **How does the proposal/idea(s) link in with the 25 year environment plan objectives?**

The focus of the pilot is to identify and promote the public and social benefits derived from sustainable land management.

Of the 10 goals in the 25 Year Environment Plan this trial will help address the following:

1. Clean and plentiful water, through delivery of WFD objectives
2. Thriving plants and wildlife, through restoring habitats to favourable condition, creating new habitat outside protected sites and increasing woodland coverage
3. A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought, through ensuring decisions on land use reflect flood risk
4. Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently, through improving our approach to soil management, ensuring the food is produced sustainably and profitably.
5. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment, through increased action to improve the environment from all sectors of society
6. Mitigating and adapting to climate change, through factoring Climate Change into management and investment decisions.

The priority target will be; enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment. By ensuring that the community are aware of and engaged with the ecosystem services approach delivered by landowners within the catchment. And further disseminating information and making government policy on agricultural and environmental issues more tangible and understandable.

### **Specific risks with the proposal/idea(s) and plans to control or mitigate against these?**

1. Risk: Match funding is not obtained (in full/part)  
Mitigation: Partner engagement and commitment; Memorandum of Agreement; delivery will not start without match funding confirmed.
2. Risk: Lack of interest from landowners & community  
Mitigation: Ensure that bid is a unique offer; early stakeholder engagement and sign-up; 'Holding Hands' approach with the landowners & communities; ensure that joined up solution with other current offers, including Brit & Hooke Facilitation Fund, Transition Town Bridport and Parish Councils.
3. Risk: Loss of key delivery staff (illness/injury/moving on)  
Mitigation: Maintain high reputation of organisations as good employers; Partner engagement and commitment; Memorandum of Agreement; knowledge sharing within and amongst delivery organisations
4. Risk: Partners fail to deliver what they say they will deliver  
Mitigation: Memorandum of Agreement; partnership engagement and briefings; ensure that all partners engage with senior management; robust governance structures; identify capacity requirements
5. Risk: Project/work stream slippage or failure  
Mitigation: Project management; quarterly returns to AONB; early engagement with landowners; build resources for additional support within the bid; flexibility within the programme team to ensure shared knowledge; Memorandum of Agreement

## Forest of Bowland, Nidderdale and North Pennines AONB Partnerships

### Proposal/idea(s) and its key objective(s)

#### Strategic objectives

The overarching objective will be to **lay the foundations for a resilient, profitable and environmentally sustainable agricultural sector in the Forest of Bowland, Nidderdale and North Pennines AONBs** by building on often long-standing collaborations with farmers and land managers to create a locally configured and locally delivered agri-environment programme alongside wider rural development funding and business support. In developing our collaborative approach to testing and trialling new initiatives, we will also work closely with our National Park Authority partners (Northumberland and the Yorkshire Dales) in our Northern Upland Chain LNP. In this way our work will be informed by, and inform, activity across the northern Pennine uplands, generating learning from a variety of different approaches across a huge swathe of upland Protected Landscape.

Our programme will be

- Based on an analysis of natural capital assets carried out by Eftec for the Northern Upland Chain LNP in 2016
- Applied at a landscape, catchment or sub-catchment scale
- Informed by best-practice from Payment By Results pilots we have helped to shape through our LNP namely the Upper Wensleydale pilot
- Developed in collaboration with Defra network organisations, Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Bright Blue team behind Greener More Pleasant Land
- Sponsored in part by non-public sector organisations via a market-based approach to commissioning improved management of natural capital

#### Operational objectives

A bespoke environmental land management programme will feature a shared range of operational objectives that will be locally prioritised and adapted by the local sector-based partnerships in each of the three AONBs. This will enable a variety of tactical responses to be tested:

Environment

- Adoption of natural flood management practice by land managers in catchment headwaters to provide sustainable downstream flood risk mitigation and improvements to both water quality and wildlife habitats – we will identify how these services might be funded, including on a by results basis.
- Improved management of peat to maintain its value as a carbon store and to reduce the cost of removing colour from drinking water sourced from extensive water company assets across all three areas – we will build on our trialling of the peatland code to see how additional resources can be applied to delivering ecosystem services alongside agri-environment contracts.
- Enhanced management of existing woodland to improve its value for wildlife and landscape, and to increase its potential as a carbon store. New planting will be planned in conjunction with land managers – we will test how the woodland carbon code can be applied to upland landscapes where woodland creation constraints, can be significant, alongside delivering agri-environment contracts

## Business

- Development of integrated farm business plans based on the principle that livestock farming must not exceed the productive potential and environmental capacity of the landholding, and that the supply of food may be ancillary to the core business in future
- Facilitate applications to rural development funding streams including the Rural Growth Programme and the Countryside Productivity Scheme

## Society

- Development and testing of a new approach to farm-based educational access as a component of a new Environmental Land Management Scheme; to improve outdoor learning opportunities for wider range of people and to help demonstrate the public benefits of high nature value farming
- Enhanced physical access to the countryside, particularly key access routes linking up local communities with visitor gateways and farms with educational access

## **What innovation does the proposal/idea(s) bring(s) to the new Environmental Land Management system?**

We will be aligning our programme with, and learning from

- The largest natural flood management programme in the country (Weardale), funded as [part of the Defra commitment in the 25year plan and part of the Border Uplands Demonstrator initiated by the previous Minister
- Learning from other Border Uplands Demonstrator including a proposed scheme trial in the Cheviot
- The opportunities provided by Tees-Swale – Naturally connected, a pioneering HLF funded programme in the North Pennines and Yorkshire Dales, fostering a deep collaboration with farmers on what can be achieved together for nature and farming
- The Forest of Bowland team has worked with farmers and land managers offering conservation advice as part of its service since the mid-1990s. Following the establishment of the Bowland Land Managers Forum in 2012, this work has developed to encompass delivery of upland hay meadow and peatland habitat restoration projects as well as the development of a Facilitation Funded farmer group for Pendle Hill.
- The Pendle Hill HLF Landscape Partnership is delivering an ambitious and exciting programme, which aims to bring town and country people together to understand, restore and celebrate the distinctive landscape and heritage of this much loved icon of the Pennines. It is particularly focusing on landscape-scale conservation alongside development of outdoor learning, including farm educational access; volunteering, community engagement; and improving access to the natural environment for new and wider audiences.
- The Nidderdale AONB farm advice team has been working with farmers for over a decade and has negotiated funding worth in excess of £10 million for the industry. It has led the Catchment Partnership for the River Nidd since 2009 and played a key role alongside the Yorkshire Dales National Park in established the Yorkshire Dales Farmer Network in 2012. The AONB established two Facilitation Funded groups in 2017 and is currently part-way through an innovative programme of combined farm business and environmental

appraisals supported by a grant from the Princes Countryside Fund following a successful pilot with the Dales and Moors National Parks using a grant from the LEP.

- Natural Capital Investment prospectuses for Peatland and Woodland in the NUCLNP
- Our collective work on understanding and promoting High Nature Value Farming and the creation of the farmer-led Northern Hill Farming panel

The areas we are focusing on, allied to partner learning areas across our LNP, are the most biodiverse part of the uplands, yet one of the parts of the country most vulnerable to the potential effects of post-Brexit change. Getting relationships, schemes and payments right here secures the future well-being of our HNV Farmers their communities, and our biodiversity. Get things right here and our uplands could thrive; the cost of getting it wrong is incalculable for the uplands of the England.

## **How does the proposal/idea(s) link in with the 25 year environment plan objectives?**

### **Chapter 1: Using and managing land sustainably**

#### **Improving how we manage and incentivise land management**

##### **i. Designing and delivering a new environmental land management system**

Our AONB teams, trusted by farmers and 'close to the ground' can provide the specialist advice and management of the 'more complex environmental improvements' associated with our priority habitats and species. We have been at the forefront of promoting 'innovative funding and delivery mechanisms' through our work on Natural Capital Investment planning, Peatland Code development and work with LEPs to support farm businesses. We would apply all of this to developing a trial.

#### **Reducing risks from flooding and coastal erosion**

##### **Expanding the use of natural flood management solutions**

The Plan specifically identifies the need to 'Learn from the £15m Natural Flood Management funding to develop our knowledge, identifying and promoting practical solutions for local implementation'. Our approach is based directly on our delivery of the largest of these pilots (Weardale). Learning will be shared with partners, e.g. in Bowland where there is a desire to test how restoration and creation of traditional boundaries in the landscape can contribute to reduce downstream flood risk. Nidderdale AONB is working with the National Trust and the JBA Trust on a Natural Flood Management scheme for the River Skell.

### **Chapter 2: Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes**

#### **Protecting and recovering nature.**

##### **i. Developing a Nature Recovery Network**

Landscape-scale conservation and restoration is our daily work but in these collaborative tests we will deliver NFM over 100km<sup>2</sup> and develop the mechanisms by which our HNV farmers can collaborate to deliver major habitat improvement at landscape scale, connected across multiple holdings and across three AONBs. We will collaborate to ensure our HNV farmers are 'New Scheme Ready' to deliver more for nature, including benefiting from innovative financing.

#### **Conserving and enhancing natural beauty**

##### **i. Reviewing National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

The future for our Protected Landscapes is surely in greater collaboration. We will collaborate across three AONBs and two National Parks to share learning and deliver our programme. This will include collaboration with the Wensleydale RBAPS Pilot and between our and our partners'

major landscape scale projects, (including the Westmoreland Dales case study cited in the 25YEP.

**Chapter 3: Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing**  
***Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces and promoting health and wellbeing through the natural environment***

In Forest of Bowland, the team are working alongside East Lancashire Community Re-start team (part of Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust) to deliver supported activities in the natural environment for people with mental health and social isolation issues. In The North Pennines, the team is working to introduce new and ‘hard to reach’ audiences to nature and farming. Nidderdale has established a vibrant partnership with a community regeneration partnership in north west Leeds that is now focusing on building links between urban and rural schools after a successful programme of outreach aimed at improving the health of South East Asian communities.

Our trial work will investigate how these areas of work can be integrated in new agri-environment contracts new farm educational access and improvement of public access to the wider countryside.

**Specific risks with the proposal/idea(s) and plans to control or mitigate against these?**

Risk	Severity	Likelihood	Mitigation	Residual risk
Lack of farmer engagement	High	Low	We have been engaging 1to1 on NFM and farm business development, and collaboratively on our HNV farming work, building trust and engagement together	Low
Uncertainty about the impact of Brexit	High	Medium	The future is uncertain but we have evidence to suggest that farmers are aware that doing nothing is not an option following the recent announcement on the end of BPS in 2024	Low
Collaborative model breaks down	High	Low	Partnership working between protected landscape organisations is long- established and enshrined in the LNP structure. There is evidence that other partners including LEPS and private sector businesses are also willing to become involved	Low

## Kent Downs AONB Partnership

In our proposals we are seeking to focus on access to the landscape; natural flood management and a very specific test around the opportunity presented, particularly to the southern landscapes, to enhance the access to, landscape and biodiversity of vineyards.

### 1. Access for Health and Wellbeing

#### The idea in a nutshell

The Kent Downs AONB Partnership is keen to work on a test or trial scheme which would link agri-environment investment with access, health and wellbeing as well as engagement with young and disadvantaged people. This is closely linked to the 25 year and plan objects.

There are probably many, very well designed agri-environment schemes which perhaps only the advisor and farmer are aware of; they are valuable in their own right but we are keen to widen the beneficiaries of environmental land management where it is appropriate to do so. In practical terms, what we are thinking about is to develop schemes on farms or preferably groups of farms which are reasonably easily accessible to urban areas and areas of deprivation. We would seek a comprehensive agri-environment investment plan, seeking to enhance landscape character (obviously including biodiversity) and in particular enhancing access to the landscape (both in the AONB and in its setting where that is appropriate to provide the outcomes needed).

We would also like to think of innovative ways to get people (particularly those from areas of social and economic deprivation and with health conditions) to access and benefit from the ELM investments in a sustainable way. We would, of course, seek to meet other natural capital enhancements at the same time.

#### Background information and preparations

In anticipation of new schemes and in support of our AONB Management Plan process, we have just reviewed our landscape character assessment for the AONB, this means we have a sound and well researched (with very wide public consultation) basis to frame the investments needed to enhance landscape character in the farmed landscape.

We have strong relationships with farmers, land managers and their representative organisations and are confident we would build a strong local proposal. Our Chairman, Chris Reynolds, as a well-respected Kent farmer is happy to provide some leadership for this. I have discussed the idea with Professor Jules Pretty at the University of Essex who is keen to be a partner in the test if appropriate.

This year is our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and we have secured HLF funding which is primarily aimed at building exactly the sort of contact with nature for those who are not benefitting at the moment, so through this work we will be able to test approaches and learn from others which could be fed into the Test/ Trial.

In addition to the 96,000 people who live within the AONB, there are **well over 1m within 1km** of the boundary added to which the Kent Downs extends into Greater London. So we are geographically close to potential beneficiaries.

We have spoken to farmers who support this – some see new access opportunities as a way to diversify their business, others are willing to work with us as ‘contractors’ to provide enhanced access opportunities; we see this proposal also as a way to manage conflicts between access and farming; for example dog control, trespass etc.

### **What we would test and trial**

This test would work with farmers and landowners as well as their representative organisations to understand the barriers to promoting and enhancing access to the landscape that CS schemes have invested in; it would seek new ways to manage the enhancement of access opportunities for instance contracting farmers to manage access routes to National Trail standards where there is clearly an opportunity for frequent use – this would provide safe, easy to follow routes with support, promotion and the provision of facilities in certain circumstances.

We would also test and trial the barriers to nearby urban and deprived communities to connecting the landscape in sustainable ways; we think that the access trial could seek to establish new ways to get people to the landscape so that the public are demonstrably the beneficiaries of the ‘public good’.

We imagine that this trial would take place over 2-3 years, starting with a research and engagement phase in order to secure agreement and investment costs in pilot areas, we would then move on to trialling some of the approaches with farmers and land managers/ local communities.

## **2. Natural Flood and Water Management that supports landscape character.**

A key natural capital resource is water, and water management (supply/ quality/ flood management) is becoming an increasingly important issue. The Kent Downs AONB covers the Kent chalk aquifer which provides  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Kent’s drinking water and is increasingly stressed; it is also (perhaps surprisingly) an area that experiences flood issues as well as low water flows in the three river valleys (2 of which are chalk rivers) and occasionally in the dry valleys where they contain winter bournes.

As part of two Interreg funded projects (SCAPE <https://www.interreg2seas.eu/nl/scape> and Triple C <http://www.triple-c-water.eu/>), we are working with a wide variety of partners (including the EA/ county flood management teams and Rivers Trusts) to take forward landscape sensitive water management techniques which also seek to conserve and enhance the wider landscape (of course including biodiversity enhancements). Locally, Natural England have partnerships with the water companies and the County Council is running a further water resilience Interreg project, ProWater (<https://www.interreg2seas.eu/nl/PROWATER>) which is researching aquifer recharge issues associated with land management practice at a landscape scale.

There is a danger that these projects work in isolation and do not pull together their findings in a way that might inform the ELMS which will operate once we leave the EU.

### **The idea in a nutshell**

The idea of this test/ trial is to pull the learning of these innovative landscape led water management projects together, engage and work with farmers, landowners and their representative organisations to inform the ELM scheme so that it can draw on best practice in water management that also meets wider landscape objectives (rather than running counter to them as is often the case).

In a practical way, we imagine a project officer coordinating and collaborating with the projects we have identified and seeking others. The Project Officer would pull together and cost the practical investments that could be made through the ELM so that there are effective ways to

manage the water environment, presenting prescriptions, guidance, best practice (with examples) and costs.

We think that this test/ trial would then move on to pilot some of the investments in a practical way, again drawing on the learning from the practical investments made as part of the Interreg and other projects identified.

### **3. World beating wines and wildlife.**

While UK viticulture is currently a relatively small part of the agricultural economy it is high profile, high value and growing rapidly. Last year was widely reported as a record year for vineyard planting (1m vines planted). This year that figure is expected to be nearly doubled (1.8m vines planted). The Kent Downs AONB is a particularly focus for wine growing (The Champagne House Tattinger has planted extensively in the Kent Downs and a single estate bottle from Chapel Down's Kits Coty vineyard costs £100). Vineyards are appearing across the country with a focus, it would seem, on the southern designated landscapes.

Vineyards are often sited on land that once might have been targeted for calcareous/ neutral grassland restoration and can be found near areas of high biodiversity value.

Vineyards represent an interesting and potentially very valuable opportunity for combining high value agriculture with high value biodiversity value; the opportunity presents itself because only 70% of the vineyard is planted with vines, the rest is often single species grassland running between the vines and along the headlands.

Initial discussions with vineyard owners shows that there is an opportunity to create flower rich grasslands in and around the vines and a new structure of hedgerows to provide shelter and manage micro climates and to manage them in a way that will enhance wildlife. Apparently there is a reasonable body of research regarding enhancing biodiversity in other wine growing areas around the world (a quick Google search seems to confirm this) but very little with specific focus on the UK.

The idea of this test is to examine how we might include the burgeoning number of vineyards in the ELMS so that this significant change in the agricultural economy can generate new public goods in a sustainable way; this would also greatly enhance the reputation of English wines.

## Quantocks AONB Partnership

### Purpose and aim

The purpose of this proposal is to gain Defra support for the development of a bespoke land management scheme that will promote locally-responsive, sustainable, sensitive land based economic activity in and around the Quantock Hills AONB, protecting and enhancing this nationally protected area in landscape, economic and environmental terms. In doing this we hope to create a new form of sustainable land management support that is more comprehensive than historic agri-environment schemes, allowing land managers (including farmers, woodland managers, and land owners) in and around the Quantock Hills to directly represent and manage and the special qualities and natural capital of this AONB within a sustainable business model.

The Quantock Hills AONB wider partnership includes a very wide range of stakeholder organisations with what is in effect an “Executive Committee”, the Joint Advisory Committee, made up of 18 key stakeholder organisations. It is the ideal body to establish and oversee a Quantock Land Management Scheme with a specialist panel assessing and supporting, where appropriate criteria are met, land managers to work in ways that are economically sustainable while protecting and enhancing the natural capital, historic landscape, economy, and communities of the Quantock Hills.

The area of this AONB is 99km<sup>2</sup>, however recent landscape characterisation work by the AONB Service has identified that the landscape types protected within the AONB continue to differing extents beyond the AONB boundary, the inclusion of these (whole or in part) gives a wider area appropriate to the scheme of 190km<sup>2</sup>. A map showing these principal areas is attached at Annex 1. Land management units across the area are small to medium, and the greater scheme ownership and joint working of clusters of units within the scheme along with self-monitoring elements will be integral to its structure.

The core aim of this proposal is the development of a localised Land Management Scheme that focusses on delivering a sustainable business model for land management businesses in the Quantock area that protects and enhances the special qualities of the AONB. The model will be transferable and potentially applicable across the country, taking the opportunity of UK exit from the EU and building on historic experience in this field to produce a truly effective, locally managed and sustainable land management scheme.

### Quantock Hills Land Management Information

Over centuries and millennia the activities of land management in combination with the natural features of the area have shaped the present landscape and cultural heritage of the Quantocks - creating many of their special qualities and leading to their designation as England’s first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The ways in which the AONB is farmed and forested form the most critical element of maintaining the natural beauty for which it is designated.

There are approximately 80 commercial agricultural holdings in the AONB covering 70% of the total AONB; this number rises significantly when the surrounding area is included. Farming includes and lowland grazing livestock farms (68% by number of farms) and Less Favoured Area (LFA) grazing livestock farms (8% by number). The main land use is permanent grassland (53% of the farmed area) and 80% of farms are under 100ha in size (51% are under 20ha).

The AONB includes 1,567ha of broadleaved woodland, 863 ha of coniferous woodland, 83ha of mixed woodland, totalling 2652ha (approx. 25% of the AONB area) including small additional felled and planting prepared areas. 1,455ha (55%) are managed, 1,213ha unmanaged.

Agri-environment payments plus single payment in the Quantock Hills AONB amounts annually to an estimated figure in excess of £3.5m and agri-environment schemes have been a particularly important tool for conservation in the Quantock Hills. In 2015 over 48% of the utilisable agricultural land area in the Quantock Hills was in a Higher Level Stewardship agreement. This figure does not include woodland grants or agreements under the latest Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Beyond purely agricultural and timber outputs farming and forestry contributes significantly to the wider Quantock visitor economy, particularly through land management of the hills, valued by the ONS in excess of £31.5m per annum.

### **Scheme Outputs**

The current EU-structured support systems for farming and forestry in the UK separate out business funding from environmental management – this scheme would aspire to bring together landscape, biodiversity, ecosystem and cultural benefits with economic business sustainability. These land management agreements will be genuinely “whole unit” not simply geographically but in respect of land management activity, achievable through liaison and coordination at a local level the agreements will be bespoke and flexible, empowering the land management community rather than imposing top-down prescriptions.

It is important that the scheme delivers good value for public investment, sustaining the special qualities of the Quantock Hills landscape while addressing wider issues including

- Soil loss and degradation
- Loss of biodiversity and wildlife population densities
- Genetic crop and livestock diversity
- Resilience to flood and drought
- Economic sustainability of traditional farming and woodland management
- Loss of local sourcing and marketing of distinctive produce and materials

It is also critical that this scheme supports sustainable business activities and development for Quantock land managers. For a farming/forestry business grant aid, provided they meet eligibility criteria including producing a whole farm business plan with a ten and twenty year vision, the following could be main areas to be funded, there may be others identified as the scheme is developed:

- Diversification opportunities for existing business – primarily in any capital investment e.g. buildings/machinery etc
- Processing and marketing
- Conservation, environment and traditional farming skills
- Any training associated with any of the above

By developing and delivering this innovative new scheme the AONB Partnership will be able to ensure the integrity and setting of the Quantock Hills while sustaining and improving their supply and reliability of public goods including high quality landscapes, biodiversity, public health and wellbeing, carbon storage, water management, opportunities for public access, enjoyment and understanding. Through the opportunity presented by the UK exit from the EU, we are able to develop and test a model all or parts of which could be replicated around the UK.

### **Key Points**

The scheme will be locally-sensitive and locally delivered while working within the national framework of priorities and the 25 YEP. It will work at the landscape scale and be evidence

based – working collaboratively with land management groups to agree and subsequently monitor the identified outputs and outcomes. It will engage with land managers from the outset involving them collectively in defining and delivering the scheme.

The initiative will be evidence-based – monitoring and assessment at the local level involving the land managers directly will produce a strong level of evidence for success/failure of the scheme, including the most innovative elements. Monitoring will focus on outcomes and success of the scheme rather than simply compliance with prescriptive management activities. Levels of detail and small print when making an agreement will be genuinely minimised and the reporting/monitoring burden will be proportionate, with more detailed elements externally gathered by agreement with the land manager. The scheme will be transparent with information on agreements available at the widest acceptable level.

As part of the scheme’s development we will investigate, with a view to implementation, opportunities for private sector payments within the scheme for natural capital/ecosystem services following the Natural Capital Committee’s recommendations.



## **Surrey Hills AONB Partnership**

A Farmer-led Natural Capital Approach to Environmental Land Management in the Surrey Hills AONB

The North Downs and Tillingbourne Farm Cluster pilot

### **Aim**

To demonstrate how Government investment in a farmer and land manager led approach to enhancing natural capital can deliver measurable environmental and amenity benefits in a Protected Landscape

### **Objective**

By 2022 to have designed, delivered, monitored and reviewed a pilot project working through farmers, landowners and partners in the North Downs and Tillingbourne Farm Cluster.

### **Key Issues**

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) aims to create a profitable farming and land management sector that includes payments to deliver 'public goods' that demonstrate 'value for public money'. In the Surrey Hills AONB, a high proportion of farm businesses depend on the Basic Payment Scheme to remain viable. If farming and forestry is not profitable, there will be a major detrimental impact on the area's capacity to produce food, provide ecosystem services and the amenity value that residents and visitors get from a nationally designated landscape outside London.

### **The proposal**

The approach will demonstrate how farmers and land managers can benefit from being in a Protected Landscape and a Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA). The pilot will work with farmers, land managers and partners through an expanded North Downs and Tillingbourne Farm Cluster to restore, conserve and enhance the natural capital, including soil health, biodiversity and water resource management; and payments to deliver access, information, interpretation, education etc. The pilot will design and measure what these payments will be for; the issues and opportunities around payments for inputs or outcomes; the level of payment and measuring the benefit.

The pilot will test and advise on how the statutory AONB Management Plan can provide the policy framework to deliver this new approach. The will include consideration of effective governance, advice, training, monitoring, compliance, payments and evaluation for a new land management approach. A key principle will be to maximise funding for delivery, engage communities in monitoring and evaluation, and build local trust and payments based on self-assessment, where appropriate.

### **Project Management**

It will be important to design a scheme that is supported by evidence base; integrates existing initiatives; has a clearly defined decision making process; and ensures good communication with all stakeholders.

The key partners, budget and resources include:

North Downs Farm and Tillingbourne Cluster – to include payments to recover farmer and land manager costs in designing the scheme. This includes farmers, foresters, estates, National Trust, Surrey Wildlife Trust, vineyards etc.

Surrey Hills AONB Board/ Surrey CC – accountable body for administering the pilot and the AONB Management Plan as the framework document. The Board includes Surrey NFU, CLA, Surrey Wildlife Trust, National Trust, local authorities etc

Surrey Local Nature Partnership – to undertake natural capital mapping and the development of the natural capital investment framework, soil health audit etc

Environment Agency – to integrate and extend the Dorking Flood Management Plan (FMP) approach to the North Downs and Tillingbourne Cluster area

Forestry Commission – to provide baseline research, monitoring, advice and payments on woodland management and grants that deliver natural capital and amenity benefits

Natural England – to provide land management advice, monitoring and compliance

Surrey University – scheme design, monitoring and evaluation framework (inc School of Biological Science; Business School; Hospitality and Tourism etc)

Nature conservation – advice on design, monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity outcomes (inc Surrey Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Woodland Trust, RSPB, Surrey Bird Club, PlantLife etc)

Utility Water Companies – catchment management planning related to flood mitigation, water supply and quality (inc Thames Water, Environment Agency, SWT etc)

Access and amenity organisations - help in design, monitoring and evaluation of access initiatives and payments (inc Surrey Countryside Access Forum, Cycling UK, North Downs Way National Trails, Cycling UK and British Horse Society, Visit Surrey etc)

Rural economic development – to lever additional investment to provide additional income, jobs and general benefit to rural businesses (inc Surrey Hills Enterprises CIC, LEPs, local authorities economic development units etc)

Public engagement and outreach – to engage and inspire innovation and new audiences (eg Surrey Hills Arts, Surrey Hills Society, Surrey Youth Focus etc)

National appraisal – to monitor, review and test how such an approach is transferable to other Protected Landscapes (e.g. National Association for AONBs, National Park England, Defra, RPA, NFU, CLA, etc)

## Tamar Valley AONB Partnership

### Project summary

The project, *New Approaches*, led by the AONB Partnership, will pioneer the practical application of Natural Capital accounting and provision of ecosystem services, working with the farming community to develop useful and deliverable on farm approaches. This will include the development and provision of whole farm Natural & Heritage Capital audits and mapping to identify key resources delivering the priority benefits for the Valley. Bespoke management advice and signposting to potential sources of income generation, grants and management advice.

Projects would work at two levels, at the **whole landscape scale** for wider engagement and at the **focus area level** in more targeted parts of the area for more in depth work.

The Tamar Valley is a focus area for Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and is also a Treescape Focus area for the Woodland Trust.

### Partners

Landowners/farmers, Tamar Organic Farming Group, NFU, NE, EA, FE, Westcountry Rivers Trust, National Trust, Duchy of Cornwall, CLA, Rothamsted, Woodland Trust, FWAG

### Aims

Aims of this project will be to increase the resilience of the landscape, both natural and cultural in the face of rapid change driven by globalisation, urbanisation and climate change, through actively supporting the survival of traditional farming communities of the valleys with their heritage of skills and knowledge. Through finding the means to articulate and account for the public goods provided by traditional approaches to farming and managing land and our cultural heritage, this will help build future landscape resilience.

### Project description

In consultation with the farming community, initial discussions have identified that the project should help to deliver the following:

- Support in focus areas for more intensive work with farmers and land managers based on priority areas within the Tamar catchment, vulnerable to water quality issues or flooding to help with accessing advice and grant support, also to help with processes such as carbon auditing (building on previous work) evaluation of carbon storage and sequestration in the form of natural capital in soils and above ground woody habitats. Carbon auditing useful for identifying opportunities for adding value may be a requirement for new farm support schemes.
- The exploration of the practical application of natural capital accounting (currently concept at an early stage & too complex for many working farmers to understand how it might integrate into their existing systems) and support to help them access to payments for Ecosystems Services delivered by farmers, e.g. visitor giving. and developing new schemes post-Brexit.
- Projects that help farmers to increase revenue (e.g. by shortening supply chains and adding value) or decrease costs (e.g. decrease inputs).
- Promotion and development of Community Supported Agriculture and Community Woodland projects close to markets i.e. Plymouth

- Encouragement and support to establish farmer-led discussion groups. The Tamar Organic Group have stated that they would be willing to help facilitate a new group for interested farmers. The Group would help to disseminate good practice and explore collaborative working.
- Hedges and Hedgerow trees – focussing on the ‘bocage-type’ landscape of the area. Advocacy of sustainable management of this vital aspect of the valley heritage to include wood fuel harvesting and with an additional focus on the impact of tree diseases.
- Species-based projects – new ideas could include hedgehogs, cirl bunting; expand on habitat enhancement work carried out through the Devon Greater Horseshoe bat project and work being accrued out for Heath Fritillary etc.

#### **Outcomes for environment and heritage**

- Improved management and stewardship of the Tamar Valley landscape including better managed hedges, woods and fields
- Improved water quality of the Tamar, Tavy and Lynher
- No net loss of biodiversity, aspiration to significantly contribute to Biodiversity 2020 targets and to help deliver the governments aspiration to improve the environment within a generation through Defra’s 25 year plan for the Environment
- Increase in land being managed for high nature value farming and not abandoned or uses intensified.
- Improved habitat quality - especially riparian habitats, decrease in Invasive Non Native Species (INNS), complete eradication of Giant Hogweed and significant reduction in Japanese Knotweed in the Lower Tamar

#### **Outcomes for communities**

- Supported and facilitated farmer led discussion, research and practitioner groups e.g. around carbon
- Increased knowledge and understanding of natural capital accounting and ecosystem services such as natural flood management.
- Enhanced landscapes rich with wildlife and heritage being better places to live and work within

#### **Outcomes for people**

- Improved knowledge and understanding about natural capital, ecosystem services, especially soil carbon, and natural flood management
- Provision of evidence-based research and tools in an accessible format. Eg ability to measure /assess natural capital on the farm such as healthy soils.
- Skills gaps identified and bespoke training opportunities provided to meet identified local needs informed by farmer groups.
- Improved inter-farmer cooperation.
- Improved knowledge and learning through organised demonstration days and study tours, sharing existing good practice and success stories.
- Farm contractors with increased knowledge awareness and skills.

#### **How will this be measured?**

- Numbers of farmers, land managers, advisors, contractors attending events, workshops, training etc
- Increase in natural capital on participating farms/land holdings

- Increased awareness of concepts around natural capital

**Cost**

£250k over 3 years

**Sustainability and Managing the Legacy**

- Initiatives to be championed by farmers themselves
- Ensure well trained, enthusiastic advisers
- Visits to farms where there is good practice and farmers themselves are strong advocates
- Ensure evidence and research data arising out of the project is made available and in the public domain.