

North West: Higher Level Stewardship Theme Statement



Natural England is actively seeking **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) applications** outside of Target Areas (area shown in green). Despite falling outside of Target areas, **high quality / multi-objective agreements** will continue to be accepted.

To help you determine whether you qualify for HLS in these areas Natural England has identified a number **specific themes** set out below.

Each theme relates to particular HLS feature(s) at risk in particular need of HLS management. Applications that address more than one theme will be most highly valued*

**Please note: If you think you might qualify please follow the link provided at the bottom of the page or contact Natural England using the number provided below.*

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What do I need to do to get an agreement?

Applications outside of target areas **MUST** contribute to at least one of the following themes:

Theme 1: Improving the resilience of Nationally Important (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) habitats to climate change: Natural England will consider applications offering to maintain and/or restore/link/buffer 'significant'¹ areas of the following habitats:

- **Unimproved Grassland Habitats** – particularly **lowland calcareous grassland, lowland dry acid grassland, lowland meadows, purple moor grass and rush pastures** and **upland hay meadows**
- **Coastal Habitats** – **coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, coastal saltmarsh, coastal sand dunes, coastal vegetated shingle** and **maritime cliffs and slopes**. These habitats are a particular feature of the Sefton coast, Ribble and Mersey Estuaries, the Lake District National Park coastline and the St. Bees coast.

- **Wetland Habitats – fens** (including **basin and valley mires**), **reedbeds** and **lowland raised bog**. These habitats are a particular feature of the Mersey Valley and West Cumbria.
- **Woodland and Tree-Based Habitats – ancient semi-natural woodland, ancient and/or species rich hedgerows, traditional orchards and wood pastures and parkland.**

Theme 2: Reversing the decline of farmland birds Natural England will consider applications that will provide a package of ELS/HLS options² capable of delivering the most appropriate management possible within **National farmland bird hotspots**³ defined as areas supporting (a) 3 or more of the following range-restricted arable birds: **grey partridge; corn bunting; lapwing; tree sparrow; yellow wagtail** OR (b) 3 or more of the following breeding range-restricted wet grassland species: **lapwing, redshank, curlew, snipe, yellow wagtail** OR (c) (with strong supporting evidence) important regional breeding populations for any of the above species OR (d) Priority sites for any of the following individual species: **chough** along the St Bees coast. Key sites for this theme are found in the Lancashire Plain including the West Lancashire Plain, the Fylde, the Mersey Valley, the Ehen floodplain and the Solway Basin.

Theme 3: Securing the recovery of Nationally Important (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) Species Natural England will consider applications offering appropriate management for the following rare species outside of areas of important habitats (listed above): **natterjack toad** – particularly in West Cumbria and along the Sefton coast and **hen harrier** in West Cumbria.

Theme 4: Improving the quality of nationally important water bodies and/or habitats adversely affected by diffuse water pollution from agriculture⁴ Natural England will consider applications offering management and/or capital items to tackle soil erosion and run-off. This will focus on (though not exclusively) resource protection measures in the catchments of SSSI and SAC **basin and valley mire systems**.

Theme 5: Reducing risk to nationally designated assets identified by the Heritage At Risk Survey Natural England will consider applications that maintain low risk assets in their present circumstances or provide the most appropriate options for addressing the source of high or medium risk to **Scheduled Monuments**, such as addressing imminent collapse or further deterioration. Applications that significantly address the condition of **Registered Historic Parks and Gardens** should make a major contribution to the design intentions or feel of the parkland and provide for their biodiversity and amenity value. Applications on **Registered Historic Battlefields & World Heritage Sites** should seek to maximise opportunities for their protection, enhancement and amenity value⁵.

Theme 6: Securing positive management of prioritised historic buildings Natural England will consider applications offering to maintain or restore historic buildings that are assessed as a priority in the region⁶

Theme 7: Reducing the damage caused to undesignated below-ground archaeological sites by cultivation and protecting and enhancing visible undesignated historic environment features⁷ Natural England will consider applications offering to take the most vulnerable archaeological sites out of cultivation, and to reduce the depth of damaging cultivations through minimum tillage or direct drilling where this offers a suitable level of protection, in accordance with advice from Natural England and local authority archaeologists⁸. Natural England will also consider applications offering to maintain below-ground archaeology under permanent uncultivated vegetation or offering to provide positive management of historic features such as earthworks, standing stones and structures that have been assessed as a priority in the region⁸. Natural England will also consider applications making a significant contribution to the maintenance of historic landscape character⁹.

Theme 8: Improving people's enjoyment & understanding of the farmed environment: Natural England will consider applications offering to enhance or improve access and recreation¹⁰ (where it can be shown that (a) there is identified demand or need and (b) where it will link people with place or (c) where it will enhance existing networks and/or provide opportunity to improve the public's understanding

of the farmed environment through educational access visits.¹¹

Theme Statement Notes – additional information for applicants

¹ ‘Significant’ areas of Nationally Important (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) habitat are defined as below:

a) all areas of Nationally Important (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) habitat (listed under theme 1) occurring on sites designated as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest** (see www.natureonthemap.org.uk)

b) all areas of Nationally Important (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) habitat (listed under theme 1) occurring on sites notified as **County Wildlife Sites**

c) all areas of Nationally Important (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) habitat (listed under theme 1) occurring on non-statutory/un-notified land containing supported by recent records for key **Nationally Important** (UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species) identified as priorities for HLS management

d) all areas of Nationally Important (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) habitat (listed under theme 1) occurring on non-statutory/un-notified land containing the habitats mentioned under theme 1 present in quantities over the **size thresholds** provided below:

Habitat	Size
ancient semi-natural woodland	n/a
ancient &/or species-rich hedgerows	n/a
coastal and floodplain grazing marsh	5ha
coastal saltmarsh	10ha
coastal sand dunes	10ha
coastal vegetated shingle	2ha
fens	1ha
limestone pavement	2ha
lowland calcareous grassland	5ha
lowland dry acid grassland	5ha
lowland heathland	5ha
lowland meadows	1ha
lowland raised bog	2ha
maritime cliff and slope	500m
purple moor grass and rush pastures	5ha
reedbeds	2ha
traditional orchards	n/a
upland hay meadow	1ha
wood pastures and parkland	10ha
basin & valley mires	n/a

* in exceptional circumstances applications containing habitat (named above) may be considered where supported by firm evidence relating to the significance of the site within its landscape context.

² The package of ELS/HLS options deemed capable of achieving the most appropriate management for farmland birds will vary from agreement to agreement and can be selected at Natural England’s discretion. A typical package of options for farmland birds would look to deliver: provision of nesting habitats, summer food and winter food. For arable birds this will typically include a combination of the following management : field corner management; provision of beetle banks, wildlife seed mixtures (both wild bird food and pollen & nectar mixes), fallow nesting plots; conservation headlands; uncropped/cultivated margins, sowing of low-input spring cereals and hedgerow management. For wetland birds this will typically require specific management/restoration of existing wet grassland and management of water levels which would provide the right sward height and conditions for this assemblage of

species.

³ National farmland bird hotspots are defined as 2km tetrads containing breeding records of three or more of the range-restricted species listed above AND important 2km tetrads containing important populations of rare single species (also listed above). These hotspots can be seen on at the following address: www.natureonthemap.org.uk

⁴ HLS applications will be targeted at soils that are at moderate to very high risk of soil erosion. This can be assessed by using guidance available from www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/pdfs/es/guidance/soilerosion-lowlandmanual.pdf

⁵ The Heritage at Risk Survey is an annual condition survey of all nationally designated heritage assets, undertaken by English Heritage. In the context of this theme, 'Nationally designated assets' are Scheduled Monuments, Registered Historic Parks and Gardens and Registered Battlefields. You can find out if you have a designated site on your holding by visiting <http://www.magic.gov.uk/> or by looking at the map provided as part of your ELS application. If you have a designated site on your holding, Natural England will be able to advise you on its 'risk rating' and, where appropriate, the major threats to the asset.

⁶ Natural England has a method of prioritising historic buildings by assessing them for their significance, vulnerability and value for money. To check the eligibility of your building, and to find out if your building is a priority for action, please contact Natural England.

⁷ The terms used above have the following meanings: 'Undesignated features' are those which are not statutorily designated as Scheduled Monuments, Registered Historic Parks and Gardens or Registered Battlefields -the primary source of information on the location and nature of these sites is held by your local authority Historic Environment Record; 'Below-ground archaeological sites' means features that can only be identified by soil or crop marks on aerial photographs, and underground structures such as souterrains and 'Visible features' are those which can be seen 'above the ground' as humps and bumps or structures.

⁸ Natural England will seek advice from local authority archaeological officers to identify the most appropriate management for features and their priority for action.

⁹ Natural England will liaise with local authority archaeological officers to identify the contribution that would be made to the maintenance of historic landscape character of an area by any proposals. This might include, for example, the positive management of traditional orchards, field boundary systems or undesignated parklands where their survival makes a good, visible contribution to historic landscape character.

¹⁰ Opportunities to enhance or improve access through HLS will be defined by local teams, in liaison primarily with Local Authorities, but also with others including National Park Authorities, AONBs and National Trail Teams.

Such opportunities will meet the criteria listed and be based upon demonstrable evidence. Although the availability of relevant data is expected to vary from county to county the primary sources for this information are likely to be:

1. Rights of Way Improvement Plans
2. Green Infrastructure Plans
3. Expiring Classic Scheme Agreements

National Park / AONB management plans may also provide useful information

¹¹ Applications that include **educational access** will necessitate the hosting of educational access visits to the farm by schools, colleges, clubs, youth groups, adult study centres and other special interest groups for formal or informal study, or guided walks to learn about the relationship between farming, conservation, and food production. Land managers are required to produce a Farm Facts Leaflet for all visits and a Teachers Information Pack if carrying out school visits.

If you think that you can help Natural England achieve any of the above objectives please contact your local office using the number below. Natural England currently hold additional information about environment features on your holding which will be used to identify priority holdings, as a result of this,

please note that you may be contacted directly by us. .

Please note:

HLS remains a competitive scheme. Successful applications will generally (though not exclusively) be those addressing the most themes within a single agreement. Successful applications should focus on management relating to the key themes under which they qualify with any additional management proposals being at the discretion of the Natural England advisor.

For more information on Higher Level Stewardship please see our website: www.naturalengland.org.uk

Before applying for HLS you are required to discuss your proposals with a Natural England adviser.

To contact an adviser please telephone 0300 060 1113