

Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme  
BROADS TEST AND TRIAL

# Summary Action Plan



October 2020

This is an action plan drawn from the Broads Test and Trial commissioned to inform Defra's development of the Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme. Supporting reports are available on the Broads Authority's website at [www.broads-authority.gov.uk/looking-after/projects/environment-land-management-system](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/looking-after/projects/environment-land-management-system)

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The Broads farmers and land managers are creating an extensive wildlife-rich landscape, shaped by grazing and reedcutting, and in turn they need an economically sustainable prospect when enhancing the environment.

Photo: Tom Mackie

## Introduction

This is an action plan drawn from the Broads Test and Trial commissioned to inform Defra's development of the Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme. The actions in the plan point to the further work that can be undertaken in an extension to the Defra Test and Trial and how that could shape a Broads ELM pilot which in turn would then inform the final ELM scheme in the Broads.

The work of the Test and Trial has highlighted much common ground between farmers, landowners and other stakeholders, developing simple tiered support with advice at the front and centre of the scheme. This work has shaped this action plan but also points towards the possibility of agreeing a wider vision and shared objectives for the Broads. These need to be debated and consulted on further. The draft vision included here does not stem directly from the Test and Trial discussions, but is inferred from them, and is included here to start that dialogue.

## Land management innovation in the Broads

The Broads area has a long history of stimulating innovation and productivity in environmental land management, including:

- Introducing the Broads Grazing Marsh Conservation Scheme, the forerunner of the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme
- Leading on lowland wet grassland management for wintering and breeding birds and specialist and sustainable fen management
- Creating new wetland sites by managing water and pioneering wetland farming
- A wealth of natural capital information and maps, including biodiversity, carbon and water opportunity mapping



Farmers in the mid 1980s - the beginning of the Broads Grazing Marsh Conservation Scheme.

Photo: Richard Denyer



Fen harvester provides large-scale solution to long rotation cutting for wetland biodiversity.

Photo: Broads Authority

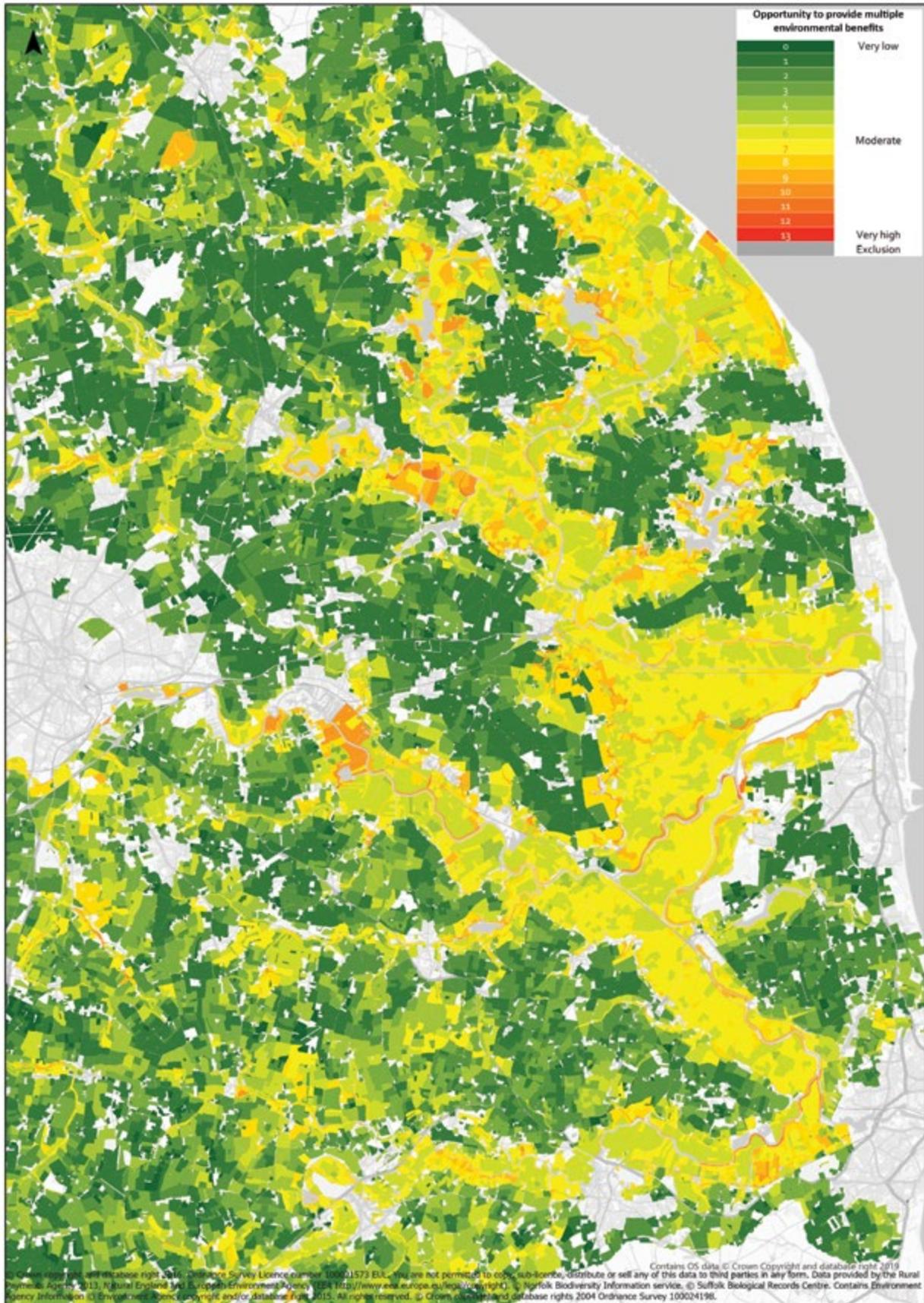


Buttle Marsh is one of the Broads new wetland creation sites where rare species are thriving.

Photo: Mike Page

### Figure 1 Map showing opportunity to provide multiple environmental benefits

(Source: Broadland Catchment Partnership)



# The Broads Test and Trial

During the ELM scheme Test and Trial, we have to date connected with nearly 300 farmers and land managers from the Broads and surrounding wildlife-rich river valleys. Over 60 attended the initial workshop and 77 people responded to an online survey, most of them farmers. We are also working with a steering group of six farmers, the NFU, reed cutters and all the major conservation organisations. This collaboration has helped inform proposed actions for Defra towards a future Broads Land Management Board as set out in the next section.



Farmers and land managers are discussing plans to enhance the public benefits that the Broads provides and at the same time they are at the forefront of the need to adapt to climate change and rising sea level.

Photo: Broads Authority

## A Broads scheme

*Mechanisms that support a simple tiered scheme, with specialist advice empowering and providing consistency of approach through the landscape that is protected by appropriate payments and monitoring and verification.*

The local approach has taken the form of a Broads Tier structure in response to a desire from the majority of workshop attendees and our steering group for a simple, flexible, tiered scheme which incorporates the best bits from previous agri-environment schemes, whilst addressing areas for improvement highlighted in the workshop.

### Broads advice

Good advice is key to the delivery of good outcomes. Our discussions with farmers and land managers confirmed that they would expect the scheme to pay for and provide advice to applicants and for the lifetime

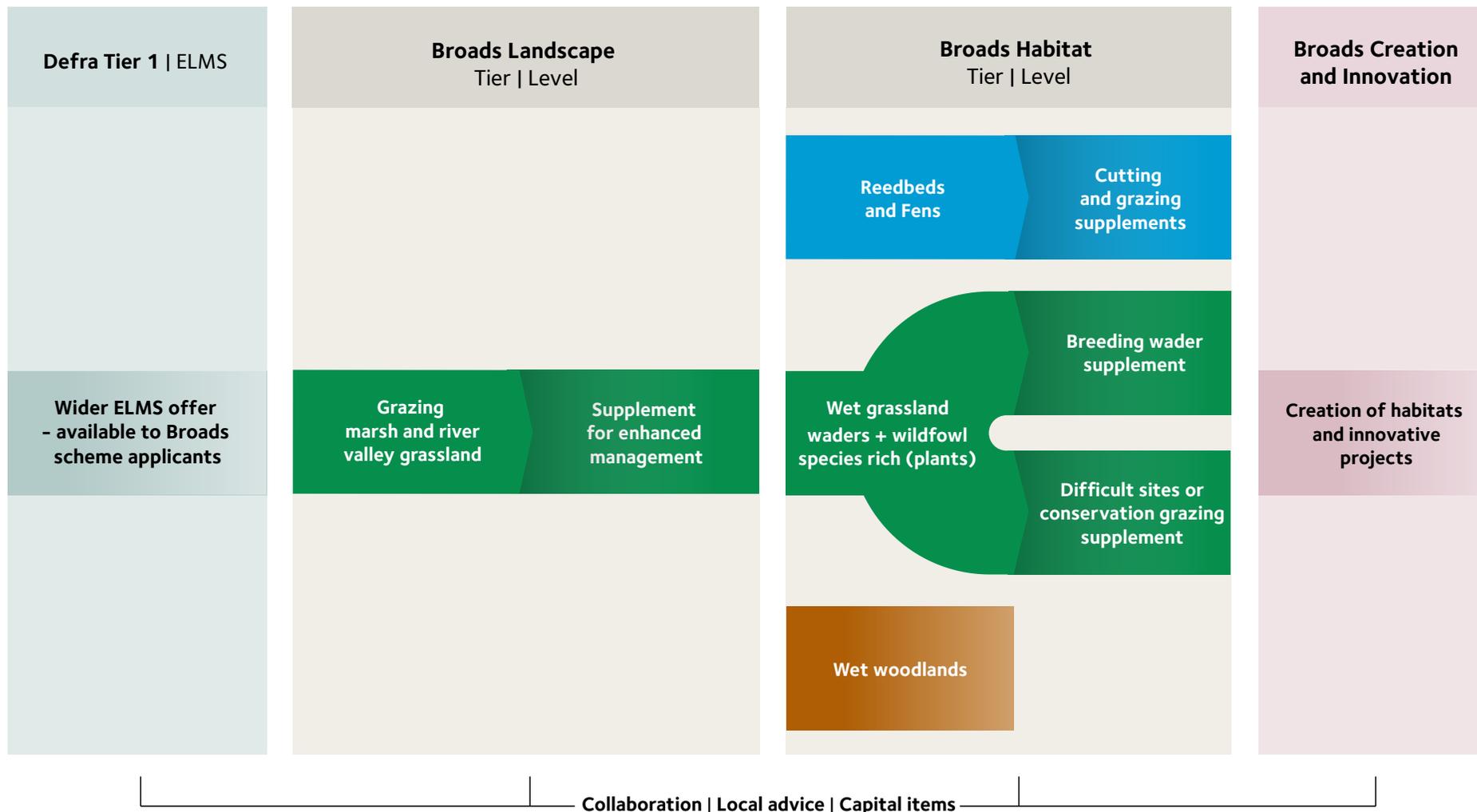
of an agreement. It was considered that a scheme will deliver the greatest environmental benefits where it is initially co-designed with an adviser or project officer who is then able to make periodic pro-active management visits to ensure the scheme is delivering its full potential.

### Broads Tier Structure

A tier structure (see page 7), developed with around 40 Broads farmers and land managers, sets out a simple structure for managing priority grazing marsh, fen and reedbed habitats.

This structure describes options that, if followed, will result in the achievement of public goods. A number of entry points allow varying levels of environmental benefits to be achieved. Management that delivers the greatest benefits, such as wildlife-rich marshes, will receive the highest payments.

Figure 2 **Tier Structure - overview**



The Tiers offer flexibility to make changes during the lifetime of an agreement, with advice and support available from knowledgeable local advisers.

## Payments

We have taken initial steps to develop costed 'grazing budgets' which demonstrate how extensive grassland management, which delivers public goods on grazing marsh habitats, compares financially to high-output systems. These cost ranges are locally derived and inform the payment rates needed to achieve the outcomes.

## Monitoring and verification

We have explored self-assessment and conclude that it is a useful tool to increase land manager understanding and achievement of outcomes, but further work is required if self-assessment is to be used for the official monitoring and setting of payment rates for complex and variable habitats, such as wetlands.

## Collaboration

*Examination of mechanisms that would encourage collaboration between farmers and land managers to deliver outcomes at a landscape scale.*

The long history of Broads agri-environment schemes and the Broads Test and Trial project have helped to build trusted relationships and local mechanisms that would secure and enhance environmental benefits for society.

We have discussed farmer and land manager led collaboration plans, based on identifying common goals or topics. We have a wealth of natural capital information about existing environmental benefits on the farm and adjoining land (see Figure 1). The environmental benefits information and collaboration plans could be combined as a basis for coordinated action across land holdings or supply chains.

This type of coordination encourages 'bigger, better and more joined-up nature'. Our farmer and land manager survey showed respondents considered that they would be collaborating more through management under the ELM scheme (45% current collaboration to 85% over a range of topics).

## Implementation – A local board

*Examination of the potential for local governance mechanisms to oversee the delivery of outcomes across the Broads geographic area.*

To support people collaborating across the Broads landscape to achieve environmental improvements, there is support to form a management board of active land managers and their advisers. The board's role will be shaped by the members and possible delivery bodies, but could also include linking to local/regional convenors, plans and initiatives such as Local Nature Recovery Networks and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The board's agenda would include responding to member suggestions, developing local priorities and supporting farmers and land managers to achieve the objectives of the ELM scheme in the Broads.

The Local Management Board should include farmers, land managers, conservation organisations and advisers. It should have oversight of a well-resourced, local and trusted project officer-based advice provision for the initial and ongoing support of applications and agreements. It also has a role to develop a coordinated private market place for advice provision that enables the supported co-design of a scheme, followed by ongoing pro-active management advice.



Farmers and land managers want to collaborate, supported by environmental experts to design systems around benefiting the environment.

Photo: Bill Smith

## 12-month Action Plan

This action plan is drawn from the Broads Test and Trial to inform the Defra's development of the Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme.

The Broads Steering Group supports the further co-delivery of ELM scheme development with Defra:

- A Broads pilot using the locally developed Broads Tier Structure
- Assess costs for fen management to inform Defra's and Natural England's payment evidence base
- Develop proposals for the better support of reed and sedge cutters and graziers
- To provide a well-resourced, local and trusted project officer-based advice provision for the initial and ongoing support of applications and agreements, with a mechanism to make ongoing alterations to a scheme to meet the desired objectives.
- To develop a coordinated private market place, alongside funding body provided advice, for advice provision that enables the supported co-design of a scheme, followed by ongoing pro-active management advice and a mechanism to make ongoing alterations to a scheme to meet the desired objectives. Mechanisms need to be developed for this advice to dovetail with local advisers provided by the funding body.
- Further develop payment mechanisms for collaborative working to include the concept of splitting collaboration payments into two elements with the payment of one element held until the delivery of longer-term objectives.

- Self-assessment of outcomes for wetland habitats
- Initiate national-level discussions on the following topics which can impact on the delivery of ELM scheme objectives in the Broads and elsewhere:
  - Sustainable use of water resources for farming and nature conservation
  - Expand sustainable wetland crops, such as thatching reed to develop green growth
  - Sustainable wildfowling
  - Predator control

The Broads Steering Group welcomes extending the Broads Test and Trial, with Defra, to do the following:

- Explore how a local Land Management Board could play a role in prioritisation, coordinated advice provision, monitoring and verification, and collaboration
- Develop collaboration plans
- Develop the concept of knowledge exchange sessions as a requirement for specific options, such as breeding waders
- Develop a 'Nature Management Points' scheme to increase the environmental management skills of scheme participants and their advisers
- Develop a Broads pilot building on the above and using the locally developed Broads Tier Structure

Norfolk Hawker Photo: Maurice Funnell



Figure 3 **Public goods** (Source: Broads Plan)

The higher tiers, such as Tier three ‘habitat creation’ result in additional benefits over and above those provided by the maintenance of existing habitats. Examples include halting ploughing and rewetting peat capturing more carbon over the longer term, improved water quality through reedbed filtration, preventing flooding and creating better habitats for species.



Grazing marsh and arable land, reed and sedge and woodland produce food and fibre including high quality beef, sustainable local thatching products and potentially new products such as reedmace for construction

Clean, fresh water supports landscapes, biodiversity, industry and local communities

Iconic, open, pastoral landscape, supporting low intensity, grass-fed beef and lamb production

Grazing marsh, fen, meadow and field margins provide nectar sources for pollinators and habitats for pest eating species and low chemical inputs

Wet woodland has significant value for creating clean air and grazing marsh and fens promote clean air through low fertiliser inputs

Genetic diversity is conserved through native breed livestock

Wetlands, grasslands and coastal dunes provide natural protection from flooding and soil erosion

Living, working landscapes are shaped by and support farming, reed cutting and tourism

A mosaic of protected wetland and grassland habitats support diverse, rare and internationally important species, including wintering wildfowl and waders, rare plants in marsh ditches and iconic wetland species

Former medieval peat diggings (the ‘broads’), drainage mills and dykes reflect the historic character of the floodplain landscape

Undrained fen peatland and uncultivated soils on grazing marsh lock in huge amounts of carbon, supporting climate regulation and promoting good soil health

Outdoor recreation and experiencing a ‘wild’ and nature-rich environment, offer a breathing space for health, wellbeing and learning

As part of a global network of protected landscapes, the Broads National Park can demonstrate how wetland resources can be managed sustainably for people and wildlife. This illustration gives examples of the Broads ecosystem and the public goods it provides.

Illustration: Ruth Murray

Footnote: More information about the natural and cultural features of the Broads landscape may be found in the National Character Area profile: 80. The Broads (<http://bit.ly/2mzZeNW>), Natural England, 2015 and in the Broads Landscape Character Assessment, BA, 2017

## A draft wider vision

The outputs of the Broads Test and Trial suggest that there is much agreement on the environmental and farming needs of the area. As a starter for discussion the following could form the basis of a vision for the Broads:

**The Broads and surrounding river valley wetlands are living, working landscapes where sustainable farming systems deliver a wide range of environmental public benefits including healthy grazing marshes, reedbeds and fens supporting a diverse range of species, with special attention to adapting landscapes and places to climate change and reversing biodiversity declines.**

**Farmers and land managers are fairly rewarded for providing these services, and the Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme is enabling them to be custodians of this landscape, harnessing their expertise so that the environment and cultural heritage are as much a part of their businesses as high-quality food and fibre production. Farming in the Broads is supporting jobs and growth in the broader rural and visitor economy.**

Photos: Tom Mackie, Tom Barrett, Karen Sayer, Jackie Dent, James Bass, Bill Smith



## Longer-term objectives

Similarly, the work to date could infer a set of longer-term objectives along the following lines:

1. We are working in collaboration to create local priorities by identifying communally agreed goals, natural capital and climate change mapping, and assessment of options and opportunities. Our priorities are to see:
  - Improvements in wetland habitats (fen, reedbed, wet woodland and grazing marsh) strengthening the core designated sites and enhancing connected networks
  - Improvements in carbon capture and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from soils
  - Sustainable production that is managing the landscape and creating local jobs, such as extensive, grass-fed beef and lamb and the reed and sedge industry
  - Management interventions that are achieving environmental benefits and things that markets do not pay for, such as wildlife, carbon capture, clean water and beautiful views
2. Networking, skills and data-sharing are creating working collaborations between businesses and along supply chains. ELM payments are incentivising management of environmentally beneficial land use, alongside capital grants to pay for conservation work. These payments may be locally agreed in accordance with local and national priorities
3. A simple, local reporting process is in place to monitor, record and report progress on key interventions (such as fen cutting), and to help avoid problems and identify corrective action
4. Nature Recovery and resilient water management solutions are in place to address climate, water and population challenges
5. We are demonstrating how nature, food and fibre production work together
6. The ELM scheme is linked to initiatives that encourage responsible recreational use of the countryside for public health and wellbeing

