

## Statement from Natural England

Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. We provide practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England's natural wealth for the benefit of everyone.

Our remit is to ensure sustainable stewardship of the land and sea so that people and nature can thrive. It is our responsibility to see that England's rich natural environment can adapt and survive intact for future generations to enjoy.

Our responsibilities include:

- Managing England's **green farming schemes**, paying nearly £400million/year to maintain two-third's of agricultural land under agri-environment agreements
- Increasing opportunities for **everyone to enjoy** the wonders of the natural world
- Reducing the decline of **biodiversity** on land and in the marine environment.
- Managing most National Nature Reserves and overseeing the management of **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**
- Involvement in the **planning** process when protected sites and species are affected.
- Advice on **climate change** adaptation

We work with farmers and land managers; business and industry; planners and developers; national, regional and local government; interest groups and local communities to help them improve their local environment. Agriculture covers the majority of land in England that isn't built on. Most landscapes, even the ones people think of as being the most 'natural' have been shaped by agricultural or other human land management activity to a greater or lesser extent.

Natural England are responsible for overseeing the **Entry level scheme** and **Higher level scheme** both are environmental stewardship grant schemes using money from partly from the European Common agricultural policy money and matched by the UK government.

They would like to see more infield conservation work done to meet the targets of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment an initiative set up by the land management sector at the request of Defra, to exceed the environmental benefits that used to be provided by set -a-side.

Farmland bird numbers are used as an indicator of a healthy farmed environment. Their number has declined over the last 30 years. To reverse this decline the Campaign for the Farmed Environment as well as Environmental Stewardship aim to provide feeding and nesting opportunities throughout the year for birds and insects. This requires that a minimum of 2% of the farmed area is managed to halt the decline. Ideally 7% should be dedicated to a range of options that will reverse the decline.

Making the farmed environment more resilient will help it adapt to climate change. Connecting habitats will increase species mobility in the farmed landscape. Improving soil structure and organic matter and will reduce soil erosion and degradation and lock up carbon in the soil.

The organisation also plays a pivotal role in **community access plans** looking at improving access into the countryside in specific areas.

They feel that ***"The way forward should be based on voluntary action and initiatives - not big government"***