

## Countryside Stewardship priorities for the Thames Basin Heaths

### Choosing priorities

Countryside Stewardship is a competitive scheme and funding is limited. Not all eligible applicants will be offered a grant. This guide will help applicants choose the options that will increase their chance of success.

Countryside Stewardship applications are scored - both top priorities and other priorities (listed in the boxes below) score points. Applicants should select at least one top priority. Choosing other priorities will improve an application's score.

#### Top priorities

Priority group	Priority type
<a href="#">Biodiversity</a>	Priority habitats
	Priority species
<a href="#">Water</a>	Water quality
	Flood and coastal risk management
<a href="#">Historic environment</a>	Designated historic and archaeological features
	Undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance
<a href="#">Woodland</a>	Woodland management
	Woodland planting
<a href="#">Landscape</a>	
<a href="#">Multiple environmental benefits</a>	

#### Other priorities

Priority group	Priority type
<a href="#">Other priorities</a>	Water quality
	Archaeological and historic features
	Woodland
	Climate change

## Biodiversity - top priorities

### Priority habitats

Applicants should choose land management options and capital works that maintain, restore and create priority habitats and support priority species that depend on these habitats.

Priority habitats to be maintained include:

- lowland heathland
- lowland fen
- lowland acid grassland
- ancient and native woodland
- wood pasture and parkland with veteran trees
- purple moor-grass and rush pasture
- riparian habitats associated with priority rivers and lakes
- arable field margins

Priority habitats (especially projects to enlarge existing sites or help join up habitat networks) to be restored include:

- lowland heathland
- lowland fen
- lowland acid grassland
- ancient and native woodland
- wood pasture and parkland with veteran trees
- purple moor-grass and rush pasture
- riparian habitats associated with priority rivers and lakes

Priority habitat creation to extend or link priority habitat to increase connectivity and reduce fragmentation. In particular, create priority habitat that will also contribute significantly to improvements in:

- water quality
- air quality
- flood and coastal risk management

### **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

Restore or maintain SSSIs that include features eligible for options – this includes options that will reduce diffuse water and air pollution effects.

### **Priority species**

Managing priority habitats will create the habitat needs for many of the priority species associated with this area. In particular by providing such essential elements as bare ground, areas of scrub and varied sward structures which will help these species thrive.

This area also has a number of priority species that need tailored management and advice. Applicants should choose land management options and capital works that meet the specific needs of the following priority species:

- corn bunting
- lapwing
- turtle dove
- willow tit
- window winged sedge
- starved wood-sedge
- green hound's-tongue
- deptford pink
- Bechstein's bat

### **Woodland bird assemblage**

Parts of this area are targeted for their variety of woodland birds. Natural England has assessed the area as being nationally significant where 4 or more of the following species occur:

- lesser spotted woodpecker
- tree pipit
- redstart

- pied flycatcher
- spotted flycatcher
- wood warbler
- marsh tit
- lesser redpoll
- hawfinch

In these areas applicants should choose land management options and capital works that maintain or enhance conditions for woodland birds.

### **Arable plant assemblage**

This area has cultivated land that may contain nationally threatened and declining populations of arable plants. The correct management of these areas will help these species thrive and help their populations increase.

### **The Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package**

This package is a collection of scheme options that benefit wild pollinators, farmland birds (such as grey partridge, tree sparrow and yellowhammer) and other farm wildlife (such as arable plants, great crested newt, bats and brown hare).

The package is voluntary, but an application will have a greater chance of success if options from the package are chosen.

The options provide the essential resources (especially year-round food, shelter and nesting places) that wild pollinators, birds and farm wildlife need to survive and reproduce. These include:

- sowing nectar flower mixes
- increasing flowers on grassland
- sowing winter bird food mixes
- managing hedgerows and other key farm habitats (like ponds and ditches)

### **Mid-Tier**

Applicants can choose from groups of options for different farm-types – arable, mixed or pastoral. Typically, the options should be applied over a minimum of 3% to 5% of the farmed land on the holding.

## Higher Tier

An application will have a greater chance of success if the holding has already helped wildlife thrive under previous schemes. For example, where a Higher Level Stewardship agreement is coming to an end, and from other areas where priority farmland species are present.

Applicants can choose from similar groups of options, tailored to their holding, in consultation with a Natural England adviser. Typically, the options will cover a minimum of 5% to 10% of farmed land to target a broader range of farmland species and habitats

Applying the right combination of these options over at least 3% of the farmed land or a holding will bring benefits to farm wildlife.

# Water - top priorities

## Water quality

Applicants should consider options and capital works in the water quality options table that address:

- phosphate, nitrate, sediment and pesticides in the Loddon and Kennet catchments
- phosphate, sediment and pesticides in the Lower Thames catchment

This includes:

- groundwater drinking water sources near Bradfield and west of Streatley affected by nitrate
- surface water drinking water sources from the Kennet and Thames (Cookham to Egham) affected by pesticides.
- the Kennet and Lambourn and associated floodplain affected by phosphate and sediment

These options help improve water quality by controlling the source or the movement of potential pollutants, including:

- nutrients from fertilisers, manures and organic materials
- sediment from soil erosion and run-off
- pesticides from their use and disposal

## Flood and Coastal Risk Management

An application will have a greater chance of success if applicants select options for flood and coastal risk issues in the priority areas of:

Within the Wey catchment:

- the Bromley Green Stream Catchments: upstream area north of Bramley (north of the Street) and west of the railway line and east of Bramley Firth Wood
- Merrow Common Brook Catchment: upstream area west of Guildford and Burpham and north of the Epsom Road (A25/A246) and the area west of the West Clandon Stream

Within the River Loddon catchment:

- Castle Bottom Stream Catchments: upstream area south of Eversley Cross
- Catsby Stream, Dungells Stream, Tudor Stream and Cricket Hill Stream catchments: upstream areas south and west of Yateley
- Cypress Stream, Yateley Common Stream and Bailey Stream catchments: upstream areas south-west of Blackwater and north of the A30
- Sandylane Ditch and Fleet Brook catchments: upstream area south of Church Crookham and land south of Redfields lane and Sandy Lane
- Mill Bourne catchment: upstream areas North-west of Bagshot, south-west of Bracknell Road and north-west of the A30
- the Lightwater Stream catchment: upstream areas located west and south of Lightwater and east of the B3015

Applicants should choose options from the flood risk table that:

- reduce the amount and rate of surface water run-off
- reduce soil erosion
- slow the movement of floodwaters on floodplains

## **Historic environment - top priorities**

### **Historic environment**

Applicants should choose active management which ensures the long-term survival of historic environment features and protects them against damage and decay. In particular some of the biggest land management threats in this area are from:

- arable cultivation
- scrub and tree growth

The following features are a high priority for active management in this area:

- designated features - archaeological features of national significance (Scheduled Monuments), Registered Parks and Gardens (RPG) and Registered Battlefields (RB)
- designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings and non-domestic historic buildings on holdings
- undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance which are part of the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE)

Applicants should consider options and capital works to:

- revert archaeological sites under cultivation to permanent grass
- reduce damaging cultivation and harvesting practices through minimum tillage or direct drilling where this provides a suitable level of protection
- remove scrub and bracken from archaeological or historic features
- maintain below-ground archaeology under permanent uncultivated vegetation or actively manage earthworks, standing stones and structures as visible 'above ground' features
- maintain and restore historic water management systems, including those associated with water meadows and designed water bodies
- restore historic buildings that are assessed as a priority in the area.
- maintain or restore Registered Parks and Gardens, including structures or features that contribute to the original design intentions or feel of the parkland or provide for their biodiversity and amenity value
- protect or enhance the condition of Registered Battlefields

## Woodland - top priorities

### Woodland management

Climate change, pests (such as deer and grey squirrels) and various diseases threaten woodland. Applicants' proposals will need to address such threats where present.

Certain types of woodland are a high priority for bringing into management, including:

- protected woodland – those designated for their national biodiversity value
- priority woodland habitat – other unmanaged broadleaved woodland
- priority species – target woodland within priority areas for woodland priority species

- planted ancient woodland site (PAWS) restoration – conversion of conifer plantations on ancient woodland sites to broadleaf woodland within priority woodland habitat networks
- United Kingdom Forestry Standard – unmanaged conifer woodland within catchments subject to eutrophication and acidification, both to reduce pressures on the water environment and improve biodiversity

All management should comply with the United Kingdom Forestry Standard and other relevant guidance such as [‘Managing ancient and native woodland in England’](#).

### **Woodland planting**

High priority objectives for new woodland planting include:

- biodiversity – planting to buffer and link existing woodlands and other semi-natural open habitats within priority woodland habitat networks
- water quality – planting designed to reduce and intercept diffuse pollution from agriculture
- flood risk – planting designed to increase infiltration of heavy rain into the ground, reduce erosion, or slow the flow of floodwaters on floodplains

## **Landscape**

Each application is likely to include a range of landscape features whose restoration should form an important part of agreements. Top priority in the area is the maintenance and restoration of features that will enhance the pattern and scale of the landscape and add to the area’s ‘sense of place’.

Top priorities in this area for landscape are:

- hedgerows
- hedgerow trees
- in-field trees
- permanent pasture
- bankside trees

## **Multiple environmental benefits**

Applicants should look to provide for multiple priorities by selecting options that achieve multiple environmental benefits.

In this area, the greatest opportunity to achieve multiple objectives is by:

- restoring historic parkland around Eversley, Pamber, Bagshot and Windsor Forest, reinstating a range of semi-natural habitats including low-input grassland, heathland and traditional field boundaries and conserving in-field trees, in locations where this will benefit biodiversity, landscape character, soil quality, water quality, groundwater resource, flood risk and the historic environment
- restoring historic water meadows and creating areas of reedbed, lowland meadow and wet-woodland habitat within the Kennet, Loddon, Blackwater and Wey catchments, with a particular focus around the Kennet SAC, in situations where this will benefit biodiversity, landscape quality, water quality, pollinating insects and flood risk management
- creating new buffer strips, beetle banks and flower-rich field margins on the valley sides of the Loddon, Wey and Kennet catchments in situations where this will reduce rates of surface runoff, reduce soil erosion and benefit pollinating insects, biodiversity and flood risk management
- establishing swales, sediment traps, buffer strips and erosion control in the Loddon and Kennet catchments in situations where this will enhance the existing biodiversity and be of benefit to both water quality and flood risk management
- enhancing existing woodlands and expanding woodland cover in locations where well managed woodland can benefit landscape character, biodiversity, water quality and flood risk, in addition to wider climate change, economic and social benefits - key locations include:
  - the catchments of the rivers Kennet, Loddon, Blackwater and Wey
  - the area to the north of Basingstoke
  - the ancient woodland associated with historic parkland

## Other priorities

Applicants should select at least 1 of the top priorities. However, applicants can also select other priorities, as this will increase the score of the application.

### Water quality

Applicants should consider options and capital works in the water quality options table that address:

- pesticides in the Lower Mole and Rythe catchment
- sediment and pesticides in the Wey catchment

This includes:

- surface water drinking water sources from the Wey (Shalford to River Thames confluence at Weybridge) affected by pesticides

These options help improve water quality by controlling the source or the movement of potential pollutants.

### **Historic environment**

The following historic environment features are lower priorities:

- designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings
- undesignated SHINE features of medium and low significance
- priority undesignated historic parklands

### **Woodland Management**

Woodlands not included in the top priority categories listed above are a lower priority for management but may still be supported.

### **Woodland Planting**

Areas are prioritised for new planting based on their potential to create biodiversity and water benefits.

Woodland planting schemes are scored depending on where the proposed scheme is in relation to the opportunity maps for woodland planting in England and how well the planting design will benefit biodiversity and water.

Other priorities for appropriately designed biodiversity schemes exist across the whole of England. Opportunities for new woodland planting for water only exist in certain parts of England.

### **Climate change**

By choosing land management options and capital works which support the management of the vulnerable features and habitats listed in this statement, including where vulnerabilities are increased by climate change, applicants will support the resilience of biodiversity, water and other scheme priorities to the impacts of climate change, which is a cross-cutting objective of the scheme.

