

# Farming

in a Protected Landscape



Agriculture is changing on the Northumberland Coast



*Conservation Grazing at Low Steads  
Photo © Gavin Duthie*



# Farming is changing as never before in our lifetime

This update from the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership sets out to provide details of upcoming policy changes for agricultural support in England. The Northumberland Coast AONB covers 165 km<sup>2</sup> of the coastal strip from Warkworth to Berwick-upon-Tweed..Along with the other 33 AONBs and 10 National Parks, it is recognised as one of England's finest landscapes and is protected accordingly. Seventy five percent of the Northumberland coast is a farmed landscape and so all AONB farmers have a significant role to play in the conservation and enhancement of the AONB's landscape for future generations.

With these changes in mind the AONB Partnership has asked local farmland conservation advisor Harry Baker Cresswell to look at how farmers in and close to the AONB might best place their holdings to take full advantage of the new agri-environment schemes and more widely the principle of farmers providing 'Public Goods'.

Harry has used case studies for three different farms across the AONB to demonstrate how using the Natural Capital approach could be beneficial in the future for land managers.

# New Countryside Stewardship

Countryside Stewardship is a scheme that pays farmers, woodland owners and land managers to look after and improve the environment. It includes things like conserving and restoring wildlife habitats, or carrying out work to manage flood risk – the full list can be found at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Countryside Stewardship will eventually be replaced with new schemes that reward farmers for providing public goods. By entering an agreement now, farmers will benefit from the new schemes when they are fully rolled out in 2024. Defra will provide a straightforward way for Countryside Stewardship scheme agreement holders to transfer across to the new schemes once they are ready. Until then, Defra has already made some changes to the Countryside Stewardship scheme for new agreements starting in January 2021. They will make the following changes to agreements from 2021 onwards:

- improving the capital grant offer, making 67 options available which can sit alongside the wildlife offer
- creating new wood pasture options in the uplands, at payment rates suitable for upland application, providing a habitat mosaic of grassland, scrub, and trees
- making the capital offer available to Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement holders, where the options are compatible
- improving woodland options, including bringing bracken control and stone wall options into woodland management and combining woodland creation and woodland maintenance grants
- increasing the number of capital items that farmers can apply for using the Rural Payments service, including hedgerows and boundaries

# What are public goods?

The new schemes will pay farmers and land managers to deliver public goods. Some examples of what this might look like in the Northumberland Coast AONB are:

**Climate change adaptation** Reducing flood risk using natural flood management solutions on farmland.

**Climate change mitigation** Storing carbon and pulling it out of the atmosphere by managing and creating saltmarsh, ponds and permanent grassland.

**Clean air** Reducing atmospheric nitrogen.

**Clean water** Protecting rivers and burns from diffuse pollution with new vegetated buffers and keeping clean and dirty water separate in yards.

**Protection of, and mitigation from environmental hazards** Good nutrient management on farms to avoid pollution.

**Biodiversity (thriving plants and animals)** Creation of coastal grazing marsh for wintering waders and wildfowl and breeding lowland waders.

**Health and well-being / recreation** Helping more people enjoy our countryside responsibly through improved access and visitor facilities.

**Beauty and heritage** Improving the quality of the landscape and restoring heritage features on farms.

# New schemes

The three new schemes that will reward farmers for looking after the environment and providing public goods are still in development and are being tested across the country, but they will look something like this:

**Sustainable Farming Incentive** will pay for environmentally sustainable land management actions that all farmers can do.

*Available from 2022/23.*

**Local Nature Recovery** will pay for action that supports local nature recovery and delivers local environmental priorities.

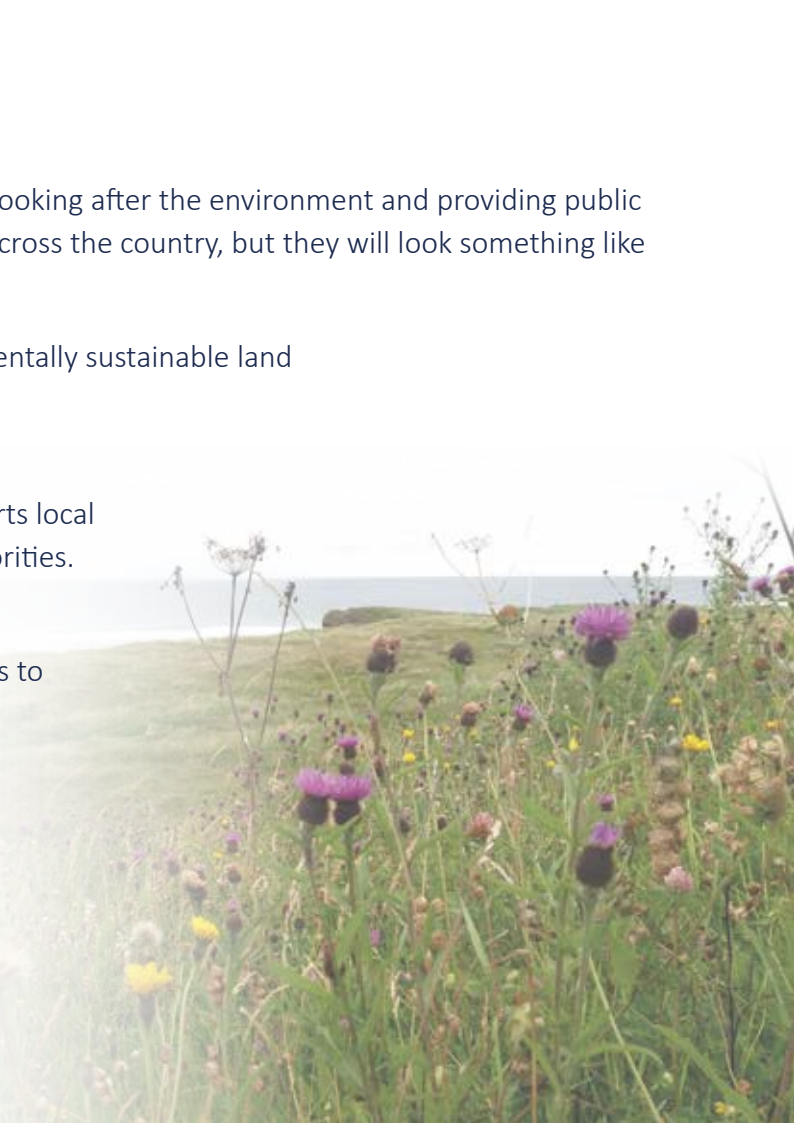
*Available from 2024/25.*

**Landscape Recovery** will involve bespoke agreements to support long-term land use change projects.

*Available from 2024/25.*

## **Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme**

*This scheme for farmers and landowners in the AONB will be launched soon. Make sure you are on our mailing list to receive further details.*



**With these changes in mind the AONB has asked local conservation advisor Harry Baker Cresswell to look at how farmers in and around the AONB might position their holdings to take advantage of new Defra schemes and expand on the policy of farmers providing Public Goods. Harry has used case studies for three different farms across the AONB to demonstrate how using the Natural Capital Approach could be beneficial in the future for land managers.**

*Natural Capital Assets (NCAs) are naturally occurring features across farmland which can be managed or increased either on a single holding or collaboratively on a wider scale..Messages from the Government’s 2019 25 Year Environment Plan suggest that future stewardship schemes may use NCAs as the base-point for Payments for Public Goods. Clean water and air, healthy soils, carbon storage, biodiversity and access to the countryside (which not mean physical access I believe) are to be the drivers behind rural funding.*

*Managing land within and close to the AONB may be an asset itself and is a good starting point; NCAs on a farm range from field boundaries – hedges, ditches or walls that are landscape and habitat assets and can be managed in an individual or a collaborative approach to pasture management for wading birds in which pre-agreed sites could be “wetted-up” for a short period each spring as required to offer roosting and feeding sites as well as perhaps breeding for lapwings.*

*Going forward all holdings contain multiple NCAs which must all be highlighted so that land managers can be ready for those assets to become farm business enterprises similar to cereals or livestock. Three new schemes which will reward farmers for producing public goods with associated environmental benefits will be in place from 2024 although details remain loose; the AONB Partnership will keep land managers informed and updated about individual and hoped-for group approaches such as that proposed by the 23 Burns Farm Group.*

**Harry Baker Cresswell**

# Case Study 1: Howick Scar Farm

The Curry family have been tenants of Howick Scar Farm for three generations. It is a mixed farm with a ewe flock, beef finishing and arable land cropped with the neighbouring Howick Home Farm. The soil on the farm creates the split between arable and pasture farming. This division is the basis for the Natural Capital Assessment, listed as follows:

- A) Managing land within a Protected Landscape in a post BPS world may well be a business asset**
- B) Permanent pastures both on the coast and a whin sill plateau slightly inland**
- C) Tillage parcels close to the coast where wading and farmland birds thrive**
- D) A watercourse to the west of the farm**
- E) A network of walls and a cross farm Public Right of Way**

Howick Scar has been in two ten-year Defra environmental stewardship agreements but in March 2021, the Currys elected to switch to a new five year Mid Tier Stewardship agreement to make use of Capital Payment opportunities and more flexible options to build up Natural Capital Resources.



Option selection will be based upon:

- AB1:** field-edge or in-field strips, based on a blend-without-grass, to supply pollen and nectar for farmland birds and insects
- AB5:** fallow sections within cereal fields to offer nesting and brood rearing sites lapwings
- AB9 or AB10:** seed bearing strips on tillage land to offer food and cover for farmland birds
- GS4:** soil improving and habitat creating legume-rich grazing or mowing leys to be managed without artificial nitrogen

There are also capital grants to assist with fencing and boundary creation and restoration that will allow GS4 to be adopted.

Also to be adopted are options to better manage pastures for a wider range of diversity; these options are not necessarily better-paying than those within HLS but will better-define the value of the pastures in the run-up to the Defra plans for Payment for Public Goods – from which the business could benefit.

**Identifying Natural Capital Resources will, in the medium term, help to deliver Payment for Public Goods and thus secure farm income from sources other than pure production.**

# Case Study 2: Hermitage Farm

Bill Dodd and his family have been tenants of the Northumberland Estate at Hermitage since the 1880s. The farm is managed as an arable only unit with permanent pastures shared with a local horse breeder and a local livestock farmer. Bill does not employ anyone, using his own time to carry out all crop protection and nutrition work. A contractor is used for sowing and for harvesting work.

The soils on the farm divide the holding into four sections from which there is a clearly defined split of Natural Capital Assets. On land closest to the sea and the A1068 Alnmouth to Warkworth road, there is significant scope to further improve habitats for farmland and wading birds with the area including an under-managed area of wet grassland. As with Howick Scar simply managing land within the AONB – a protected landscape – may well become an asset and with an element of collaboration between Bill and his neighbouring land managers, better habitat management can be put in place. This will create an increase in the value of Natural Capital Assets that will in turn deliver Payment for Public Goods.

The area of pasture to the west of the A1068 holds Natural Capital of a different type as there appears to be historically valuable field boundaries that could be restored. This could be explained through an

on-farm web based resource about the Natural Capital value of the holding: producing food, managing existing habitats and creating new ones. As with Howick Scar, and the third farm Fenham le Moor, there is a moderately well used network of access paths across Hermitage and with that, an audience to be better-informed about the values generated by land management within a protected landscape.

On the Warkworth side of the farm, there is an asset just off the farm boundary – woodland buffers the River Coquet as it threads its way through the town to the estuary and by buffering, a new habitat can be created and a Natural Capital Asset enhanced. As with the proposed improvements to the wet grassland site, if collaboration between land managers within the Protected Landscape can be generated – in this case topping-times in the immediate area being pre-planned to optimise the time pollen will be available- environmental assets are enhanced and created.

**At present defining Public Goods is not an exact science but with aspirations being set out by Defra and the AONB, matching on-farm assets to the targets will be an increasingly essential element of the farm business at Hermitage.**



# Case Study 3: Fenham le Moor Farm

The farmland opposite Holy Island has been owned and managed by the Burn Family for several years and is presently looked after by brothers David and Fraser. It principally covers tillage land, with blocks of pasture on either side of the estuary of the Fenham Burn, where it reaches the North Sea at Fenham Flatts.

As at Howick Scar and Hermitage, there are a wide range of Natural Capital Assets – being land managers within a protected landscape will be an asset when payment for public goods becomes a clear business “enterprise”. There are a fine network of field boundaries at Fenham le Moor, both adjacent to farm access tracks and in between arable parcels; Mid Tier stewardship would provide funding to restore sections as well as fence the boundaries off, in turn allowing grazing of tillage fields using Option GS4 to take place within a re-arranged farm rotation. The pastures close to the estuary as well as the tillage parcel closest to the sea are much-used by wading birds during high tides for feeding, but with careful adding of water, the value of the sites can be widened at certain times of the year whilst still maintaining farm productivity.



Soil health can also be improved through Mid Tier Stewardship via the use of Option AB15 – a legume rich two harvest “break crop” that will broaden the interval between the oilseed rape. crops which presently are the main break crop and throughout their flowering period offer pollen and nectar to farmland insects.

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*Assessing Natural Capital Asset values is a variable approach as all concerned view assets differently, not least farmers themselves. The Northumberland Coast AONB Team have experts on hand to look at farms within this protected landscape. There are projects planned at local and nationwide levels to promote land management that will better deliver public goods in a protected landscape.*

*Defra are considering how best to incentivise a collaborative approach to environmental asset management – the 23 Burns Farmer Group has carried a Test and Trial to identify routes to work together and thus increase earnings from delivering Public Goods such as insect-rich land cover, developing wetter pastures to create habitats for waders, establishing seeding crops for farmland birds.*

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*Natural Capital Assets at Buston Links  
Photo © Gavin Duthie*

# For further information

## **Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership**

[www.northumberlandcoastaonb.org/agriculture-and-forestry/](http://www.northumberlandcoastaonb.org/agriculture-and-forestry/)  
[info@northumberlandcoastaonb.org](mailto:info@northumberlandcoastaonb.org)  
07774 715744

*To receive regular updates about Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme from the AONB, please send us an email*

## **Defra Future Farming Blog**

<https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/>

## **Twitter**

Janet Hughes, Future Farming Director at Defra @JanetHughes

## **Rural Payments Agency (RPA)**

The Rural Payments Agency is the delegated authority for Countryside Stewardship  
[www.gov.uk/government/organisation/rural-paymentsagency](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisation/rural-paymentsagency)

## **Championing the Farmed Environment**

<https://www.cfeonline.org.uk/>

## **Farming Rules for Water**

[www.gov.uk/government/news/new-farming-rules-for-water](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-farming-rules-for-water)

## **Forestry Commission**

*The Forestry Commission offers several schemes for increasing, protecting, and managing trees, forests, and woodlands. Yorkshire and North East area*  
0300 067 4900

The Defra publication “Farming is Changing” provides further details and is available at:

**[www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-farming-changes-to-farming-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-farming-changes-to-farming-in-england)**

Paper copies are available by sending an email to:  
**[ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk)**





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