

Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme
BROADS TEST AND TRIAL

Tier Structure



October 2020

This is a theoretical scheme design which has been used as a tool to seek the views of farmers and land managers on the outcomes and interventions for habitat management in the Broads and river valleys. There is no guarantee that it would be used for the ELM scheme. The suggested Tier Structure will be submitted to Defra with the recommendation that this is considered as a national ELM scheme pilot.

The Tier Structure has been discussed with around 40 Broads farmers and land managers and changes have been made to accommodate their suggestions.

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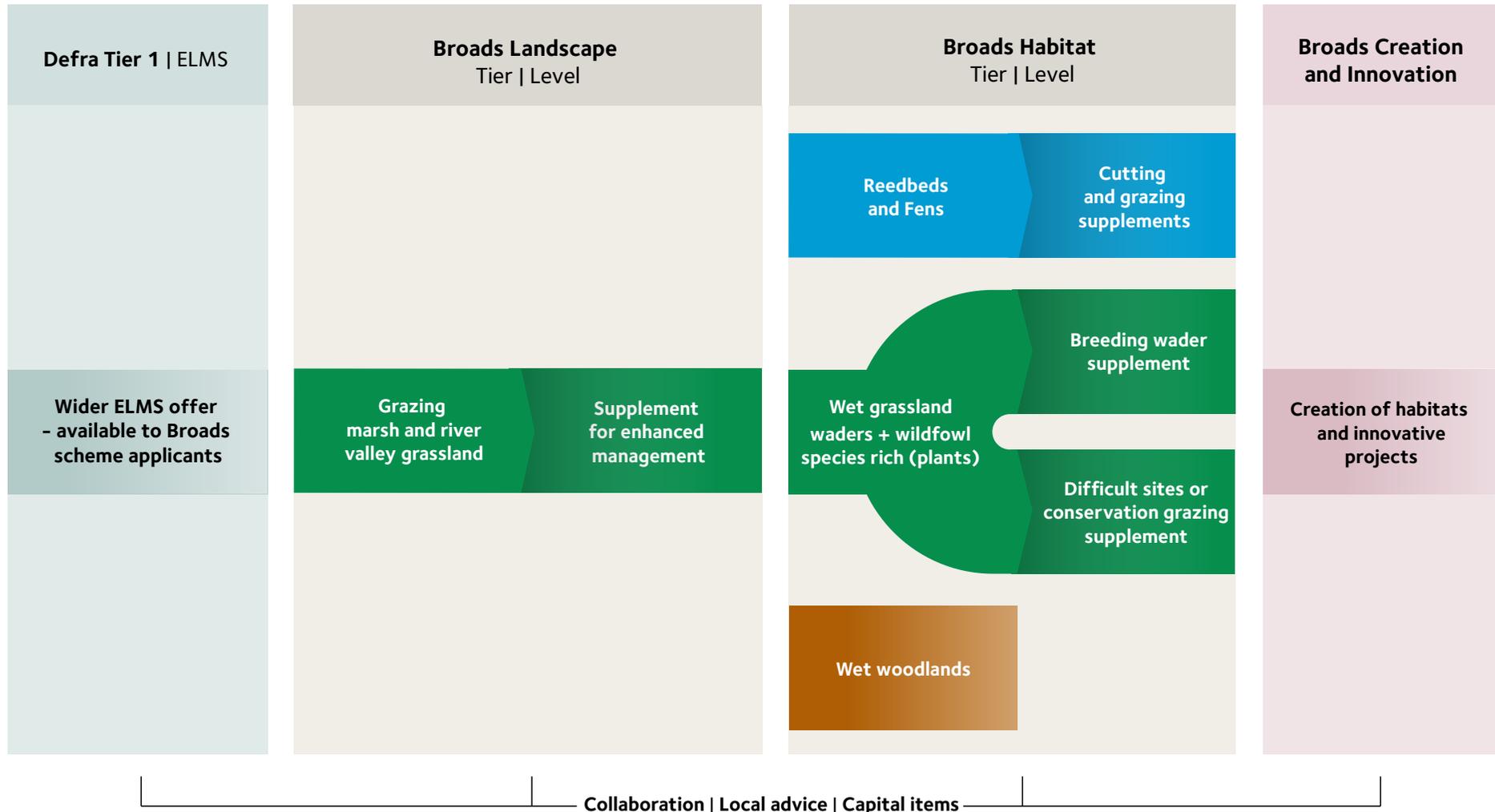
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Norfolk and Suffolk has over 27% more arable farmland than the average for England but around 15% less grassland, making the extensively-managed grasslands of the Broads and river valleys locally important. Photo: James Bass

Tier Structure - overview



This theoretical scheme design has been used as a tool to seek the views of farmers and land managers on the outcomes and interventions for habitat management in the Broads and river valleys.

Key principles and assumptions

- Scheme design is focussed on the floodplain – our core Broads habitats – whilst recognising the importance of the surrounding land, particularly where it facilitates the management of the core habitats.
- Applicants can choose from the options in the Broads scheme PLUS those in the wider ELM scheme offer (arable options, water protection options, public access, etc.).
- Flexibility to move up/down through the Tiers, and to add/remove supplements – during the lifetime of the agreement.
- The grazing marsh/river valley grassland option should be accessible to all who wish to provide a basic level of public goods on their floodplain grassland.
- Move away from historical prescriptions which don't achieve outcomes, such as certain date restrictions, whilst maintaining basic compliance standards.
- As a general rule, the agreements should be flexible enough to allow for seasonal variations, but 'derogations' may be needed where agreement-holders need to make temporary changes to their management for good reasons (e.g. thistle control). The over-seeing authority, local delivery board and/or local advisers should be able to issue simple and responsive blanket 'derogations' for all agreement-holders in exceptional circumstances, such as extreme weather conditions.
- The habitats, species and management operations may be subject to regulations, designations, other legislation or sources of funding. The Tier Structure does not go into detail on these.
- Payments could be made up of an area-based payment and a linear amount based on the length of ditch. We are investigating the idea of bonus payments for the achievement of certain outcomes but this has not had much support to date.
- Applicants will need access to knowledgeable and trusted local advisers who can help tailor the scheme to the holding.
- The application process should be straightforward and easily completed. The Tier Structure does not go into detail on this.

Please note that wet woodland has been added to the overview diagram in response to land manager feedback but there has not been time to add any further detail at this stage.

The main public goods provided by the scheme

One of Defra's visions for the ELM scheme is that it will 'reward public goods with public money'. Defra has defined public goods as things that benefit more than just the recipient and cannot be rewarded by the market alone. The following summarises the public goods that could be provided in the Broads.

Fens and reedbeds

- Clean and plentiful water.
- Clean air.
- Carbon storage in peat.
- Iconic species such as swallowtail butterfly, bittern, European crane, otter, marsh harrier.
- Nationally/internationally-important wetland habitats.
- Nationally/internationally-important plant and invertebrate populations.
- Flood storage capacity.
- Rare and iconic wetland landscapes.
- Traditional and new/novel industries producing sustainable local products (e.g. reed and sedge for thatching, biofuel and biomass, and typha for construction).
- Benefits to wellbeing and mental health from experiencing a 'wild' and nature-rich environment.
- Genetic diversity – native livestock breeds.

Habitat creation (additional benefits over and above those provided by the maintenance of existing habitats)

- Cessation of carbon loss from ploughed soils.
- Stabilisation, re-wetting and building of peat resulting in increased carbon storage.
- Improved water quality from reduced inputs and permanent vegetation cover (e.g. reedbed filtration).
- Improved soil health through permanent vegetation cover.
- Re-creation of habitat transitions.
- Increased resilience to climate change.
- Water storage.
- Increased biodiversity.
- Increased pollinators.
- Potential improvements to air quality through arable reversion / cessation of fertiliser inputs.

Grassland

- Clean and plentiful water.
- Clean air.
- Food plants for pollinators.
- Iconic species (such as otter, brown hare, Norfolk Hawker dragonfly, barn owl, snipe, lapwing and skeins of geese).
- Nationally-important grassland habitats, particularly Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh.
- Nationally/internationally-important populations of aquatic plants and invertebrates in ditches.
- Nationally/internationally-important populations of wintering wildfowl and breeding waders.
- Carbon storage in peat/uncultivated soils.
- Iconic, open, pastoral landscape, supporting low intensity, grass-fed beef and lamb production.
- Flood storage capacity.
- Genetic diversity – native livestock.

Additional public goods from collaborative projects

- More efficient use of water resources across the landscape.
- Reduced run-off and improved water quality.



The Broads headwater rivers and Trinity Broads provide drinking water for people

Photo: Tom Barrett

How the Tier Structure could work in practice

- Applicants build a Land Management Plan for their holding, incorporating options and supplements from the Broads Tier Structure together with aspects of the wider ELM scheme offer.
- Land managers follow the Basic Requirements detailed below, and carry out the interventions detailed under each option, in order to achieve the agreed outcomes.
- Where land managers apply for a Supplement, they manage their land in accordance with both the base option and the supplement, e.g. wet grassland with the breeding wader supplement.
- Interventions and outcomes will need to be tailored for the holding. For instance, the wet grassland option can be used on both species-rich (plant rich) peat marshes and species-poor clay marshes with populations of wintering wildfowl, so the management and outcomes may be different.
- Land managers may also apply for capital items to support and enhance their habitat management.
- Land managers may choose to move up through the tiers if they have achieved the outcomes of their existing option(s) and wish to do more.

Basic Requirements

- No ploughing, cultivating or reseeding without prior approval.
- Weed and rush control on grassland by cutting, spot treatment and weed wiping only.
- Herbicide use in fens / reedbeds restricted to stump treatment and foliar application to control scrub.
- Supplementary feeding restricted to mineral licks and creep feeders moved regularly.
- No introduction of additional species without prior approval.
- Do not deepen or reprofile ditches without prior approval.

ASSUMPTIONS: Baseline ELM scheme requirements or regulations will restrict damaging activities such as overgrazing, excessive poaching, spreading or dumping of waste products, herbicide and nutrient application close to ditches, scrub removal in the bird breeding season, etc.



Much of the iconic Broads landscape has never been ploughed. Photo: James Bass

Grazing marsh and river valley grassland (Broads Landscape Tier)

Open, extensively-managed, winter-wet grassland in the floodplain, with healthy ditches and watercourses.



Halvergate Marshes is at the centre of seven river valley grass marsh landscapes. Photo: Mike Page

Aims/outcomes

- Open grassland with low scrub cover.
- Varied sward height and structure. Some uncut/'untidy' areas, particularly next to woodland/scrub.
- Water levels sufficient for ditches to act as 'wet fences'.
- Open, unshaded ditches with good water quality, supporting a range of aquatic plants, fish and invertebrates.
- Low cover of injurious weeds and nettles.
- No more than moderate cover of soft and hard rush (non-jointed rushes).
- Wet conditions over winter.
- Open landscape: ditches unfenced where practical, gates with wings.
- Invasive non-native plant species are absent or rare, e.g. Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, *Crassula helmsii*.
- If SSSI, achieving or working towards favourable condition status.



Ditches are home to rare water plants such as water soldier. Photo: Katherine Trehane

Likely interventions

- Restricted use of artificial fertiliser and manures (80-90kg N/ha? - only where cut for hay?). Buffer ditches.*
- Management by grazing and/or cutting.
- Ditch maintenance on a 3 to 8 year rotation, during autumn/winter, leaving one bank (or other sections) untouched. Follow a ditch management plan – reviewed annually / as required.
- Scrub / tree management along ditches and watercourses.

**Alternatively, we could say 'no fertilisers and manures' and set payment rates accordingly to compensate for reduced yields.*

Supplement for enhanced management

Reduced inputs and higher water levels to enhance water quality, ditches and grassland habitats.

Likely interventions

- No application of fertilisers or manures.
- Water levels no more than 45cm below marsh level throughout the year.
- Follow an alternative worming strategy, avoiding the use of avermectins while cattle are on the marsh (see veterinary advice on page 17).

NOTE: Some farmers have major concerns about the practicalities of this. Needs further work before we make this a scheme requirement.

Wet grassland (Broads Habitat Tier)

Specific management for over-wintering waders and wildfowl, and species-rich wet grassland habitats.



Fen meadows on peat soils support over 400 plant species, including orchids. Photo: Andrea Kelly

Aims/outcomes

- Open grassland with [zero/less than 5%] in-field scrub cover.
- A suitable sward height for the target plant/bird species.
- Water levels no lower than 30cm below marsh level during the summer, and high enough to provide over [10/20%] standing water on clay marshes through the winter months (managed water levels).
- High cover of wildflowers on peat soils; plants allowed to flower during the summer.
- Waders and wildfowl are feeding and/or roosting.
- Open, unshaded ditches with good water quality, supporting a range of aquatic plants, fish and invertebrates.
- Less than 5% cover of injurious weeds and nettles, and less than 20% cover of soft and hard rush (non-jointed rushes).
- Open landscape: ditches unfenced (where practical), gates with wings.
- Invasive non-native plant species are absent e.g. Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, *Crassula helmsii*.
- If SSSI, achieving or working towards favourable condition status.



Wintering birds, such as pochard, provide a Broads wildlife spectacle. Photo: Nick Upton/2020Vision

Likely interventions

- Management by grazing with cattle/ sheep OR
- Cutting and removal after 30th June (15th July for species-rich fields). Aftermath grazing.
- Low stock numbers (preferably cattle) on species-rich peat marshes in spring/early summer to allow plants to flower.
- No application of fertilisers or manures.
- Cutting, flail topping or weed wiping of dense rushes.
- Late-season topping/more intensive grazing if needed to achieve the target sward height.
- Ditch maintenance on a 3 to 8 year rotation, during autumn/winter, leaving one bank or other sections untouched. Follow a ditch management plan – reviewed annually/as required.
- Active water level management and/or allowing seasonal inundation.
- Restricted recreational activities, including wildfowling, to reduce disturbance. [*No wildfowling at all? Supplementary payment?*]
- Scrub/tree management along ditches and watercourses.
- Follow an alternative worming strategy, avoiding the use of avermectins while cattle are on the marsh (see veterinary advice on page 17).

NOTE: Outcomes and interventions aimed at breeding waders would be covered by adding the appropriate supplement.

Breeding wader supplement (Broads Habitat Tier)

A supplement on the 'wet grassland' option, providing specific management for breeding waders. *Could be subject to a minimum area threshold – land managers could collaborate with neighbours to achieve this.*



Lapwing breed on the marshes and overwinter in their thousands. Photo: Ian Robinson

Aims/outcomes

(Additional to the wet grassland outcomes, or superseding them where breeding wader outcomes are more demanding.)

- Open grassland with no scrub cover.
- Short swards in spring – average of 5-15cm in April and May, but with some tussocks for redshank nests.
- Footdrains, scrapes and low areas are reliably wet/muddy through June and into early July.
- Waders are nesting and successfully fledging chicks.
- Less than 10% cover of soft and hard rush (non-jointed rushes).



Footdrains provide young chicks with invertebrate food. Photo: Katherine Trehane

NOTE: Lapwing and redshank are the main breeding species. Interventions and outcomes would need to be adapted for breeding snipe.

Likely interventions

(Additional to the wet grassland interventions, or superseding them where breeding wader management is more demanding.)

- Management by grazing with cattle from April/May and cattle or sheep from July. Fields must not be shut up for hay/silage.
- Grazing with low numbers of calm cattle while nests are present, to reduce the risk of trampling (as a guide, 0.75-1 LU/ha from April – June).
- No mechanical operations 15th March – 15th July.
- Weed wiping of dense rushes.
- Late-season topping or intensive grazing if needed to achieve short swards in spring.
- Manage water levels to provide flooded in-field features (Feb to May) and allow gradual draw down (May to July).
- Maintenance of scrapes and footdrains. Follow a maintenance plan – reviewed annually/as required.
- Conduct a breeding wader survey every spring.
- Follow a predator management strategy to improve breeding success (opportunity for collaboration).
- Attend a 'knowledge-sharing/best practice' event annually with other land managers doing this option.

Management of fens and reedbeds (Broads Habitat Tier)

Open reedbed, fen and fen meadow with patchy, scattered scrub and healthy ditches and watercourses.



Mosaic of sustainably managed species rich fen and reedbeds are a hotspot for rarities such as the swallowtail butterfly. Photo: Mike Page

Aims/outcomes*

- Diverse range of wetland plant species.
- Less than 5% cover of undesirable species, such as nettles and brambles.
- Invasive non-native plant species are absent e.g. Himalayan balsam, *Crassula helmsii*.
- Suitable hydrological conditions for the plant communities present (site specific).
- Scattered scrub within the fen (no more than 5% cover) and/or in blocks around the edges providing habitat for birds and invertebrates.
- 'Soft edge' or 'ecotone' e.g. scrub with varied age structure on fen edge grading into wet woodland.
- Ditches with good water quality, supporting a range of aquatic plants, fish and invertebrates.
- Open water (from shallow pools to deeper areas providing feeding habitat for species such as bittern).
- If SSSI, achieving or working towards favourable condition status.

* Adding the cutting or grazing supplements will help land managers achieve these outcomes.

Bittern need large areas with some cut reeds and open water for feeding. Photo: Jackie Dent

Likely interventions

(Cutting or grazing would be covered by the relevant supplement.)

- Scrub removal in winter to maintain the target scrub levels.
- Rotational management of scrub edge.
- Disposal of arisings off the fen or by sensitive burning.
- Naturally-functioning hydrological conditions are generally preferred but water level management may be required in some circumstances.
- Do not allow poor quality water (definition needed) to empty into fens and reedbeds, where this is within the control of the landowner.
- Follow a ditch/dyke maintenance plan, agreed in liaison with your SSSI/scheme adviser and any commercial cutters operating on the site.
- Rotational management of pools.
- Possible management of terrestrial predators (particularly mink), to protect ground-nesting birds and water vole.



Wetland cutting supplement (Broads Habitat Tier)

A supplement on the 'Management of reedbeds and fens' option, facilitating the cutting of fen/reedbed vegetation on a suitable rotation.



Sedge beds are excellent for wildlife and provide a local product that captures carbon. Photo: Tom Barrett

Outcomes

(Additional to 'Management of reedbeds and fens' outcomes, or superseding them where the cutting supplement outcomes are more demanding.)

- Varied habitat structure – areas of shorter and taller vegetation, and tussocks present.
- Diverse plant communities and rare/uncommon species associated with regularly cut fen vegetation.
- Habitat for ground nesting birds in cut areas (e.g. bittern, crane, marsh harrier).
- Low cover/depth of litter.
- Low frequency of common reed in fen meadows.
- Fen meadow vegetation typically less than 0.5m high.



Cranes are secretive birds which are easily disturbed, they feed their young in the cut areas created by reed cutters. Photo: Nick Upton

Likely interventions

(Additional to 'Management of reedbeds and fens' interventions)

- Follow a cutting plan agreed in liaison with your SSSI/scheme adviser and cutter(s) – the timing of cutting may need to be reviewed annually based on the location of nesting birds.
- Harvesting of reed and sedge where desirable and practical. Alternatively, the reuse or disposal of arisings off the fen or by sensitive burning.



Photo: Julian Claxton

Wetland grazing supplement (Broads Habitat Tier)

A supplement on the 'Management of reedbeds and fens' option, facilitating the grazing of fens and reedbeds.



Hardy breeds of cows or ponies prevent trees and scrub taking over reedbeds. Photo: Katherine Trehane

Outcomes

(Additional to 'Management of reedbeds and fens' outcomes, or superseding them where the grazing supplement outcomes are more demanding)

- Varied habitat structure – areas of shorter and taller vegetation, and tussocks present.
- Diverse plant communities and rare/uncommon species associated with regularly grazed fen vegetation.
- Low cover of litter.
- Low frequency of common reed in fen meadows.
- Fen meadow vegetation typically less than 0.5m high.



Foraging of cattle in fen and reedbed create interesting places for wildlife.

Photo: David Tipling/2020Vision

Likely interventions

(Additional to 'Management of reedbeds and fens' interventions)

- Extensive grazing – timings and stocking rates likely to be site specific owing to differing habitat needs. Commercial sedge beds should not be grazed.
- Follow an alternative worming strategy, avoiding the use of avermectins while cattle are on the fens and reedbeds.



Swallowtail caterpillar relies on the rare milk parsley plant. Photo: Tom Barrett

Conservation grazing or Difficult sites supplement (Broads Habitat Tier)

Supplement for grazing/managing particularly difficult sites (e.g. inaccessible sites, sward has very poor nutritional value, very limited grazing period, etc.). *Could be subject to a grazing management plan which sets out the outcomes (required sward height, structure, etc.). Payments are only made if these are achieved.*



Some wetland sites are difficult to graze, but the benefits for wildlife and low carbon management are significant. Photo: James Bass

Capital items (available in all Tiers)

Payments for specific capital works to facilitate habitat management and upgrades through the Tiers. Available throughout the agreement term, as 2-3 year Capital Works Plans.

Should include ditch creation/restoration, creating in-channel features/meanders, water control structures, wind pumps, invasive species control (e.g. mink rafts; control of invasive plant species), creation of footdrains and scrapes, ponds (not limited to max. 1ha), livestock management infrastructure, anti-predator fencing, scrub and tree removal, feasibility studies/implementation plans (including Water Level Management Plans), reed and sedgebed 'restoration cutting', purchase of specialist equipment, specialist training (e.g. reed cutting apprenticeships), infrastructure to enable reed/sedge harvesting (e.g. tracks and covered dressing areas), technical innovations (e.g. invisible fencing / GPS collars for livestock, GPS trackers to aid monitoring).

Capital items should only be available as part of a wider agreement, unless a contractor is applying for equipment to use on multiple Broads sites, e.g. grants for reed cutting equipment.*

There should be a requirement to sign up for ongoing maintenance of a habitat following restoration (e.g. after clearing scrub or creating a pond).

Could fund the replacement of existing structures where they have reached the end of their life, e.g. culverts, fences? (Notwithstanding the requirement to maintain capital items.)

Collaboration

Potential for a collaborative approach to capital items / contracted-in services. Collaboration bonus for buying specialist equipment as a collective and sharing use?

*Other grant schemes

Reed and sedge cutters should be eligible for grants to buy equipment needed to carry out commercial and conservation cutting. New entrants into farming may need capital funding for items like cattle crushes. These aspects may fit better in the Productivity Scheme than the ELM scheme.

Creation of grassland habitats (Creation and Innovation)

Reversion from arable to one of the grassland options. Could be a phased process, reverting to Landscape Tier grassland first, followed by upgrades to Habitat Tier at a later date.



Grassland farming can provide greater environmental services than arable farming. Photo: Julian Claxton

Outcomes

- As per the grassland habitat options.
- Where reverting to basic grazing marsh/ river valley grassland, the addition of legumes/wildflowers (UK provenance) to the sward will increase benefits for invertebrates and associated species.
- Water levels can be held higher, potentially at a landscape scale, with associated benefits for waders and wildfowl.



Creation of wet areas, such as marsh footdrains, scrapes and ponds attract wildlife and store water. Photo: Kevin Simmonds

Likely interventions

- Amelioration of any compaction issues.
- Establishment of grass/wildflower sward (exact components and method will depend on the soil type, target habitat, intended management, etc.).
- Regular topping in first/second growing season (or more intensive grazing).
- Development of water level management plan (capital item) and liaison with neighbours, and IDB/EA (where proposing to raise water levels).

May require a feasibility study/implementation plan which could be covered by a capital item. Please assume that ditch works, water control structures, livestock infrastructure and creation of scrapes/footdrains would also be covered by separate capital funding.

Special projects (Creation and Innovation)

Innovative projects such as the creation of fen/reedbed/wet woodland, Natural Flood Management or 'Making Space for Water', river restoration, 're-wilding', catch dyke projects, turf pond creation.



Creation of reedbed helps capture carbon, filter water and provide habitat for species such as swallowtail butterflies, bittern and crane. Photo: Peter Han

Would need to be supported by feasibility studies/implementation plans and other capital items.

Applicants would be expected to put forward a detailed proposal and costings for consideration by the local delivery board or funding body.

Funding from other sources, such as water and carbon storage funds, could be blended in with the ELM scheme funding.



Broads partnership projects create large areas of freshwater wetlands that provide multiple public benefits by storing water and carbon, providing wildlife habitat and wonderful places to visit.

Photo: Mike Page



Additional areas for swallowtail butterflies are needed if the species is to be resilient to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise.

Photo: Jackie Dent

Restricted use of avermectin-based wormers

– discussion with Ben Crowter (Westover Vets) 16/03/2020

Notes taken by Katherine Trehane

Cattle

Ben believes that it is extremely simple to follow a worming regime which avoids the use of avermectins while cattle are out on the marshes. It shouldn't be necessary to give a worming treatment in the summer within extensive grazing operations. Obviously there will be exceptions but he finds this to be true the vast majority of the time.

Reducing the use of wormers is important for the responsible use of medications, quite apart from environmental reasons. Farmers should be monitoring (faecal egg counts) and only treating where necessary.

The alternatives to avermectins are, by and large, just as effective, but susceptibility profiles are spatially variable. There is very little resistance to worming products in cattle parasites. Flukicides are not avermectin-based and some will kill round worms.

The alternatives to avermectins are often cheaper as they are more old-fashioned. However, they are always oral treatments, so the labour cost in administering these may be higher than for pour on products.

Sheep

Avoiding avermectins is much more difficult for sheep. They are much more susceptible to round worms and spread their droppings around more, so exposure is higher. Smaller animals – worms have a greater impact.

Wormer overuse has led to increased resistance to multiple classes of product, making it very difficult to restrict avermectin use.

Are avermectins really a problem?

Apart from the comment about responsible use of medications, it is very commonly observed that dung doesn't decompose after animals have been wormed. The dung is either toxic to invertebrates or somehow unpalatable to them. Regardless, there must be an impact on invertebrate populations. Ben doesn't know how long the effects of avermectins last in the dung.

He commented that administering avermectins by injection, instead of pour-on products, could reduce the environmental impact of avermectins and is a much more efficient way to use them. The concentration of the product in pour-on products is 5 times that of injections, implying that 4 out of 5 molecules do not make it into the body of the animal and could be washed off. The product is lethal to bugs on the body of the animal when it is applied, so is probably lethal to invertebrates on the ground as well.

We probably need to look at existing research on the impact of avermectins on invertebrate fauna, and possibly carry out some specific research to see if they have any knock-on impacts on birds, before we implement avermectin restrictions as a scheme requirement.