

Countryside Stewardship priorities for the Northumberland Sandstone Hills

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
Biodiversity	Priority habitats
	Priority species
Water	Water quality
	Flood and coastal risk management
Historic environment	Designated historic and archaeological features
	Undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance
Woodland priorities	Woodland management
	Woodland planting
Landscape	
Multiple environmental benefits	

Other priorities

Priority group	Priority type
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Other priorities	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:

- purple moor grass and rush pasture
- upland heathland
- lowland fen
- upland calcareous grassland
- lowland raised bog
- blanket bog
- riparian habitat associated with priority rivers and lakes
- ancient and native woodland
- arable field margins

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

- purple moor grass and pasture
- lowland raised bog
- upland heathland
- lowland meadows
- blanket bog
- riparian habitat associated with priority rivers and lakes
- ancient and native woodland

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:

- twite
- curlew
- small pearl-bordered fritillary
- a protected aquatic species
- red squirrel
- juniper

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.

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:

- phosphates, nitrates and sediment in the Berwick to Alnmouth coastal area, Aln and Till catchments
- phosphates, nitrates and sediment in the Tweed river catchment
- sediment in the Wansbeck catchment
- faecal bacteria on land upstream of Spittal Bathing Water

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
- faecal bacteria from both manures and livestock

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 following priority areas:

- upstream of Waren Mill and Lucker
- Coplith Burn, to reduce flows in Rothbury

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:

- animal burrowing
- bracken, 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 – top priorities

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
- stone walls
- field margins and buffers

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:

- establishing new wetland habitat, including purple moor grass pastures within sub-catchments of the rivers Coquet and Till in locations where this will reduce rates of surface run-off and benefit water quality, biodiversity, landscape character and flood risk management
- managing moorlands to restore the ecology of blanket bog, wet heath and upland mire habitats, where this will benefit flood risk, carbon storage, water quality, biodiversity, drinking water resources and historic features
- establishing swales, sediment traps, buffer strips and erosion control in the Till and Coquet river catchments in locations where this will benefit water quality, biodiversity 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:
 - riparian zones within the Till and Coquet river catchments
 - juniper scrub woodland in Sandyford, Bewick & Beanley and Simonside moorland
- selecting capital options (such as fencing river banks and sediment traps) in the River Rede catchment both to protect protected aquatic species and to improve water quality

Other priorities

Applicants should select at least one 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:

- phosphate and nitrates in Wansbeck and Coquet Catchments

Historic environment

The following historic environment features are lower priorities:

- 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