

Pilot Agri-Environment Scheme for the Broads

Report by Chief Executive

Summary: In line with the resolution adopted at the January meeting of the Authority an expression of interest for a pilot agri-environment scheme for the Broads has been submitted to Defra.

Recommendation:

Note the contents of the submission to Defra for a pilot agri-environment scheme for the Broads which builds on the partnership work with the National Farmers Union and local land managers and prepared with the assistance of the local conservation NGOs.

1 Background

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Authority in January Members were provided with an update on the National Parks England meeting on 25 January 2018. The Park Authorities were invited to submit bids by the end of February for pilot studies to review how new payment schemes to farmers might be organised and implemented post Brexit.
- 1.2 Members were supportive of the Authority submitting a bid for a Broads pilot but were mindful of the impact on the Authority's resources, given its recent commitments to large projects. However, given the recent on-going cooperation and liaison established with the farming community it was considered important that resources should be diverted to submit a bid such that the particular circumstances of farming in the Broads were considered in the development of new land management scheme.
- 1.3 A copy of the document submitted to Government as a result is attached as an Appendix. Louis Baugh and Rob Wise of the NFU have provided valuable support and guidance as have the Chief Executives and Regional Director of the Norfolk and Suffolk Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB.

Background papers: None
Author: John Packman
Date of report: 5th March 2018
Broads Plan Objectives: B 2

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Proposal for a Pilot Agri-Environment Scheme in the Broads

Proposal for a Pilot Agri-Environment Scheme in the Broads



Submission by



Broads
Authority

What is special about a Pilot Agri-Environment Scheme in the Broads

The Broads Authority welcomes the opportunity to submit a bid to pilot a new agri-environment scheme in the Broads to support the development of a new universal approach for the country as a whole. This has been prepared under the umbrella of the ambition set out in the “Farming in the English National Parks” paper and the Government’s recognition of the need to balance farming and the environment while leaving the environment in a better state for future generations.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage with Defra on the ideas in the submission learning from the experience of land managers in the Broads and the Broads Authority.

The Broads is the most biodiverse of the National Parks with over 25% of the UK’s rarest species within its boundary.

It is therefore not surprising that this is where the Broads Authority, working with local farmers, pioneered payments to support the retention of lowland, wet grassland systems in the Halvergate Grazing Marshes Scheme which was the forerunner of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA).

With the UK’s most precious sites for nature conservation next to highly productive arable land, a pilot in the Broads has to recognise the varied agriculture within individual landholdings. This would enable a scheme to be developed that blended wet grassland and floodplain habitats alongside a universal scheme and so be applicable for much of the rest of the country.

There is a long history of joint working between local farmers, landowners and the Broads Authority which included an NFU led initiative ‘Why Farming Matters’

highlighting the importance of farming to both wildlife and the local economy.

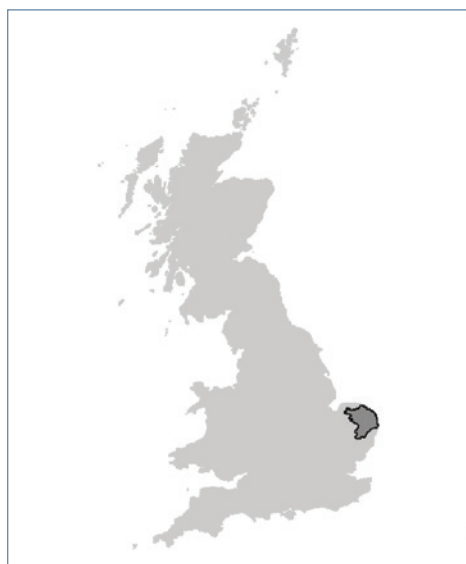
At the same time the conservation bodies value joint working across the Broads and initiatives like the Wildlife Trust’s Living Landscapes and the RSPB’s Futurescapes are being applied to the Broadland valleys.

The protection of the Britain’s most important wetland requires a catchment scale approach and through the Broadland Catchment Partnership the Authority, with support from Tesco and other partners, has been again pioneering new techniques to reduce the amount of nutrient and soil entering the rivers.

This is the area of Britain most at risk from climate change and sea-level rise and any new system of support for farming needs to take account of these long-term trends to build resilience and adaptive options.

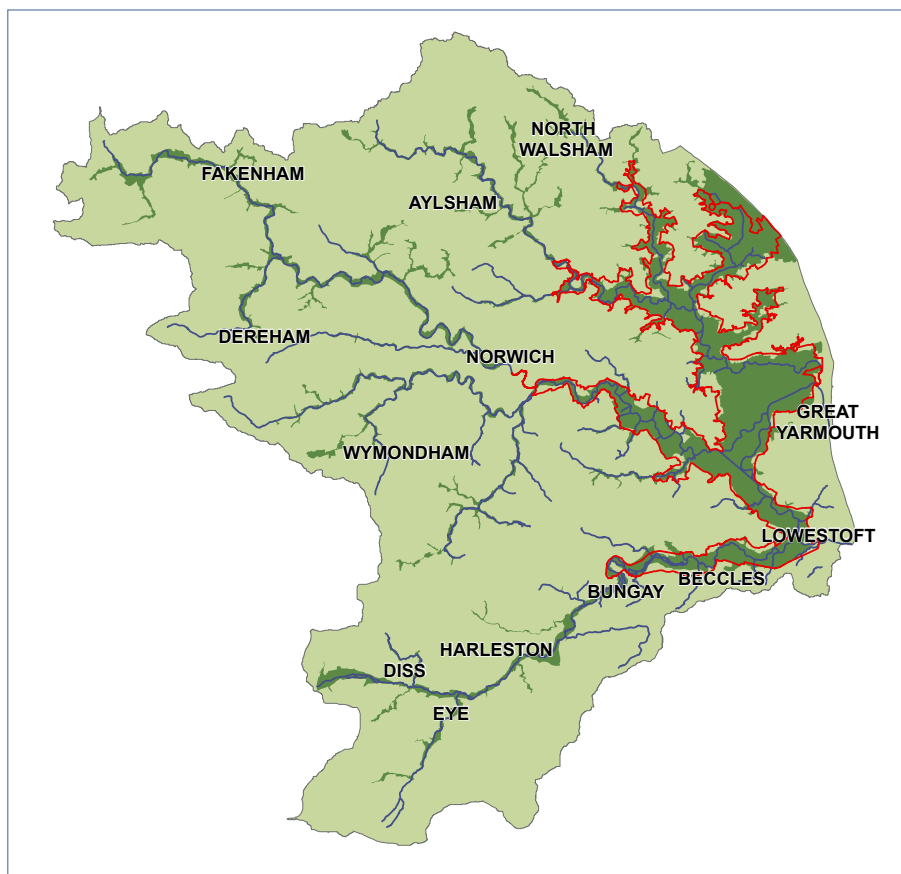
Map 1. Broads Location Map

The map shows the location of the Broads Executive Area (30,300 hectares) at the bottom of a much larger catchment (>320,000 hectares) and the historic Broads Environmentally Sensitive Area covering most of the Broads and river floodplains of Norfolk and North Suffolk (43,190 hectares).



- Main rivers
- Broads Environmentally Sensitive Area
- Broads Authority Executive Area
- Broadland Rivers Catchment

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What can we learn from past experience?

Benefits of a simple, locally developed solution

The Broads ESA was a simple, local solution which worked to retain a special landscape. The 11 page guidance document was accompanied by a 3 page application form which could be easily completed by farmers. It contained three wetland grassland prescriptions providing a graduated series of options. The equivalent guidance now runs to around 800 pages and this complexity in part explains issues around the take up of the latest schemes. Collaborative working allied to quality local advice will allow the complexity to be stripped right down and simplified into a more digestible format without losing the gains.

The economic needs

The agricultural market does not provide sufficient returns to guarantee the security of this landscape and its environmental features, so agri-environment schemes have, and should, bridge that gap.

The Farm Business Survey, financed by Defra, demonstrates lowland grazing systems are at an income level equivalent to that in the Less Favoured Areas. In reality, if the intensive lowland grazing systems are removed from the figures the extensively grazed, low input Broads marshes will record incomes below that of the Upland LFA.

Recognising one solution doesn't suit all

Solutions to the Broads' needs are best developed by sharing local understanding. The one grass option in Mid-Tier does not provide suitable flexibility to make a difference and make it attractive. At the end of ESA the Broads Authority commissioned a survey and report by Norfolk Farming and Wildlife Group (FWAG) on farmer intentions regarding future management of the Broads marshes. This report and the canvassing of local farmers indicate an erosion of previously high levels of farmer commitment to stewardship to fragmented and variable levels of engagement.



What would a new Broads Pilot look like?

A radical departure from the present arrangements will be essential and future agricultural support should build on the successful elements of past schemes. Thus we would advocate the following design criteria for a new scheme:

- A return to a simpler scheme that contains suitable grazing choices with appropriate water level management– building on the original Broads Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme. Option selection can be simple – self-service like the current Mid-Tier and avoiding the complexity of the current Higher-Tier administration
- Scheme choices need to be economically viable as part of the overall farm business with innovative incentives such as payment by results
- Take a long term view by providing 10 year agreements giving economic stability but also recognising getting the environmental changes needed can take time
- Respect and acknowledge the local landscape needs and integrate this with the Catchment Based Approach
- Locally designed, implemented and monitored working to agreed plans and targets allowing simpler and cheaper administration
- Fen management and wet woodland needs to be a part of the scheme helping develop a more robust reed and sedge industry to meet market needs
- Reintroduction of permissive access will improve public support for the scheme

A Broads PLUS scheme

The Broads Plus Pilot would complement a universal scheme that supports good husbandry and favours natural capital protection (water and land) that will ensure the catchment is managed appropriately

and reduces the pollution entering the Broads from upstream. It will provide a support mechanism to get the best for a special landscape in terms of biodiversity and food production along with retaining the health and wellbeing offer a National Park can provide.

Element	Achieved by	Benefits and results
Focus on the floodplain	Concentrated effort on land and water resource protection and enhancement	Improvements in designated landscapes and habitats
Tackling lowland grazing systems	Promoting best practice grazing and water management bringing biodiversity improvements to wet grassland.	Retaining iconic landscapes and wildlife along with retaining viability and sustainability of lowland wet grassland grazing
Incorporating other vital wetland products	Fen management options to support reed and sedge cutting and acknowledging importance of wet woodlands	Sustainable products boosting the home market and enhancing biodiversity in wildlife rich areas
Integrated quality advice	Covering environmental land and water management as well as agricultural economics and rural diversification	Clear, relevant and implementable ideas to embed good practice
Public money for public goods	Investing in management that boosts public needs when economic viability is challenged	Protects Natural Capital and multiple ecosystem services
Working at a landscape scale	Throughout the floodplain with cooperation across boundaries not recognised by nature	Facilitated clusters of landowners meeting the Lawton principles of bigger, better and more joined up
Taking biodiversity even further	Incentivising working for wildlife for multiple benefits	Quality management options with buffering and linking to protect and favour adaptation
Combining new technology with self-regulated monitoring	GIS mapping to aid targeting and decision making allied to agreed local compliance monitoring	Makes use of data and mapping to create consensus targets and empowers farmers to deliver results
Building positive farmer & landowner relationships to target consensus solutions for public good	Recognising need, sharing knowledge and skills, fostering collaboration	More trust and greater progress towards common needs
Directing declining public finance into the most beneficial places	Rewarding action and investment in Natural Capital and climate adaptation	Retains natural resources, boosts wildlife with encouraging resilience and adaptive approaches whilst producing quality food

Important elements to develop in a pilot

Learning from our experience over the last 30 years the Broads Plus Pilot period would test the following key elements:

- Supportive and tailored advice to develop and agree with farmers and land managers appropriate measures to manage water levels, measure, protect and enhance natural capital to provide better biodiversity and multiple public goods. Integrated with advice on farm diversification and modernisation to similarly boost productivity.
- Simple but clear results based options with payment methods that are easy to administer but provide incentives to achieve targets.
- Reduced compliance complexity through self-reporting and focusing external monitoring on where it is needed and makes a difference.
- Exploring plan based approaches for clarity and programmed change
- Cluster groups to encourage collaborative working across the landscape providing linkages and buffers – for wildlife, supply and marketing chains, access, and adaptation.
- Continued use of Broads Authority mapping systems to work with farmers to identify particular sites with risks (e.g. of run-off) and opportunities (e.g. targeted applications, cross boundary links)
- Continued pioneering of new and specialised equipment such as the fen harvester and wonder wheel to manage fen areas and reduce run-off from arable fields. Encouragement to develop and test high-tech solutions.
- Exploring integration with the universal scheme to avoid unintended consequences and allowing adaptive choices to cope with a changing climate and rising sea-level.
- Develop advisor supported management plans bringing agreed outcomes, allowing complex needs to be addressed and simplifying administrative procedures.

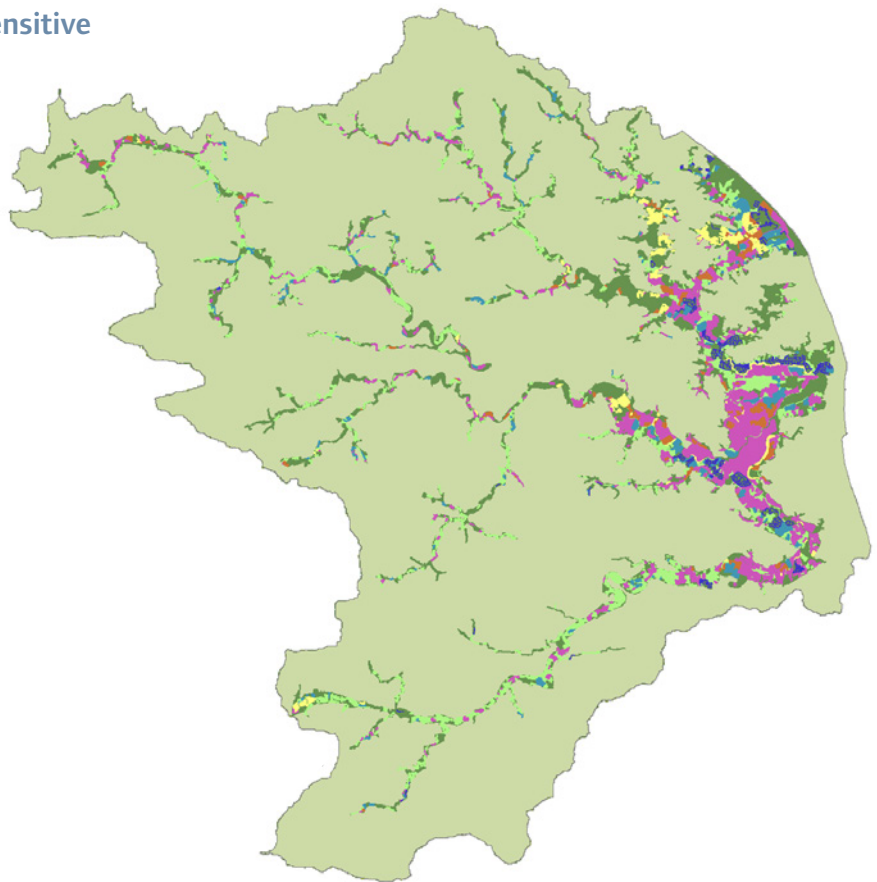


Map 2. Broads Environmentally Sensitive Area Historic Uptake in 2001

The map shows the locations of different tiers of agri-environment and demonstrates the previous landowner interest in low input landscape management with almost half of the eligible area (43,190) in the scheme. 665 ha also received a Water Level Supplement.

ESA Tier

- 1 - Permanent grass (8994 ha)
- 2 - Extensive grass
- 3 - Wet grass
- 4A - Arable reversion to permanent grass
- 4B - Arable grass margins
- Fen
- Broads Environmentally Sensitive Area
- Broadland Rivers Catchment



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Map 3. Multiple Ecosystem Services Opportunity Map

The multiple ecosystem services map demonstrates the potential of land to provide benefits for water quality, water quantity, wildlife habitat, and potentially for carbon storage. This may require a change in land use or management. The higher scoring areas are generally more marginal land that can be subject to waterlogging or flooding and are usually drained if in agricultural land use. The modelling was developed in 2014 by representatives of local stakeholders, including farmers, who agreed which ecosystem services and data to use and developed a scoring system generally at the field level. The scores can help to target, prioritise and/or weight payments for fields entering any new schemes.



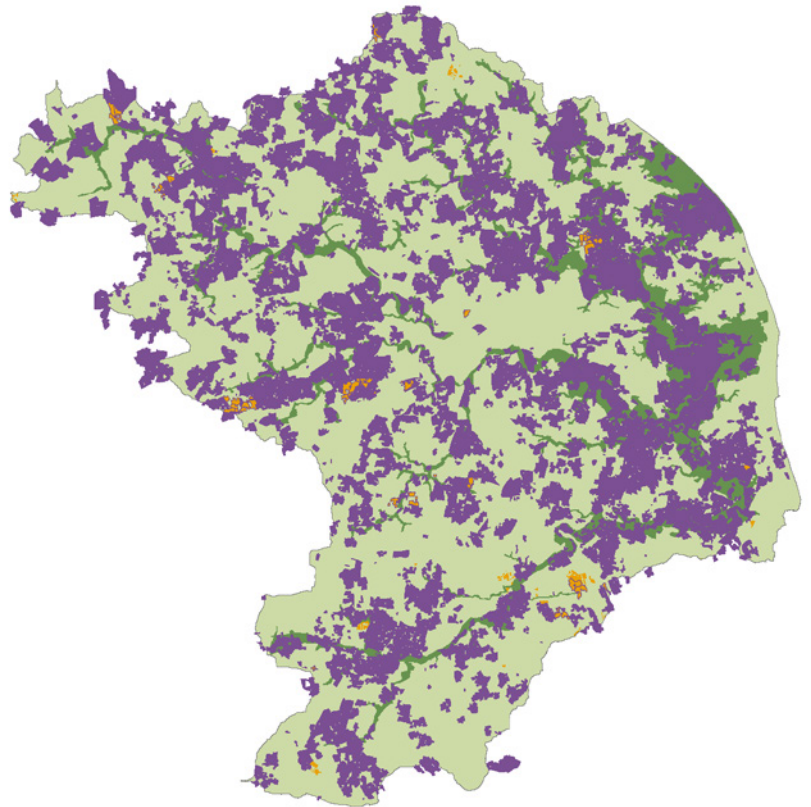
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Map 4. Current Stewardship Agreements

The maps show the location of current agreements (February 2018) for Environmental Stewardship (Entry Level and Higher Level Schemes) and Countryside Stewardship (Mid tier and Higher tier) throughout the Broadland Rivers Catchment.

Current agreements

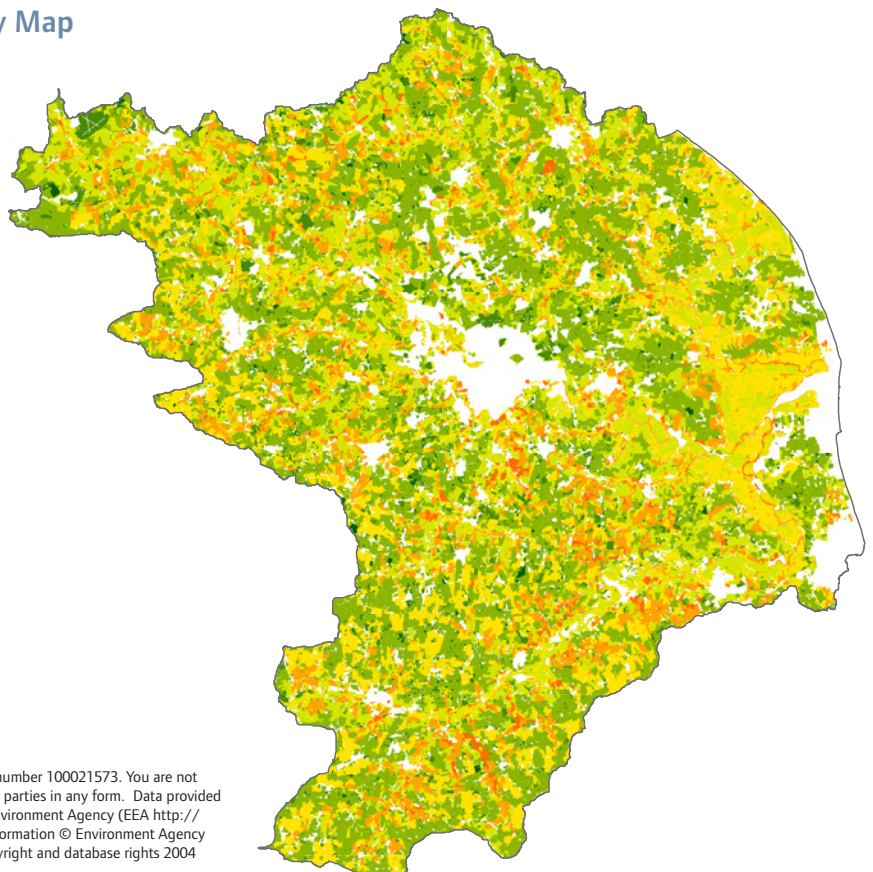
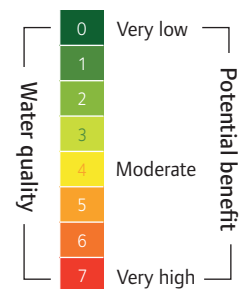
- Countryside Stewardship
- ESS Agreements
- Broads ESA
- Broadland Rivers Catchment



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Map 5. Water Quality Opportunity Map

The map demonstrates the potential of land to provide benefits for surface water quality and emphasises the need to work across an entire catchment to protect and enhance downstream waterbodies including The Broads. Relatively simple land management measures, such as cover crops, in high scoring areas can assist the provision of this service without impacting the provision of food and can also enhance biodiversity, soil, crop yield and profit.



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