

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND MANAGEMENT – TEST FOR DEFRA AND POLICY DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

Summary: To present the results of the ELM Test and to consider whether a separate response to the ELM Policy discussion document should be submitted.

Recommendation: That the:

- A) Results of the ELM test are noted**
- B) That the Board supports the NAAONB’s response to the ELM Policy discussion document currently being prepared.**

Reviewed by the Executive Committee: Yes / No

If yes, the Committee’s comments: The Committee considered the Test to be a quality piece of work and noted the report. Regarding supporting the NAAONB submission to the ELM Policy discussion document, the draft submission is to be circulated to the Executive committee to make an informed decision on whether the Board submits its own response

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

Background

1. The Environmental Land Management scheme (ELM) is the scheme that will replace direct payments to farmers and agri-environment schemes by paying farmers for public goods and services that will deliver the Governments 25 year Environment Plan. ELM will sit alongside other areas of the new Agriculture Policy such as animal health and productivity. ELM will pilot from late 2021, launch in 2024 and be fully operational from 2028 after the transition period and last stage of the withdrawal of the Basic Payment Scheme.
2. In 2018 Defra invited proposals to test and trial various aspects ELMS to help in the co-design of the scheme. The Cotswolds Conservation Board put forward three proposals, one of which progressed to discussion stage with Defra.
3. The original proposal was ‘to research new and innovative ideas and the need for local payment rates and options/themes to achieve national and local outcomes in the Cotswolds’. Whilst the title of the test remained unchanged, in discussion with Defra, the agreed objective of the test evolved into:

By the end of February 2020 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.

The test was agreed and the contract issued by Defra on 24 September 2019, much later than originally anticipated.

Test Delivery

4. The core of the test was four workshops with farmers, foresters and land managers and a questionnaire circulated using SurveyMonkey. To design, deliver and report back on the workshops Red Kite Environment, based near Stroud, was appointed by the Board at the end of September
5. To help design the four workshops and the questionnaire a pilot workshop was held on 22 November 2019 with nine participants including farmers with different farm types, foresters, equine and conservation land management. The four main workshops were held in village halls across the Cotswolds in January 2020 across two days.
 - Cold Ashton Village Hall, 10.00am 7 Jan (9 attended)
 - Pitchcombe Village Hall, 7.00pm 7 Jan (14 attended)
 - Oddington Village Hall, 10.00am 8 Jan (19 attended)
 - Notgrove Village Hub, 7.00pm 8 Jan (19 attended)

We were helped in promoting the workshops by the NFU, FWAG and a Farmer Cluster Group.

6. We hoped for around 20 participants for each workshop. Cold Ashton was noticeably below the target. This could be down to the area being a smaller, narrower part of the Cotswolds AONB, the area being dominated by a large estate and/or the CCB and AONB not being as visible in the area compared to the central and north Cotswolds.
7. Following the pilot and four workshops, Red Kite undertook a Gap Analysis to identify if any test objectives had not been satisfactorily covered. The analysis was used to help finalise the questions in the questionnaire and for the follow-up discussion held on 6th February with a small invited group. The questionnaire and circulated directly by the CCB and partners as for the workshop invitations. 36 responses were received. Red Kite also had one-to-one meetings with five farmers and land managers to focus on specific topics.
8. When designing the test it was envisaged that when discussing new and innovative ideas, mechanisms and how they could be measured, it would involve practical detail. In the event, the participants were more interested in discussing at a strategic level how ELMS could and should work for the Cotswolds. One participant summed this up as *'Does not matter how its delivered on the ground, delivery of ELMS is important such as advice, payments and being delivered locally.'*
9. During the workshops and discussions, however, a number of ideas and mechanisms were identified and are listed in the Red Kite Report, Appendix 4. Discussion on 'measures' focused more on the need for trusted baseline data for soils, carbon, outcomes etc and not what the measures should be. Measures for the more obvious

interventions such as length of hedge, area of pasture, number of trees etc. were taken 'as read'.

Much more detail on the test, key findings from the workshops and recommendations are in the Final report produced by Red Kite – attached as **Appendix 'A'**

Review of the test

10. Red Kite proved to be a successful appointment. They are not an agricultural consultancy and as such had no preconceived views and offered a neutral stand point.
11. The test worked well and met most of its intended objectives. Variations occurred such as the desire by participants to discuss ELMS at a more strategic level than originally envisaged. Attendance at two workshops was lower than hoped for, but in the end the test engaged with 100 individuals achieving the overall target of 100.
12. To some extent, participants were self-selecting but efforts were made to ensure a wide representation of farmers, foresters and land managers. The forestry, conservation, equine and agency sectors were specifically targeted with success. Golf courses were also approached but with no response.
13. It proved challenging but possible to deliver the test over a six month period, including initial research, design of workshops, booking venues etc. This was, however, made possible by sending out the tender for the consultant/contractor in advance of the test starting and appointing the successful consultant a matter of days after signing the contract with Defra to deliver the test. To include the process of tendering and appointing a consultant within the test period after signing the contract would have required an additional 6 – 8 weeks.
14. Running the four workshops over two days was time efficient in some ways but proved challenging to Red Kite to review the workshops and make any amendments ready for the next. Allowing longer for the workshops, spreading them across a few more days would have been helpful.
15. Modifications were made to the workshop and Powerpoint presentation over the course of the four workshops. Both to improve the workshops and to ensure the test objectives were met. The Gap Analysis proved particularly useful to identify the objectives not being fully met and to fill the gaps with the questionnaire and follow-up meeting.
16. Holding the workshops in early January and promoting them over the Christmas and New Year period may have impacted on attendance. Finding times of the year in the farming and land management calendar for meetings and workshops can be challenging. The original programme for the test allowed a gap for the harvest period. Starting the test earlier and holding the four workshops in November may have proved beneficial for the test.

17. The final report was submitted to Defra in March and has been well received. At the same time the Board's claim was submitted to Defra for the costs of the test and full payment has subsequently been received.

Environmental Land Management Policy discussion document

18. In February 2020 Defra published the ELM Policy discussion document to increase engagement with stakeholders and seek views on the initial thinking for ELM. Responses were invited with an original deadline of 5th May 2020. A series of regional workshops were also planned to take place from March to May. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the workshops have been postponed and the consultation paused. A new deadline for submitting comments on the policy discussion document has yet to be set.
19. The Board's Land Management Officer, Mark Connelly is currently preparing a response to the discussion document for the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) with Richard Clarke, National Policy and Development Manager for NAAONB. The response will be submitted by Richard to avoid any potential conflict with Mark representing the NAAONB on the ELM Design and Marketing Project Board. The Project Board is mostly made up from Deputy Directors from across Defra and is directly involved in the design and communication of ELM. Mark also represents the NAAONB on the ELM Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Working Group
20. The question has been raised as to whether the Board should submit its own response and how in light of involvement with ELM design on behalf of the NAAONB. Whilst the NAAONB's response will make reference to examples from AONBs across the country, the main messages are very likely to be the same as in a CCB response. One option, therefore, is to support the NAAONB response.
21. When ready, the final draft NAAONB submission will be circulated via email to the Executive Committee and a decision made whether to endorse the NAAONB submission or for the board to prepare its own.

The ELM Policy discussion document is on Defra's website:

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/elm/elmpolicyconsultation/supporting_documents/elmdiscussiondocument20200225a%20002.pdf

It is also recommended that Board members read 'Farming for the future – policy and progress update' which explains how ELM fits with the other areas of the developing agriculture policy such as animal health and productivity. All too often ELM is seen as something that stands alone. The progress update is also on Defra's website:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/868041/future-farming-policy-update1.pdf

Supporting document(s):

- Appendix 'A' - Red Kite, March 2020. Identifying new and innovative approaches to achieve national and local outcomes through the Environmental Land Management Scheme in the Cotswolds AONB. Final report (*available to view at cotswoldsaonb.org.uk*)