

Countryside Stewardship target statement for **Upper Thames Clay Vales**

Your application is scored and a decision made on the points awarded. Both top priorities and lower priorities score points but you should select at least one top priority.

Scoring is carried out by... (This is yet to be provided)

Choosing priorities

To apply you should choose at least one of the top priorities, and you can choose lower priorities - this may help with your application.

Top priorities

Priority group	Priority type
Biodiversity	Priority habitats
	Priority species
Water	Water quality
	Flood and coastal risk management
Historic environment	Designated historic and archaeological features
	Undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance
Woodland priorities	Woodland management
	Woodland planting
Landscape	
Climate Change	
Multiple environmental benefits	

Lower priorities

Priority group	Priority type
Lower priorities	Water quality

	Archaeological and historic features
	Woodland

Biodiversity - top priorities

Priority habitats

You should carry out land management practices and capital works that maintains, restores and creates priority habitats.

Maintain priority habitat such as:

- Lowland meadow
- Lowland fen
- Floodplain grazing marsh
- Traditional orchard
- Wood pasture and parkland
- Pond

Restore priority habitats (especially proposals which make existing sites bigger or help join up habitat networks) such as:

- Lowland fen
- Floodplain Grazing Marsh
- Wood pasture and parkland
- Reedbed
- Traditional orchard
- Lowland meadow

Create priority habitats – to extend or link priority habitat to increase connectivity and reduce fragmentation. Defra is looking for proposals to create priority habitat that will also contribute significantly to improvements in:

- water quality
- air quality
- flood and coastal risk management

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Proposals to maintain or restore Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs including SACs) with eligible features are a priority, and both on-site and off-site options (such as to reduce diffuse water and air pollution impacts on SSSIs) are relevant.

Priority species

For the majority of priority species found on the priority habitats listed above, their ecological requirements can be met through good generic habitat management. Managing for those essential elements associated with priority habitats - in particular bare ground, areas of scrub, varying sward structures will allow these species to thrive.

A number of priority species associated with the area require specific and tailored management and advice. You should carry out land management practices and capital works that meet the specific needs of the following priority species:

- *Emberiza calandra subsp. calandra/clanceyi* Corn Bunting (bird)
- *Vanellus vanellus* Lapwing (bird)
- *Streptopelia turtur* Turtle dove (bird)
- *Poecile montanus subsp. Kleinschimdti* Willow Tit (bird)
- *Euphydryas aurinia* Marsh Fritillary (butterfly)
- *Leptidea sinapis* Wood White (butterfly)
- *Thecla betulae* Brown Hairstreak (butterfly)
- *Agonopterix atomella* Greenweed Flat-body Moth (moth)
- *Grapholita pallifrontana* Liquorice Piercer (moth)
- *Macrostes cyane* Pondweed Leafhopper (invertebrate)
- *Caloplaca luteoalba* Orange-Fruited Elm-lichen (lichen)
- *Myotis bechsteinii* Bechstein's Bat (mammal)
- *Apium repens* Creeping Marshwort (vascular plant)
- *Centaurea cyanus* Cornflower (vascular plant)
- *Cynoglossum germanicum* Green Hound's-tongue (vascular plant)
- *Lythrum hyssopifolia* Grass-poly (vascular plant)
- *Mentha pulegium* Pennyroyal (vascular plant)
- *Microthlaspi perfoliatum* Cotswold Pennycress (vascular plant)
- *Sium latifolium* Greater Water Parsnip (vascular plant)
- *Viola persicifolia* Fen Violet (vascular plant)

Further guidance on the priority species in this area that require more tailored targeted management and advice, as listed, can be found:

- [Links to guidance on those bespoke species' needs found in this area]

Parts of this area are targeted for their breeding wader assemblage, i.e. they contain area(s) assessed as being nationally significant for two or more species (of Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew & Snipe). Where your land includes such areas, you should carry out land management practices and capital works that:

- maintain/enhance conditions for breeding waders

Parts of this area are targeted for their woodland bird assemblage, i.e. they contain area(s) assessed as being nationally significant for four or more species (of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Pipit, Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Marsh Tit, Lesser Redpoll and Hawfinch). Where your land includes such areas, you should carry out land management practices and capital works that:

- maintain/enhance conditions for woodland birds

This area has also been identified as a hotspot for wild pollinators, farmland birds and other wildlife associated with the wider countryside – through the Wild Pollinator and farm Wildlife package implement these options to make sure these species thrive all year around:

- option 1
- option 2

Water - top priorities

Water quality

The area has particular issues with:

- phosphates, nitrates and sediment in the Bristol Avon Rural catchment. Phosphates, nitrates, sediment and pesticides in the Thames, Upper Great Ouse, Oxon Ray and Ouzel and Milton Keynes catchments. Phosphates and pesticides in the Upper Thames catchment. Phosphates, sediment and pesticides in the Ock and Evenlode catchments.

This includes:

- phosphates, nitrates and sediment affecting protected aquatic species in the Bristol Avon catchment.
- Pesticides affecting surface water drinking sources from the Ouse (Newport Pagnell to Earith) and from the Thames (Leach to Evenlode, Cookham to Egham, Egham to Teddington).
- Phosphates, nitrates and sediment affecting the Ouse Washes SAC and Portholme SAC.
- Nitrates in groundwater affecting Wendlebury Meads and Mansmoor Closes SSSI.

You should consider options and capital works that address these issues. These are detailed in X guidance document. These options help to improve water quality by controlling the source or the movement of potential pollutants. For this area, this includes:

- nutrients from fertilisers and manures
- sediment problems from soil erosion and run-off
- pesticides from their use and disposal

Flood and Coastal Risk Management

Applications that select options to address flood risk issues within the area will also be welcomed, primarily within the flood risk priority areas of **STILL AWAITING INFORMATION**. You should consider options that:

- reduce the amount and rate of surface water run-off
- reduce soil erosion
- slow the movement of floodwaters on floodplains

These are detailed in X guidance document.

Historic environment - top priorities

Active management is important for the long term survival of historic environment remains and to protect them against damage and decay brought about through cultivation, scrub growth, burrowing animals or poor maintenance. These features cannot be recreated once they have been lost.

Ancient routeways such as the pre-historic Lower Icknield Way and Roman Ermine Street cross the area. Ridge and furrow dating back to medieval times survives across the area, with nationally important survivals at West Hanney, Denchworth, Lodgershall, Hogshaw and Creslow. Around Aylesbury the deserted villages, such as Quarrendon, Fleet Marston and Creslow, are significant historic landscape features from medieval times. Royal hunting grounds first created in Saxon times are evidenced by embankments, ditches and ancient semi-natural woodland, for example, Bernwood and Braydon. Anglo-Saxons have also created pagan burial sites in the south of the area.

Thames valley clay vales, were the equivalent of the M1 corridor during the medieval, post-medieval and industrial period until the introduction of rail in the early 1800's – rivers were particularly important in this location. Therefore key structures such as boat and cargo handling facilities along the key navigable rivers (and later the canals) but especially the Thames, such as wharfs, quays, piers, docks, remains of lifting mechanisms, boatyards and warehouses etc. In addition in the southern section of the NCA the line of the great western railway travels to Swindon and is one of the first railways constructed and the first one built by Isambard Brunel – any railway structures along the line of the railway could be of particular significance.

Characteristic farm buildings include [XXXX with some rare examples of XXX buildings/materials]. The 2014 Heritage at Risk 2014 survey has identified [XXX %] of designated features as being 'at risk', particularly from *[insert most significant threats (relevant to land management)]*¹. (Awaiting information)

The following historic environment features are a high priority for active management in this area:

- Designated Features - archaeological features of national significance (Scheduled Monuments), Registered Parks and Gardens (RPG).

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- Designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings and non-domestic historic buildings on holdings
- Undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance which are part of the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE)

You should carry out land management practices and capital works that:

- revert archaeological sites under cultivation to permanent grass
- reduce damaging cultivation and harvesting practices through minimum tillage or direct drilling where this offers a suitable level of protection
- remove scrub and bracken from archaeological or historic features
- maintain below-ground archaeology under permanent uncultivated vegetation or actively manage earthworks, standing stones and structures as visible 'above ground' features
- maintain and restore historic water management systems, including those associated with water meadows and designed water bodies
- restore historic buildings that are assessed as a priority in the area.
- address the condition of Registered Historic Parks and Gardens, through the proactive maintenance or restoration of structures or features that make a major contribution to the design intentions or feel of the parkland, provide for their biodiversity and amenity value.
- deal with specific issues that are causing damage or decay to archaeological and historic features, but which are not covered by standard options.

Woodland - top priorities

Woodland management

Management of all woodland to improve structure and species mix is important for biodiversity and to make them more robust in relation to future threats such as climate change, pests and diseases.

Certain types of woodland are a high priority for bringing into management, including:

- protected woodland – those designated for their national biodiversity value
- priority woodland habitat – other unmanaged broadleaved woodland
- priority species – all woodland within areas important for woodland butterfly and woodland bird species
- Planted Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) restoration – conversion of conifer plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites to broadleaf woodland where they are in close proximity to existing broadleaf woodland
- United Kingdom Forestry Standard – unmanaged conifer woodland within catchments subject to eutrophication and acidification, both to reduce pressures on the water environment and improve biodiversity

Woodlands not included in the categories above are a lower priority for management.

All management should comply with the United Kingdom Forestry Standard and other relevant guidance such as 'Managing Ancient and Native Woodland in England'.

High priority woodlands or woodland management initiatives in this area include:

- Bernwood
- Breydon Forest

Woodland planting

High priority areas for the planting of new woodlands include:

- biodiversity – planting to buffer and link existing woodlands and other semi natural open habitats within priority woodland habitat networks
- water quality – planting designed to reduce and intercept diffuse pollution from agriculture
- flood risk – planting designed to increase infiltration of heavy rain into the ground, reduce erosion, or slow the flow of floodwaters on floodplains

In order to provide the required biodiversity and/or water benefits, new woodland planting needs to be in the right part of the landscape and to the right design.

High priority areas for new planting or local initiatives prioritising woodland creation in this area include:

- Bernwood – buffering and linking ancient woodland
- Upper Thames tributaries (Thames, Ock, Thame, Ray) where these would slow floodflows
- Great Western Community Forest – green infrastructure in and around the expanding town, in particular linking what's already there.

Landscape – top priorities

High priorities are the management, restoration or re-creation of landscape features that contribute significantly to the local character by reinforcing the overall pattern and scale of the landscape, together with other important features that give an area its unique and distinctive sense of place.

Top priority in Upper Thames Clay Vales is the restoration of these features:

- Hedgerows
- Management and restoration of hedgerows and associated hedgerow trees Pollarding of bankside willows (and Black Poplar in Aylsbury Vale)
- Restoration of drystone walls north of the Midvale ridge
- Protection/replacement of infield trees – particularly mature oaks South of the Midvale ridge and in parkland settings (e.g. outer Blenheim, Eynsham)
- Restoration and creation of infield ponds
- Management and restoration of permanent grassland
- small woods and shelterbelts

Climate Change

Climate change will pose variable threats and opportunities in different landscapes. Priority should be given to targeted features and issues that are particularly vulnerable to or affected by climate change.

You should carry out land management practices and capital works that help to:

- make existing priority habitat sites bigger
- extend or link priority habitat to increase connectivity and reduce fragmentation
- reduce the impacts of climate change on local communities, for example by targeted planting of woodland to reduce flood risk
- reduce loss of carbon and emissions of other greenhouse gases
- increase carbon uptake, for example by tree planting
- increase carbon storage, for example by converting arable land to permanent grassland
- provide shade for wildlife and livestock

Multiple environmental benefits

Opportunities for multi-objective agreements

You should look to provide for multiple priorities by selecting options that achieve multiple environmental benefits.

In the Upper Thames Clay Vales you have the greatest opportunity to achieve multiple objectives with:

- establish new wetland habitat within sub-catchments where they're likely to improve water quality, reduce run-off rates into watercourses, add to biodiversity and landscape character and protect historical features. See Water Quality and Flood Risk Management target areas above.
- change arable cropping systems to low-intensity grassland and restore connectivity (e.g. by removal of embankments) between the river and the Thames floodplain between Oxford and Cricklade, on the lower Cherwell and Oxfordshire Ray, to benefit biodiversity, farmland and wetland birds, flood risk, water quality, landscape character, and to protect historical features
- restore hedgerows to manage water flow, decrease soil erosion, create wildlife habitats and corridors, and strengthen the local landscape and historic field boundary patterns in the areas listed under Water Quality and Flood Risk management above
- select options such as the use of rural sustainable drainage systems, buffer strips and erosion control in the **xx** catchment to improve both water quality and support flood risk management (Still awaiting comment)
- maintain woodland in *the Bernwood* area to support *Bechstein Bats* species in the wider landscape

Lower priorities

You should select one of the top priorities. However, you can also select lower priorities as well as this will attract points used to score your application.

You should consider the following other priorities that are of specific interest in this area.

Water quality - lower priorities

Water quality

In addition to the top priorities, this area has particular issues with:

- Nitrates and sediment in the Upper Thames catchment. Phosphates and pesticides in Thame and Windrush catchments.

You should consider options and capital works that address these issues. These are detailed in X guidance document. These options help to improve water quality by controlling the source or the movement of potential pollutants.

Historic environment - lower priorities

The Historic environment features set out below are a lower priority.

- Maintain designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings.
- Undesignated SHINE features of medium and low Significance
- Priority Undesignated Historic Parklands

Woodland – lower priorities

Woodland Management

Woodlands not included in the top priority categories listed above are a lower priority for management but may still be supported.

Woodland Planting

Areas are prioritised for new planting based on their potential to create biodiversity and water benefits. Woodland planting schemes are scored depending on where the proposed scheme is in relation to the

opportunity maps for woodland planting in England and how well the planting design will benefit biodiversity and water.

Lower priorities for appropriately designed biodiversity schemes exist across the whole of England. Opportunities for new woodland planting for water only exist in certain parts of England.

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