



## CFE County Priorities for Bedfordshire

### 1. Aim

This document has been drawn together by the CFE Local Liaison Group for Bedfordshire with input from all LLG members and their respective organisations. The aim is to ensure that all advisers and partners have a clear, concise and consistent message about the aims of CFE in Bedfordshire that can be used by farmers and landowners to ensure their actions deliver maximum benefit to the environment. The action undertaken on each farm may differ depending on the farm type and enterprise.

### 2. County Overview

Bedfordshire has the following National Character Areas:

- The *Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands* covers the majority of the county and consists of a lowland plateau with broad river valleys. It is a predominantly arable landscape on clay soils growing cereals and oilseed rape, and most holdings are over 100 ha. There is some ancient woodland.
- The *Yardley Whittlewood Ridge* is a limestone ridge capped with clay which just enters the north of the county and features important remnants of ancient woodland. Both arable and livestock farms are present, though mainly cereals are grown, and fields are medium sized and tend to be well hedged. About one-third of holdings are 100 ha or bigger, and about one quarter are less than 20 ha, often with livestock.
- In central Beds, the *Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge* is an important landscape feature, with varied land use which includes grassland and woodland as well as arable farms, which form the majority. Livestock numbers are increasing slightly. Shooting is often a major enterprise on the larger estates.
- To the south, the *Chilterns* NCA is an area of mixed farming and woodland, on mainly chalky soils. A large part of the area is an AONB and both chalk grassland and chalk streams are of international importance. Most farms are less than 20 ha, with an increase in hobby farming, but there are also large farms and estates producing mainly cereals.

Bedfordshire is affected by motorways (A1, M1) and contains the major urban areas of Luton and Bedford.

Central Bedfordshire Council runs a farm estate in the county. Tenants have been encouraged to enter agri-environment schemes.

### 3. County designated sites and partnerships

- Bedfordshire has 40 SSSIs and 400 County Wildlife Sites (CWS), including woodland, chalk grassland and other grassland sites, some wetlands and old pits and quarries.
- The Chiltern AONB enters the south of county.
- The Greensand Ridge and Flit Valley, the Ouse Valley and the North Chilterns Chalk are all Living Landscape Projects identified by the Wildlife Trust.
- The Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge has been adopted as a Nature Improvement Area by the Local Nature Partnership. As part of this, advice and assistance to the farming community has been identified as important.
- Strategic overview of natural environment initiatives is provided by the Local Nature Partnership (LNP).

### 4. County Priorities

The following sections aim to define the county priorities by theme.

#### a) Theme: Priority farmland habitats and description

The county's priority habitats are listed on

[http://www.bedscape.org.uk/BRMC/newsite/index.php?c=habitats\\_home](http://www.bedscape.org.uk/BRMC/newsite/index.php?c=habitats_home)

**Ponds:** Infield ponds are significant across the county. This includes those in the Marston Vale where great crested newts are present. (VM1, VM4, VM17, VM19, VM20)

**Hedgerows:** Surveys in Bedfordshire have shown a gradual decline in length and species richness of hedgerows. Hedgerows on the claylands are described as gappy, but in other areas there are good, full hedgerows with hedgerow trees. (VM17, VM20)

**Arable Field Margins:** Existing arable plant flora is found on thinner soils on the chalk and greensand around perimeters of fields, particularly within the triangle of Luton, Barton le Clay and Hitchin, according to Plantlife data. This provides a much needed habitat for beneficial pollinators. (VM13, VM14)

**Permanent Grassland:** composed of Lowland Meadows, Lowland Calcareous Grassland and Lowland Acid Grassland. There are remnant patches of species-rich grassland in all these grassland types. (VM19)

**Rivers:** quality and quantity of water is a major issue. Buffering rivers and avoiding erosion and run-off of pesticides and soils is key. (VM1, VM2, VM3, VM4, VM5, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM20)

**Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland:** ancient and secondary woodlands are important in several areas of the county. (VM17, VM19, VM20)

**Any specific action required:**

- Pond management, especially buffering for great crested newt habitat.
- Hedgerow management to maintain a diverse range of flowering species, hedge age and structure. Habitat connectivity important.
- Creating arable field margins in relevant areas.
- Appropriate management of semi-improved and unimproved grassland (acidic, neutral and calcareous).
- Protecting streams from over abstraction and pollution, in particular sediment from soil erosion and run off.

**b) Theme: Priority species and requirements**

- **Great crested newts:** Especially in Marston Vale - ponds, grassland adjoining pond areas. (VM1, VM4, VM17, VM19)
- **Dormice:** In south Beds and introduced into Maulden Wood - broadleaved woodland, hedgerows.
- **Water vole:** Vegetated banks on rivers and ditches which have continuous water levels. (VM1, VM4)
- **Brown hare:** A mosaic of crop types and grass margins for year round grazing, and undisturbed cover for raising young in May/ June/ July. (VM1, VM5, VM7, VM8, VM10, VM12, VM15, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM20)
- **Farmland birds:** In particular turtle doves in the east of the county: large hedges and cultivated areas; and grey partridge on the chalk and on big shooting estates such as Southill: winter cover and food sources, spring nesting habitat and springtime source of insects for feeding young. (VM6, VM7, VM8, VM9, VM10, VM11, VM12, VM13, VM14, VM15, VM16, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM21, VM22)
- **Arable plants:** Cultivated, untreated areas on chalk and sand, close to field edges. (VM13, VM14)
- **Invertebrates and pollinators:** Beetle banks, dry margins, hedgerows, flower rich areas. (VM1, VM6, VM7, VM8, VM10, VM13, VM14, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM20, VM21)
- **Bats:** provision of insects and corridors. (VM1, VM6, VM7, VM8, VM10, VM13, VM14, VM18, VM19, VM21)

**Any specific action required:**

- Provision of winter food, nesting habitat and insect-rich options for farmland birds, particularly grey partridge.
- Allow hedges to grow tall and bushy near suitable arable plots for turtle dove.
- Avoid siting grass margins on areas with rare arable plants

**c) Theme: priority river catchments**

- To the north of the county the River Great Ouse is a CSF priority catchment together with its tributaries the Ivel and the Flit, and in the southwest of the county the River Ouzel. The Ouse leads to the internationally important Ouse Washes in Cambridgeshire.
- The Environment Agency has supplied a map showing where water bodies in the county are failing to meet the Water Framework Directive Good Ecological Status because of rural diffuse pollution. See Attached PDF.
- The EA continues to be concerned about Metaldehyde entering watercourses. A key action should be to push the “get pelletwise” campaign with farmers in the Ouse catchment.
- The EA would also like to promote its Rural Sustainable Drainage advice publications to assist farmers in identifying suitable and cost effective measures to prevent run-off and the loss of nutrients and soil from fields. As we are likely to continue to experience extremes of weather with short intense rainfall episodes these measures are also helpful adaptation measures for the future. These kinds of measures are helpful for meeting commitments under the Water Framework Directive.
- Anglian Water has concerns over the concentrations of pesticides and nitrate being detected in the raw water abstracted from the Great Ouse at Bedford for public supply.

**Any specific action required:**

- Buffering watercourses and avoiding erosion and run off. (VM1, VM2, VM3, VM4, VM5, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM20)
- Metaldehyde stewardship.
- Promote the Environment Agency publication, “Key actions for farmers relating to water management” and the six actions detailed there.

**d) Other county priorities not already covered**

Invasive non-native species:

Himalayan Balsam, Mink, Signal Crayfish are present in the River Ouse and require controlling. Some work has been undertaken on the control of mink.

Any specific action required:

Link farmers to any local schemes tackling these issues.

## CFE options within Entry Level Stewardship agreements (excluding Uplands ELS)

		2013	2014		2015		2016 and later
			Jan-Jun	Jul to Dec	Jan-Jun	Jul to Dec	
Bedfordshire	Maintenance of watercourse fencing (EJ11) - km	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Supplementary feeding in winter for farmland birds (EF23) - tonnes	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Skylark plots (EF8) - number	0	0	0	0	5	16
	All other CFE2 options (hectares)	13	40	34	2	404	1092
	<i>Permanent grassland with very low inputs: outside SDA &amp; Moorland (EK3)</i>	4	20	30	0	223	630
	<i>Field corner management (EF1,EK1)</i>	7	17	4	2	103	256
	<i>Wild bird seed mixture (EF2)</i>	2	2	0	0	21	66
	<i>Nectar flower mixture (EF4)</i>	0	1	0	0	11	45
	<i>6m/12m buffer strips next to a watercourse (EE9, EE10, EJ9)</i>	0	0	0	0	22	66
	<i>Extended overwintered stubbles (EF22)</i>	0	0	0	0	18	21
	<i>Other</i>	0	0	0	0	6	7