



## CFE County Priorities for Hertfordshire

### 1. Aim

This document has been drawn together by the CFE Local Liaison Group for Hertfordshire 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 Hertfordshire 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

The Hertfordshire landscape is more or less equally divided between clay and chalk, and is largely arable with farms of 100 ha or more. It includes the following National Character Areas:

- The *Chilterns* is underlain by chalk bedrock with a pattern of mixed agriculture and woodland. This is a somewhat enclosed landscape with smaller fields, particularly on steeper slopes, and internationally important chalk streams. Large farms predominate with cereals the main crop type, but there is also a growing number of smallholdings with diverse and exotic livestock.
- The *East Anglian Chalk*, a continuation of the Chilterns chalk geology, is an open, large-scale, predominantly arable landscape with variable but mainly thin soils. Fields are large and hedges generally date from the enclosure period. Farms are mostly large, arable enterprises growing cereals and oilseed rape, and there is a small amount of livestock grazing.
- The *Northern Thames Basin* is a diverse plateau landscape divided by a series of broad river valleys and extensive areas of broadleaved woodlands. Arable floodplain land with hedgerow-deficient field boundaries lie alongside open grazing land in certain areas. A larger number of smallholdings than elsewhere, but mainly cereals and oilseeds, with grass predominantly sheep-grazed.
- *South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands* cover the eastern part of the county and consist of an undulating wooded landscape dissected by river valleys. It is a predominantly arable landscape, with irregular shaped fields growing wheat and oilseed rape.

Generally there is a lot of broadleaved woodland and coppiced woodland in the county, including ancient woodlands, and small estates. An important percentage of the world's chalk streams exist in Hertfordshire.

Field patterns in the south east and west of the county are smaller and more irregularly shaped than elsewhere, but hedgerows are less apparent around where horse grazing has become centred in the southern part of the county closer to urban areas.

### **3. County designated sites and partnerships**

- The Local Nature Partnership is run by the local authority for East Herts, as part of its sustainability initiative for the county.
- Part of the Chilterns AONB lies in the west of the county.
- The Lea Catchment is currently Hertfordshire's only Nature Improvement Area. The Lee Valley is also a RAMSAR site, designated for its wetland flora and fauna.
- There are three Wildlife Trust Living Landscape projects in the east of the county: the Lee Valley, the Stort Valley and the South Hertfordshire Woods.
- There is a total of 43 SSSIs in the county, mainly small with the largest being Tring Reservoirs in the west.
- The Wildlife Trust has identified almost 2000 Local Wildlife Sites in the county, many of them ancient woodlands.
- There are two Special Areas of Conservation: Chilterns Beechwoods and Wormley Hoddesdonpark Woods.

### **4. County Priorities**

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

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

Between 2012 and 2013 Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust mapped all the habitats of Hertfordshire. This information has been digitised on to GIS and provides a reference for the county's natural environment. The work has identified the key habitats in the county and that land which provides the best and most cost-effective opportunity for linking existing high quality habitats and restoring or recreating habitats.

**Chalk Rivers: There are only 180 chalk rivers in the world and 85% in England.** Hertfordshire has several important chalk streams, which are a priority due to their global rarity, unique ecology and threatened status. Restoration is needed, with buffering to reduce diffuse pollution and siltation. (VM1, VM4, VM19, VM20)

**Lowland beech woods:** As a key UK priority with a significant proportion within Hertfordshire, these should be protected from farming operations where they adjoin farmland. Woodlands should be linked by hedgerows and buffer strips. (VM17, VM19, VM20)

**Ancient species-rich hedgerows:** These are an important feature in Hertfordshire, especially to the south of the county which has a more enclosed landscape. Buffer strips and linkages between hedgerows are important. (VM17, VM19, VM20)

**Lowland calcareous grassland:** The core areas are on the chalk in the north of the county, but other small pockets can be found scattered across the county. These grasslands in particular need to be managed with low inputs. There are opportunities for re-creating this rare grassland where soils are suitable. (VM19, VM20)

**Lowland acidic grassland and lowland heathland:** These important habitats are found in the Chilterns and the Central River Valley areas. Low input management is required. (VM19)

**Cereal Margins:** Appropriate management of field margins can benefit rare arable plants, particularly on the chalk ridge which runs from the Chilterns to the north east of Hertfordshire. Grass margins are important for buffering watercourses. (VM1, VM13, VM14)

**Lowland hay meadows:** There are a number of core areas where these are found: north east Herts, south Herts, the Chilterns and north of Tring. Low input management is required. (VM19)

**Oak hornbeam woods:** Hertfordshire has a significant proportion of these within the county, most of these being found in the south and east on the London clay. They should be buffered from farming operations and linked by hedgerows and other ecological appropriate habitat such as heathland. (VM17, VM19, VM20)

**Pond creation and management:** A disappearing feature from Herts farms. Buffering with grass margins is important for both water quality and habitat provision. (VM1, VM4)

**Any specific action required:**

“Making Space for Nature”, the outcome of a review of England’s wildlife and ecological network headed by Professor Sir John Lawton, and the basis for the government’s environmental white paper, was published in 2010. It concluded that the essence of what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of England’s ecological network can be summarised in four words: *more, bigger, better* and *joined*. There are five key approaches which encompass these, and also take account of the land around the ecological network. We need to:

- (i) Improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management.
- (ii) Increase the size of current wildlife sites.
- (iii) Enhance connections between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through ‘stepping stones’.
- (iv) Create new sites.
- (v) Reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

Our work in farmed Hertfordshire should contribute to achieving these five key objectives, principally for CFE through:

- Buffering woodland, trees and hedges and creating connectivity between habitats.
- Buffering watercourses.
- Restoration of grassland.

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

- Bees and butterflies, particularly on the chalk of the Chilterns and the north-west of Hertfordshire, need a supply of pollen and nectar over a long season. (VM6, VM7 VM8, VM19)
- Bats need roosting and hibernating places, and a network of feeding places such as hedgerows, wetlands, and woods which support a diversity of flying insects. (VM1, VM6, VM7, VM8, VM10, VM13, VM14, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM21, VM22)
- Farmland birds, especially turtle dove, linnet and grey partridge. They require nesting and foraging habitat in spring and summer, and seed sources over winter. (VM6, VM7, VM8, VM9, VM10, VM11, VM12, VM13, VM14, VM15, VM16, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM21, VM22)
- Arable plants are a priority across the county but particularly on the lighter soils. (VM13, VM14, VM15, VM21)
- Dragonflies, newts and toads are a priority in the clayland areas, particularly where there are ponds and watercourses. (VM1, VM4, VM17, VM19, VM20)
- Brown hare requires a mosaic of crop types across arable land for grazing, plus undisturbed areas for bringing up young. (VM5, VM7, VM8, VM10, VM15, VM17, VM18, VM19, VM20)
- Water voles are increasingly rare – they need waterbodies which remain wet throughout the year, where there is good bank vegetation. (VM1, VM4)
- The numbers and range of otters has reduced over the past five years. Quiet lying-up and safe breeding places along watercourses will help them. (VM1, VM4)

**Any specific action required:**

- Where rare arable plants such as cornflower, corn chamomile, corn cleavers and fumitories are recorded, margins should be cultivated annually without fertiliser and herbicide application, rather than grassed over.
- Farmland bird populations require overwinter food sources, the provision of nesting habitat and insect-rich areas in spring and summer. Turtle doves favour arable weeds, and linnets need year-round seed.
- Water voles require not only constant water levels and good bankside vegetation, but safety from the alien predator, mink. Landowners could be signposted to mink rafts and capital grants for obtaining them.
- Insecticides reduce the food available to bats, so its use where bats are known to hunt could be reduced. (VM21)

**c) Theme: priority river catchments**

- The Upper Lee and Stort is a Catchment Sensitive Farming priority catchment. Its aims are reducing pesticide and sediment run-off, separating clean and dirty water, and preventing rainwater entering slurry and silage stores. The catchment includes the rivers Mimram and Beane, which are chalk streams challenged by over-abstraction.
- Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust is the 'catchment host' for the Upper Lea through the Catchment Based Approach, co-ordinating catchment management planning for the Beane and Mimram Partnership.
- The Mimmshall Brook is a Catchment Sensitive Farming priority catchment, aiming to reduce sediment, pesticide and fertiliser run-off, damage to soil by stock or machinery, separate clean and dirty water from yards, and reduce pesticide loss from sprayer loading and cleaning.
- The Upper Great Ouse is a Catchment Sensitive Farming priority catchment, with an emphasis on reducing sediment, pesticide and fertiliser run-off, soil poaching, and damage to soil by stock or machinery.
- The rivers Ver and Gade are tributaries of the Colne, and the Ver in particular suffers from over-abstraction and canalisation. These rivers form part of the Colne Catchment Action Network, co-ordinated by Groundwork South and the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project.

**Any specific action required:**

- Buffering of all watercourses, including farm ditches. (VM1)
- Erosion and run-off measures. (VM2, VM3, VM5, VM17, VM18, VM20)
- Morphological mitigation with water companies.

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

Farmers and landowners should be made aware of the problems caused by invasive non-native species, including mink, signal crayfish, and the injurious non-native plants.

**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	
Herts						
Maintenance of watercourse fencing (EJ11) - km	0	0	0	0	2	4
Supplementary feeding in winter for farmland birds (EF23) - tonnes	0	0	0	1	0	1
Skylark plots (EF8) - number	0	0	0	0	45	1452
All other CFE2 options (hectares)	13	13	157	23	267	1209
<i>Permanent grassland with very low inputs: outside SDA &amp; Moorland (EK3)</i>	0	11	137	10	131	587
<i>Field corner management (EF1, EK1)</i>	12	2	16	5	83	275
<i>Wild bird seed mixture (EF2)</i>	1	0	3	3	34	115
<i>Nectar flower mixture (EF4)</i>	0	0	1	0	11	62
<i>6m/12m buffer strips next to a watercourse (EE9, EE10, EJ9)</i>	0	0	0	0	3	59
<i>Extended overwintered stubbles (EF22)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	45
<i>Other</i>	0	0	0	5	5	66