

## Five Asks for the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS)

July 2024

This briefing is on behalf of Wildlife and Countryside Link ([Link](#)) and outlines a set of quick wins for the new Government for making Environmental Land Management Schemes deliver for farmers, nature, animal welfare and the public.

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**The new Government has come to power with a strong mandate to make Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) work better for farmers and nature.**

Farmers continue to struggle in the long tail of global price rises and the accelerating consequences of climate change and ecological degradation - the biggest threats to food security.<sup>1</sup> Research has demonstrated that nature degradation is an enormous economic threat, with nature loss risking a 12% loss to UK GDP.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the British public remains deeply concerned about the lack of political action on the twin nature and climate crises,<sup>3</sup> A more sustainable food system that can promote public goods for all, including nature-based solutions, animal welfare and public access, is an essential part of the response to these environmental and farming crises.

The Government has an opportunity to address these environmental risks and make ELMS work for farmers, building on lessons learned<sup>4</sup> and working with a range of stakeholders to promote a just and equitable future for British farming. Taking action now will enable the Government to deliver on its priorities to produce the right outcomes while safeguarding food security and ensuring nature's recovery.

**This briefing sets out five policy changes to start getting ELMS on track: A new, free advice package for farmers, a bundle approach to the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), more**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/impact-of-climate-change-and-biodiversity-loss-on-food-security/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2024-04-29-nature-degradation-could-cause-12-loss-uk-gdp#:~:text=New%20research%20has%20found%20that,financial%20crisis%20or%20Covid%2D19.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-poll-finds-most-people-think-main-parties-falter-nature-and-climate-crises-run-general>

<sup>4</sup> For example, the National Audit Office has published its value for money report on the Farming and Countryside Programme: <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-farming-and-countryside-programme/>

Countryside Stewardship & Landscape Recovery, a higher regulatory baseline and better application of data and modelling.<sup>5</sup>

## 1) Target the right actions in the right places through a nature-positive Sustainable Farming Advisory Service

**Quick win for the new Government: Deliver a free (or affordable at cost), widely accessible and high-quality advice offer for farmers to ensure the right actions are targeted in the right place on the right farms.**

To restore nature by 2030, the Government must take early action to facilitate a just transition to nature and climate-friendly food and farming.<sup>6</sup> Advice provides an effective way of ensuring every penny spent on ELM delivers excellent value for money and delivers win-wins for nature and their business.

As the system of direct payments continues to be phased out, advice and peer-to-peer learning will enable all farmers to help shape a climate-friendly, high-nature food system. Farmers must be able to access understandable guidance, 1-to-1 and peer-to-peer advice and opportunities for learning opportunities through community collaboration and engagement with other stakeholders as appropriate (e.g., engaging with water companies and Local Authorities as part of a catchment-wide approach for natural flood management).

The Government should consult on the type and scale of advice needed across farm sizes, types and geographical regions, followed by an assessment of what actions and funding are required to meet these needs. However, there is an urgent need to introduce nature-positive advice into the SFI, as the way some actions are currently being delivered is not benefitting nature and is therefore compromising value for money.<sup>7</sup> As a first step, the Government can take immediate action to improve value for money by broadening the scope of advice and moving away from siloed advisory services. For example, the Government could invest in growing the advisory capacity within Catchment Sensitive Farming and expanding the facilitation groups/cluster groups programme. The latter has already proven successful, and

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<sup>5</sup> Many of these cross-cutting issues are assessed in the context of the 2024 public access options in a recent Link briefing: [https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link\\_Public\\_Access\\_in\\_ELM\\_June\\_2024.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_Public_Access_in_ELM_June_2024.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/vicki-hird/just-transition-farming-and-food-possible-and-essential>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-farming-and-countryside-programme/>

increased investment would enable groups of farmers to come together and secure funding for a coordinator who can then bring in appropriate advisors to advise farmers in the SFI on a broader range of environmental outcomes, and eNGO advisors where relevant.

An adequately resourced Sustainable Farming Advisory Service should enable the provision of advice by trained farm and ecological advisors who have expertise in the local context, farm size and type and regional/local land needs. Advisors should have access to guidance, training and awareness on specific nature-positive approaches (e.g., organic, agroforestry, species-rich grassland, wetter farming on peat soils and natural flood management), as well as access and public rights of way. For example, the Forestry Commission recently invested in 10 agroforestry advisors to help farmers understand how agroforestry could work for them and hopefully ensure that ELM money is spent on actions that deliver and ensure farmers are supported long-term. These actions should set the groundwork for the new Government to undertake long-term investment in expanding the farm advisory workforce, which will serve as the foundation for a new generation of farmers and advisors, equipped to deliver the required change.

A nature-positive advisory service would be an effective tool to help the Government get back on track and make progress on its environmental commitments such as the species abundance targets and Environmental Improvement Plan commitments including water quality, animal welfare and public access to the countryside. Farms are more than a business – they are complex socio-ecological systems that are more than the sum of their parts. A whole-farm approach focuses on integrating all aspects and assets within the farm into planning and fostering circularity across the whole farm system.<sup>8</sup> An advice service would be a useful entry point for integrating whole farm principles into ELMS planning, giving farmers more support as they plan their business models, select the best actions for achieving desired environmental objectives and deliver business resilience on- and off-farm.

A study from 2019 suggested an investment of just £34 million a year would be sufficient to secure ample environmental advice for all farmers in England.<sup>9</sup> Defra could secure this investment by better deploying existing funds. For example, over £43 million has been spent on various SFI plan actions to date (such as the soil management plan and moorland

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<sup>8</sup> Soil Association (2024) *Planning for change: The role of Whole Farm Plans in the agricultural transition*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Scale%20of%20Need%20Report%20July%202024%20FINAL.pdf>

assessment) in SFI 2023.<sup>10</sup> However, there is no corresponding obligation on land managers to implement these plans. A further c£20 million has been spent on the SFI management fee for entering and managing a SFI agreement, a figure that could rise to £92 million a year if 70% of farmers sign up for SFI.<sup>11</sup> The SFI management fee could be replaced by free advice, providing more effective support for farmers. This reinvestment into advice would then secure better delivery of the outcomes the schemes pay for, improving their value for public money.

Good quality advice can help farmers to improve their business while prioritising the most appropriate actions for the landscape they work within (spatial prioritisation) and deliver intended environmental outcomes. For example, actions to reduce dependence on artificial fertilisers could save farmers money. Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) is another example of the successful coordination of environmental advice in a landscape to help improve environmental outcomes. The £100m funding committed to FiPL for distribution from 2021 to 2025 has enabled National Park Authorities to invest in nature via dedicated project officers in National Parks and Landscapes. These officers have the local skills, knowledge and time to facilitate funding bids, provide advice and create the best possible projects which maximise environmental outcomes. This funding is, however, short term and needs to be scaled up and embedded in ELM as another option for farmers to apply for and receive support.

Effective advice provision may build relationships, build confidence in delivering nature outcomes and also foster better understandings of how actions, like the habitat creation payments, can be linked to the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs). The relationship between LNRSs and the resources and policy levers to deliver it through ELMS have not yet been made clear. The Government has an opportunity to deliver its priority of devolving power and resources to local authorities by strengthening this link. As LNRSs are another tool to spatially target the uptake of ELMS and ensure that actions and payments are directed to areas where they will have the most beneficial effect for nature and people, farm advisors should be guided to consult these when providing advice on ELMS options. Joining up LNRSs and ELMS would also enable local authorities to plan to deliver their LNRS without relying on biodiversity net gain funds.

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<sup>10</sup> Based on RSPB calculations from public and private data provided by the Rural Payments Agency. Spend is calculated by multiplying the action hectareage by the payment rate.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cs-es-and-sfi-option-uptake-data-2024>

<sup>11</sup> Based on the figures of £40/hectare for the first year of the agreement, then £20/hectare for the following two years of the agreement, for the first 50 hectares entered into SFI actions.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-farming-and-countryside-programme/>

## 2) Improve the Design and Delivery of ELMs through Packages and Targeted Measures

**Quick win for the new Government: Address the “pick-and-mix” approach in ELM by establishing packages and Land Management Plans to support guided choice and the spatial targeting of actions and take-up related to the Environmental Targets/Environmental Improvement Plan.**

Farmers must be fairly rewarded for the public goods that ELMs incentivise them to deliver. Payment rates, while now healthier, still do not reflect many of the outcomes that need to be delivered for nature and people and much more can be done to ensure high-quality design and implementation for specific actions like public access<sup>12</sup> and creating nature-based solutions.

However, the SFI currently follows a free-for-all or “pick-and-mix” approach. This means that land managers can select almost any action combination, creating a pattern of delivery driven by payment rates rather than by public and environmental needs or what is most suitable for the farm business, which risks delivering adverse environmental outcomes in some instances. Additionally, the pick-and-mix approach fails to offer incentives for actions to be combined where they are known to synergise well, which would be logical to deliver improvements for nature and sustain food production.

This approach is not strategic enough to drive progress towards statutory biodiversity targets and better spatial prioritisation is needed. At a minimum, a Land Use Framework could provide a mechanism for targeting ELM actions in the right places and should be published imminently to deliver on the previous Government’s commitments. Premium payments, which are already being introduced in SFI 2024 for certain actions, would support the delivery of local priorities for nature recovery identified by the Land Use Framework (including National Parks and National Landscapes), as well as by LNRs and Protected Landscape Management Plans.

Equally, undertaking individual options on their own may not deliver the whole-farm farm productivity, returns and resilience, as well as public goods, that a package of actions would achieve. Farmers should have the option to choose packages alongside single actions. Introducing an element of guided choice into the SFI is compatible with its ‘free choice’

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link\\_Public\\_Access\\_in\\_ELM\\_June\\_2024.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_Public_Access_in_ELM_June_2024.pdf)

approach and would give the Government more precise control over the outcomes the scheme pays for, to ensure it contributes sufficiently to environmental targets.

The Government should commit to setting out a long-term vision of a whole-farm/whole-system approach. Land Management Plans were popular in early iterations of the Test and Trials<sup>1314</sup> and would provide farmers with a tool to manage their whole landholding holistically over a period—enabling them to select actions that suit their farm best and which would best deliver public goods. This approach will better facilitate guided choice to ensure the whole-farm delivery of outcomes and value for money for the taxpayer, above and beyond the piecemeal pick-and-mix approach, and remove the inefficiency of paying for multiple separate plans for soils, hedgerows and pesticides.

Land Management Plans connect to the delivery of farm advice and guidance. These plans bring together a range of information related to the farm (maps, field records, natural capital baselines etc.) and can involve working with an advisor to assess the farm business and opportunities and risk areas, including a checklist of actions that will facilitate managing the land sustainably and profitably. However, Land Management Plans need to be delivered to have value. Therefore, Land Management Plans and packages of actions need to be bundled and paid for together to ensure the delivery of themed nature recovery actions within SFI (such as for organic farming, wetlands, species management for conservation, species-rich grasslands, nutrient management and woodland management).

### 3) Reward early adopters of agri-environment schemes by increasing access to high-ambition schemes

**Quick win for the new Government: Take action to make Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery more accessible for a greater range of farmers and ensure they are fully integrated into the full ELMS offer.**

Farmers who adopt high-ambition actions deliver the most for nature and climate, which underpin future food production. Yet, over the past decade, the Government has failed to invest in high-ambition schemes, meaning they have become difficult to access and are poorly funded, leaving farmers doing the most for nature at the back of the queue.

<sup>13</sup> <https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2022/02/10/watch-episode-1-land-management-plans-and-the-sustainable-farming-incentive-pilot/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64cb763c47915a00142a91de/elm-tt-june22.pdf>

For a decade, the Government supported just 300-500 ambitious higher-tier agreements per year. This is not even enough to cover the backlog of expiring Higher Level Stewardship agreements, many of which were due to expire 5+ years ago. This has left at least 7,000 farmers in limbo, and many more unable to unlock investment to recover habitats and adapt to climate change on their farms. The new Government has an opportunity to develop a comprehensive delivery plan that is accompanied by the right amount of funding to enable greater access to Countryside Stewardship (CS) Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery.

After a decade of government cuts to the total number of agreements (there are just 2,700 higher tier agreements in total, the Government used to be able to support 2,000-2,500 higher level stewardship agreements a year a decade ago), the Government must urgently scale up CS Higher Tier to 3,000-4,000 agreements per year. A lack of clarity over progression from the less ambitious ELMS offers to more ambitious ones also risks compromising rising ambition over time.

As well as increasing numbers in CS Higher Tier, the Government should urgently publish guidance on how farmers can progress from SFI and legacy Higher Level Stewardship to CS Higher Tier and details for how payment rates for CS Higher Tier will be higher than SFI. Ensuring a hierarchy in payments between these schemes will prevent backsliding in ambition.

Land with sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) and priority habitat and species has vast potential for working alongside nature-friendly farming to support wildlife and food production.<sup>15</sup> CS Higher Tier agreements are targeted at the most important sites, making these agreements immensely important for SSSI management, with around a third of the SSSI network being privately owned, often by farmers.<sup>16</sup> The commitment to double CS Higher Tier agreements needs to be supported by immediate action to reduce bottlenecks in agreement processing and resolve IT system issues in the RPA. To make SSSIs work better for nature, the Government should publish clearer guidance around funding arrangements for high-ambition actions on SSSIs and commit to greater Natural England resourcing and prioritisation to ensure that CS Higher Tier can be effectively accessed where land contains a SSSI.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Sites%20of%20Special%20Scientific%20Interest%20\(SSSIs\)%20-%20Briefing%20note%20-%202015.09.23.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Sites%20of%20Special%20Scientific%20Interest%20(SSSIs)%20-%20Briefing%20note%20-%202015.09.23.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/47003>

<sup>17</sup> Currently land containing SSSIs are not eligible for some mid-tier CS options (the Woodland Offer) and SFI options. The Government may wish to address these barriers alongside higher tier.

The Landscape Recovery scheme also has immense potential to deliver for habitats, biodiversity, climate, animal welfare and other public goods such as access. We strongly support how Landscape Recovery brings multiple landowners and stakeholders together, as well as the focus on long-term agreements. However, the financing arrangements around Landscape Recovery are still unclear, and extremely limited in scope, leaving participants confused and at risk of dropping out.

For example, with additional resources, National Park Authorities and National Landscape Partnership Boards/Conservation Boards could be empowered to promote and increase take-up of, actions that suit the needs of their area. A high proportion of Landscape Recovery projects awarded in rounds 1 and 2 exist within National Parks and Landscapes, which demonstrate widespread ambition for large projects. However, more certainty is required to ensure the success of these projects. On the other hand, without appropriate governance and financial protections, smaller farmers may also be reluctant to take on the risk of covering the costs of the projects should something go wrong.

The Government must restate its support for Landscape Recovery and provide long-term security in the financing of these projects. Long-term resourcing, alongside protections to protect smaller farmers from taking on cost risks, will create a more equitable Landscape Recovery scheme and enable these projects to get off the ground and move from the development stage into delivery phases.

Support, monitoring and public/private financial frameworks should be much clearer and of a standard fit to meet the scheme's ambition. Furthermore, biodiversity and carbon should not be in competition with each other as the drivers of Landscape Recovery project outcomes. For example, there have been significant problems in securing funding for calcareous grassland restoration projects which would deliver clear biodiversity gains on the most species-rich grasslands but are disadvantaged by the weighting given to the net zero objective.



## 4) Clarify the relationship between the regulatory baseline and SFI & improve enforcement and compliance

**Quick wins for the new Government: Establish an effective regulatory baseline for farming that rises over time, alongside appropriately resourced monitoring and enforcement.**

Despite being integral to creating a level playing field for farmers and good value for money for the taxpayer, regulation is the element of the farming transition that is withering on the vine. A solid, well-enforced regulatory framework for farming ensures that taxpayer money is spent on cost-effective actions that deliver environmental outcomes above and beyond what is considered basic good practice.

ELMS is not a sufficient replacement for farming regulation. Growing regulatory gaps<sup>18</sup> and less enforcement hurts farmers who are doing the right thing, taxpayers who pay for SFI actions that used to be baseline rules (such as waterbody pollution buffers), and farm biodiversity and wildlife.

The regulatory side of the farming transition has been largely discarded in favour of an ‘advise and prevent’ approach. The incentives of ELMS cannot work without effective protective measures such as regulations. For example, cross compliance, which originated in the system of farm support that applied when the UK was a member of the EU and obligated farmers claiming Direct Payments under the Basic Payment Scheme to demonstrate compliance with a set of rules known as “Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions” (GAEC), ended in January 2024.

The final loss of basic payments means that many farmers will lose their contractual relationship with the Government, meaning they will not be subject to the same obligations as before to receive public money, such as keeping public rights of way clear for the public to enjoy.<sup>19</sup> Although some flexibility is good for encouraging farmers to do the right thing, this should not come at the expense of increasing ambition in the regulatory baseline over time. Taking fast action will ensure value for money as public spending goes to the most effective incentives, promote fairness and provide clarity for farmers. In respect of water pollution, for example, regulatory certainty will strip out further costs borne by water companies and consumers, as well as the wider environment.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link%20briefing%20-%20Cross%20Compliance%20-%20October%202023.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link Public Access in ELM June 2024.pdf>

The Government should urgently respond to the Farming Inspection and Regulation Review (the ‘Stacey Review’)<sup>2021[66]</sup> and set out a plan for increasing ambition in regulations over time.<sup>22</sup> Although cross compliance was poorly enforced and sometimes unnecessarily bureaucratic, the risk of inspection visits from the Rural Payments Agency and penalties complemented domestic rules and provided an additional layer of support to the monitoring and enforcement efforts of local authorities. Therefore, having baseline elements of compliance in exchange for public money is good for both the environment and the taxpayer. The Government should quickly assess how conditionality (or a minimum entry threshold) may be integrated into ELMS by developing a mechanism for which the lower-ambition (“deadweight”) options in SFI are incorporated into regulations over time (e.g., transition periods of 3-5 years). For example, farmers will (or should) already be undertaking actions to develop buffer strips and assess soil health and nutrient management, and these actions should form part of the regulatory baseline over time. Doing so will set the groundwork for connecting regulations to the long-term plan for ELM.

Monitoring and enforcement are equally important for ensuring that all land managers, including those in receipt of public money through ELMS, are complying with basic rules to prevent further diffuse agricultural pollution, such as the pollution responsible for over 40% of freshwater failures to meet good environmental status.<sup>23</sup> To prevent further catastrophic pollution resulting from high levels of non-compliance and enforcement gaps,<sup>24</sup> the Government needs to rectify the failures to enforce<sup>25</sup> the Farming Rules for Water and other regulatory frameworks as relevant by committing more resourcing and capacity for regulatory bodies (Environment Agency, Rural Payments Agency and Natural England), as well as clarifying their responsibilities to enforce regulation. To clean up rivers, lingering regulatory gaps around permitting,<sup>26</sup> slurry application and storage must also be filled urgently. An integrated approach to nutrient management regulation, as part of a package of incentives and support, is needed to reduce pollution of air, water and soils, as recommended by the Nutrient Management Expert Group.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-inspection-and-regulation-review/farm-inspection-and-regulation-review-summary-and-recommendations#recommendations>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2022-03-30.150189.h>

<sup>22</sup>

[https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/Link\\_briefing\\_farming\\_regulation\\_April\\_2023\\_Wildlife\\_Country\\_side\\_Link.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/Link_briefing_farming_regulation_April_2023_Wildlife_Country_side_Link.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://anglingtrust.net/2022/04/21/lack-of-action-on-agricultural-pollution-is-killing-our-rivers/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://anglingtrust.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Final-Axe-Regulatory-Report.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.endsreport.com/article/1756396/ea-chief-defra-told-us-not-enforce-farm-water-rules>

<sup>26</sup> [https://wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/Link\\_Briefing\\_Permitting\\_June\\_2024.pdf](https://wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/Link_Briefing_Permitting_June_2024.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> [Nutrient Management Expert Group \(NMEG\) report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nutrient-management-expert-group-report)

## 5) Monitor progress and evaluation more effectively

**Quick win for the new Government: Set a transparent, publicly available plan for monitoring against delivery timescales to improve confidence in ELMS and quickly course-correct where targets are not being met.**

Both farmers and the general public need to have confidence in the schemes – and this confidence is contingent on accessible data and evidence that show that ELMS is delivering.

High-quality, transparent data will also be essential for expanding polluter pays approaches and supporting the development of private markets for environmental improvements in the farmed environment. The Government could play an important role by establishing baseline data<sup>28</sup> and a transparent public register of payments for public goods, alongside a spatial record of contracts for key environmental assets like nutrient or biodiversity net gain credits.

The previous Government and Defra have started publicising the evidence and modelling used to develop ELMS.<sup>29</sup> However, gaps in data on environmental outcomes currently restrict Defra’s ability to assess the impact of specific measures on the environment, or their value for money.<sup>30</sup> Continuing this evidence and modelling work, and expanding the range of evidence-based measures used to inform the long-term plan for ELMS, is crucial to ensure that progress is effectively monitored and evaluated against environmental targets and value for money.

Agri-environment monitoring of outcomes for nature has been shaped by what are, in land management terms, very short cycle programmes. Often, these cycles work in units of 5 years or even less. The Landscape Recovery programme offers an opportunity to build capacity to look at how longer-term change is delivered. Plans and funding for 20+year Landscape Recovery projects need to be accompanied by appropriate monitoring – with an understanding of what needs to be measured and over what timescales.

Defra must work cross-departmentally (e.g., with other Government departments such as DESNZ and arm’s length bodies such as Natural England and the Rural Payments Agency) to

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<sup>28</sup> For example, see the precedent of the Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment programme:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-capital-and-ecosystem-assessment-programme/natural-capital-and-ecosystem-assessment-programme>

<sup>29</sup> <https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2024/03/11/the-evidence-we-use-to-develop-our-environmental-land-management-schemes/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-farming-and-countryside-programme/>

develop guidelines for monitoring farm-level data to strengthen the link between ELMS, LNRS, the eventual Land Use Framework and water management strategies, as well as climate change planning (e.g., the National Adaptation Programmes and Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy). Farm-level data, as well as data on the area in schemes, uptake against targets and the selection of actions for budget prioritisation and payment rates, should be used to inform outcome-based metrics of success (beyond simple uptake) and evaluation for how progress on the ground feeds into Environmental Improvement Plan outcomes.

Modelling is also crucial for understanding how ELMS is delivering. The new Government should review the outputs of the Environmental Valuation Assessment Scenario Tool (EVA) heuristic, the modelling unit within Defra that has started to assess outcomes delivered by ELMs against targets. The evidence should be used to set out cohesive delivery timescales, capturing those in the Carbon Delivery Budget, Net Zero Strategy, Environment Act and Environmental Improvement Plan. These outputs should closely inform the development of further actions and schemes within ELMS, and be closely tied in to the promised review of the Environmental Improvement Plan to make it better at delivering environmental targets.<sup>31</sup>

## Quick wins connect to long-term success

Although the new Government can snap up these quick wins rapidly and at a modest cost, these measures connect to larger actions that will cement long-term success and a sustainable just transition for the farming sector that benefits nature and people. Alongside swift measures in the short term, the Government must commit to paying farmers fairly<sup>32</sup> and ELMS requires significantly more investment to drive nature-based solutions and achieve nature targets, particularly the pressing 2030 biodiversity and water quality targets within the Environmental Improvement Plan. Increasing the budget for nature-friendly farming is a crucial investment and cost-effective way to meet these targets and to ensure long-term cost savings.<sup>33</sup>

The Government needs a vision and direction for this change, including moving all layers of ELMS towards greater whole farm/whole farm-system working.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Government-review-of-the-environmental-improvement-plan.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/print/pdf/node/335>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Scale%20of%20Need%20Report%20July%202024%20FINAL.pdf>

These gaps point to the desperate need for a long-term plan that sets out how ELM will evolve beyond 2025, and in particular, after 2027 when basic payments end. This includes clarifying plans about how other schemes, such as the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, which was part of the Agricultural Transition Plan, and the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO), will roll into or support ELM.

By setting out a long-term plan that underpins any short-term actions, as well as plans for scaling up public and private investment and capital funding, the Government will ensure the success of climate-resilient, nature-friendly farming and food production in England.

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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 84 organisations to campaign for nature, climate, animal welfare and access to and enjoyment of a healthy environment for everyone. Wildlife and Countryside Link is a registered charity number 1107460 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales number 3889519.

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**The following Link members have inputted into this briefing and support making ELMS work better for farmers and nature:**

A Rocha UK

Bat Conservation Trust

The British Mountaineering Council (BMC)

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Butterfly Conservation

Campaign for National Parks

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)

Compassion in World Farming

CPRE, the countryside charity

Earthwatch Europe

Open Spaces Society  
People's Trust for Endangered Species  
Plantlife  
Ramblers  
RBST  
Rewilding Britain  
River Action  
RSPB  
Soil Association  
Sustainable Soils Alliance  
Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)  
The Wildlife Trusts  
The Woodland Trust  
WWF-UK

**The following Link partners support making ELMS work better for farmers and nature:**

OF&G Organic  
Pesticide Collaboration  
Sustain