



CFE County Priorities for Gloucestershire

1. Aim

This document has been drawn together by the CFE Local Liaison Group for Gloucestershire with input for 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 Gloucestershire 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

Gloucestershire has a range of landscape types; extensive woodland of the Forest of Dean and Wye valley with the associated open habitats of heathland / acid grassland (characteristic of medieval hunting ground) sits in the south west tip of the county. Farms are smaller, predominately pasture although there are pockets of fertile arable. Fields are small to medium on the undulating land that is dominated by the woodland. This leads into the Lower Leadon Vale which contains traditional orchards, including the distinct Perry pear, and neutral grassland and wood pasture. The Severn Vale, as well as traditional orchards, holds a significant proportion of the county and regional lowland wet grassland. This is a low lying, open agricultural vale landscape, floodplain grazing livestock and arable elsewhere with traditional orchards common.

Slicing through the centre of the county, running north/south is the Cotswold escarpment; a strong and the largest, landscape feature in the county. The Cotswolds hold over half of the country's species-rich limestone grassland and is one of five South West ancient woodland priority areas due to its wooded valleys and beech trees. Farming is mixed; arable dominates on the open, high wold on thin, brash soils. Pasture is predominantly on steep scarp slopes and in the valleys and gives a network of arable and semi-natural habitats to the landscape. Parkland and large Estates are characteristic of the area. The land is a mix of grade 3 and 4 agricultural land.

The Cotswold river valleys link the Cotswold Hills with the Cotswold Water Park to the south east, and flow into the River Thames. Most of the rivers represent key examples of oolitic limestone rivers and are linked with the woodland and grassland habitats. The Cotswold River Park traditionally has low intensity farming, which has maintained flower-rich meadows. The mineral extraction has led to marl lakes which support key aquatic diversity.

3. County designated sites and partnerships

International Designations: The Severn Estuary and adjacent Walmore Common are both recognised as Ramsar sites and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). There are seven Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) including Rodborough Common; Dixton Wood; The Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites; The River Wye; The Wye Valley Woodlands; The Severn Estuary; and Cotswold Beechwoods.

National Nature Reserve (NNR): Painswick and Cranham.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): over 120 statutory SSSIs in the county.

Further 800 recognised Key Wildlife Sites which cover approximately 5% of the county.

Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONBs): the Cotswolds, the Wye Valley and the Malvern Hills together cover 50% of the county.

See accompanying prioritisation map for further details and local priority areas.

4. County Priorities

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

a) Theme: Priority farmland habitats and description

Unimproved grassland habitats: including neutral grassland, calcareous grassland, heath and acid grassland & coastal and flood plain grazing marsh. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM19 Fertiliser-free permanent pasture; VM20 Arable land reverted to grass. Manage within Tried & Tested advice.

Arable habitat and field margins. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM6 Wildflower mix; VM7 Pollen & nectar mix; VM10 Wild bird seed mix and maize-free game strips; VM11 Skylark plots; VM12 Lapwing plots; VM13 Unsprayed and/or unfertilised cereal headlands; VM14 Cultivated margins; VM15 Over-wintered stubble; VM17 Field corners; VM18 Beetle banks; VM21 Selective use of spring herbicides; VM22 Brassica fodder crops. Manage within Voluntary Initiative advice.

Other: Traditional orchards & woodland: key local habitats; manage as part of whole farm approach.

Boundaries: ancient/species-rich hedgerows & stone walls: key local habitats; manage as above.

Any specific action required:

Retain what is already on the farm; assess habitats and their value – seek advice where necessary – key principles are to protect the existing habitat first, buffer habitat and consider extending habitats to link to other habitats and features.

Promotion of ‘retain what you have’ message until further CAP/greening information and NELM schemes are known.

Encourage the ‘stacking’ of options to increase environmental benefits and make areas out of agricultural production work harder and deliver more for the environment.

Hedgerow management to consider National Pollinator Strategy.

b) Theme: Priority species and requirements

Arable farmland birds, in particular grey partridge, corn bunting, turtle dove, tree sparrow, yellow wagtail – winter food, insect rich foraging areas in the summer, nesting habitat for ground and hedge nesting birds. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM6 Wildflower mix; VM7 Pollen & nectar mix; VM10 Wild bird seed mix and maize-free game strips; VM11 Skylark plots; VM12 Lapwing plots; VM13 Unsprayed and/or unfertilised cereal headlands; VM14 Cultivated margins; VM15 Over-wintered stubble; VM17 Field corners; VM18 Beetle banks; VM21 Selective use of spring herbicides; VM22 Brassica fodder crops.

Grassland farmland birds, in particular lapwing, redshank and wading species – nesting sites and food sources. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM12 Lapwing plots; VM19 Fertiliser-free permanent pasture; VM20 Arable land reverted to grass.

Barn owl – nest boxes, hunting ground eg rough grass, especially near to hedge lines. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM1 Grass buffer strip next to a watercourse or pond; VM17 Field corners; VM19 Fertiliser-free permanent pasture; VM20 Arable land reverted to grass.

Brown hare – open farmland, preferably large open fields with crop diversity, mixed livestock and arable farming. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM6 Wildflower mix; VM8 Legume and herb rich temporary grass; VM15 Over-wintered stubble; VM17 Field corners; VM19 Fertiliser-free permanent pasture; VM22 Brassica fodder crops.

Bats – hedgerows, semi-natural grassland and ponds. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM1 Grass buffer strip next to a watercourse or pond; VM17 Field corners; VM19 Fertiliser-free permanent pasture; VM20 Arable land reverted to grass.

Bees/butterflies/invertebrates – food source, shelter, nesting habitat. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM6 Wildflower mix; VM7 Pollen & nectar mix; VM8 Legume and herb rich temporary grass; VM19 Fertiliser-free permanent pasture.

Water voles – un-polluted watercourses, protection from non-native species. Key CFE Voluntary Measures: VM1 Grass buffer strip next to a watercourse or pond; VM2 In-field grass strips to avoid erosion; VM3 Management of maize to avoid erosion; VM4 Watercourse fencing.

Any specific action required:

Provide information on the needs of all species to enable beneficial management of habitats to meet their needs.

Promotion of stacking value of voluntary measures.

Provide information on best practice and management of conservation areas.

c) Theme: priority river catchments

The vast majority of the county is in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) – south of Gloucester and the Forest of Dean is excluded.

The area between Stow-on-the-Wold to Stroud to Cirencester is a groundwater priority area and the surface water priority area lies around Stroud and on the western boundary.

Catchment Sensitive Farming works predominately in the Cotswold, Severn Vale, River Leadon and River Wye catchments.

See accompanying priority map for further details.

Key CFE Voluntary Measures include: VM1 Grass buffer strips next to a watercourse or pond; VM2 In-field grass strips to avoid erosion; VM3 Management of maize to avoid erosion; VM4 Watercourse fencing; VM5 Winter cover crops; VM17 Field corners; VM18 Beetle banks.

Any specific action required:

Promote voluntary measures that support better water quality.

Provide advice to reduce diffuse and point source water pollution.

Work with existing, in particular CSF; and new projects within catchments to share resources and knowledge to farmers.