

DEFRA ENVIRONMENTAL LAND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TESTS AND TRIALS

Summary: To present an update on the Board's proposals to Defra for tests and trials

Recommendation: That the report be noted.

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

Background

Purpose

1. In June 2018 Defra invited the submission of proposals/ideas to test and trial for the future Environment Land management System (ELMS). The Board submitted three proposals based on the Farming and Rural Development proposal developed and discussed since the 2017 Farming Forum:
 - Design of an environmental land management scheme tailored for a particular landscape with devolved local delivery using the Cotswolds as a pilot
 - Researching and piloting the need for local payment rates and options to achieve outcomes in the Cotswolds.
 - Combining environmental land management and rural development into a single scheme

Only one of the three proposals, Researching and Piloting the need for Local Payment Rates and Options to Achieve Outcomes in the Cotswolds, has had a positive response from Defra but only with a number of requested modifications
2. According to Defra, Rural development is 'currently out of scope'. Consequently the Board's lead proposal of Combining Environmental Land Management and Rural Development into a Single Scheme has not been accepted as a test. A revised rural development and land management proposal with more supporting evidence was submitted in the autumn and two letters have been written by the Board Chairman to Lord Gardiner, Parliamentary Under Secretary within Defra, in an attempt to reverse Defra's position but to no avail. It is possible that the criteria Defra use to assess proposals for tests and Trials may change as the design of the Environmental Land Management System progresses.
4. The 'Researching and Piloting the Need for Local Payment Rates and Options to Achieve Outcomes in the Cotswolds' proposal has been modified at the request of Defra. The key change has been the removal from the proposal of a review of the uptake and barriers to delivery of current and past agri-environment scheme options as this area of work is being undertaken by Natural England albeit on a national basis. The revised objectives of the proposal are attached as Appendix 'A'
5. The Board's land management and rural development proposal has also been included in the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) proposal combined with ideas for tests and trials from 10 other AONBs. This joint proposal is also gaining traction with Defra. If the Board remains as part of the joint proposal we would have to change the Cotswold element to the local rates and options test. Defra has been keen that we are part of the NAAONB proposal but we have explained that we are

ready to go and that we are concerned that the NAAONB still needs to develop their proposal further and this will considerably delay any trial commencement. Defra seems to have taken note of this concern and the Board's proposal was considered by the Tests and Trials Panel on 23rd April. Whilst feedback was 'positive' we are awaiting final go ahead.

6. The Board's original start date was 1st April 2019 but was revised to 1st May as the Defra timetable shifted. The start date and the timetable for the test will need to be updated again if the go ahead is given. The current situation is that Defra are still sorting out the budget for Tests and Trials and what rates will be paid for consultants etc. The indication at the time of writing this report is that a tranche of tests and trial could be given the go ahead towards the end of May. Hopefully, we will be part of that tranche.
7. To deliver the proposal, the Board will need to take on additional resources in the form of a contractor/consultant. A tender document has been prepared in readiness as we will have to move very quickly if given the go ahead from Defra, partly due to the potential competition for contractors/consultants from other tests and trials. A verbal update will be given if any progress is made prior to the Executive meeting.

Supporting Paper(s):

Appendix 'A'- Researching and piloting the need for local payment rates and options to achieve outcomes in the Cotswolds – objectives.

Appendix 'A'**Researching and piloting the need for local payment rates and options to achieve outcomes in the Cotswolds - objectives**

Assuming a 1st May 2019 start:

By December 2019 work with a range of farmers, land managers, advisers and agencies to discuss and identify new and innovative approaches and applicant requirements to achieve national and local outcomes through ELMS in the Cotswolds. This could include business advice, local payment rates and land management advice.

1. Appoint consultant/contractor by end of May 2019.
2. Using the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2018 – 23, the Cotswolds NCA Profile and the 6 principles of the 25 Year Environment Plan to identify the national and local priorities and objectives for the Cotswolds by the end of June.
3. Hold initial discussions with 10 farmers, land managers and advisers to help inform and design the workshops and questionnaire by the end of July.
4. By the end of October hold 4 independently facilitated workshops across the Cotswolds with 80+ farmers and land managers to:
 - a. Identify new and innovative ideas and mechanisms and how they could be measured
 - b. Identify local payment rates and local advice and guidance.
 - c. Test the inclusion in the Land Management Plan (LMP) of an assessment of the needs of the business to optimise ELMS delivery. This could include infrastructure, equipment, training and diversification opportunities

for ELMS to effectively deliver outcomes for the agreed national and local priorities for the Cotswolds and the 25 Year Environment Plan.

5. Circulate a questionnaire based on 'a' to 'c' above to farmers and land managers unable to participate in the workshops using a platform such as SurveyMonkey during October and collate results for inclusion in the draft report by the end of November.
6. Using the results from the workshops, hold follow up small group, 1:1 meetings and telephone interviews with 15 farmers and land managers to develop detail and explore more sensitive topics and business needs by the end of October.
7. Collate the results of the initial discussions, workshops, questionnaires, small group and 1:1 meetings and produce a draft report by the end of November.
8. Review the test and recommend any changes required for further iterations by the end of December 2019*.
9. Submit final report and recommendations to Defra by the end of December 2019.
10. Run further iteration(s) with associated recommendations in 2020.

*Other areas of England are very likely to have the same issues as the Cotswolds. This test can easily be replicated. The Board would be happy to replicate this test in other AONBs, National Parks or other areas during 2020.