

# South East: Higher Level Stewardship Theme Statement



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Natural England is actively seeking **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) applications** outside of Target Areas (area shown in green). High quality/multiple objective applications falling within this area will be considered. To help you determine whether you qualify for HLS in these areas Natural England has, in conjunction with partners, identified a number of **specific themes** as set out below. Each theme relates to a particular HLS feature(s) at risk and in particular need of HLS management. Applications should look to address more than one theme wherever possible.\*

*\*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.*

## 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'<sup>1</sup> areas of the following habitats: **chalk downland** on the fringes of the South Downs, North Downs, East Kent Downs, Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Target areas; **purple moor grass and rush pasture** particularly on the Pett Levels; **heathland** particularly in Hampshire; **saltmarsh, mudflats, sand dunes, vegetated shingle and grazing marsh, traditional orchards, fens, wood pasture and parkland, ancient semi-natural woodland, species rich hedgerows, lowland meadows and dry acidic grasslands and reedbeds** across the region.

**Theme 2: Reversing the decline of farmland birds:** Natural England will consider applications that will provide a package of ELS/HLS options<sup>2</sup> capable of delivering the most appropriate management possible within **Nationally Important Farmland Bird Hotspots**<sup>3</sup> defined as areas supporting (a) 3 or more of the following range-restricted arable birds: **grey partridge; corn bunting; lapwing; turtle dove; 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: **stone curlew**.

**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 & rapidly declining species outside of areas of important habitats (listed above): **barbastelle bat** particularly in Ebernoe Common and The Mens, in the West Weald; **rare ground beetles** (on central northern fringes of North Kent Downs and High Weald), **rare bumblebees** including the **knapweed carder bumblebee** and **rare arable plants** in the **Important Arable Plant Areas** across the region.

**Theme 4: Improving the quality of nationally important water bodies and/or habitats adversely affected by diffuse water pollution from agriculture**<sup>4</sup> Natural England will consider applications offering management and/or capital items to tackle soil erosion and run-off issues. **The Test & Itchen** in Hampshire; **The Kennet** in Berkshire; **The Beult** in Kent; **The Stour** in Kent; **The Meon** in Hampshire; **The Loddon** in Berkshire & Hampshire; **The Arun** in West Sussex and the **Solent coastal estuaries** including the harbours of **Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester**.

**Theme 5: Reducing risk to nationally designated assets identified by the Heritage At Risk Survey**<sup>5</sup> 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 value.

**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 region.<sup>6</sup>

**Theme 7: Reducing the damage caused to undesignated below-ground archaeological sites by cultivation and protecting and enhancing visible undesignated historic environment features**<sup>7</sup>

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 archaeologists<sup>8</sup>. 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 region<sup>8</sup>. Natural England will also consider applications making a significant contribution to the maintenance of historic landscape character<sup>9</sup>.

**Theme 8: Improving people’s enjoyment & understanding of the farmed environment:** Natural England will consider applications offering to enhance or improve access and recreation<sup>10</sup> 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 (d) provide opportunity to improve the public’s understanding of the farmed environment through educational access visits<sup>11</sup>.

## Theme Statement Notes – additional information for applicants

<sup>1</sup>. ‘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](http://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 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 present in quantities over the **size thresholds** provided below:

Habitat	Size
ancient semi-natural woodland	n/a
species-rich hedgerows	n/a
<b>grazing marsh</b> (coastal and floodplain grazing marsh)	5ha
<b>saltmarsh</b> (coastal saltmarsh)	n/a
<b>sand dunes</b> (coastal sand dunes)	n/a
<b>vegetated shingle</b> (coastal vegetated shingle)	2ha
fens	1ha
<b>chalk downland</b> (lowland calcareous grassland)	5ha
<b>dry acid grassland</b> (lowland dry acid grassland)	5ha
<b>heathland</b> (lowland heathland)	5ha
lowland meadows	1ha
purple moor grass and rush pastures	2ha
reedbeds	2ha
traditional orchards	n/a
Wood Pastures and Parkland	n/a

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

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://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](http://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](http://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 1112**