

FUTURE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Summary: To present an update on the development of a post Brexit Agri-environment and Rural Development proposal.

Recommendation: That the report be noted.

Officer Ref: Mark Connelly, Land Management Officer (01451 862006)

Background

1. Leaving the European Union (EU) also means leaving the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). Following Brexit there will be the need for a new agriculture policy and whilst this presents many challenges it also presents an opportunity to design a policy tailored not only to England but also to the Cotswolds. It is generally accepted that the much criticised Pillar 1 Basic Payment Scheme will disappear and that agri-environment payments will need to demonstrate that they buy public goods.
2. There is a risk that the focus of future agri-environment could be on the upland areas and that lowland England, including the Cotswolds could lose out, particularly if the future budget is reduced. The NFU believe this will not be the case, but can we afford to take the chance?

Developing the proposal

3. The development of a proposal for the Cotswolds started last year when the first draft of the 2018 – 2023 Management Plan was being developed. The Current draft Management Plan has the ambition for a locally designed and delivered agri-environment scheme tailored to the Cotswolds AONB with a Cotswolds specific menu of grants and incentives which reinforces the special qualities of the Cotswolds landscape. This is supported by a number of policies throughout the draft plan.
4. Initial and developing ideas have been presented, discussed and further developed over the past 7 months starting with the Post Brexit Farming Conference held at the Royal Agricultural University and the Cotswolds Farming Forum in March and April this year.
5. Whilst the Board has been developing initial ideas, the National Parks have developed a proposal along very similar lines. The National Parks proposal for a FARM and FARM Plus agri-environment scheme fits entirely with the Board's thinking. Therefore the Board has adopted this approach to develop a consistent approach to the Parks and Conservation Boards but has added a stronger and integrated rural development component based on its direct experience of delivering and being the Accountable Body for LEADER in the Cotswolds.

6. To aid discussion and following an offer from the Farming Forum a working group of Farmers chaired by Lord Bathurst met on 11th July with a second meeting taking place on 2nd November. The July meeting concluded that:
 - There is support for a Cotswold agri-environment scheme designed and delivered locally and supported by advisers working with the farmers delivering the scheme on the ground.
 - The scheme needs to be an enabler, not an enforcer and demonstrates it supports landscape, biodiversity etc and good quality food production and provides value for money
 - The case needs to be made for the Cotswolds as a landscape and that it needs a different approach
 - Local people will need to understand and support the scheme
7. The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) was silent on the subject of farming after Brexit until shortly after the annual conference in July when a letter was sent to Lord Gardiner proposing that AONB Management Plans are used to help direct delivery of agri-environment and rural development support payments within AONBs. The NAAONB has now established an email based National Agriculture Sub-group to develop the proposal as to how management plans could help direct delivery of agri-environment and rural development support payments. The purpose of the group was to provide ideas and evidence to be presented to Lord Gardiner who can then reflect on the offer and provide feedback at the Chairmen's meeting in London in November. The Board's Land Management Officer was part of the sub-group.
8. Whilst the focus of the NAAONB is the use of AONB Management Plans to direct future agri-environment delivery, it is evident from comments from other members of the Sub-group that some other AONBs are also promoting local design and delivery.
9. The process of developing the Board's proposal to date has involved:
 - Draft Management Plan 2018 – 2023
 - Presentation to Post Brexit Farming Conference 17th March 2017
 - Cotswolds Farming Forum 27th April 2017
 - National Parks proposal finalised
 - Farming Working Group – 11th July 2017
 - Discussion at Executive Committee 20th July 2017
 - Initial proposal sent to Lord Gardiner
 - Brief outline in presentation to local MPs
 - Presentation of proposal to Board 5th October
 - Participation in NAAONB National Agriculture Sub-group
 - Proposal discussed with Andrew Sells, Chairman of Natural England 23rd October 2017
 - Second Farming Working Group 2nd November 2017

10. Attached as Appendix 'A' is the current proposal for a single menu of agri-environment and rural development grants delivered locally, informed by local evidence and investing in the special qualities of the protected landscape

Supporting Paper(s):

Appendix 'A' – Farming and Rural development in the Cotswolds AONB