

NELMS meeting 10th February 2014: Feedback to Defra

BACKGROUND

The Broadland Catchment Partnership is a range of organisations working together to plan and facilitate delivery of improvements to the water environment (water quality, quantity, habitat and recreation) whilst supporting sustainable farming within the Broadland Rivers Catchment.

The Broads - Britain's largest wetland with the status of a National Park - are located at the bottom of the catchment so are significantly affected by what happens further upstream as well as tidal surges and saline incursion from the North sea.

A stakeholder workshop on 3rd December 2013 identified the New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS) as a key measure to deliver improvements to the catchment and the Broads. Engaging local farmers, land managers and advisers on the suitability of the proposed NELMS to deliver improvements to the water environment was regarded as an essential short-term goal.

A working group was established to provide this feedback to Defra and incorporate conclusions and recommendations into the catchment plan being produced by the partnership. The Broads Authority are hosting the partnership and provided the meeting venue. The partnership officer arranged the meeting and e-mailed Defra information and analysis provided by the NFU to attendees prior to the meeting.

This information provided prior to the meeting included the latest list of likely revenue and capital payment options, exceptions, baseline requirements and a summary of changes from previous environmental stewardship options. Additional information presented for discussion at the meeting included catchment and sub-catchment scale run-off risk maps and a water regulation opportunity map.

TARGETING AND INCENTIVISING

The NFU reported that existing agreements will take up much of the new budget for 2015-2020 and while around 70% of agricultural land is currently under environmental stewardship, this will drop based on Natural England estimations to 30-35% with less money available for new entrants/schemes.

Given budget constraints, from a Broads perspective, targeting the right options in the right places and encouraging farmers to take up measures by making them attractive from a business perspective is essential for the environmental, economic and social development.

Inclusion of some exceptions for specific coastal, wetland and woodland habitats was noted. Despite this it was strongly felt that 5 year agreements are not strategic from a farm business planning perspective, especially for mixed farms within the Broads Executive area and river valleys. Therefore:

A geographic derogation to cover the whole Broadland catchment, for a minimum agreement term of 10 years, should apply. Much of this land has been in ten year ESA and then HLS agreements in order to give confidence for long term land use change through arable reversion to grazing, and five year agreements would be insufficient to secure existing grazing land let alone allow for new arable reversion.

Farmers felt that the proposed baseline requirements went beyond existing cross compliance and greening requirements and did not have their or other stakeholder's support.

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BROADS AND RIVER VALLEY GRAZING MARSHES

Farmers were in agreement that those mixed farm with a relatively large amount of grassland can be disadvantaged. Increasing water levels and decreasing stock is often not viable or profitable, does not necessarily benefit the environment, and there is a risk of decrease in capital land value and could actually encourage many to revert grazing marshes back to arable land. A reduction of cattle in the Broads, for this very reason was reported. The RSPB highlighted that managing grassland for breeding waders can be, at least, cost neutral based on experiences from Berney marshes but there was no specific case study data from this site.

The use of LIDAR data (owned by the BESL project) in field level mapping, and assisting scheme design and locations on individual holdings was supported. Face-to-face advice, from local specialists was favoured.

There was consensus that agreements have become too prescriptive. It was noted that advisers can give derogations but there is a need for more flexibility in schemes and individual agreements including moderate inputs of nitrogen fertiliser, lower water levels and higher stock densities in some instances depending on field level conditions.

Many felt that there was a move towards a 'take it or leave it' approach that would result in many farmers not applying for entry into NELMS, especially given current wheat prices and land values. Therefore:

It is important that the new options lists have flexibility built into them so that NE advisers can agree with farmers appropriate stocking densities, input rates and water levels at the start of new agreements.

WIDER CATCHMENT

Farmers present were generally not representative of more arable interests in the wider catchment and further engagement is required to canvas views of those farmers outside the Broads Executive area.

Farmers reported that much run-off occurs due to compaction of arable land and precision farming and optimisation of fertiliser application, resulting in less traffic, was identified as a useful mitigation measure. Capital grants to encourage purchase of such equipment through the current Farming & Forestry Improvement Scheme was supported along with equipment to disrupt tramlines.

Reported increases in payment for 'Soil and Water' and 'Arable' measures were welcomed but it was difficult to establish if 'Soil & Water' measures such as bunds and sediment traps would be taken up until point/payment rate information was released. Similar sentiments were expressed for the 'Making Space for Water' measure that was likely to be dependent on multiple farmer collaboration that is inherently difficult, costly and leading to permanent loss in commercial land value.

It was noted that that the adoption of water holding and/or grassland flooding measures, especially in the non-tidal Bure and Wensum valley and floodplains, could result in more aquifer recharge and thus be of benefit to agricultural abstractors but would require a concerted effort from all farmers.

There was some disappointment expressed at the removal of 2m buffers since 4m+ buffers were not attractive for some arable farmers but field corner options were viewed as appropriate given machinery sizes and gateway requirements.

Attendees highlighted that these discussions are particularly appropriate at a time of abstraction reform and given current flooding across the country. The lack of holistic thinking around abstraction licensing, flood defence and environmental improvement funding and incentivisation from Defra was raised.

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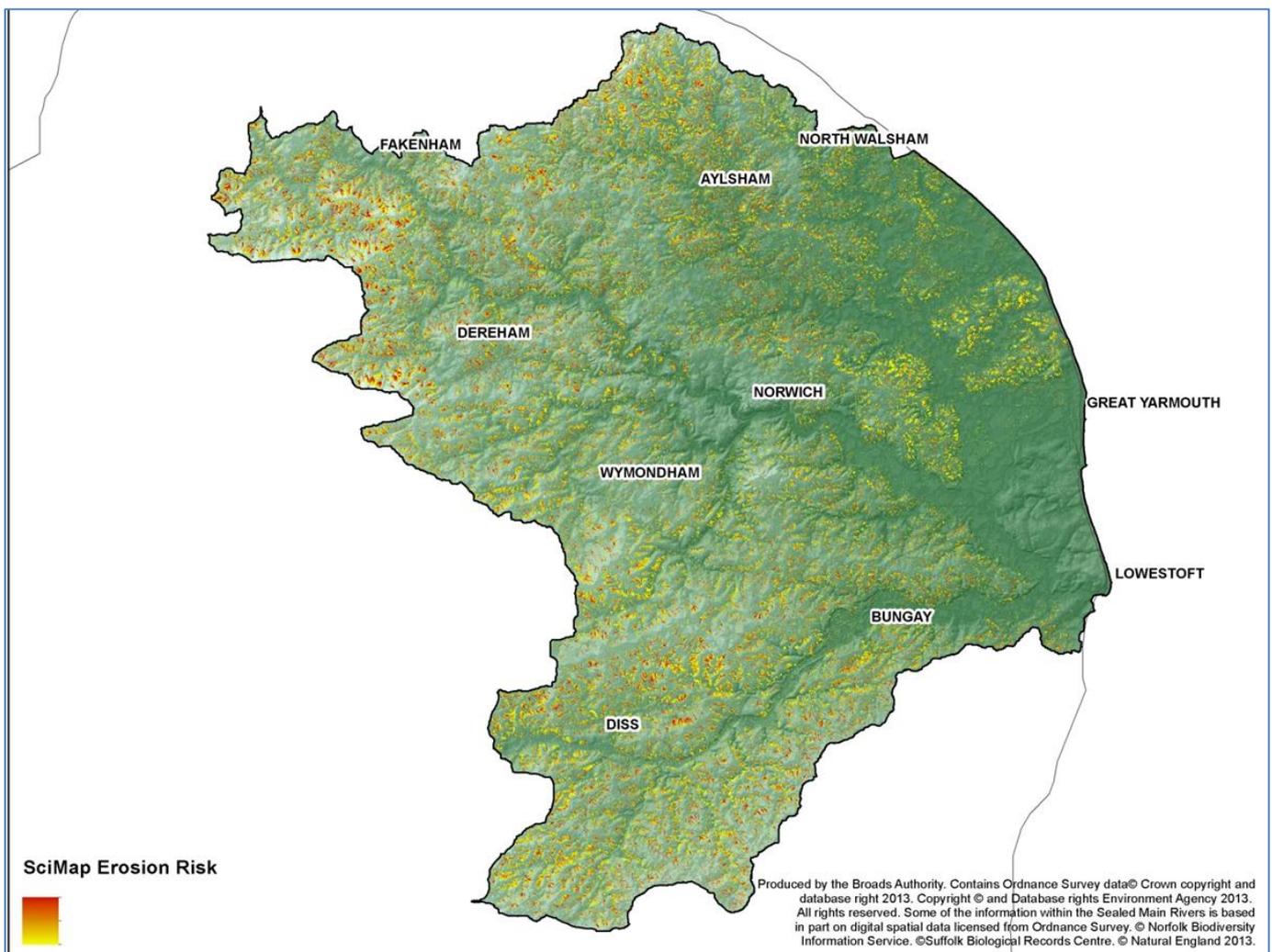
CONCLUSIONS

In the short term, the Broads and their river valleys need to be recognised due to their unique circumstances with longer length NELMS agreements (10 year minimum) available and enough flexibility so that they can be tailored to individual circumstances through discussions with farmers.

For the entire Broadland rivers catchment a holistic approach with evidence based targeting and appropriate incentivisation was agreed as the best way to achieve multiple benefits including for wildlife habitat, access, soil and water resource protection and flood risk reduction whilst supporting profitable farming. Strategic planning based on models that incorporated farmer knowledge were supported.

Linking the rural development programme, flood risk and environmental stewardship funding around hydrological boundaries with the potential for a locally administered 'catchment pot' was discussed as a long term aspiration.

Broadland rivers catchment area (3200km²) showing elevation and potential run-off/erosion risk



**Broadland Catchment Partnership
NELMS Meeting
AGENDA**

10th February 2014

Waveney Room, Yare House, Broads Authority
10:15-13:00

Attendees

Louis Baugh, NFU/BA Board (Farmer)	Andrea Kelly, Broads Authority (Senior ecologist)
Barry Bendall, Rivers Trusts (E.England Director)	Joe Mitchell, NFU (Farmer)
Henry Cator, WMA/NFU (Farmer)	Neil Punchard, Broadland Catchment Partnership
Adam Clarke, Environment Agency (Land & Water)	Rory Sanderson, Environment Agency (WFD)
Nigel Cooke, NFU (Farmer)	Will Sands, NFU (Farmer)
Nicholas Deane, NFU (Farmer)	Mark Smart, RSPB
Jonathan Gill (Farmer)	Henry Walker, Farm Conservation (Adviser)
Rob Holland, Essex & Suffolk Water (Adviser)	<i>Rob Wise, NFU (Environmental Adviser) CHAIR</i>

Apologies

Rebecca Banks, NWT	Penny Hemphill, SWT
Robert Camps, NE (CSF)	Maisie Jepson, CLA
Victoria Fradley, NE (CSF)	

No.	Item	Who
1.	Welcome, apologies, introductions	Rob Wise
2.	Background to the partnership, workshops and NELMS meeting	Andrea Kelly
3.	Update on Defra National consultation	Rob Wise
4.	Options, capital items and payment rates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All options discussion • Soil & Water specific discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Making Space for Water (river channel soft engineering) ○ Earth banks and soil bunds ○ Silt Filtration Dams/Seepage barriers ○ Equipment to Disrupt Tramlines in Arable Areas ○ Water Management Training and Run-off Mitigation Design - Soil and Water Management Plan ○ Riparian Management Strip 	All
5.	Length of agreements and exceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water/wetland habitats • Woodland creation 	All
6.	Targeting of measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollution run-off risk and ecosystem services mapping • Catchment plan recommendations and actions 	Neil Punchard
7.	Any other business <i>To be notified to the Chair in advance of the meeting</i>	All