

Restocking the Weald

Securing the future of livestock farming in the High Weald's working landscape.

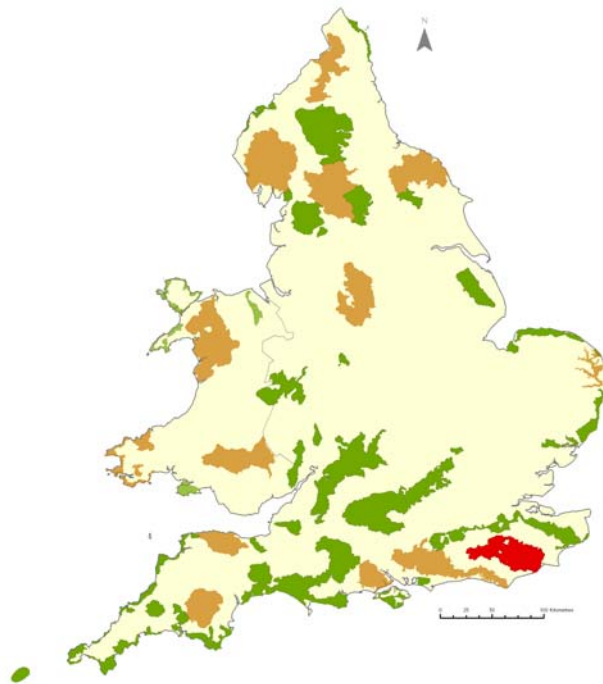
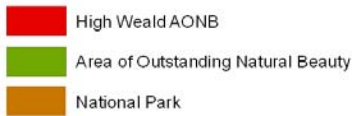


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For: The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

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The High Weald: A cultural landscape

The High Weald is a special place. Its dispersed settlements, ancient routeways, abundant ancient woodland, extensive open heaths, and small, irregular shaped and productive fields are draped over rolling hills of clay and sandstone that together create a unique landscape distinct from other parts of Sussex and Kent and the rest of Britain.

The High Weald's distinctive countryside arises from a long history of human interaction and collaboration with the natural environment. Its main features were established by the fourteenth century and these features have either survived or been fortified by a number of subsequent historical events and social and technological changes.

The High Weald is essentially a cultural landscape and is considered as one of the best

surviving coherent medieval landscapes in northern Europe. This is why the High Weald is considered worthy of protection – it has remained a unique, distinct, and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years.

In recognition of the national importance of its landscape, the High Weald was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983 and joined a family of 46 other AONBs and 13 National Parks across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is a partnership of 15 local authorities, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Natural England, the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association, Action in Rural Sussex, and the Forestry Commission.

The JAC is supported by the High Weald AONB Unit, a small multi-disciplinary team. The AONB Unit aims to increase the understanding of the High Weald landscape's special qualities and provide information, advice and support to organisations and local people on action and policy to help conserve and manage the area (for more information visit www.highweald.org).

Foreword

This report was prepared following a five-week sabbatical from IIED in August and September 2012, and is based on interviews – mainly in person – with farmers and farm managers, land agents, farm advisors, marketers, retailers, statutory bodies, and researchers in and beyond the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The author is grateful to IIED for the opportunity to work with the agricultural sector in our ‘backyard’. Special thanks to AONB Unit co-directors Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender for hosting and guiding the sabbatical, and also to Matt Pitts and Ruth Childs at the Unit for advice, for accompanying the work, and for data and mapping. Many thanks also to Frank Langrish, Leo Hickish, Jonathan Howard, Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender for comments on an earlier draft. The interviewees and respondents (see Annex), who were willing to meet in person and follow up by email, are the ‘stars’ of the report and the report is based on their first-hand personal insights. But the views expressed here are the author’s sole responsibility.

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Introduction

The High Weald is an excellent place for **red meat production**. Its **poor clay soils** grow excellent **grass**. Little external feed is required, and by turning forage into protein, livestock production does **not strongly compete for arable land**. Well managed grassland **sequesters carbon** and can be an important part of **climate resilient** agriculture; it also has a much **lower impact on water quality** than arable land in terms of losses of soil and nutrients. Lamb and beef produced from the High Weald are of potential **high quality**. The High Weald is **close to markets** of SE England London and continental Europe, and has retained important **market infrastructure** including live markets in Ashford and Hailsham.

Grazing – along with the management of woodland -- has produced a **landscape of national importance**. Key to the continued success of grass-based livestock production on the High Weald, and thus the Wealden **landscape**, is a **reversal in the decline in livestock** on the High Weald. This report focuses on two interlinked areas that are central to that goal and to the economic resilience of livestock agriculture in the High Weald.

Part 1 is about **improving the productivity of the available grassland resource**, and **creating space for new entrants** into livestock farming. This supports the national strategy for **sustainable intensification of food production in the UK**. It leads to a **proposal to connect start-up farmers with the pasture of non-farming landowners and retirees**. The proposal **works with the existing institutions** – land owners, land agents, young start-ups, and market – to minimise long term dependence on project funding or need for major policy reform.

Part 2 covers another area of importance -- **Environmental Stewardship** -- which appears to be (a) failing smaller farms; (b) not living up to its stated objective of investing in heritage landscapes; and (c) better adapted for arable rather than lowland pastoral farming systems. The report recommends that the AONB partnership, in wider alliance, **intervenes to shape the debate** on stewardship and its relevance for the small farms and pastoral systems that make up the High Weald, during what is an important year for Natural England and DEFRA in designing the new generation of Stewardship policies.

The report ends with a short discussion on the need for a clear vision of the **social and economic underpinnings of farming** in the production of ecosystem services and cultural landscapes.

Part 1. Matching High Weald pasture with livestock: an opportunity for start-up farmers

1.1 Livestock are the primary tools of maintaining the High Weald landscape

The High Weald is a **lowland¹ pastoral landscape**, with a distinctive ancient mosaic of small fields used primarily for **livestock grazing**. It is a **working landscape**, which is **underpinned by the economic vitality of livestock agriculture**. Of the 46 AONBs in the UK, the High Weald ranks second (after the Cotswolds) in the total number of farm holdings (1563) and number of lowland grazing holdings (770).² **Independent family-scale farmers** have an important position in the landscape, compared to the Surrey Hills where large amounts of land are held by the National Trust and a few large estates. In common with Surrey but unlike many other protected landscapes, the High Weald is **surrounded by intense economic pressure**. The ‘London effect’ on land values and ownership is an important feature, which is picked up again in section 1.5. Lowland grazing livestock farms in England have a history of low incomes per farm, per hectare and per unit of labour as compared to the other lowland land-based farm types.³ Even with the upturn in market prices, most cattle and sheep producers including lowland beef suckler herds and breeding sheep flocks made a net loss in the year ending March 2012 after accounting for all costs, including higher input costs such as diesel.⁴

1.2 Livestock numbers have been declining on the High Weald

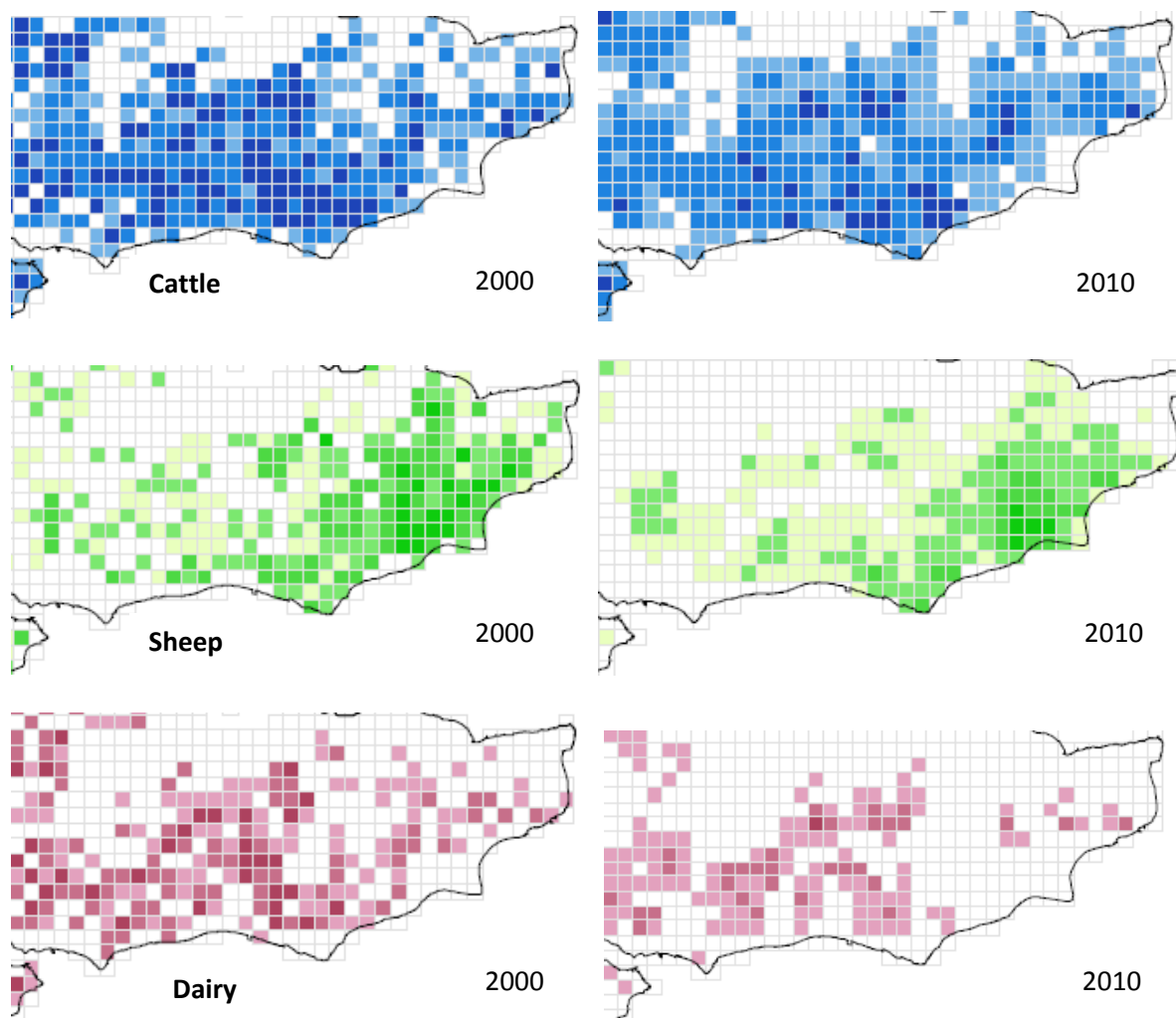
The number of cattle and sheep on the High Weald has **declined markedly** in the past decade, with **sheep** numbers down **32%** and **cattle** down **24%** in the period 2000-2010 (Table 1). This follows almost complete loss of dairy on the High Weald. The trend was noted by many interviewees from Wealden agriculture. Because beef and sheep prices have been recovering since 2009, this decline may have bottomed out.

Table 1 Total numbers of cattle and sheep in the High Weald AONB, 2000-2010. Source: DEFRA⁵

Year	Total cattle	Total sheep
2000	45,885	252,011
2001	45,057	240,896
2002	39,239	221,227
2003	37,887	223,040
2004	38,984	219,027
2005	36,914	209,039
2006	35,943	222,387
2007	34,608	203,312
2009	35,002	186,201
2010	34,836	172,472
Decline 2000-2010	-24.1%	-31.6%

The destocking of the region can be seen in the change in density of animals over the decade (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Density of livestock by 5km² grid squares in Kent and Sussex, 2000 and 2010. Source: DEFRA⁶



Key

Cattle	Sheep	Dairy
<250	<1000	<125
250 - 500	1000 - 2000	125 - 250
500 - 1000	2000 - 4000	250 - 500
1000 - 3000	4000 - 8000	500 - 1000
>3000	>8000	>1000

This rather rapid decline in the High Weald mirrors a drop in livestock numbers across the UK and EU that followed the **decoupling** of farm support from production.⁷ In England the national cattle herd declined by 10% and the sheep flock by 26% in the same period (Table 2). In Scotland the beef breeding herd declined by 10% with the sheep breeding flock falling by 25% between 2000 and 2008.⁸

Table 2. England livestock population ('000 head) in 2000 and 2010. Source: DEFRA

Year	Cattle	Dairy herd	Beef herd	Sheep	Pigs
2000	6,156	1,575	781	19,144	5,442
2010	5,542	1,160	756	14,240	3,606
Decline 2000-2010	-10%	-26%	-3%	-26%	-34%

The decline in livestock numbers is also felt in the food chain, with abattoirs reporting a shortage of animals and operating well below capacity.

1.3 The efficiency of Wealden pasture for livestock production is declining

The decline in livestock numbers on the High Weald is associated with a decline in the efficiency of use of the Wealden grassland resource for livestock production, though evidence is anecdotal. Many interviewees observed that there has been a **degradation of pasture** in the High Weald. A growing number of fields – especially small ones – are reverting to thistles, ragweed, coarse grasses, scrub and bracken (See Figure 2). Need for more intensive grazing is noted in other protected areas with declining livestock numbers, such as uplands of SW England, Scotland and North York Moors.⁹

Figure 2. Pasture reverting to weeds and coarse grasses, near Goudhurst and Peasmarsh



1.4 Non-farmers are a major factor in farmland ownership¹⁰

Key to restocking the High Weald is **matching pasture with animals** at a significant level, beyond small niche projects. One important factor is the **large amount of pasture in the hands of non-farmers**, and the **low intensity** of use of that resource. One land agent alone was aware of around 2,500 acres of grass owned by their clients and that land they knew of that was not farmed at all and was out of Single Farm Payment (SFP) under the Single Payment Scheme – in other words, out of reach of the levers of agricultural and agri-environmental policy. This underused resource in the hands of non-farmers can either be viewed either as a problem or an **opportunity for new farmers** who are starting up with little or no land of their own.

While precise data for the High Weald are not available, non-farmers are an important part of the farmland market. Across the country over the past decade, **private non-farming buyers** have represented around **37%** of all buyers of agricultural land, while **farmers**, whose primary objective is expanding their farming businesses, represent around 54% of buyers. The rest of the market

comprises institutional and corporate buyers.¹¹ One interviewed land agent reported that the proportion of land purchases by non-farmers increases markedly for sales below 20-30 acres. The reasons for non-farmers to acquire agricultural land are because of associated residence, or to buy privacy and a pastoral aspect, or because of tax advantages,¹² or as an investment.

Where property is bought for lifestyle, the agricultural resource may often, though not always, be poorly managed. The **infrastructure** of livestock production can then disappear quite rapidly. Fences and gates fall into disrepair. Yards and farm buildings are converted to non-farm use. Husbandry of pastures and soils is neglected. Infrastructure also includes agriculture skills and crafts residing in individuals and communities; and **knowledge centres** for land-based sectors, such as Plumpton College¹³ and Hadlow College¹⁴ which are vital to the resilience of production agriculture across generations.

It is these fields on the smaller holdings of 'residential' farms where the decline of pasture quality has been the most marked. Land owners may have to pay to have the fields mown (including for hay) or 'topped' but the land may effectively be lost to production agriculture. Livestock farmers looking for **rented grazing** will not invest to reinstall fences and gates, because the cost (£4-5/m) does not warrant the investment when there is plenty of larger areas of grass available. The land owners, expecting an income from their land for which they may have paid at least £6,000/acre, are surprised to find that, without good infrastructure, they will receive little rented income, and may even have to **pay** graziers to come in. The market for hay currently has little value, and much of the land is not suited to commercial haylage production. **Land agents**, who are major players in this area, may advise these owners that the only way to manage their pastures is to bite the bullet and install fences and bring the land back into production; to fence a 10 acre meadow would cost in the region of £3-4,000. With an expected rental income of £60-130/acre with SFP or £0-30/acre without, the return on investment is rather poor.

These dynamics of non-farm ownership and the decline of livestock infrastructure have seen grass-based livestock agriculture almost disappear from some parts of the Home Counties such as Hertfordshire. But these impacts are also felt in the uplands, where the organisation for the English beef and lamb sector EBLEX has commented that "in marked contrast to the recent past, the key challenge facing many hill and upland areas in the future is likely to be maintaining sufficient grazing animals to meet their landscape management objectives, rather than to prevent over-stocking."¹⁵

Reduced use efficiency of the Wealden pasture resource is not just attributed to non-farming landowners. As farmers transition to retirement, they may also destock while taking the single farm payment. Many successful farms do not have a successor.¹⁶

1.5 There are major barriers to young start-ups in livestock farming

There is a revival of interest in farming with young people in this country. But the problems for young people to enter farming in the UK are well known, especially access to land. All around the world succession is a problem, and new farmers must be able to start with little or no land. The UK population are ageing. Only 5% of 'agricultural holders' were under 35 years old in 2000, while 52% were 55 or older.¹⁷ One way to get started without owning farmland is to set up in **mobile grazing**. For example in sheep production with just a four wheel drive and trailer, some pens and a yard, and a lot of hard work, enough grazing land can potentially be aggregated through short term **grazing agreements** or longer term **tenancy** agreements to run a flock that is big enough to support a family,

perhaps 4-500 ewes if the grazier owns his/her house and had a second income, or 1000-1500 if there is a mortgage to pay. But despite the underuse of the pasture resource, there are **major barriers** to younger people who want to get started in livestock agriculture with little or no land. These barriers **may not be well appreciated by newcomers in livestock agriculture who arrive with capital** and who do not need to take a salary or housing costs out of their farm enterprise.

The 1995 Agricultural Tenancies Act created the Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) as a legal framework to encourage landowners to let more land. But on a national scale it is claimed that “the amount of land being released from true owner-occupation appears small” and the Agricultural Tenancies Act has not led to an increase in the size of the let sector.¹⁸ Neither landlord nor tenant has typically been comfortable with an agreement over five years for a wide variety of reasons, not least uncertainty over agricultural markets. Land farmed under an FBT does not qualify for relief from Inheritance Tax. And with CAP reform landowners will not be encouraged by land agents to enter into longer term tenancy agreements, because it would mean losing SFP, since farmers must now demonstrate ‘active management’ to retain SFP.¹⁹

Furthermore, graziers without an existing land base will always be **outbid by large established farmers** who can spread their fixed costs over the extra acres. Large operations and commercial farm management operations such as Burden Brothers or FGS can offer high rents (eg £130/acre); those farmers can cherry pick pasture if they have a good reputation. Also land **owners are much more attracted to such large and financially 500secure farmers** who are proven as competent and who have the right equipment.

Another aspect is **finance**. When the banks look at the figures for a grazier/tenant, they don’t see a sustainable business. Even a five-year rental agreement would not be seen by the banks as good security, compared to longer tenancy period such as 25 years. Critical to making the sheep profitable is having a very low cost system and regular cash flow, which not easy for a small farmer. They may only be able to sell sheep for a relatively small part of the year -- July to November – and so without another income (eg from forestry) or a core land asset against which they can borrow money, they struggle with irregular cash flow.

For young people to start in farming they need a **core holding or yard**. Councils are very reluctant to give approval for farmyards. There is also the issue of **housing**, as young farmers need to live where they work, but houses are converted by owners to weekend housing or rented out. Young farmers are also finding it difficult and expensive to get the necessary **licenses** to start up in farming, for example to tow trailers or to move livestock, costs for licenses can run into £000s.

Lastly, there is the issue of **suitability of grant schemes**. It is the Rural Development Programme for England (**RDPE**)²⁰ that should be supporting schemes to provide start-ups with a foothold in livestock agriculture. In fact, **very little of the current RDPE seems to offer anything to help young farmers**; some RDPE-funded projects can even risk taking buildings and yards **out** of the pool that young farmers will need to get started, in the name of rural ‘diversification’. The measure available to EU Member States under the Competitiveness axis for **“setting up young farmers” has not been implemented in England**.²¹ The NFU has recently criticised RDPE funding as being poorly allocated and difficult for smaller family farms to access.²²

1.6 The High Weald is not renowned for supplying the mainstream market with high quality meat

One of the ironies of High Weald livestock production is that such a rich grassland resource is not particularly renowned for producing a **quality meat product**. There is high quality **niche** production – especially of pedigree Sussex cattle – for local butchers, high end food service, and direct sales. But the mainstream market in the region requires a different product. Wholesalers such as Weddel Swift in Canterbury and Tottingworth near Heathfield actually bring quite a lot of beef from the Midlands and northern England; there is a perception that local producers are generally less professional when it comes to turning out a consistent quality product. There is a move of production out of organic across the region.

The British sheep and lamb market is not controlled by supermarkets and serves a large ethnic customer base, so does not have the level of vertical integration found in other parts of the agrifood system. This can work to the benefit of small farmers with smaller number of animals.

But there is still room for a **quality local product aimed at the mainstream market**, for both beef and lamb. The main independent retailer in the eastern side of the High Weald had a clear impression that the industry has not risen to the opportunity of **aligning with a local retailer** with a focus on the long term. To supply retail, producers need to provide **consistency and quality**, and work with the retailer, spending time in store and listening to what the customer says. The retailer may also expect some exclusivity. The interviewed retailer also felt that there is a lot of opportunity for **product differentiation**. Customers he thought would be very interested in meat identified from **different breeds** including Sussex beef, supported by organised producers. At the moment ‘beef’ and ‘lamb’ is too generic a commodity; beef on display in store was labelled British but with no further detail on origin; lamb had no country or place or origin labelling (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Beef and lamb with generic point of sale and on-pack information, Peasmarsh



Such attention to quality, and alliances with local mainstream retailers, may be a **more promising direction than regional labelling**, though the High Weald AONB has some market cachet. The experience of conservation grade lamb from the South Downs (‘South Downs Lamb and Beef’ marketed through South Downs Marketing Ltd) and other regional labels including Dartmoor Farmers²³ have not been universally positive. There are challenges in building up a critical mass and of setting and proving compliance with standards for breed, product quality, land management, animal welfare, and traceability, as well as understanding of the supply chain and the costs of processing and marketing, matching supply and demand in a strong marketplace with lots of competition, and in running an effective producer organisation, without a large market premium.

1.7 A Proposal: connecting start-up farmers to non-farming land owners

To summarise so far: **restocking** the Weald means **connecting animals to the pasture owned by non-farmers** and also of pasture of farmers who would otherwise be de-stocking or leasing their land in transition towards **retirement**. The target would be to get back to at least livestock numbers that existed in 2000, ie an extra 80,000 sheep and 10,000 cattle within the AONB.

The **proposal** is for a **coordinated Wealden partnership scheme** to restock primarily through **creating space for young start-ups** that also supports high levels of **resource management** (farm and environment) and **animal health**. The proposed scheme is built on commercial principles and production agriculture, from which the Wealden landscape is an important by-product.²⁴ It works by aligning the public and private institutions that already exist rather than establishing a major new project infrastructure.

For the scheme to attract young start-ups with little or no land, it has to work on the basis of mobile grazing. Farmers operating 'flying flocks' can have a poor reputation with short termism on both sides – grazier and land owner – leaving no-one to protect the land or the landscape. Match-making initiatives to pair grass with animals (such as East of England Grazing Exchange²⁵ or SheepKeep²⁶) may not be the way forward. The intention of the proposed scheme is to have a less short-term and more secure business that **preserves the landscape and builds soil fertility and grazing infrastructure**, and produces **high quality meat product**. This is done through a package of **training and start-up grants, and through aligning** the relevant policies and institutions. If young start-ups have guidance and skills, then land owners will feel more comfortable in letting their land to them.

The proposal is far from complete but **it is recommended that the AONB Unit, Natural England, the NFU and the land agents** support a **feasibility study** as a first step to developing and seed funding the proposal. The feasibility study would include a **mapping** exercise to see how much unused and underused land is actually available for such a scheme.

The benefits of the scheme are several:

- It is insulated from the high cost of farmland
- It does not demand high involvement or transaction costs from non-farming landowners
- It works with rather than against/around existing institutions (including land agents and education centres), rather than a separate project organisation
- It does not affect entitlements of landowners to CAP payments
- It improves the value of land
- It could meet growing demand for a quality product for mainstream retail
- It is built on a new generation of young farmers
- It does not require farmers to be organised together in the market (though it could provide the basis for producer organisation if want to go that way)

Accumulation of pasture. Most start-up farmers can't afford to buy farmland or woodland.

Farmland prices in the Weald are set beyond the productive earning potential from agriculture of what is in fact rather marginal farmland -- 63% of land in the High Weald National Character Area²⁷ is Grade 3, being heavy clay soils with a long winter. For most start-ups the way in has to be via land rental. As already stated, the economics of running a mobile livestock operation without owning land depend on accumulating enough pasture that is reasonably contiguous, to keep down costs of

transportation and keeping a sufficiently close eye on the stock – a radius estimated by respondents of 3-5 miles.²⁸ With the smaller fields typical of holdings of non-farmers, that task is even more challenging. In the scheme landowners would be encouraged to enter their unused or underused pasture. Landowners within pilot hubs would be contacted directly, especially where the pasture resource is not being well managed.

There is no doubt however that the logistical challenges of accumulating enough ground for 1000-1500 ewes (400 acres, and 1500 acres in winter) without a core land holding are huge. As part of the scheme, there could be a **nucleus** of secure land around a **Farm Business Tenancy** or **shared farming arrangements/joint venture/partnership**²⁹ perhaps linked to the Fresh Start initiative or the Henry Plumb Foundation.

Rental arrangements. What would be proposed to landowners a **grazing rent set at zero**³⁰, but the **value of their land could be increased** through facilitated access to fencing grants and improved land management. Land owners are saved the costs of mowing and topping, and the high standards of stewardship would ensure compliance with all ELS or HLS agreements; enrolment into Environmental Stewardship would be facilitated by the Land Agent (see below). There is evidence that this sort of arrangement could align well with priorities of non-farming landowners, which are seldom purely profit-driven. In South Wales non-commercial landowners appeared to be more interest in finding graziers or in accessing capital grants such as for fencing, rather than fixed on per-hectare payments.³¹ Landowners with SFP would keep the entitlement, and thus their status as active managers. Most grazing in the scheme would be under short-term grazing agreements, but with an understanding that those agreements would be renewed on an annual basis to provide some continuity and stability to the start-up business.³² After a trial period, if a good young grazier has proved his/her worth, commitments from landowners would have to extend beyond one year, preferably to five years. Longer term tenancies could also be incorporated where that suits the landowner (for example where the land is not registered with the Rural Land Registry and Rural Payments Agency and therefore out of SPS). In short, under the scheme **owners would see graziers as a contractor to help deliver land management outcomes rather than rental income.** Specialist breeds of sheep and cattle; opportunities to see farming in action close up; and opportunities to source local meat all can help to involve non-farming owners. Landowners would sign up initially for one year, though with expectation of renewals on an annual basis, and with mechanisms to minimise free-riding (whereby owners sign up for the scheme and then raise rental rates out of reach of start-ups once the land is improved).

Accessing grants for grazing infrastructure. An essential part of any package that connects graziers to non-farming landowners is reinstalling the missing infrastructure of gates, fences and water (Figure 4). As noted above, landowners may have access to SFP which can support installation of fencing and water. Where fencing is in poor condition, the landowner would be supported in applying for fencing grants from RDPE, HLS (not ELS) and other sources such as the Catchment Sensitive Farming³³ Capital Grant Scheme (to fence off water courses and ponds). HLS grants are set at ie £1.80/m though this is now considerably less than half the market rate; fencing costs using a good contractor are now close to £4.50/m, especially on the Weald where field boundaries do not run straight or level for long distances.³⁴

Figure 4: Installing missing infrastructure – before and after fence replacement, near Tonbridge



A supportive planning regime. There is currently a perception that planners and local decision makers have very little recognition of the role and value of farming or forestry. Start-up farmers need access to **yards**, and affordable **housing**. Success with the scheme would require the backing of local **councils** in planning policy and decisions. And yet Wealden and Rother councils are reported to be very sceptical about agricultural occupancies (though with some justification considering abuse of agricultural occupancies). The Scheme would engage local planning authorities and the ownership community, to demonstrate the importance of farming and young entrants to the profession.

Stewardship. The Scheme may not have to depend on the grazier receiving CAP payments. The landowner can utilise CAP entitlements under a Profit of Pasturage agreement, where they retain the management of the land -- this would encourage more to participate and perhaps fund some of the fencing/water costs. The scheme can also encourage enrolment of land into Environmental Stewardship and be designed to ensure that farm payments do not complicate matters. Non-farmers may be unfamiliar with Stewardship options (covered in Section 2). When that is the case, they will be guided towards Entry Level (ELS) if the land is not already enrolled, with much of the early administrative burden including registering of land, being carried by the scheme. Thereby the scheme brings an added benefit of getting ELS to parts of the landscape that it generally would not reach.³⁵

Training – the essential role of institutions of land-based further education. The provision of **land-based skills and training** has a vital role to play in the maintenance of the landscape and in bridging the gap between incomers and indigenous farmers, encourage active farming among incomers. As part of the scheme, start-up farmers would be offered a package of match-funded **courses** in livestock handling, product quality, pasture management, animal health and welfare, Environmental Stewardship and Catchment Sensitive Farming and farming in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones. There would also be support for obtaining **licenses** for livestock transportation and for towing trailers. The presence and experience of bodies such as **Plumpton College and Hadlow College** and **support of experienced farming ‘mentors’** in this respect could be invaluable part of reducing the perceived gap in land owners’ trust between young start-ups and established ‘safe pair of hands’ graziers.

Managing complexity – the role of land agents. From the perspective of many landowners who may not have empathy or understanding of agriculture,³⁶ the key is to have minimum transaction costs, presenting them with very simple interface and little paperwork. **Handling the complexity** associated with creating a web of bespoke grazing agreements that bring enough reasonably contiguous land together, plus fencing grants and ELS applications, is best done by the people with

day to day access to non-farming and semi-retired farming populations – the **land agents**, in association with the relevant statutory bodies. This approach is considered more durable than a stand-alone project. A register of pasture entered into the scheme would be shared by the land agents and other participating organisations (see below).

Access to Finance. Because the scheme provides a greater degree of certainty for lenders, **banks** would be encouraged to support the scheme by offering competitive interest rates to participating start-ups.

Aiming at product quality. Building on the earlier observations about current perceptions of quality from the local beef and lamb product, and the opportunities for product differentiation within the mainstream market, there is every reason to expect that if start-ups in the scheme would focus on quality breeds and genetics, they could meet a growing consumer demand for a distinctive but affordable quality product. These farmer-graziers, preferably as a producer organisation, could work with wholesaler such as Tottingworth and local mainstream retailers to provide such a product. There is **not a history of producer organisation** in High Weald meat production – even the Wealden Farmers Network, which was set as an example of how small farms can market collectively – is no longer functional. And as long as the livestock market is relatively open and transparent (thanks to the live markets) there is less incentive to collaborate. But in this case of supplying a new market, there is a stronger rationale to ‘cooperate to compete’. It does however also require a strong **reciprocal commitment from the retailer**, to be a reliable trading partner and to co-invest in the development of the product. There is a perception that retailers have never wanted to buy local unless it is cheaper than they can buy from the wholesaler, and that they also do not want to buy carcasses and would just stack the shelves with pre packed cuts. Most Wealden farmers are unable to supply meat for more than 20 weeks in a year (the best operations can manage around 44 weeks), but to ensure a continuous high value market there needs to be a 52-week supply. This shows how important it is for the retailer, processor and farmers to collaborate and co-invest in putting a high volume of quality local product on the shelves.

Community recognition. Landowners who partner with the scheme could be formally recognised as supporters of the Wealden Partnership, through awards, property signage etc.

Supporting policy: reorienting the Rural Development Programme. The sort of package of measures described in this paper, aimed at providing start-ups with a foothold in livestock agriculture, should be front and centre of a revised RDPE that emerges out of CAP reform.

A coalition of the willing. The scheme could be run as a collaboration between the **NFU**, the **AONB** Partnership, **Plumpton College**, the main **land agents** in the High Weald, the district Councils, **Natural England** and the **CLA**, as a coalition of the willing. The NFU has been vocal in the creating opportunities for young people to get into farming. To do this with low levels of public subsidy and avoid the project boom and bust, it may be best to have temporary support for a full-time coordinator housed with a supportive organization and working to a locally-based steering group of the above partnership. A group of 4-5 local part-time **mentors** would also be needed, who can support and advise on pasture management, improvement in stock quality, business management, conservation and supplementary employment eg in forestry. Support could be sought from DEFRA, rural development donors and private sector sources in first year, but with a transition to part or full self-sufficiency (through commissions) over time.

The scheme proposed is very much in line with the objectives of the new **foundation set up by Lord Plumb**³⁷ to provide grants, a mentoring network, scholarships and bursaries to give young people a 'leg up' into a career in farming. There could be an excellent opportunity to present the High Weald as a test site and implementing partner for the foundation.

Part 2: Environmental Stewardship Policy

The second focus of the report is on **Environmental Stewardship (ES)**, the agri-environment scheme introduced in 2005 in England and managed by Natural England to target CAP Pillar 2 payments and encourage public goods farming to produce public goods.

As a nationally recognised heritage landscape which is largely produced and maintained by working farmers, one would expect that Environmental Stewardship would be well adapted to the realities of High Weald farming and would support Wealden farmers to conserve and enhance the landscape resource. This is not the case. This section asks why, and stresses the need for the AONB Unit – in collaboration with other Protected Landscapes – to re-enter the debate on reform ES in a critical year for CAP reform.

2.1 Uptake of Environmental Stewardship in the High Weald is lower than the national average

Environmental Stewardship has three levels of support as follows:

- Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) is designed to support “good stewardship of the countryside” and applies to the whole farm, with focus on wildlife (including farmland birds), landscape quality and character, the historic environment, natural resources (water quality and soil erosion), and climate change mitigation. ELS agreements are for five years and there is a flat rate annual payment of £30/ha. Acceptance into ELS is determined by simple points per hectare calculations across a whole farm. Some landowners think that ELS is too much of a hassle relative to the payment.
- Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) is ELS geared to organic and organic/conventional mixed farming systems. Annual payment is £60/ha
- Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) aims to deliver significant environmental benefits under the same headings as ELS but involving more complex environmental management, in 110 high-priority situations and areas, including the High Weald NCA.³⁸ HLS agreements last for ten years. HLS payment rates are higher than ELS – annual payments average £200/ha and on lowland grassland can go as high as £355/ha.³⁹ But that is only for the land that is in the option, which may only a few hectares goes of a much larger farm.

There is also an Uplands Entry Level Stewardship Scheme which does not apply to the High Weald.

Around **half of the agricultural area within the AONB is under Stewardship** (Table 3). This is **less than the national uptake** which in March 2011 stood at around 67% (comprising 59% ELS and 12% HLS).

Table 3. Area under Environmental Stewardship in the High Weald AONB (2010 figures)

Scheme	Area in AONB (ha)	% agricultural area
Entry Level	24,527	24.86
Entry Level + Higher Level	11,432	11.59
Higher Level	3,042	3.08
Organic Entry Level	4,160	4.22
Organic + Higher Level	5,196	5.27
Total	48,359	49.01
Total area of the AONB	146,170	
Area in AONB under agriculture	98,670	

The relatively poor uptake of ES – especially HLS – in the High Weald seems to be down to four factors: (1) relatively small farm size; (2) the privileging of certain types of biodiversity over landscape in the targeting of HLS; (3) the predominance of permanent pasture; and (4) the amount of land owned by non-farmers,

2.2 Small farms have a much lower level of participation in ES

Average **farm size in the High Weald is small** by national standards -- 35.7ha in 2006, compared to around 81ha nationally. In parts of the High Weald especially on the western side farming comprises two extremes – wealthy landowners at one end, and struggling small farmers including tenants at the other.

In the AONB there is a **negative correlation between farm size and land under stewardship**. The average holding in stewardship (ELS and HLS) is **five times larger** than the average landholding, and that figure rises to **seven fold for HLS only**.⁴⁰ This can be a result of **economies of scale**; For a small farm the hassle of ELS application is frequently not seen to be worth the effort of setting it up. It takes no less time to set up a 100ha ELS scheme than a 30ha scheme. For HLS, it costs £2000 to pay a consultant to put Farm Environment Plans (FEPs) together for an application; it is clear that it makes much more sense for large farms and estates to apply than for small farms; big estates can afford to be in every scheme.

This observation is supported by a national survey of ELS by Hodge and Reader (2010) who found that the number of smaller holdings (5–50 ha) in a district was significantly **negatively correlated** with ELS area.⁴¹ Noting the consistent findings in many studies that participation in agri-environment schemes is correlated with farm size, the authors also present reasons for the effect that include but are not limited to transaction costs.⁴² Under ELS there is also a **small field supplement** of £35/ha for fields under 2ha. The **small field supplement** in has **not** been taken up in this region.

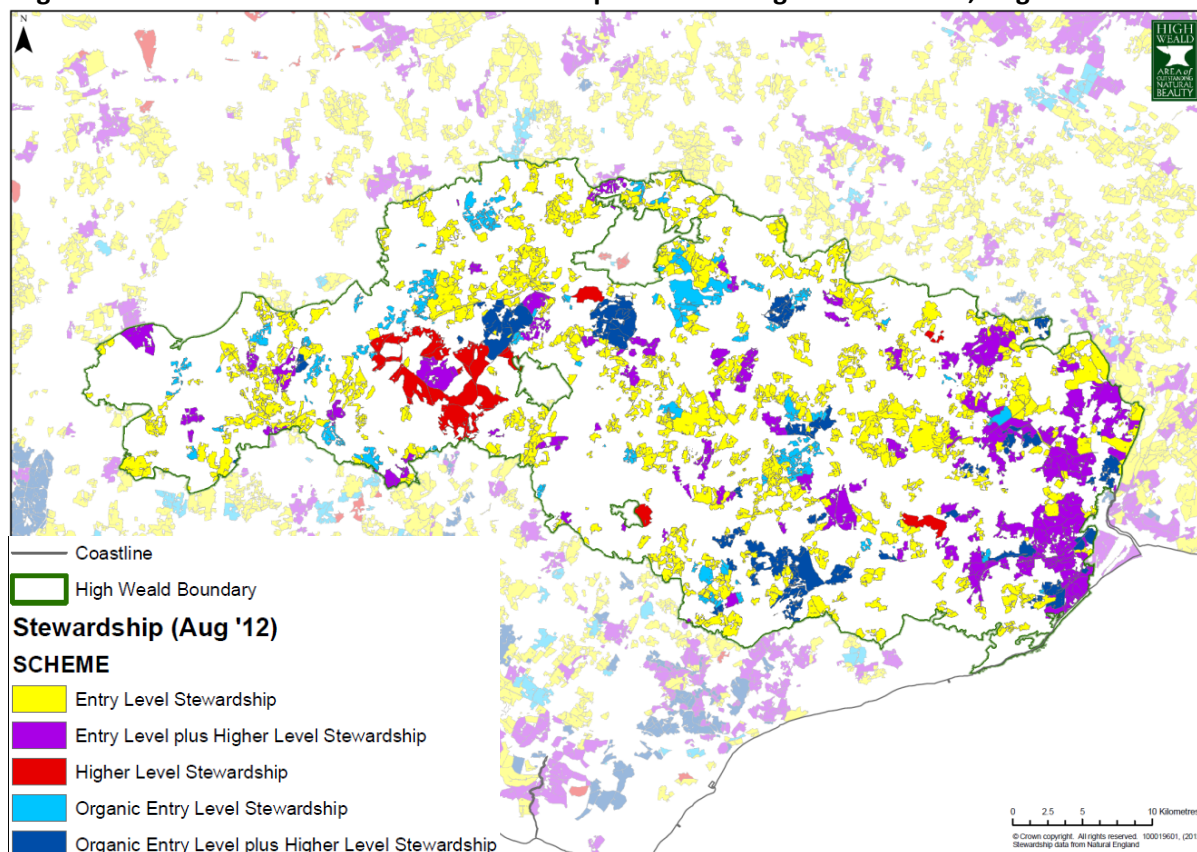
This impact of farm size has implications for equity and accessibility to Stewardship resources for small-scale farming. It also has implications for effectiveness in that Stewardship will not reach sufficient **scale across landscapes** to create the sort of resilient ‘**ecological network**’ that is envisioned in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper⁴³ and the Biodiversity 2020 Strategy⁴⁴, though there is a risk of raising expectations too high about the ability of 5-year ELS agreements to restore biodiversity at landscape level (see below).

The most obvious ways of **levelling the playing field for smaller farms** reduce the administrative burdens – especially for ELS – and to include a facility for **group applications** whereby contiguous small-scale farms apply as a group rather than as individuals to reduce compliance costs. This is a common feature of voluntary sustainability standards such as organic, Fair Trade, and Forest Stewardship (FSC).

Indeed under HLS there is a supplement (**HR8**) to facilitate **communal agreements** that coordinate delivering an agreed outcome. The HR8 supplement of £10 per ha is supposed to contribute towards the costs of facilitating linked agreements, which together manage a target feature. It is particularly targeted at common land and areas of shared grazing -- under ELS and HLS there is a '**common land and shared grazing**' option⁴⁵ that requires the establishment of commoners' or graziers' association. The Ashdown Forest HLS Agreement and the Forest of Dartmoor HLS Agreement are examples [check]. Shared grazing has not really been designed to support collaboration of independent farms in non-commons lowlands. According to one respondent HR8 has had very poor uptake because the drivers are not strong – incentives are small and the scheme is inflexible.

On a **landscape** scale, the end result of ES design based on individual farms is clear in Figure 5. There is a **patchwork pattern** of farms under Stewardship with little coherence at a landscape level to build a critical mass of contiguous farmland under stewardship.

Figure 5. Land under Environmental Stewardship within the High Weald AONB, August 2012



This challenge is well recognised and the lack of connectivity and buffering around core habitat has been an explanation for the reported weak impact of stewardship⁴⁶ in reversing the decline of indicator farmland species. A number of groups are looking into landscape-level approaches to ES, for instance by forming environmental groups around HR8 and its upland equivalent for farmers to

collaboratively conserve environmental goods.⁴⁷ Although HR8 has been used most widely in upland commons, Franks and Emery (2013) cite case studies that involve HR8 agreements on non-common lowlands to bring fragmented, high nature value sites within single management regimes.⁴⁸ Such initiatives remain however remain very much the exception.

The logic of collaborative approaches from a biodiversity point of view is quite different from the logic from a small farm point of view. For biodiversity the drive is for securing threshold effects, connectivity (spatial arrangement), buffering (edge effects) and core sites. There is **very little in the way of producer organisation** in the High Weald and many other UK livestock areas that would provide a platform for group approaches to Stewardship.⁴⁹ There has not been an incentive for farmers to pool their resources, other than in the procurement of inputs, thanks to the scattered nature of family farms and the presence of competitive live markets. Most farmers would likely look to external agencies like Natural England or a successor to the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) to handle the coordination, rather than it being built around bottom-up farmer organisations.⁵⁰ One interviewee reported that Natural England may have concluded that group working in collaborative landscape approach is not the way forward and is too long-term, unless there is a history of cooperation such as in marketing.

Another approach to support landscape-wide Stewardship with independent farms has been to encourage ELS applications, through assistance to landowners and land users, within priority corridors such as work of the Sussex Wildlife Trust in the Gatwick Greenspace project and the West Weald Landscape project on the western side of the High Weald.⁵¹

2.3 Biodiversity is privileged over landscape in the targeting of Higher Level Stewardship

As already stated, land in the High Weald under HLS is concentrated in areas with existing statutory designations for habitat. It is important to look into the reasons for the low uptake on classic pastoral Wealden landscape, in addition to farm size factors (2.2).

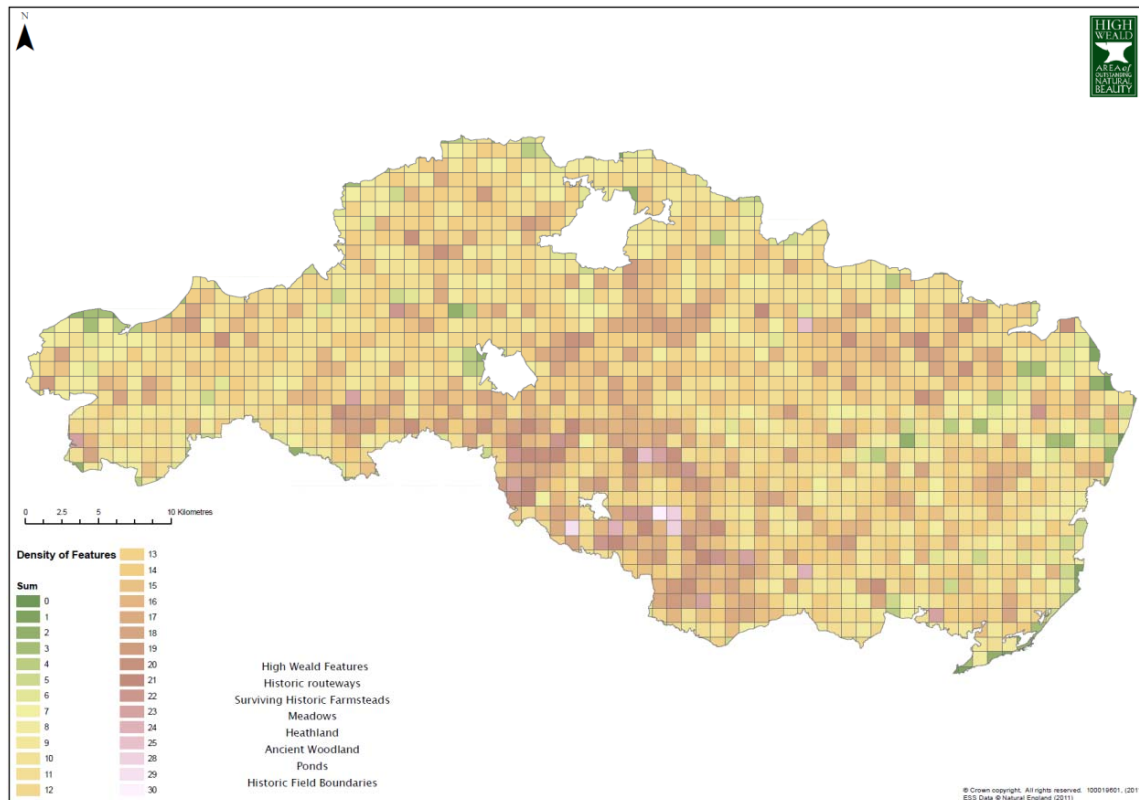
The HLS Target Area Statement for the 'High Weald and Associated Valleys Target Area'⁵² states that applications must perform one or more of the following land management activities:

- Habitat restoration
- Provision habitat for range-restricted farmland birds
- Management of archaeological and historic features
- Protection, maintenance and restoration of historic landscapes and their features
- Maintenance or restoration of historic buildings
- Land management practices to minimise soil erosion and diffuse pollution within the Rother catchment
- Restoration of characteristic field boundary patterns in the High Weald AONB (applications seeking to maintain or restore field boundaries must be accompanied by another land management activity from the list)
- Create new permissive access

With these criteria much of the High Weald AONB would appear to be eligible based primarily on **conservation and restoration of landscape features**. But when the map of **density of important landscape features** in the AONB (Figure 6) is compared with the actual area under HLS in Figure 5,

there appears to be another **negative correlation, between wealth of landscape features and HLS enrolment**. What is particularly striking is that the most ‘wealthy’ area which is richest in features, along the ‘southern slope’ around Heathfield, has the lowest density of HLS, or even ELS. Some of this could be a result of the smaller fields and higher levels on non-farmer ownership. Quite a lot of land, especially that in the hands of non-farmers, is not on the Rural Land Register (RLR)⁵³ or IACS database of agricultural land and so will be out of single farm payment and off the radar for Stewardship and Catchment Sensitive Farming – could this explain some of the big white spaces in Figure 5.

Figure 6. Density of important landscape features in the High Weald AONB per km2



But the poor correlation between landscape richness and ‘stewardship’ brings into question the whole approach of ES targeting and value for money.

HLS funds are very much **targeted** to areas with **existing statutory designations for habitat**, as can be seen in the distribution of land under Stewardship in Figure 3. The most extreme examples within the AONB are the heathland habitat of the Ashdown Forest -- which has European designation as Special Protection Area and national recognition as a Special Area of Conservation and a Site of Special Scientific Interest – and the wet grassland on the eastern levels of the AONB such as the Pevensey Levels, for which HLS payments of up to £330/ha are possible.⁵⁴ This **drains stewardship budget from the whole area**. The Ashdown Forest, which comprises only **2%** of the AONB area, is consuming up to £300,000 per year ie £3m over the 10-year agreement. One land agent estimated that the Ashdown Forest HLS had consumed 80% of HLS budget for the area. It seems that, despite the menu approach of HLS, a farmer is highly unlikely to even get the go-ahead to submit an HLS application without a strong element of habitat restoration and biodiversity.

What may come as a surprise to taxpayers is that, unlike ELS, **HLS is rationed** (it is discretionary and competitive) rather than allocated based only on **eligibility**. Land agents spoke about being prevented from submitting “no end of fantastic HLS proposals” because funds had already been distributed, having previously been encouraged to put such schemes forward. On a Natural England regional level the AONB sits within the East, London and South East (ELSE) Region, which had in 2011-12 a total HLS budget of £9.7m.⁵⁵ In practice this means, according to another land agent, that the High Weald will compete for funds with the Norfolk Broads and the South Downs and it is perceived that the Weald will not represent value for money in comparison.

In theory there may be more Pillar 2 money under the new CAP regime; the new DEFRA secretary of state Owen Patterson favours this, The likelihood however is that HLS will be **even more ‘targeted’** in the new post-2013 regime in order to deliver ‘value for money’ and with reduced Natural England officer time allocated. This bodes badly for the availability of High Level payments to support the contribution of Wealden farms to conserving the working landscape of the High Weald. ‘Targeting’ can be mis-translated as ‘a few big wins.’

Restocking the High Weald must be done in a way that does not compromise the value of the grassland resource as habitat for floral and faunal biodiversity. But unlike arable farming, the current focus in grassland seems to be mainly on conserving small areas of unimproved species-rich meadow rather than improving the management of the mainstream pasture resource for animals and biodiversity.

2.4 Permanent pasture has a low perceived value for habitat and biodiversity

Agriculture in the High Weald is dominated by permanent pasture. From a Natural England perspective, a basic grassland field is not perceived to give much stewardship value. While it is clear that HLS needs to be more responsive to role of farmers in conserving important pastoral landscapes such as the High Weald, there is also a need to (1) see how restocking the High Weald can be achieved without a biodiversity trade-off; and (2) improve the reputation of grassland within Stewardship.

ES seems currently better adapted to arable farming systems. A national survey found that districts with a greater area of **cereals** also have greater uptake of ELS. The points derived in ELS applications from the ‘low input grassland option’ are small and it is relatively easy to convert permanent pasture to arable -- by planting a few hectares of bird mix a farmer can compensate for taking large amounts of permanent pasture out of the scheme.⁵⁶

There is some justification for the low perceived value of permanent pasture to nature conservation. The experience of arable reversion to grassland in the scheme that preceded ES was that it was neither good for biodiversity in terms of flora⁵⁷ nor good habitat for farmland birds. The shift in farming in Pevensy to a dominance of grassland has also apparently been detrimental for farmland birds. It is well recognised that ecological heterogeneity is important to sustain biodiversity.

Furthermore, biodiversity in permanent pasture can easily be lost. Interventions to improve rough pasture, such as reseeding and adding even small amounts of nitrogen, can turn species-rich pastures into uninteresting land from a biodiversity point of view that may take years to recover if at all. Farmers whose pasture has been under Stewardship for 10 years, with relatively low stocking

levels and no added synthetic nitrogen, reported in interviews that they have not seen the expected recovery in floral diversity.

What is known from the Grasslands Trust and Weald Meadows Nectar Networks is that unimproved neutral grasslands of national importance grasslands⁵⁸ tend to flourish under **combination management**, usually both hay making and grazing. There should be very little fertilisation and seeding should only be done to add species. Management practice should avoid both over- or under-grazing, as the absence of both grazing and cutting can lead to dominance of coarse grasses and the eventual succession to scrub and woodland.

While the conservation of unimproved species-rich grassland is of importance both to the AONB and nation, there appears to be a dearth of practical advice to landowners and users on **improving the performance of mainstream pasture** and pastoral landscapes for livestock and biodiversity, which could improve its national value to ES. This would cover stocking density, nutrient balance (P, K and especially lime), managing grass and woodland boundaries, optimal timing of mowing and grazing, leaving ungrazed areas to provide early spring cover for birds and other wildlife, and improving the richness of legumes and herbs in swards. This is important also for managing the kind of small meadows that may be brought into more intensive production through the scheme proposed in Part 1. One farm manager on an estate that works with the Grasslands Trust stressed the need for education and training to accompany ES.

2.5 A proposal: shaping the debate on making Environmental Stewardship work for farmers and landscapes

Now is a good time to bring perspectives and new ideas from the High Weald AONB into national debate on the future shape of Environmental Stewardship. Natural England has the task of gathering ideas over the coming year. The biases that are reflected in the current scheme will be repeated in the instruments of a reformed CAP if the AONB does not get involved, in alliance with other AONBs, especially those with important contribution of lowland grazing. Under CAP reform and its national interpretation ES will see some significant changes, within a frozen or shrinking budget and under strong demands to justify its cost by ensuring provision of public goods and value for money. Because of EU proposals for cross-compliance for the single farm payments, ELS – as a ‘broad and shallow’ stewardship – starts to look less relevant. There is a risk that ELS will morph into cross-compliance for the SFP, and that HLS will be even less feasible for small farms and farms that are not sitting on an existing habitat designation.

The core issues for attention from the High Weald AONB appear to be the following:

Establish common cause with other AONBs and Protected Landscapes. There is much to be gained though sharing experience and developing a unified lobby with other Protected Landscapes, especially with those with important numbers of lowland grass-based farms. Already in 2003 a report⁵⁹ for the Cotswolds AONB, in response to the decline of livestock numbers and threat of increased scrub encroachment, noted how grassland management becomes a priority, as does greater use of stewardship schemes and the need to engage part-time farmers as well as remaining full-time farmers.

Improve the ‘fit’ of ES to small farms and small fields. The Stewardship playing field can be somewhat levelled for typical High Weald small farms, by including agri-environment **training** within

entry-level schemes, by regional take up of the **small field supplement**, and by a concerted effort to bring small parcels on smaller scale farms into HLS.

Raise the status of protecting Cultural Landscapes within the HLS. For too long in stewardship policy, the landscape has been seen through the lens of biodiversity and wildlife habitat. At the DEFRA level and the influential organisations in ES policy – particularly the RSPB – there appears to be little recognition of the importance and special nature of agriculturally-generated landscapes, in their own right. If that continues then the High Weald will lose when placed in competition with designated habitats. HLS can secure some of our best but vulnerable and uneconomic habitats in the short term but – in the High Weald at least -- has yet to succeed in integrating these areas at scale into economic land management. For **making HLS work for pastoral landscapes**, the southern slopes of the High Weald could provide a useful case study.

Engage in the debate on landscape approaches. Initiatives to stitch together the patchwork of ELS and HLS into a coherent areas can work for or against the interest of family farmers; either supporting group approaches and reducing costs per farm; or draining the majority of stewardship funding into a few biodiversity honeypots.

Raise expectations expect from pastoral systems in Stewardship. Through research and practical advice to landowners and users, the status of permanent pasture and pastoral landscapes as the poor cousin could be reversed. We may need to look at and consider seriously conventional farming techniques when managing permanent grassland – the headlands in particular. The Game Wildlife and Conservation Trust have some initial thoughts based on research on how this could be done.

Local adaptation. CAP reform is a blunt stick. It's a good time to bring local perspectives into national lobbying, including for a **more bespoke agri-environmental scheme**. The more locally defined and driven approaches to support better land management and farming system, that were behind the Land Management Initiatives set up by the Countryside Agency in 1999⁶⁰ have an appeal and would fit the localism agenda. But a regionalised model adapted to specific requirements of Protected Landscapes with payment according to delivery of outcomes will be opposed by Europe.⁶¹

Concluding remarks

The future of **High Weald landscape must come from the farming community** rather than tourism, carbon markets, or deals between farmers and water companies. Public goods that farming produces will be a **by-product of profitable agriculture**.

Sustainable intensification is possible in the High Weald without an environmental trade off, if done right. UK agriculture will need to use land for its best purpose, with climate-friendly agricultural practices. For the High Weald that primarily means grass-based production of livestock. If managed productively, grass-based agriculture also contributes to the heritage landscape and protection of soils and water.

But holes are appearing in the system that are constraining that opportunity for sustainable intensification. A growing amount of **pasture is in need of animals**. And a lot of **young people are in need of a foothold into farming**. Furthermore, the main instrument of incentivising the production of public goods from farming – **Environmental Stewardship** – is not sitting well on the pastoral landscape of the High Weald.

Neither requires a huge project or subsidy. They need all the important private and public institutions to **pull together** to ensure that young start-ups can break through the ceiling that otherwise rewards scale and deep pockets. The proposal in Section 1 aligns the interests of young start-ups with non-farming land owners and farmers headed towards retirement, land agents, local council planning departments, education establishments, processors and retailers, NFU, CLA, AONB, and Natural England, perhaps brokered by new part of land management business. ‘Residential’ farmers and non-farming landowners (too easily dismissed as ‘sofa farmers’ or ‘blow-ins’) must be part of the solution.

An important debate is also to be had on making the system of **stewardship** better adapted to Wealden agriculture. But in the big picture, the carrots and sticks of the CAP will become less central as drivers of behaviour of land owners and land users compared to market in the decades ahead. It is imperative to balance attention between instruments of public policy and what can be done through private levers, especially related to product quality, collaboration in the market, and long term supply chain relationships. To that end, the most urgent rethink in the subsidy regime is probably not in Stewardship but in **Rural Development**, and it’s vital that the AONB and other organisations campaign for an agricultural focus to the RDPE, including maintaining livestock numbers in the High Weald. As one agent put it, “Any new scheme needs to recognise its wider importance on community and social fabric of a sustainable farming economy.”

The question then arises as to how well placed the AONB is to drive the sort of proposals set on in Sections 1 and 2 of this report. The AONB Unit, with its history of supporting **working landscapes** rather than a pure conservation agenda, and with its position as an honest **broker**, could play a pivotal role within a coalition of NFU, councils and planning authorities, education establishments, land agents, the CLA, and market actors. Many interviewees supported the idea of the AONB **becoming more active in the debate** on Wealden agriculture – for example by co-hosting lunches or dinners around hot topics such as creating space for young people in agriculture. It’s important to bring the land users as well as the owners (indigenous and incomer/ residential) into these debates. The AONB can thereby “be seen as a mechanism for sustainable economic development” and distance itself from perceptions that it is part of the group of quangos around Natural England or used by Councils to impose rules around the AONB designation. The NFU is re-regionalising and could be an excellent partner in hosting such events; as would the CLA.



Annex Interviewees

Name	Position	Date
Andrew Jempson	Jempsons Supermarket	3 Sept
Andy Robertson	East Sussex County Council New NFU Director General Former Scottish NFU CEO	29 Aug
Anthony Weston and Mark Weaver	CLM Land Managers http://www.c-l-m.co.uk/	24 Aug
Brenda Hide	Farm manager, Bungehurst Farm Maplesden pedigree Sussex herd.	30 Aug
Charles Clark	Land Agent http://www.charlesclark.co.uk/	6 Sep
Chris Short and Jane Mills	CCRI Gloucester Research on collaborative approaches to Stewardship	11 Sep
Christopher Strangeways	Farmer, Bosney Farm	14 Aug
Colin Hedley	CJH Agri-Environment Consultants Ltd	23 Aug
Dawn Brickwood	Grasslands Trust and Weald Meadows Nectar Network	By email
Elwyn Davies	Managing Director of Hobbs Parker Auctioneers LLP	28 Aug
Frank Langrish	Farmer and NFU Council delegate, E Sussex	20 Aug
Gillian van der Meer	E Sussex NFU chair.	6 Sep
James Mulleneux	Territory Manager for Kent, Surrey and Sussex Country Land and Business Association (CLA) Herd of Sussex Cattle	24 Aug
Jane Howard	Farmer, Sussex cattle herd	29 Aug
Jeremy Franks	SAFRD, University of Newcastle	By email
Jim Seymour	Area Manager, Kent and Sussex Natural England	22 Aug
Jo Hughes	Homestead Farm Herd of pedigree Sussex cattle and sheep	6 Sept
Keith Datchler	Estate manager Beech Farm Estate	By email
Laurie Jackson	Landowner Advisor West Weald Landscape Project, Gatwick Greenspace Project, Sussex Wildlife Trust	23 Aug
Leo Hickish	Head of Rural Asset Management, Batcheller Monkhouse www.batchellermonkhouse.com	30 Aug
Polly Dumbreck	Hoopers Farm Traditionally reared Sussex beef	20 Aug
Richard Clarke	South East Protected Landscapes (Network of SE AONBs and National Parks)	16 Aug (by phone)
Sarah Blackford	Plumpton College Centre for Sustainable Food Farming and Forestry	29 Aug
Simon Jenner	Former Farm Manager Highfields Farm	Aug 30
Jonathan Howard	Sheep and apple farmer near Ticehurst	24 Nov (by phone)

Notes

¹ While it seems odd to define the 'High' Weald as 'lowland', the classification of "lowland" is if less than 50% of its total area is in an EC Less Favoured Area.

² DEFRA stats for 2010

³ Fogerty M., Soffe R., and Robbins K. (2012). Farm Business Survey 2010/2011 Lowland Grazing Livestock Production in England. RBR Rural Business Research. www.ruralbusinessresearch.co.uk

⁴ EXLEX Business Pointers 2012: Business costings of English cattle and sheep enterprises for the year ending 31st March 2012. http://www.eblex.org.uk/documents/content/returns/brp_p_cp_businesspointers2012.pdf

⁵ Data for 2008 removed as spurious

⁶ DEFRA Maps of livestock populations in 2000 and 2010 across England

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-june-detailedresults-livestockmaps111125.pdf>

⁷ [Explain effect of area payments, and as farming population ages, are likely to de-stock as head towards retirement. Some dispute over the role of decoupling. But very unlikely to be a return to 'headage' payments based on numbers of animals.]

⁸ http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/454.pdf P9

⁹ See John Wibberley & Martin Turner Farming and Rural Economy issues facing the South-West English Uplands <http://www.rase.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/journal/2009/17-ixzhdfmqj8362.pdf>

¹⁰ To add: analysis by Bohnet

¹¹ Lobley, M et al (2012). *Making Land Available for Woodland Creation*. Centre for Rural Policy Research, Department of Politics, University of Exeter. June 2012. <http://www.campaignforrealfarming.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Who-owns-agricultural-land-in-the-UK.pdf>. The recent trends is for strength in the commercial farmland sector and investors, and weakness in the residential (or 'lifestyle') arena whose fortunes are tied more closely tied to the wider economy.

¹² Owners of agricultural land and forestry pay no inheritance tax on these assets after two years, so is a good investment vehicle to roll over capital gains

¹³ www.plumpton.ac.uk

¹⁴ www.hadlow.ac.uk

¹⁵

http://www.eblex.org.uk/documents/content/publications/p_cp_changeintheairtheenglishbeefandsheepproductionroadmap.pdf

¹⁶ Note here on how CAP reform and area payments the SFP has allowed farmers to intensify production/de-stock.

¹⁷ <http://www.ecifm.rdg.ac.uk/maclab3.htm>. Statistics about the age of farmers must be treated with caution, however. The figures are skewed by the fact that a father may still be the "farmer" well into his 70s or 80s for personal or tax reasons, whereas the son/daughter is actually doing most of the physical work.

¹⁸ ADAS Consulting Ltd (2004). Entry to and Exit from Farming in the United Kingdom (RMP 2037): Executive Summary. <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/foodfarm/reports/documents/Entry.pdf>. In the High Weald one agent had a different opinion, that FBTs did release more land that had previously been farmed 'in-hand' ie by the landowner.

¹⁹ [But what is the land is unregistered and out of SFP? Then why not have long term tenancies??]

²⁰ Pillar 2 (Rural Development) of the CAP, implemented in England as the RDPE, which aims to "improve competitiveness in the agriculture and forestry sector, safeguard and enhance the rural environment, foster competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities." The RDPE comprises four axes: (1) Competitiveness; (2) Environment and Land Management (administered by Natural England as ELS, HLS and UELS and by the Forestry Commission as Woodland Grant Scheme -- covered in Section 2); (3) Rural Economy; and (4) LEADER. The RDPE was reviewed in 2010 and as a result DEFRA announced a package of measures "to stimulate sustainable growth in the rural economy and help rural businesses." This included £100 million from the RDPE to help small businesses improve their skills, facilities and competitiveness, and a £20m small grants scheme to help farming, forestry and horticultural businesses in England to become more efficient at using resources. The LEADER programme, which uses "local knowledge to promote an integrated bottom up,

community-led delivery” of projects of farm diversification, tourism, renewable energy, forestry, village renewal, micro businesses, and rural heritage, steers clear of anything directly related to agricultural production. Under CAP reform it is proposed that Rural Development will have 6 priorities:

- Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation;
- Enhancing competitiveness;
- Promoting food chain organisation & risk management;
- Restoring, preserving & enhancing ecosystems;
- Promoting resource efficiency & transition to low carbon economy;
- Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas

²¹ Unlike France, Germany, Denmark, Italy and Spain. DEFRA has claimed that “research shows no evidence of major barriers to entry that justify policy intervention and no evidence of significant market failure in the processes of entry to and exit from farming.” DEFRA is also opposed to a proposed EU-wide support scheme for small farmers. ADAS Consulting Ltd (2004). Entry to and Exit from Farming in the United Kingdom (RMP 2037): Executive Summary.

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/foodfarm/reports/documents/Entry.pdf>

²² NFU vice-president Adam Quinney cited in Farmers Guardian 26 Oct 2012

<http://www.farmersguardian.com/home/business/business-news/cap-reform-must-not-overshadow-collaboration-on-family-owned-farms/50687.article>

²³ <http://dartmoorfarmers.co.uk> See Farmers Weekly article at

<http://www.fwi.co.uk/Articles/25/05/2012/133104/PHOTOS-Dartmoor-Farmers-meat-venture.htm>

²⁴ Putting farm landscape or biodiversity objectives ahead of (rather than together with) production objectives can lead to oddities such as wildlife trusts owning their own animals to deliver conservation of target flora and fauna species.

²⁵ <http://www.grazingforum.co.uk/grazingexchange.asp>

²⁶ <http://www.sheepkeep.co.uk/>

²⁷ National Character Area as defined by Natural England, with borders approximately equivalent to the AONB

²⁸ “The relevant radius of search for such land will be constrained both by the bulk feed requirements of the animals and the distance over which he can keep a sufficiently close eye on the stock. The options are likely to be much more restricted than those facing the arable farmer seeking “marginal extra acres”.” Errington, A., Millard, N. and Whitehead, I. (1998). The emerging shape of Farm Business Tenancies. RICS Research, London. ISBN 0854068942

²⁹ Gemmill, W. (2005). The new role of the new entrant. *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* 166. <http://www.rase.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/journal/2005/16-87858929.pdf>

³⁰ An opinion also stated by Will Gemmill of Strutt & Parker: “If the new entrant is prepared to farm without the Single Farm Payment (SFP) that is currently being allocated to individuals and businesses rather than the land itself, or can do without environmental payments, they are going to be able to obtain land at very little or no rent.”

³¹ Mills, J., Gibbon, D., Dwyer J., Short C, and Ingram, J. (x). Identification of Delivery Mechanisms for Welsh Top-Tier Agri-Environment Schemes. CCW Policy Research Report No 06-15.

http://www.ccri.ac.uk/Projects/FoodandFarming/Completed/F11_download.pdf

³² A land agent interviewed for the study said that the tenanted sector, especially in the High Weald, has been dominated for decades by short term/season grazing agreements, but that in reality something that appears to be very short will typically run on for years.

³³ Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) offers farmers practical training, advice and capital grants to help reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture in 65 priority catchments including East Rother & Walland Marsh (35), River Beult (44) and Rivers Medway & Eden (59) and covering much of the AONB area. See

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/csf/cgs/catchments.aspx> Includes Capital Grants Scheme

³⁴ Note the earlier experience of the AONB with a £40k pot for fencing, offering up to 75% costs through Weald meadows, but could not spend it. Landowners were reluctant to come forward even with 25% matching contribution, and it was difficult to get any guarantee that grazing would be secured for any length of time. But as part of a coordinated grazing project fencing grants could be a more attractive proposition

³⁵ Dividing payments eg SFP and ES between grazier and landowner is being discouraged. HLS applicants do have to have management control of the land, but have been able to apply as a countersigned party eg with a grazier. But problems of “dual Use” in which one party takes the SFP and another takes the HLS. The Rural Payments Agency is looking hard at these and is writing to farmers; they will want either the owner or tenant to claim everything. <http://www.c-l-m.co.uk/uploads/pressReleases/78941795/SEF%20April%202012.pdf>

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- ³⁶ Farmland to non-farmers. Anglia Farmer, March 2008 <http://www.woolley.co.uk/news/Farmlandtonon-farmers.html>
- ³⁷ The Henry Plumb Trust is looking to raise £2m from donors, which will generate an annual income that can provide practical support to young farmers. <http://henryplumbtrust.org> . See Farmers Weekly <http://www.fwi.co.uk/Articles/27/09/2012/135388/Lord-Plumb-creates-foundation-for-young-farmers.htm>
- ³⁸ Natural England (undated). *NCA 122: High Weald Key Facts & Data* http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/images/122_high_weald_tcm6-32489.pdf
Applications are also sought outside of those areas – see Natural England (2008). *South East: Higher Level Stewardship Theme Statement* http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/southeast_tcm6-6476.pdf
- ³⁹ The maximum amount being for wet grassland creation for breeding waders.
- ⁴⁰ Note that care is required in equating ‘holdings’ with ‘farms’. Data to be checked.
- ⁴¹ Hodge, I and Reader M. (2010). The introduction of Entry Level Stewardship in England: Extension or dilution in agri-environment policy? *Land Use Policy* 27 (2010) 270–282
- ⁴² “The fixed cost element is likely to be greater relative to the potential benefits on smaller holdings. Farmers on smaller holdings may also be generally less well educated and informed and, owing to financial constraints, less responsive to the opportunities presented. They may also be older and less likely to have a successor, two factors that have been associated with lower rates of take-up. Also, small farms may tend to be more intensively farmed, which would mean there is less scope to adopt ELS options that limit production, and may have fewer eligible features (e.g. hedges), as well as having a higher proportion of dairy farms.”
- ⁴³ HM Government (2011). *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature*. 2011. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>
- ⁴⁴ DEFRA (2011). *Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England’s Wildlife and Ecosystems Services*. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/08/19/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020/>
- ⁴⁵ Natural England (2011). *Common Land and Shared Grazing Supplement to the Environmental Stewardship Handbooks*. Updated October 2011
- ⁴⁶ Monitoring & Evaluation of Agrienvironment Schemes. Final Report. May 2009
- ⁴⁷ Franks, J. R., Emery, S. B., Whittingham, M. J. and McKenzie, A. J. (2011). Options for landscape scale collaboration under the UK’s Environmental Stewardship Scheme. Newcastle University Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/publish/researchreports>.
- ⁴⁸ Franks, J. R. and Emery, S. B (2013). Incentivising collaborative conservation: Lessons from existing environmental Stewardship Scheme options. *Land Use Policy* 30 (2013) 847– 862
- ⁴⁹ Though there are buying groups such as Southern Farmers where farmers cooperate to purchase inputs
- ⁵⁰ Franks, J. R. and Emery, S. B (2012). Aspects of collaborative agri-environment schemes (cAES): Facilitating (Border) Organisations. http://www.macauley.ac.uk/LandscapePartners/Presentation5_JeremyFranks.pdf
- ⁵¹ http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/uploads/35056%20working%20with%20landowners_0.pdf Also refer here to Local Nature Partnerships and Nature Improvement Areas?
- ⁵² HLS Target Area Statement SE03: High Weald and Associated Valleys Target Area. http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/hlstarargeting/High_Weald_and_Associated_Valleys.pdf
- ⁵³ <http://rpa.defra.gov.uk/rpa/index.nsf/UIMenu/57EB5CADAD0BFAD580256F72003D47AE?Opendocument>
- ⁵⁴ Grassland options offered under HLS are for ‘species-rich, semi-natural grassland’, ‘wet grassland for breeding waders’, ‘wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl’, and ‘semi-improved or rough grassland for target species’. There are supplements for hay making, raised water levels and inundation grassland.
- ⁵⁵ Natural England. *Environmental Stewardship Information Note 24 January 2012* http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/images/es-info-notev5.0_tcm6-30376.pdf
- ⁵⁶ 150 points per ha. Grassland management options available under ELS are ‘Management of archaeological features on grassland’, ‘Permanent grassland with low inputs’, ‘Permanent grassland with very low inputs’ and ‘Management of rush pastures’. A new ELS option will be available post-2013 for “Legume- and herb-rich swards” which will “provide habitat and food for invertebrates including crop pollinators, benefit soil structure, mitigate climate change by reducing nitrogen fertiliser use and provide productive high quality forage for livestock” on temporary grassland at 200 points per ha. See Natural England (2012). *Entry Level Stewardship: Environmental Stewardship Handbook. Fourth Edition – January 2013*
- ⁵⁷ See evaluation of arable reversion at http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=10190_MA01015.pdf
- ⁵⁸ Unimproved species-rich neutral grassland of National Vegetation Classification (NVC) community **MG5** is now one of the most threatened semi-natural habitats in the UK. It has been estimated that only 4000 ha remain. Since 1940 there has been over a 95% decline nationally in the area of this habitat.

http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/userfiles/file/Publications/FARMINGSUMMARYfinal_12042005144028.pdf

⁶⁰ Countryside Agency (2004). Experiences from the Land Management Initiatives.

[http://www.ukeconet.co.uk/images/stories/research/water_and_wetlands/humberhead/Experiences from the land management initiatives.pdf](http://www.ukeconet.co.uk/images/stories/research/water_and_wetlands/humberhead/Experiences_from_the_land_management_initiatives.pdf)

⁶¹ Investigate the possibility of an regionalised **High Weald HLS**