



Cumulus Consultants Ltd

**Grazing and Grasslands in the Wye
Valley AONB: a review of existing
projects and opportunities for a
Local Partnership Project**

Report for

**European Forum on Nature Conservation and
Pastoralism and the Wye Valley AONB**

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Grazing and Grasslands in the Wye Valley AONB: a review of existing projects and opportunities for a Local Partnership Project

Report prepared for

European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism and the Wye Valley AONB

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Glossary

AGAP	Anglesey Grazing Animals Project
AES	Agri-Environment Scheme
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BFCP	Burren Farm Conservation Programme
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
bTB	Bovine Tuberculosis
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CSS	Countryside Stewardship Scheme
ELS	Entry Level Stewardship
EFNCP	European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FMD	Foot and Mouth Disease
FT	Full Time
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
GGI	Gwent Grasslands Initiative
GWT	Gwent Wildlife Trust
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
HNT	Herefordshire Nature Trust
HNV	High Nature Value
HNVF	High Nature Value Farmland
LCP	Limestone Country Project
LPP	Local Partnership Project
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
MMG	Monmouthshire Meadows Group
NIA	Nature Improvement Area
PGP	Parish Grasslands Project
PT	Part Time
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SDF	Sustainable Development Fund
SPS	Single Payment Scheme
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WVG	Wye Valley Graziers

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1 Introduction

The valley of the River Wye between Hereford and Chepstow is one of the most significant landscapes in lowland Britain. A rich combination of breath taking views, impressive geology, historic legacies and diverse wildlife led to the designation, in 1971, of the valley and adjoining plateaux and hills as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Wye Valley AONB covers 72km of the lower reaches of the River Wye totalling an area of 326km² (128 square miles), being 45km North to South and 11.3 km at its widest (East - West) point. It stretches from Mordiford in the north, just east of the city of Hereford, southwards to the outskirts of Chepstow, see Figure 1-1. The Wye Valley AONB is unique among the 47 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 14 National Parks in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in being the only protected landscape to straddle a national boundary; being 64% in England and 36% in Wales.



Figure 1-1: Wye Valley AONB

Agriculture and forestry are the main land uses with farmland covering 58% of the AONB and woodland 27%. There is a broadly similar proportion of arable land and grassland in the farmland.

Flower-rich grasslands are among the most important habitats of the Wye Valley AONB, however many of these semi-natural pastures and meadows have been lost through ploughing, fertilisation and reseeding, or through the abandonment of grazing and/or mowing. There are a number of projects, such as the Parish Grasslands Project and the Monmouthshire Meadows Project within the AONB which have sought to protect, maintain and restore semi-natural grassland sites, with varying degrees of input and success. As in other parts of the country, these initiatives tend to be quite localized and to suffer from a lack of continuity, especially because funding is 'ad hoc'.

Semi-natural farmland is the core of High Nature Value (HNV) farming across Europe, and the maintenance of this type of farmland is a priority of the EU's rural development policy. As part of its work on policy development for HNV farming, the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) has proposed that a more ambitious and joined up approach to the maintenance of semi-natural farmland is needed. Under this approach, well-resourced and long-term Local Partnership Projects could work to maintain all remaining semi-natural farmland over large areas, for example at the scale of an AONB. This approach is consistent with the findings of the Space for Nature report to Defra (Lawton et al, 2010). EFNCP has proposed to the European Commission that future regulations for Rural Development Programmes should make explicit provision for funding for Local Partnership Projects of this sort from 2014. The newly proposed EAFRD regulation (COM(2011)627/3) makes provision under Article 36 for support for "co-operation" involving at least two entities and in particular:

"co-operation approaches among different actors in the Union agriculture and food chain, forestry sector and among other actors that contribute to achieving the objectives and priorities of rural development policy, including inter-branch organisations;"

Eligible themes include:

"collective approaches to environmental projects and ongoing environmental practices"

Eligible costs would include the running costs of the co-operation project. This Article appears to match the Local Partnership Project approach proposed by EFNCP.

1.1 Project Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the various projects which are (or have been) concerned with grazing or grassland sites in the Wye Valley AONB, summarise their successes and draw on lessons learned. These findings will help to inform the development of an AONB-wide grassland project proposal, bringing together relevant partners in the formation of a Local Partnership Project (LPP) which could enable a co-ordinated, pro-active approach to grassland management potentially

fundable as a Co-operation Project through the Rural Development Programmes for England and Wales post-2014, and/or from other sources.

1.2 Structure of the Report

This report is structured as follows:

Section 1: The **introduction** sets out the background, aim and objectives of the study and summarises the layout of the report.

Section 2: The **methodology** describes the project approach adopted.

Section 3: summarises the characteristics of **HNVF** in the Wye Valley AONB

Section 4: Contains a **review of existing projects** within the Wye Valley AONB.

Section 5: Summarises the responses of **stakeholder interviews**

Section 6: Investigates examples of **other LPPs**

Section 7: Draws on the previous sections to address the costs and practicalities of **setting up a Wye Valley AONB Grazing and Grassland LPP**.

Section 8: outlines the **next steps** required to develop the initiative.

2 Methodology

2.1 Review of existing projects within the Wye Valley AONB

Documents and data on past and present projects concerned with grassland and grazing within the AONB were reviewed to ensure a full background picture is achieved before developing an AONB-wide project.

2.2 Review of HNV farmland within the Wye Valley AONB

Descriptions and mapping produced by partners in order to develop a typology of HNV farmland (HNVF) in the AONB, and assess its extent, were reviewed. This helps inform future priorities; the LPP may focus on areas with large amounts of HNVF, or where gaps appear with potential for linkage or expansion.

2.3 Stakeholder interviews

Phone interviews were undertaken with representatives of various organisations or project officers responsible for the projects reviewed in 2.1. The stakeholders included:

1. Andrew Blake/ Andrew Nixon – Wye Valley AONB
2. George Peterken – Parish Grasslands Project
3. Stephanie Tyler – Monmouthshire Meadows Group
4. Fran Griffiths – Herefordshire Nature Trust
5. Gemma Bodé – Gwent Wildlife Trust
6. Janet Lomas – Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
7. Rob Havard – former Woolhope Dome Project Officer
8. John Hardwick/ Stuart Thomas/ David Lovelace – Wye Valley Graziers

2.4 Review of other LPP projects

A review of a small number of grazing and grassland projects outside the study area, in the UK and elsewhere in the EU, was undertaken to inform the development of the LPP in the AONB.

2.5 Development of a Grazing and Grasslands LPP

Drawing upon all the information gained above, an innovative, practical and compelling proposal for a Grazing and Grasslands LPP in the AONB was then developed.

3 Summary of HN VF in the Wye Valley AONB

'The HN VF farming concept comes from a recognition that certain patterns of farming and of farmland are inherently of biological richness, especially when existing on a landscape scale' (Beaufoy, 2011 – see www.efncp.org/high-nature-value-farmland for further detail).

HN VF farming as a policy concept aims to improve the way agricultural and conservation policies address farming landscapes that retain a significant proportion of semi-natural land under active use. It sees this land not as wildlife habitats separate from farming, but as a part of a functioning landscape where semi-improved grassland and low-intensity cropping, and features such as thick hedges and patches of scrub and woodland, complement the biodiversity values of the semi-natural land. Implicit is the need to understand and support (financially and/or otherwise as appropriate) the farming systems and enterprises which underpin HN VF farming.

HN VF has not been analysed for the whole of the Wye Valley AONB, but has been described in the southern part, the Lower Wye Valley, around the Parish Grasslands Project area and also on the Monmouthshire side of the AONB. In the northern part of the AONB the landscape tends to be more gentle with broad meanders and more open farmland over the Herefordshire lowlands. In the Lower Wye Valley the landscape contains steeper wooded slopes, interspersed with broader valley reaches, rounded hills and plateaux with a mix of farmland and woodland.

Within the Lower Wye Valley the key HN VF farmland type is semi-natural or unimproved grassland in small fields, with areas of semi-improved grassland where agricultural improvement has been possible or worthwhile. Boundaries are stone walls and hedges, often unmanaged. Mature trees and woodlands are frequent features of this area, thus much of the area around the Hudnalls could be regarded as of HN VF quality. The land surrounding the Hudnalls area is agriculturally improved, with more intensive management of boundaries and fewer trees, although there is still a mosaic of ancient woodland. There are occasional 'pockets' of unimproved grassland, where access or field size has prevented improvement.

In Monmouthshire a similar pattern of unimproved, species-rich grassland exists as small, often isolated fields, managed as hay meadows or grazed pastures. There are also areas of unimproved dry acid grassland and remnant areas of heathland and mire. Grassland along the floodplain is generally improved however areas of rush pasture occur in unimproved areas. Traditional orchards, and their associated unimproved grassland are an important feature of HN VF farmland in the AONB. Most of the boundaries in the area are species-rich hedgerows, with some dry stone walls. There is a large extent of woodland and managed forest in the AONB. The remaining area is farmland with arable or improved grassland.

For further detail please refer to 'Applying the HN VF farmland concept in the Lower Wye Valley: Brockweir, Hewelsfield and St Briavels' by George Peterken and 'High Nature Value Farmland on the Monmouthshire side of the AONB' by Stephanie Tyler.

Quantifying the extent of HNPF across the AONB has been more difficult, with many of the habitats and features within the AONB being thought to qualify as HNPF at varying degrees. A mapping project was undertaken for the AONB by Border Ecology, which by excluding all non-agricultural land and woodlands resulted in a map which shows large areas of HNPF semi-natural grassland in the AONB in Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire (data did not include the Herefordshire part of the AONB). This information was correlated with local knowledge of sites and known areas of arable or improved grassland were excluded. However no ground truthing was undertaken so some mapping may not be wholly accurate. The maps of HNPF extent were also cross referenced with data on agri-environment schemes (CSS/ELS/HLS in England and Tir Gofal/Tir Cynnal in Wales.) See Figure 3-1.

The areas marked in red (semi-natural grassland) and those with blue edging (SSSI) can be positively assumed to be HNPF. HNPF may also be present in areas edged in black (AES schemes) but as semi-improved grassland as opposed to semi-natural (or unimproved) grassland. The same may be said for areas marked grey or white on the map. The presence of large blocks of woodland may also explain some of the white areas.

In terms of land in agri-environment schemes, there is 2,502ha under Tir Gofal and Tir Cynnal in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB (21.3%) and 727ha under Environmental Stewardship in the Gloucestershire part of the AONB (12.4%). Unfortunately it is not possible to determine the proportion of HNPF under agri-environment schemes from the data available (see Section 5, however, for stakeholder views on agri-environment scheme uptake).

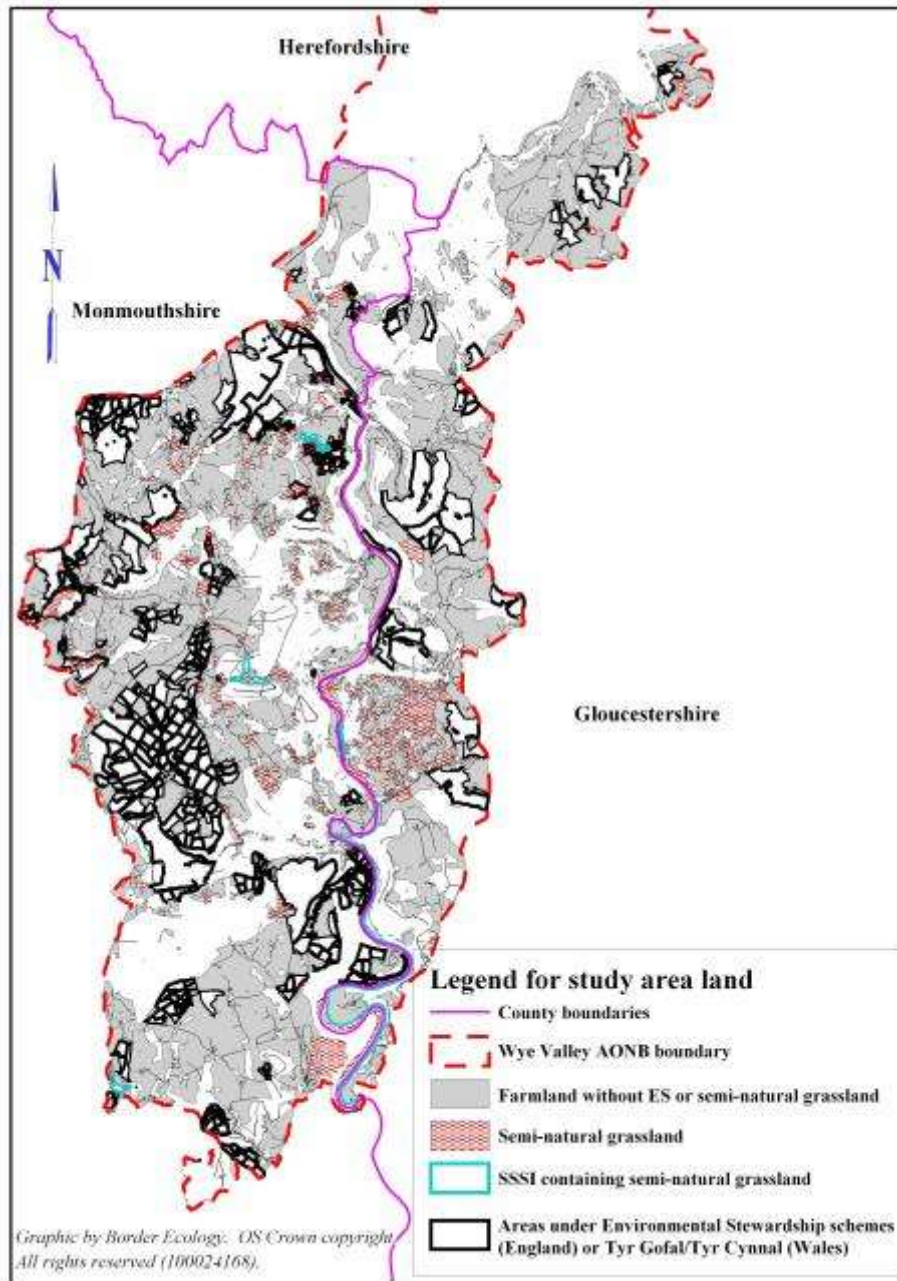


Figure 3-1: Extent of HNMF and ES schemes within Wye Valley AONB

The pattern of HNMF around the Parish Grasslands Project area (Figure 3-2) and land at Pentwyn Farm (Figure 3-4), Monmouthshire is shown below, along with aerial images for comparison (Figures 3-3 and 3-5).

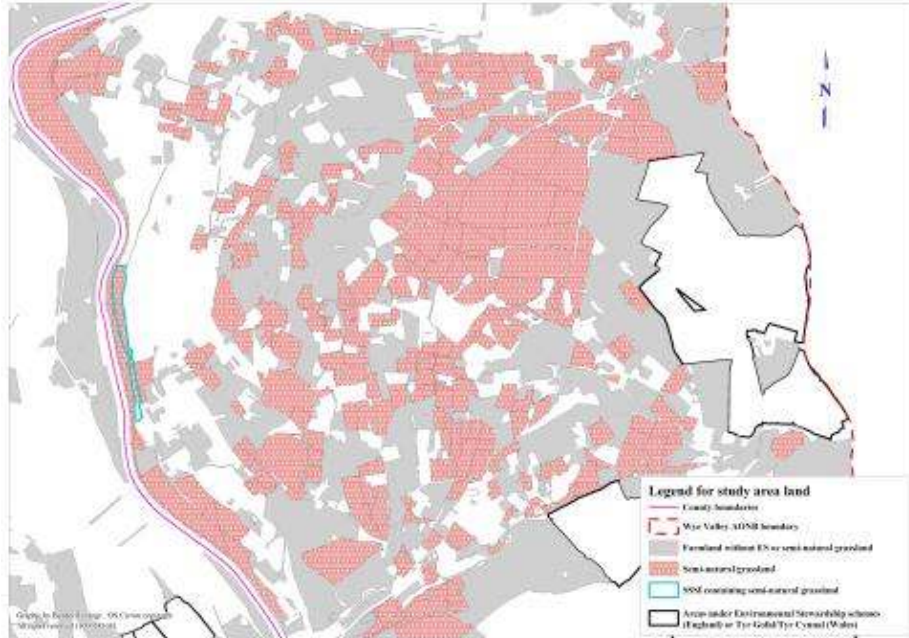


Figure 3-2: HNMF in the Hudnalls, (Parish Grasslands Project area)



Figure 3-3: Aerial view of the Hudnalls, (Parish Grasslands Project area)

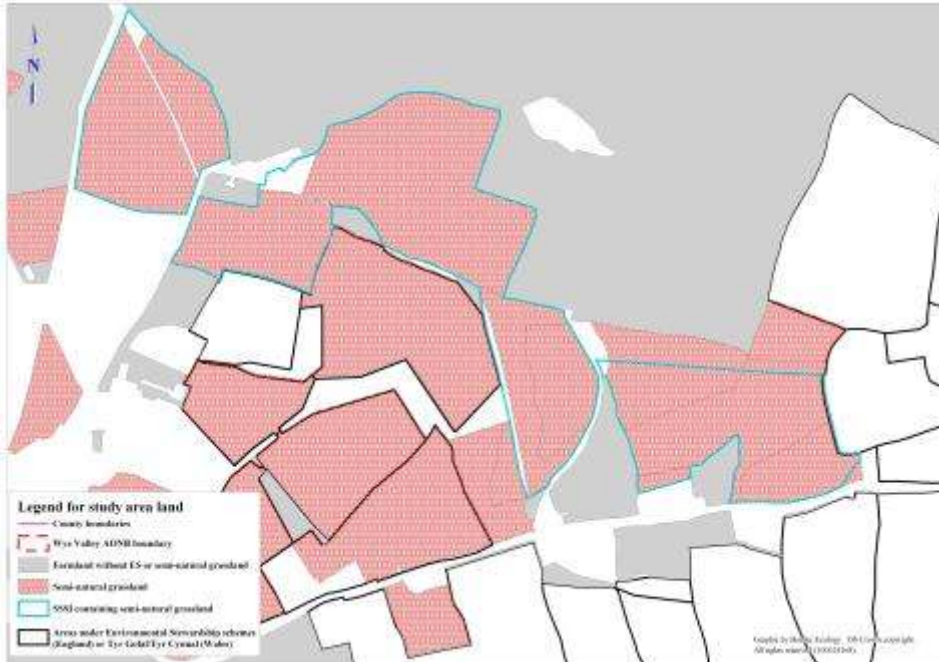


Figure 3-4: HNVF at Pentwyn Farm, (Gwent Wildlife Trust Reserve)



Figure 3-5: Aerial view of Pentwyn Farm, (Gwent Wildlife Trust Reserve)

In assessing the extent of HNVF there are a number of rough estimates we can make, based on figures from nationally available data, the AONB management plan and other studies. As a starting point, AONB area data by county is shown in Table 3-1.

Total AONB area	Monmouthshire	Herefordshire	Gloucestershire
32,600ha	11,736ha (36%)	14,996ha (46%)	5,868ha (18%)

Table 3-1: AONB area by county

According to DEFRA's Agricultural Survey for June 2010, agricultural land use amounts to 13,777ha (42% of AONB). The land use and cropping split is shown in Table 3-2.

	Crops & Bare Fallow	Temporary Grass	Permanent Grass	Rough grazing	Woodland	Other
Total	6,306ha	986ha	5,651ha	100ha	527ha	206ha
% of AONB	19%	3%	17%	0.3%	1.6%	0.6%
% of agric. Area	46%	7%	41%	0.7%	3.8%	1.5%

Table 3-2: AONB land use and cropping

HNV grassland is likely to be within the permanent grass and rough grazing categories, which totals approximately **5,750ha**.

The Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 and Ecosystem Services Report 2011 states that:

- 62% of AONB is farmland (approx. 20,340 ha)
- 25% of AONB is woodland (approx. 8,280 ha); and
- 7.1% of AONB is non-intensive farmland (marsh, small fields, parkland) (approx. **2,315ha**)

The review produced by George Peterken suggests that the majority of the land in the Lower Wye Valley study area could be regarded as HNVF.

There is some discrepancy between these different sources, notably the area of agricultural land based on the DEFRA Agricultural Survey for June 2010 (and previous surveys for the AONB in the period 2007-2009).

It is reasonable to assume, however, given the above data, that the total area of HNV grassland, including semi-natural grassland and semi-improved grassland

which forms part of the matrix of grassland habitats, lies in the range between **2,315ha** at the lower end and **5,750ha** at upper end (i.e. 7-14% of the AONB).

Aerial photography provides another picture as to where HNMF may be concentrated within the AONB. Most of the land in the north of the AONB (Herefordshire) appears to be large, regular arable fields, with some areas of woodland, aside from the small fields and woodland around the Woolhope Dome area. Much of the low-lying floodplain land north of Ross on Wye has been agriculturally improved, however south of the town, fields tend to be smaller and less uniform within a network of wooded valley systems, an indication that agricultural intensification has been less pronounced in this region of the AONB. Further south still, around Lydbrook and Coleford, the area is highly wooded (as part of the Forest of Dean) with a network of small pastoral fields interspersed by patches of larger arable field where land appears to be flatter. In the very southernmost point of the AONB, the land immediately adjacent to the River comprises steep wooded valleys with small unimproved fields; however further from the river valley land use appears to be more intensive. This all suggests a concentration of HNMF in the Southern part of the AONB; with HNMF occurring in smaller pockets in the Northern part (e.g. Woolhope Dome).

4 Review of existing projects in the Wye Valley AONB

4.1 Parish Grasslands Project

The Parish Grasslands Project (PGP), which started in 2001, aims to increase interest in and knowledge of the grasslands around the 'Hudnalls' area, formerly a large common for the settlements of Brockweir, Hewelsfield and St Briavels.

The area is characterised by a patchwork of meadows and pastures, which due to their small field size, have remained semi-natural and agriculturally unimproved. However it is also these characteristics, combined with a decrease in livestock farming which means that many of these small flower-rich grasslands have become neglected.

A group of residents therefore set up a community-based initiative to assist meadow owners – many of whom are not 'farmers' so lack management knowledge and/or equipment – to restore neglected fields and maintain them as species-rich meadows and pastures. The PGP is largely made up of enthusiastic volunteers (including a retired, professional ecologist) working alongside a local farmer. The PGP has approximately 80 members, both landowners and others.

The PGP offers advice on management and restoration, publishes newsletters, guides and information leaflets, provides training for meadow owners, surveys grasslands and records species, and assists with grant scheme advice. The group was successful in obtaining around £64,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and other sources to purchase small-scale machinery with which it can offer a grassland management service to meadow owners, including topping, cutting and baling. This management service has benefited over 60ha of land in the area. A small membership fee is charged annually.

For further information see: <http://www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk/>

4.2 Monmouthshire Meadows Group

On the West side of the Wye from the Parish Grasslands Project, the Monmouthshire Meadows Group (MMG) has a similar role to the PGP in managing and conserving grassland.

The MMG is a group of like-minded people which formed in 2003. It now has more than 80 members with almost 200 ha of grassland scattered over Monmouthshire but with a concentration on the Trelleck Plateau. The group includes 3 ecologists on the committee who can make preliminary surveys of members' meadows and prepare scientific records of sites of particular biological interest.

The group offers training in species identification and meadow management to members and works with them to prepare and implement management plans which are tailored to their individual needs and those of the grassland site. The

group can also offer management solutions such as grazing by borrowed ponies. It has also purchased a tractor, mower and hay-making kit which is available to members. The MMG is largely self-funded by membership fees, with some grant funding accessed to buy machinery.

For further information see: <http://www.monmouthshiremeadows.co.uk/>

It is worth noting that PGP and MMG between them cover around 300ha, say, of HNV grassland in the AONB. This equates to 5 to 13% of HNV grassland (based on the 2,315 to 5,750ha range provided in Section 3).

4.3 Gwent Wildlife Trust reserves and projects

The Gwent Wildlife Trust (GWT) owns a number of important grassland sites, managed as reserves, in the AONB. Pentwyn Farm, Penallt is an 11 ha reserve based on a traditional small farm important for its four unimproved hay meadows and hedgerows. It forms one of the largest remaining areas of unimproved grassland in Gwent and is designated SSSI. Notable species include: early purple orchids, greater butterfly orchids, green-winged orchids, common spotted orchids, common twayblade, cowslips, ox-eye daisy, hay rattle and eyebright. Alongside GWT is undertaking a large-scale habitat creation project at Wysewood Common; 42ha of improved dairy pasture has been purchased to create a mosaic of unimproved species-rich grassland and woodland.

Purchase and management of GWT reserves is largely funded by trust membership, fundraising initiatives and donations such as legacies. The GWT also run projects, which may obtain one-off funding from sources such as HLF or aggregates levy.

GWT also runs the **Gwent Grasslands Initiative** (GGI) which identifies areas of species-rich grassland, advises and supports landowners, provides contacts for contract work such as hedgelaying, and identifies areas suitable for wildflower meadow restoration or creation. Species-rich grassland was identified via site visits to semi-improved or unimproved grassland recorded on the 1991 Phase 1 habitat survey. GWT found there to be a high percentage of species-rich fields remaining due to small field sizes, however these were often neglected due to lack of grazing or hay cutting. Many of these sites were owned by non-farming landowners who lacked the skills or equipment required to manage the grassland. The project offered advice and support to landowners, providing them with survey and management information, and set up landowner meetings for grassland management to be discussed. The project had a small fund available to landowners of these important sites to access for capital items such as fencing for re-introduction of grazing livestock or clearing scrub. Some sites were given Local Wildlife Site (LWS) status, a non-statutory voluntary system designed to encourage and support landowners in the management of sites. LWS status recognises that the land is important for wildlife, and is something the owner can be proud of.

For further information see: <http://www.gwentwildlife.org/index.htm>

4.4 Herefordshire Nature Trust reserves and projects

Similarly, the Herefordshire Nature Trust (HNT) owns and manages a number of reserves within the AONB, managed extensively to maintain or increase the biodiversity of the pastures. Examples within the AONB include: Common Hill SSSI, an area of unimproved limestone grassland managed as a traditional meadow; Wessington Pasture, a semi-improved pasture being grazed by longhorn cattle to improve species diversity; and the grassland at Woodside SSSI which is grazed in winter by Hebridean sheep to control scrub growth.

HNT was a key partner (along with Wye Valley AONB and English Nature/Natural England) in the **Woolhope Dome Biodiversity Project**, which aimed to produce a targeted habitat management and restoration strategy for the Woolhope Dome area and support the special landscape by combining wildlife gains with socio-economic interests. The area has high concentrations of important habitats and species, characterised by ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland, semi-natural grassland and traditional orchards.

The project operated successfully for six years (2002-2008) with capital items funded by LEADER, a project officer funded by the Countryside Agency and the AONB, and Sheep Wildlife Enhancement Scheme environmental land management payments funded by English Nature (using sheep national envelope monies). The project worked with a range of partners, farmers, smallholders, rural business owners and members of the community by providing information, expertise, advice, guidance, facilitation and incentives. Benefits were achieved for the local economy and ecology by focusing on linking local produce, producers and consumers and encouraging environmentally friendly production methods.

As a result of the success of the Woolhope Dome project, project partners looked to build upon the approach and develop a broad landscape corridor linking the Wye Valley and Malvern Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Landscape Link Project undertook a feasibility study to identify the best physical route between the two AONBs with the most potential for habitat restoration and creation along with a number of socio-economic benefits. The project sought funding from the HLF Landscape Partnership grants programme, but was unsuccessful; however the aspirations of the project are of relevance to the development of a LPP within the Wye Valley AONB.

HNT also ran the Community Commons Project, a five year project that worked with local landowners, communities, commoners and stakeholders to produce management plans for 12 selected commons (although these lay outside the AONB). The management plans were aimed at improving habitat on the commons, and Phase 2 of the project paid for a machinery ring to manage invasive bracken and gorse, and training for the local community to use the equipment. Wildlife interpretation, remedying access difficulties, and reinstating sufficient grazing levels on the commons were other actions carried out by the project.

For further information see: <http://www.herefordshirewt.org/>

4.5 Wye Valley Graziers

The Wye Valley Graziers comprised a group of livestock farmers in the Wye Valley, who were concerned with the sustainability of livestock farming and its associated benefits to biodiversity, landscape, the historic environment and geology. They came together to identify and highlight the issues, with the hope of finding solutions. The AONB unit supported the group by overseeing the production of "The Sustainable Wye Valley Livestock Feasibility Study" in 2002.

The report highlighted the benefits of sustainable grazing to the environment and the historic landscape as well as outlining the problems livestock farmers in the Wye Valley were facing, and outlined a number of recommendations, which although now dated are relevant to a Grazing and Grasslands LPP in today's climate:

- Explore opportunities under grant schemes to promote traditional livestock enterprises and add value to products;
- Explore opportunities for marketing and branding under the name of the Wye, and for co-operative marketing between like farm businesses;
- Investigate markets for traditionally produced meats, both locally and further afield;
- Identify opportunities for expansion of wet grassland expansion in the context of flood water retention in the Wye Valley;
- Set up a register of graziers who can take on the management of small patches of grassland where the owner does not have stock;
- Set up a register of species-rich grassland sites to act as a 'seed source' for others wanting to increase diversity on less rich sites;
- Organise farm walks and events to discuss and share best practice;
- Publicise the importance of maintaining viable livestock systems to the wider public;
- Explore options for adding extra supplements to schemes/projects which support extensive livestock grazing systems;
- Lobby for longer term support systems for traditional livestock production through CAP reform.

The group also commissioned a report on the potential income to livestock farmers from the Environmental Stewardship scheme, as a means of offsetting losses which were anticipated to arise from the introduction of the Single Payment Scheme (SPS). The degree of losses and potential for recouping payments via Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and/or Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) varied between the farms studied, however the key point was that all farms were highly dependent on subsidy, whether in the form of SPS or agri-environment schemes (AES) to continue their livestock enterprises. In other words, these farms were not commercially viable without support.

The group is no longer officially running, however a number of former members are still active within the area.

4.6 Other projects

There are a number of other projects in Wye Valley AONB relating to grassland and/or grazed habitats (such as lowland heathland), and grazing.

AONB staff themselves have been proactive in promoting the positive management of special grassland sites, for example offering advice on grazing management via projects such as the Staunton Meend Habitat Restoration which worked with the 'Friends of Staunton Meend' to restore an area of common land to its original heathland/dry acid grassland habitat. The AONB's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) has also enabled the grazing of a number of heathland sites using Exmoor ponies.

The Forestry Commission has taken forward a number of other heathland restoration projects on both the English and Welsh sides of the Wye.

The Woodland Trust has been involved with limestone grassland restoration at Little Doward and elsewhere, funded by the Ravine WoodLIFE project (LIFE Nature) and the Overlooking the Wye Landscape Partnership Scheme (with the support of HLF).

For further information see: <http://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk>

It is also worth noting that just outside the AONB, a new Forest of Dean Grassland/ Meadows Group is developing, with support from individuals involved with existing groups including the PGP and MMG.

5 Summary of stakeholder interviews

List of stakeholders:

1. Andrew Blake/ Andrew Nixon – Wye Valley AONB
2. George Peterken – Parish Grasslands Project
3. Stephanie Tyler – Monmouthshire Meadows Group
4. Fran Griffiths – Herefordshire Nature Trust
5. Gemma Bodé – Gwent Wildlife Trust
6. Janet Lomas – Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
7. Rob Havard – former Woolhope Dome Project Officer
8. John Hardwick/ Stuart Thomas/ David Lovelace – Wye Valley Graziers

5.1 Issues encountered

There are some common issues arising from the projects reviewed but also differences depending on the project area, the nature of the grasslands and owner/manager characteristics.

Common issues include:

- **Poor profitability of livestock enterprises.** The grazing of semi-natural and semi-improved grasslands is usually not economically viable without the support of the SPS and AES. Even with scheme payments, cattle and sheep grazing can be a marginal enterprise for farmers and landowners. The dependency on subsidies raises a question mark over the long term sustainability of such enterprises.
- **Livestock disease and associated bureaucracy.** Diseases affecting cattle including Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) have had the effect of reducing the number of holdings (and farmers) with cattle and the number of cattle available for grazing in recent years. Bureaucracy associated with cattle has also had influenced some farmers to give up cattle, for example ear tagging, movement rules and bTB checks and restrictions. Movement testing and the disease risks associated with moving animals are cited as reasons for cattle not grazing isolated or unimproved sites, those which are often of high nature value.
- **Reduction in livestock numbers and cattle/sheep ratio.** Cattle have reduced in numbers relative to sheep due to their low relative profitability, labour requirements and other factors mentioned above. However sheep are often not the optimum livestock for grazing species-rich pastures and meadows. On farms where cattle grazing is still present, cattle themselves are often a loss-making enterprise, kept in low numbers due to the farmer's

interest and passion for keeping them, but financially supported by other, more profitable enterprises on the farm, or by off-farm income.

In the areas covered by the PGP, MMG and the Woolhope Dome Project, the following specific issues have also been identified. These relate in particular to the small field sizes and landownership trends in these areas.

- **Lack of management and loss of sites.** An overarching issue is the general lack of grassland management and/or inappropriate land use and management practices. In the worst cases, this has resulted in the loss of the site's conservation interest.
- **Changing social patterns.** There has been an increase in the number of landowners without farming (or conservation) knowledge and skills, together with a corresponding reduction in the number of smallholders and commoners with livestock available for grazing. There are fewer options for bilateral arrangements for grazing land. Some incomers are getting stock but do not tend to be willing to graze other people's land.
- **Machinery availability and use.** Managing grassland with machinery has been used as an alternative to grazing. However, aside from the initial capital cost (covered by one-off funding), machinery operation is hard work and relies heavily on a knowledgeable and willing farmer, and/or the commitment of semi-skilled volunteers. There are also difficulties with integrating operations around the farmer's own land and time. Sharing machinery between projects (PGP and MMG) has proved impractical given the demand occurring at the same time of year. These projects have been unable to charge sufficient rates to cover depreciation (to enable re-investment at the end of the life of the machinery).
- **Lack of infrastructure.** In the Woolhope Dome, the lack of infrastructure for grazing such as fencing and water supply was a key issue at the outset. The right infrastructure has now been provided but will need to be replaced at some stage in the future. The need to replace fencing is an increasing issue and cost, due to the shorter life of fence posts being no longer treated with arsenic based products. Therefore investment in fencing is a more frequent expense for livestock owners/managers, especially with small fields having disproportionately larger boundary lengths per area.
- **Agri-environment scheme payments.** These are potentially available however there is a large amount of paperwork which is unattractive to those who do not really need the money or for whom the total payments may be small (i.e. in the case of small pieces of land). The schemes are not really targeted at small landowners who rely on others to provide the grazing. Environmental Stewardship payments are not tiered by field size; small field and/or difficult sites supplements are available but insufficient to cover the higher management costs associated with smaller fields. In Wales, in the MMG area, agri-environment schemes are not considered to have helped much; this is not expected to change much in the future under Glastir. Figure 4-1 shows

that most of the semi-natural grassland in the AONB is not covered by agri-environment contracts.

- **Landowner interest and awareness.** Despite best efforts from the projects, some landowners are just not bothered. They have no interest in conservation and do not mind fields becoming scrub (preferring 'wildness' to managed meadow or pasture and responsibility for livestock) or want to plant trees (e.g. for wood fuel). In addition to neglect, some fields have also been agriculturally improved and/or developed (the EIA regulations intended to stop the cultivation/improvement of species-rich grassland appear to have had little effect).
- **Project officers.** Where project officers have been employed, there is concern from some stakeholders that this approach does not offer continuity. Project officer posts are often only funded for 2-3 years, which may not be sufficient for an impact to be made. There is also a high turnover of individuals undertaking the project officer role; this limits the building up of a successful working relationship with local landowners, farmers or graziers.

In the more commercially farmed areas of the AONB, the following issues have also been identified:

- **Competition with other land uses and crops.** In the Herefordshire area of the AONB, the management of semi-improved grassland under an extensive pastoral system is in competition with the demand for land for high-value crops (potatoes, soft fruit, and asparagus). The soils are 'too good to be growing grass for pasture', although some farms include a seed ley in the rotation to increase organic matter. As an aside the lack of livestock in this region has led to a shortage of manure available, and soils are becoming more depleted in organic matter.
- **Integrating conservation management with current farming systems.** There is a need to improve farmer understanding of conservation management issues, and put in place the right incentives to deliver the desired management. This needs to be based on a full understanding of the current farming situation, and the practical, economic and other issues relating to livestock and livestock grazing.

5.2 Successes

A summary of the successes arising from the projects reviewed include the following:

- The PGP and MMG are both community driven initiatives. Expertise and advice is provided from within the group membership, rather than relying on employed project officers.

- Grazing has been delivered via the landowners' own animals or via local farmers and graziers.
- Local, rare breed beef and lamb is produced and sold by farmers to other members of the community. In the PGP, one farmer has been successful in building a long term business. Farmers markets were established and continue in the Woolhope Dome.
- Specialist machinery has been purchased in both PGP and MMG, with funding from national and local sources. The machinery is maintained and operated by local farmers. Members pay a subsidised fee for work; the farmer is paid for his time. This has been very useful and enabled the appropriate management of sites.
- Landowners are brought together with local contractors via the projects; these contractors are then employed for various tasks such as hedging, walling etc. The projects have brought local work to local people.
- Advice on land management and conservation has been provided by PGP and MMG members and volunteers, or through a project officer in the case of the Woolhope Dome Project. GWT recognise the advice available to landowners through the MMG is welcomed and vital.
- Advice and help with grant/scheme applications has also been provided. Agri-environment scheme agreements have been set up and implemented successfully in the different project areas.
- Funding of capital items via a small capital grant scheme at the Woolhope Dome has been important to enable the appropriate management of sites.
- External funding has been successfully applied for and made available to benefit grassland sites in the project areas.
- There is improved awareness amongst landowners of the importance of their sites as a result of the projects.
- Children and young people have been involved with the projects, including playgroup, primary school, youth club and sixth form. This has provided education and inspiration.
- Talks, courses, walks and open days have been run for local people on a range of subjects including wildlife identification and land management.
- Training on a variety of subjects (e.g. cross compliance, ELS and orchard management) has been provided to farmers and other land managers.
- Baseline surveys and mapping of semi-natural grassland in the project areas, and follow-on monitoring and reporting, have been undertaken.
- A number of good grassland sites have been identified and designated as Local Wildlife Sites via the GGI, ensuring recognition of their importance. These sites have also benefited from improved management.
- The projects have communicated with members and others in the community via websites, newsletters etc. This, together with a range of other local activities, has helped bring the community closer together.
- The projects have also reached out to others in a similar situation in different areas (e.g. Forest of Dean and Torfaen), extending the benefits.
- With the WVG, the farmers were interested in and engaged with the subject of maintaining grazing and livestock enterprises, even if there has been limited

action (due to insufficient economic incentive) since the studies were produced.

5.3 Lessons learned

Lessons learned from the various projects - for consideration when developing a LPP - include the following:

- The GGI used a previous Phase 1 habitat survey to target landowner visits, however the Phase 1 was sometimes inaccurate in defining semi-improved or unimproved grasslands so ground truthing to identify and target advice and grant opportunities to these sites was vital.
- Local ownership of a project is vital to its success according to the FWAG advisor. The involvement of a small number of active farmers is also necessary for successful grazing and grassland management (it is difficult to maintain adequate contact with larger groups).
- Community-based initiatives such as PGP and MMG depend on an inner core of committed individuals driving the project. However, reliance on a small number of key members raises a question over the long term sustainability of these projects. The inner core should include a botanist and, ideally, individuals with knowledge of other taxa (e.g. invertebrates).
- With 'amateur' landowners and small sites, there is a need to engender a collaborative approach and co-ordination as there are no or limited economies of scale.
- It is good to involve the local community and link into existing local networks (including local voluntary organisations and funders)
- It is useful to do something new and different each year to maintain local interest and enthusiasm.
- Where machinery is used, there needs to be some means of generating sufficient income to enable re-investment. Sharing machinery across a wide area is not feasible. In addition, it is not always possible to rely on volunteers (who are often elderly) to do this work.
- Linking landowners to local contractors can help improve long term sustainability.
- The Woolhope Dome Project 'stuttered and stumbled' as the funding was a 'mish-mash'. Continuity and consistency suffered as a result. MMG, however, has been successful in obtaining funds for grassland management from organisations such as Countryside Council for Wales, Monmouthshire County Council and the AONB.
- In terms of grazing animals, the biggest lesson was that although there has been a determination to stop the decline in cattle numbers in the Wye Valley over the last 10 years, efforts have so far failed. In order to reverse the trend a long-term commitment to supporting sustainable livestock farming must be made.
- There has been a mixed reaction to renewing ELS schemes now some options have changed/been removed. Many are not renewing as the income (£30/ha)

is not attractive enough given the potential alternative income from high value crops such as potatoes, strawberries or asparagus.

- With commercial farmers, there is a need to have the right incentives backed up by advice, and a vision of what the incentives can deliver.

5.4 Future LPP

Comments from stakeholders regarding a potential Wye Valley Grazing and Grasslands LPP include the following:

- The LPP would ideally be AONB wide.
- The LPP should dovetail with other ongoing initiatives:
 - The Wye Valley AONB and partners are making a Nature Improvement Area (NIA) application to Natural England covering SW Herefordshire and the English part of the AONB. Its aims include enhancing the conservation value of existing sites, such as semi-natural grasslands, and improving ecological connectivity.
 - GWT and Monmouthshire County Council are applying for funding for another LWS project, which will include a capital grants scheme. This may assist in the management of some grassland LWS.
- The LPP needs to be generated by local people, not foisted upon them. This is likely to require broadening out from nature conservation objectives.
- The LPP needs to be versatile in terms of its approach, services and support.
- Financial backing and the right incentives are required. Financial support needs to be able to fill the gaps, for example complement HLS, be applicable where HLS support is not available and/or help fund management on undesignated sites (i.e. not SSSI or LWS). It needs to be able to fit around agri-environment schemes and state aid measures. There also needs to be continuity of funding.
- There needs to be resources for adequate advisory networks. This could involve contracting in independent farm environment consultants, and/or other mechanisms.
- Co-ordination and/or management is required (but not from a 'top down' and/or short term project manager). There is a need for consistent, centralised support including, where appropriate, assistance with recruiting new core members/volunteers to ensure succession. This may help with the long term sustainability of projects currently reliant on a few key members.
- Any LPP will need to support local livestock farmers in order to ensure the availability of grazing animals. This could be in the form of supplements for cattle grazing, support and development of local markets or in lobbying at a national and EU level for subsidy support.
- A grazing network would be beneficial for multiple landowners.
- A machinery ring or equivalent network of suitable contractors is key.
- There is a need to raise the knowledge, understanding and skill of 'amateur' landowners in terms of species identification, grassland management etc.

Commercial in Confidence

- Consideration should be given to linking to, and expanding, training and skills delivered by Holme Lacy (Herefordshire College of Technology), Coleg Gwent and other training providers.
- Regular meetings, good communication and the provision of guidance and other resources are all important.

6 Review of other LPPs

This section reviews a number of case studies and example projects where habitat management and restoration has been undertaken at a landscape scale utilizing a partnership approach.

6.1 Case Study 1: ADEPT Project, Târnava Mare, Romania

In Romania there is a large proportion of HNV farmland, mostly on very small livestock farms. The Romanian government set up an agri-environment scheme to support HNV farming, however up-take is patchy and national rules exclude 1.9 million farms of under 1 ha from the scheme and from all CAP support.

ADEPT is a locally established NGO that works to maintain HNV farmers and their farming systems. The project works with farmers to bring them into support schemes and improve the opportunities for marketing their produce. The project also works with the government to improve the design of schemes, and improve up-take of the HNV farming scheme.

Common grazing land is a key part of HNV farming in the area and the ADEPT project has assisted the set-up of common-land grazing associations to enable them apply for agri-environment payments. The money will also allow investments in common projects such as a milk collection and processing unit, and a village abattoir which will add value to local agricultural projects, create employment and help ensure long-term sustainability of the local livestock farming system.

The project received approval for a LIFE Nature project, for conservation measures for two dry grassland habitats, of around 10,250 ha mainly under public ownership and control. Around 30% of grassland is badly managed in the project area: overgrazing in easily accessible sites, encroaching scrub in less accessible common pastures, and the spreading of scrub on privately owned hay meadows, the result of years of neglect and collapse of the traditional rural economy.

The project aims to give technical assistance to help implement grassland management plans that will bring abandoned dry grasslands under proper long term traditional management regimes. The existence of a Local Action Group covering the same area is very helpful in facilitating the coordinated management of these large areas of priority habitat. Also see www.fundatia-adept.org

Issues/principles/lessons applicable to the Wye Valley Grazing and Grasslands LPP:

- A pro-active advisory, problem-solving and “animation” role with local farmers is key to ADEPT’s success.
- HNV is on small farms
- Grassland subject to both overgrazing and elsewhere scrub encroachment due to abandonment

- Variable up-take of AES. AES is adapted to ensure suitability to local needs but not available for the smallest farms
- Common land grazing association enables access to AES payments
- Linked investments to add value to produce and create employment
- Markets developed for local produce
- A Local Action Group facilitates co-ordinated management
- Local approach and community ownership of project

6.2 Case Study 2: BurrenLIFE project, the Burren, Ireland

The BurrenLIFE Project covers a large area of internationally important, limestone pavement in the West of Ireland; a habitat shaped by nature and by thousands of years of farming activity. Modern farming techniques are not well suited to the conservation of the Burren, however the project has recognised that the best way to protect the Burren is to continue farming traditionally.

The loss of traditional farming - tight winter grazing by hardy store cattle, with little in the way of supplementary feeding, has resulted in many winterages being under-grazed; scrub encroachment is an issue. A lack of farm labour has also contributed to abandonment through changes in farming systems.

The BurrenLIFE Project is working closely with farmers and drawing on their knowledge and skills. It is also investigating the best ways of farming the Burren through a programme of practical research. The overall aim is to develop a model whereby farm families are recognised as custodians of the land, its natural and built heritage, and rewarded as such, for sustainably managing important habitats. See <http://www.burrenlife.com/#>

Issues/principles/lessons applicable to the Wye Valley Grazing and Grasslands LPP:

- Loss of traditional farming practices and lack of labour
- Pro-active working with farmers and drawing on their knowledge and skills
- Applied research programme into optimal farming systems
- Practical, locally-targeted solutions tried and tested by farmers on their land, closely monitored by the project team.
- Project initially funded via EU LIFE Nature. Now the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) is funded via Ireland's RDP (using Article 68 measure).
- BFCP is a targeted, farmer-led, output based programme which contains some real innovations such as a 1-page farm plan and a payment for the production of species-rich grasslands (locally adapted AES)
- Useful 'best practice' guides on grazing and scrub management produced



Figure 6-1: Limestone pavement landscape of the Burren

6.3 Case Study 3: Limestone Country Project, Yorkshire Dales, England

The Limestone Country Project (LCP) ran between 2002 and 2008, focusing on the conservation and management of over 11,000 ha of limestone uplands designated as internationally important Special Areas for Conservation for the outstanding limestone geology, unique habitats and species.

The area has a long history of mixed sheep and upland cattle grazing, however the recent decline in cattle farming has resulted in the degradation of habitats. The LCP aimed to restore the diversity of grasslands by encouraging farmers to return to mixed farming using traditional breeds of cattle such as Blue Greys and Belted Galloways that are adapted to harsh winters living off the rough grasses and do not graze so intensively as sheep.

The project included a programme of economic and ecological research and monitoring, the production of farm conservation plans, and a range of demonstrations, publicity and awareness-raising events and practical management of invasive plants. Farmers were offered grants to establish upland cattle herds, and marketing of local produce was undertaken. For further information see: www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/limestonecountryproject

Issues/principles/lessons applicable to the Wye Valley Grazing and Grasslands LPP:

- Decline in upland cattle farming
- Supported production of farm conservation plans

- Investment aid provided to establish traditional breed herds and infrastructure including buildings and mobile handling equipment
- Niche marketing of traditional cattle breeds to underpin long-term sustainability
- Funded via EU LIFE

6.4 Case Study 4: Anglesey Grazing Animals Partnership, North Wales.

Anglesey Grazing Animals Project (AGAP) is a partnership project which assists landowners and graziers through provision of grant funding for capital work, a livestock leasing scheme and a marketing initiative to promote the sale of products from wildlife sites. The use of rare and traditional breeds is encouraged which are suited to unimproved land.

The project employs a co-ordinator to offer grazing and management advice, training on stock-checking and meat hygiene; offers grants for fencing or water supply to facilitate grazing; promotes local markets through the AGAP Quality Mark and brand – ‘Anglesey Wildlife Friendly Produce’; and leases starter herds/flocks to help achieve appropriate grazing or links to farmers/graziers with suitable animals.

Issues/principles/lessons applicable to the Wye Valley Grazing and Grasslands LPP:

- Co-ordinator to offer advice and training
- Grants for capital works to re-introduce grazing
- Network of graziers for landowners with no stock
- Marketing local produce to improve sustainability of livestock enterprises

6.5 Case Study 5: Cut & Chew Project, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, England

The Cut and Chew Project, is an initiative run by the Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs, Northants and Peterborough which aims to ensure the long-term survival of Bedfordshire’s and Cambridgeshire’s wildflower grasslands, by promoting good management, restoration and appreciation of them.

The project has a number of registers on which people can find available grazing land, or stock in need of extra grazing, hay for sale, grassland sites for making hay and find local fencing contractors or shearers. Owners of semi-improved or unimproved (species rich) grassland can request a free site visit from a Wildlife Sites Officer to advise on management and species identification.

Issues/principles/lessons applicable to the Wye Valley Grazing and Grasslands LPP:

- Creating a network to enable linkages which help manage sites
- Management advice provided to site owners

7 Outline proposal for the Wye Valley AONB Grazing and Grasslands Local Partnership Project

This section sets out a broad framework for the Wye Valley AONB Grazing and Grasslands LPP, drawing on the findings from the previous parts of the report.

7.1 Aim and objectives

The overall aim of the LPP would be to improve the environmental and economic sustainability of HNV grasslands in the AONB, via their appropriate management through grazing and/or hay cutting.

The LPP would have three key objectives:

- To conserve and enhance grassland habitats and species, and associated landscape features.
- To support and promote extensive farming systems, specifically low input cattle and sheep grazing and hay meadow management.
- To engage local communities with grasslands and grazing (e.g. through education, training and volunteering) and improve the contribution of grassland sites and extensive farming systems to the local economy (e.g. encouraging the local production and consumption of beef and lamb, using local contractors, and promoting traditional skills).

Complementary objectives would include *inter alia*:

- Delivery of a range of ecosystem services such as natural resource protection, flood risk management, climate change mitigation and genetic conservation;
- Conservation of the historic environment; and
- Supporting high standards of animal health and welfare

What difference would the LPP make?

The LPP would deliver the following:

- An increase in the area of HNV grassland under positive management in the AONB, including a number of restored sites
- Two local grassland groups sustained and three new groups created (e.g. Woolhope, Ross-on-Wye, Forest of Dean).
- More cattle and sheep farms involved with extensive grazing and hay meadow management, with profitable businesses
- More non-farming businesses linked to HNV grassland and grazing (e.g. contractors, butchers, retailers etc.)
- Improved landowner and farmer awareness of HNV grasslands and extensive grazing systems

- More local people involved with HNV grasslands and grazing in a range of different ways
- More resilient and sustainable grassland sites and systems of management (a result of the above, and investment in infrastructure, markets, education etc)

7.2 Scope

Geographic area

The LPP would ideally reach across the entire Wye Valley AONB. The AONB provides a clear geographic focus and a relatively discrete, 'manageable' area.

At the outset of the LPP, the approximate extent of semi-natural grassland to be targeted by the project should be established e.g. 2,000 ha. It is worth noting that existing grassland projects cover around 10-15% of this total.

Potential complicating factors with the AONB as a target area include:

- Split between England and Wales, and hence different RDPs for funding purposes (although this could also be an advantage).
- Differences in the character of grasslands across the AONB, the issues facing those grasslands, and the challenges involved in maintaining or restoring appropriate management.
 - HNV farmland is concentrated in the South of the AONB; this area is particularly rich in ecological terms.
 - To the North lies a more intensively farmed landscape where semi-natural grasslands exist but sites are fewer and more fragmented.

That said, there is no reason why the LPP could not provide a range of services to benefit different types of grassland, or create two target areas – the Northern and Southern grasslands.

It is worth noting that there would be a geographic overlap with the proposed NIA for SW Herefordshire; this could and should be beneficial given that both initiatives are seeking to promote nature conservation, amongst other things.

Time period

The LPP would be focused on long term sustainability and as such there is a strong case to be made that the LPP itself should be a long term venture as opposed to a short project. Significant funding is likely to be time-limited (e.g. a 7 year funding period from RDP or similar) but this does not mean that the initiative could not continue, albeit on a lower input basis thereafter.

7.3 Approach

Drawing on the experience of previous and present projects, it is possible to outline some key principles which would underpin the approach taken by the LPP:

- The LPP should be set up and operate from the 'bottom up' rather than the 'top down'. There is a need to engage with existing and potential beneficiaries (individual farmers and landowners, and communities) to define and guide the LPP.
- The LPP should have long term sustainability embedded into it from the outset; this links to getting landowners committed to their grassland and its management, and the involvement of others.
- The LPP should work alongside, and take advantage of, existing/future schemes (e.g. ELS, HLS, Glastir, other RDP funding, HLF, NIA etc.) but should not be dependent on them, as they are prone to changes in criteria, funding etc.
- The LPP should help make available a range of practical and other resources which will support long term grazing and grassland management. Examples include machinery, livestock, training, guidance and advice, etc.
- The LPP should be about helping people to help themselves; ideally reducing reliance on external funding and initiatives.
- The LPP should contribute to building stronger communities and a more vibrant rural economy.
- Flexibility in services and delivery is key. The LPP should be able to operate in gaps left by other schemes and initiatives.
- The LPP should be pro-active. There is an important role for an 'animateur' to energise and motivate local groups engaged in grazing and grasslands.
- Ongoing co-ordination and support is important.

7.4 Services

The LPP would support the provision of a range of services to achieve its aim and objectives. Possible services are listed below, grouped by key objective (although some services would contribute to more than one objective)

Conserve and enhance grassland habitats and species, and associated landscape features

- Advice on grasslands (e.g. wildlife, historic interest) and grassland management (e.g. grazing, hay cutting), building on existing guidance and resources.
- Setting up an AONB wide machinery ring or network of contractors; this could include support for the purchase of specialist machinery where required subject to delivery of a management service over a specified area.
- Consider establishing a flying herd and flock to graze the most important and/or fragmented sites until a suitable grazier can be found.

- Providing capital works payments for land management/re-introduction of livestock (hedge laying/coppicing, walling, fencing, stock handling, watering etc) via a LPP grant scheme to complement existing AES funding.
- Updating grassland records and maps to provide accurate AONB-wide coverage. This should inform priorities and activities.

Support and promote extensive farming systems, specifically low input cattle and sheep grazing and hay meadow management

- Support/encouragement for local farmers wishing to go into or expand traditional breed cattle and sheep.
- Support for new graziers and entrepreneurs with new ideas and innovative approaches.
- Supporting marketing initiative(s), working with groups or individuals, in order to improve returns from beef, lamb and other products from Wye Valley grasslands.
- Provision of a conservation marketing fieldsman (e.g. on contract) – providing advice and training on stock finishing and marketing, and one to one support for beef and lamb product placement
- Supporting the development of further markets and animal products e.g. animal skins.
- Advice on AES, RDP and other grant applications. Individual and group applications could be supported (e.g. group HLS, or investment in local meat processing plant).
- Applied research into sustainable grazing/grassland systems, working with and being guided by local farmers. Developing practical, locally targeted solutions. Then providing demonstration events and knowledge transfer

Engage local communities with grasslands and grazing and improve the contribution of grassland sites and extensive farming systems to the local economy

- Advice on sustaining, as well as setting up, a local grassland group(s). Also provision of support for grassland group volunteers (e.g. training, back-up, model documents etc).
- Developing the network of volunteers for survey/monitoring work and possibly livestock checking.
- Supporting and/or providing subsidised education and training courses (rural skills/farm business management/conservation), where possible linking into existing providers and initiatives.
- Encouraging outreach to children and young people.
- Setting up an AONB wide directory of graziers, contractors, local businesses and outlets (e.g. shops/pubs/restaurants selling local food), community grassland groups, specialists etc. This would link to existing and equivalent local area directories/registers.

General

- Co-ordination of the above grazing and grassland activities. This would include a one-stop point of contact for information and advice (e.g. a knowledge hub with technical data).
- Communicating news, information and advice to all those interested in or involved with grazing and grasslands in the AONB.
- Influencing policy and schemes, including the adaptation of SPS, agri-environment schemes and other RDP schemes to support grazing and grasslands.

At the outset of the LPP, this 'long list' of possible services would need to be fine-tuned via discussions with landowners/farmers, grassland groups, funders and others.

7.5 Structure

The LPP would by definition involve a range of local partners both during its development and implementation. It is crucial that these include and start with representatives of local farmers, graziers and landowners, and existing community-based grazing groups. Other bodies would be involved, for example, HNT, GWT and of course the Wye Valley AONB Unit. It would be important however that the initiative is and perceived to be genuinely 'owned' by local people and meets their and the area's needs.

It is suggested that a Local Action Group (LAG) is the LPP 'board' and decision making body, using a similar model to the current LEADER programme. A brief, indicative description is set out below:

- The LAG's primary roles would be to:
 - Devise the overall strategy and bid for RDP and other funding
 - Monitor priorities, progress and funding; and
 - Make decisions on individual funding applications.
- The LAG would meet a minimum of 4 times per year with members undertaking work between meetings.
- The LAG would consist of 10-20 members including representatives from the private, community and voluntary sectors
- Large applications for funding would be appraised by the project co-ordinator (or an external appraiser) and approved at a quarterly meeting of the LAG. Small applications would be appraised by the project co-ordinator (or an external appraiser) and then sent to the rest of the LAG for comment, apart from 3 members (selected by the Chair) who would act as decision makers. The aim would be to make the decision making process as short as possible.

The staff involved with LLP management and delivery would include:

Job Title	Full or Part Time	Key Areas of Responsibility
LPP Co-ordinator	Full Time	Project Management Co-ordination of activities Delivery of advice to groups Management of consultants Grant scheme management
LPP Administrator	Part Time	Marketing Administration

Table 7-1: LPP Staff and Areas of Responsibility

The proposed staff complement would be deliberately small. It would be focused more on co-ordination and facilitation, and delivery through others (e.g. farmers/landowners, grassland groups, independent advisers), than undertaking work 'on the ground' itself.

The rationale behind this is that the LPP is there to work with, and not usurp, existing individuals and groups. The LPP would help develop initiatives and deliver services, but this would mainly be through existing channels and specialist consultants as required (e.g. farm business advice, marketing etc.).

This model would achieve its goals but would be more sustainable in the long term than a one-off project doing lots of things itself.

Two examples are provided by way of illustration:

- In existing and new grassland groups, advice would continue to be provided by local volunteers. The LPP could support these groups and volunteers, say by providing training and resources, but would not take over their valuable role on the ground.
- The LPP would seek to influence and adapt mainstream agri-environment and other schemes to suit local needs. This is likely to be more effective in the long run than putting too much store on directly funding management and works. That said, some of this will be essential in the early years to fill current gaps not covered by existing schemes.

It is envisaged that the staff would be employed and housed by an existing organisation (e.g. the Wye Valley AONB), albeit funded at least for an initial period, by the LPP.

7.6 Budget

The main costs associated with the LPP are set out below (indicative at this stage).
Figures are totals for the 7 year period:

Project Expenditure	£
Direct spend	
<u>Conserve and enhance grasslands</u>	
LPP Capital Grants (e.g. infrastructure, machinery etc.)	280,000
Advice, survey and consultancy for grasslands	105,000
<u>Support and promote extensive farming</u>	
Marketing initiatives	100,000
Advice and consultancy to farmers	105,000
Research and development	30,000
<u>Engage local communities with grasslands and grazing etc</u>	
Volunteer development	52,500
Education and training	52,500
Directory and one-off initiatives	20,000
Total Costs	£745,000
Overhead costs	
Staff costs (FT Co-ordinator & PT Admin x 7 years)	266,000
Recruitment costs	1,750
Marketing and promotion	4,000
Staff travelling (10,000 miles/yr @ 45p/mile x 7 years)	31,500
Staff training	7,000
Running costs for project office	8,400
Office Equipment including computer hardware	3,000
Other costs (materials, stationery, vehicles)	5,000
Cost of monitoring & evaluation	7,500
Total Overhead Costs	£334,150
Sub Total	£1,079,150
<i>Inflation (5%)</i>	<i>53,957</i>
<i>Contingency (10%)</i>	<i>107,915</i>
TOTAL cost of the Project over 7 years	£1,241,022
<i>[Private match funding (alongside LPP Capital Grants)]</i>	<i>£280,000]</i>

Table 7-2: LPP Indicative Budget

Our budget assumptions are as follows:

- The LPP would operate for a 7 year period (e.g. 2014 to 2021) consistent with RDP funding (see below). Please see the continuation strategy section below regarding follow-on activity.
- LPP Capital Grants would be payable at 50%. The balance is shown as private match funding.

An indicative budget breakdown is provided in a separate excel spreadsheet.

7.7 Funding

The intention is that the LPP would be funded primarily via the next (England and Wales) Rural Development Programmes which will be for the period 2014-2020.

At this stage, the priorities, scope and criteria for local partnership project funding under both RDPs in the next period are unknown. Much remains to be discussed and negotiated.

Other funding sources could provide complementary funding. This could include funding from other public sources (e.g. European Social Fund for education and training), the lottery (e.g. Heritage Lottery Funding, Big Lottery Fund), NGOs and the private sector.

7.8 Monitoring and evaluation

It is suggested that a monitoring system would be developed as part of LPP start-up phase covering financial information, activities, targets, outputs and outcomes. The system would allow progress reporting against targets set out in a LPP business plan and funding bid.

An evaluation of the LPP at the end of the initial operating period would enable an assessment of performance relative to target outputs, results and impacts. Crucially it would also demonstrate the lessons learnt from developing and implementing a grazing and grasslands LPP for future policies and delivery mechanisms. The evaluation would also guide the continuation strategy (see below).

7.9 Continuation strategy

A 'continuation strategy' would need to be developed during the development of the LPP to ensure the continuity of the co-ordinating role and availability of resources for farmers, graziers and community-based grassland groups.

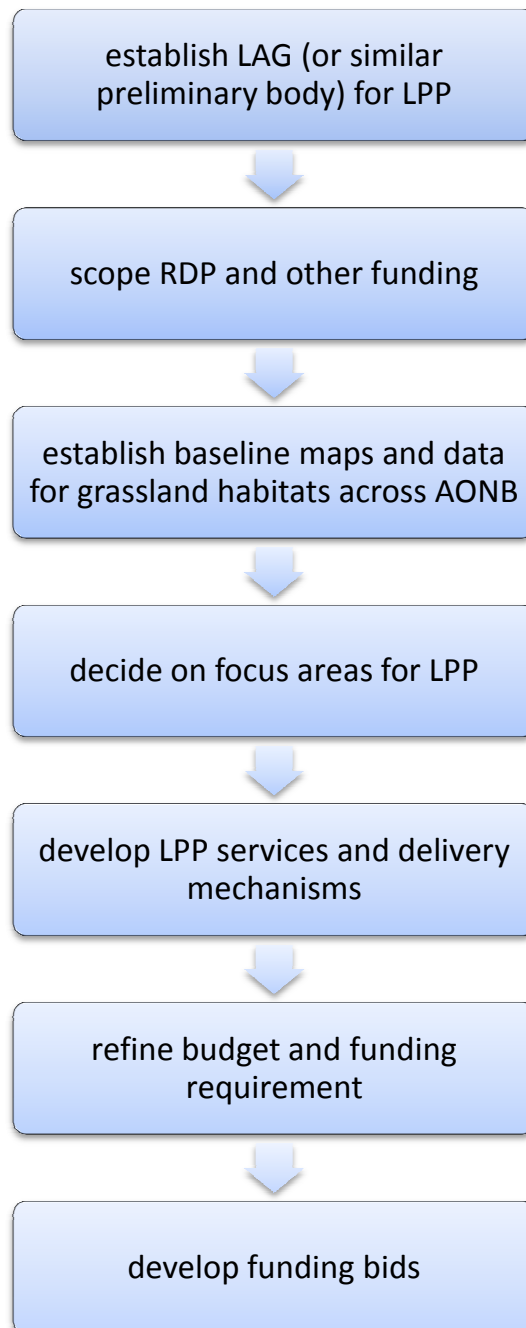


Commercial in Confidence

It is assumed that the role and resources would be integrated into the mainstream work of the Wye Valley AONB. This would be at a lower level of intensity (and much lower level of funding) than the initial period. Additional external funding could be sourced for one-off projects as required.

8 Summary of next steps

In order to progress the LPP we suggest the following basic, next steps:



Appendix 1: Bibliography

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