



## CFE County Priorities for Somerset

### 1. Aim

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

There are four key landscapes to Somerset; firstly the Somerset Levels and Moors, which extend across parts of the north and centre of the county; Clevedon to Glastonbury to Ilchester and Langport. This consists of flat, open and exposed fields with little woodland cover; the main features are rivers and the floodplain and coastal grazing marsh which allow productive farming. Most farms are on higher ground with small field sizes and predominantly dairy systems with beef and sheep and a few arable enterprises. To the north of this flat landscape, the Mendip Hills rise abruptly. This limestone ridge is a very rural area, still with large-scale quarrying particularly in the east of the area. This is predominantly calcareous grassland and woodland.

To the west of the county the Vale of Taunton and Quantock Hills sit between the Levels and Moors and Exmoor and the Devon border. Here the steep moorland-topped Quantock Hills contrasts with the open character of the Moors and Levels. It is lush pastoral land, but with mixed farming with fertile soils in part and irregular small to medium sized fields. The mixed farming boasts dense hedgerows, extensive woodland and wooded coombes and acid grassland with a little arable land. Much of the arable farming in the county is in the south east, bordering Dorset and Wiltshire, with larger field sizes.

### 3. County designated sites and partnerships

International Designations: The Severn Estuary, present within Somerset and the former Avon county, is both a Ramsar site and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The Somerset Levels and Moors is also a Ramsar site and SPA with the Chew Valley Lake present in Avon being a SPA. There are ten Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within Somerset including Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods, Exmoor Heaths, Hestercombe House, Holme Moor & Clear Moor, Mells Valley, Mendip Limestone Grasslands, Mendip Woodlands, North Somerset & Mendip Bats, Quants and the Severn Estuary. Within the former Avon county there are two SACs including: Avon Gorge Woodlands and Bath & Bradford-on-Avon Bats.

National Nature Reserve (NNR): A total of fifteen: in former Avon county - Gordano Valley and Leigh Woods; and in Somerset - Barrington Hill, Bridgwater Bay, Dunkery & Horner Woods, Ebbor Gorge, Ham Wall, Hardington Moor, Hawkcombe Woods, Huntspill River, Rodney Stoke, Shapwick Heath, Somerset Levels, Tarr Steps Woodland, Westhay Moor

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): 127 statutory SSSIs in Somerset and 86 statutory SSSIs in the former Avon county.

A further 5000 Local Wildlife Sites in Somerset, 862 (20,053 ha) in the former Avon county, 299 (4,997 ha) in Bath and North East Somerset, 89 (1,580 ha) in Bristol, 203 (8,554 ha) in North Somerset and 271 (4,922 ha) sites in South Gloucestershire.

Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONBs): the Blackdown Hills, Quantock Hills and the Mendip Hills.

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 limestone and neutral 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: key local habitats; manage as above.

Rivers and wetland habitats: 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

Grassland farmland birds (Somerset Levels) in particular lapwing, redshank, bittern 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

There are numerous patches of the county that are in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) but it is by no means a complete coverage. There are two key groundwater priority areas; north of Shepton Mallett and west of Frome and the southern tip of the county west of Ilminster. Surface water is more extensive across the country as a priority area, predominantly focused east of Taunton and Bridgwater.

The River Tone and Parrett catchment covers a vast majority of the county and the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative works across the area. CSF catchments include the Somerset Levels and Moors; Rivers Exe, Axe and Otter; Somerset Frome; and the North Somerset Moors.

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.