

Response from the Heritage Alliance

06 July 2015

The Heritage Alliance is a non-government organisation based in the UK.

Together its members own, manage, and care for the vast majority of England's historic environment. The Heritage Alliance represents 98 Members – major national and regional non-Government organisations, which are in turn supported by over 6.3 million members, volunteers, Trustees and staff.

This response is from The Alliance's Rural Heritage Advocacy Group – a body set up to review and influence policies that impact upon the management of the rural historic environment. Their specialist knowledge and expertise across a huge range of issues affecting the rural historic environment is a highly valuable national resource, much of which is contributed on a voluntary basis for public benefit.

The Heritage Alliance is represented at Defra's Rural Development Programme for England external working group.

The Heritage Alliance response:

The Heritage Alliance strongly supports the inclusion of the historic environment within the Countryside Stewardship targeting framework and anticipates that it will be just as successful in delivering historic environment benefits as was the Environmental Stewardship scheme.

We do, however, recognise that the new CS scheme places greater emphasis on biodiversity and resource protection. As there is less funding available for the historic environment under the new scheme, it is essential that the CS maximises historic environment opportunities and synergies in drawing up agreements with farmers and land managers.

The Rural Heritage Advocacy Group [RHAG] considers it is important that:

1. Defra should involve Historic England; in addition to Natural England's own specialists, in the final stages of the selection criteria design. It is very important that the scoring system (as presented in Annex A of the tabled paper) is thoroughly tested and monitored to ensure that the historic environment and heritage opportunities are being fully realised.
2. As part of the monitoring process, Defra should undertake a rapid assessment of the option uptake in all new CS agreements after 6 months to ensure that historic environment opportunities and synergies are being maximised. The Government will be undertaking a review of modulation in 2016 and should consider the opportunities for increasing spending on the historic environment. This could then feed into a revision of the selection criteria and scoring system for CS.
3. It is not clear how synergies between CS objectives; for example, between biodiversity and historic environment, will be accounted for by the selection criteria and scoring system. A lot of biodiversity options also deliver significant benefits for the historic environment. Options providing multiple environmental benefits should count for more in the scoring system.

4. Maximising the historic environment outcomes of CS depends on access to appropriate expertise at the agreement negotiation stage. RHAG members are concerned that historic environment expertise may have been lost during the recent restructuring of NE. RHAG members are therefore concerned that historic environment options may not be selected if there is not sufficient advice available during the agreement negotiation stage.

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