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Ashdown initiative shows potential for Landscape Recovery scheme

Some key messages for farmers have been highlighted by a CLM-run project in Ashdown Forest, as Farm & Environment Consultant Harrison Anton explains

It's expected that the second application window for Defra's Landscape Recovery (LR) scheme will be open throughout the summer.

A key part of ELMs, this aims to help the environment by funding large-scale projects through bespoke, long-term agreements involving groups of farmers and others working together across thousands of acres.

It follows last autumn's announcement of the 22 projects accepted in the first round, which collectively hope to restore nearly 700km of rivers and protect and enhance 263 species across over 40,000 hectares.

At CLM, we've been involved in helping shape LR, having run one of Defra's test-and-trials for the scheme in 2022 – an initiative working with



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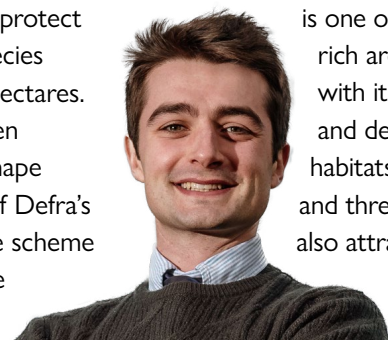
landowners, tenant farmers, commoners, charities and public bodies around Ashdown Forest.

This beautiful East Sussex spot, which covers over 10 square miles, is one of the most wildlife-rich areas in the South East, with its lowland heathland and deciduous woodland habitats home to many rare and threatened species (it also attracts over 1.5 million visitors every year).

Our brief was

to supply advice to Defra in terms of how it might shape the rules surrounding LR – and we presented them with a draft agreement which we hoped would inform how they structure the bespoke agreements for individual projects.

The test-and-trial considered how to create new habitats and link others, so improving the connectivity and resilience of these areas and the wildlife in them to the threats posed by climate change. We also kept farming revenues, →



food production, tourism, plus the potential for species reintroduction in mind, as well as looking at establishing a conservation herd.

Our feedback to Defra will hopefully shape the agreements that will be on offer in future. Obviously, the terms of these will vary greatly depending on the objectives, but we found some central themes.

First, the payments clearly needed to be sufficiently high (and flexible) to de-risk the process and make joining a LR scheme appealing to landowners. Key to this is the ability for participants to 'stack' payments, particularly from private investment.

If the payments on offer are viable, there could be strong interest and it could potentially make up for – or indeed more than cover – the subsidy payments farmers have lost.

There also needs to be a degree of flexibility, not currently seen in other agri-environment schemes. This means new members should be able to join a scheme and participants should be able to leave under certain circumstances (perhaps with differing levels of penalty depending on the 'tier' of the land within an agreement and the duration they have been in a scheme).

A key element for success, especially when there are various land ownership structures plus different individuals and groups involved – as was the case in the Ashdown Forest trial – is that they share a clear sense of place.

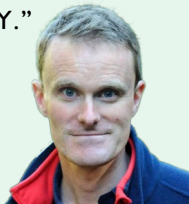
This helps provide a 'uniting

factor' and a clear set of initial parameters. An iconic location also links them to a common objective. With its history, clear conservation goals and as a destination for recreational activities, Ashdown certainly has a powerful sense of place and 'story'.

In our test-and-trial, we noticed a group mentality quickly developed, even though we had brought the participants together specifically for the purpose. There was a desire to work collectively, and to do

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JAMES ADLER
Ashdown Forest
Chief Executive



something which worked both for them as individuals, as well as for the wider landscape.

It may well be that the groups who apply for LR elsewhere will already be formed, with existing objectives in mind.

We’re optimistic about the potential LR schemes offer farmers, and we’ll be watching with interest to see the rules around funding and how stacking can happen. It’s also vital the administration burden doesn’t become preclusive – which is a risk, give the bespoke nature

of projects and their long-term ambitions (they could well be 20-plus years).

Having a central body managing each LR project will also be important. This is likely to be a single legal entity, which can drive the direction of the project while incorporating the views of the wider group. In Ashdown Forest, for example, the Conservators (who manage it on behalf of the owners, the Ashdown Forest Trust) would be the logical body to do this.

According to James Adler, who’s the Forest’s Chief Executive, the test-and-trial successfully brought together a range of individuals and groups – everyone from landowners and tenants to commoners, the RSPB, town councils and the MoD.

“We talked together about the idea to work collectively on some really big ideas to deliver food production, conservation, climate resilience, carbon sequestration, water protection and alternative funding,” he says. “The ideas really started to flow and the trial created a great energy. Our neighbours and the Forest could achieve so much.

“We’re looking at how we can make LR work to turn around nature’s loss, while supporting our farming community, and intend to apply during the second round of the scheme.

“We are proud to look after such an attractive, unique and treasured landscape and the ambition is to make it bigger, better and more joined up.”





CHRIS MANN - STOCK ADOBE.COM

5 possible sources of funding for your viticulture project

The government grants system can be complicated, so it's no surprise vineyard owners may be unaware of funding they may be eligible for.



ALEX
MACDONALD

The whole structure of public funding in the countryside is changing. For many farmers, understanding the new system is challenging, but they have some experience of claiming payments. But viticulturalists may have never applied for such support before – so establishing what's on offer, understanding the small print and conditions, and completing the paperwork can be a daunting

prospect.

It's well worth exploring, however, with thousands of £s on offer – and some of it might even be for work you're already doing so will require little or no change in your approach.

Payments from some of the various schemes can also be 'stacked', so even relatively small sums from different 'pots' can add up.

It rarely makes sense to shape a business around the available subsidies, but once you've decided your strategy, then it's worth looking at what funding might be available.

Although some payments are more relevant to those who run a wider agricultural enterprise in tandem with their viticulture business, some may be applicable for pure viticulturalists.

Here are 5 options worth considering:

1. Farming Equipment and Technology Fund

Although the application period is now closed for 2023, this fund is expected to be available again next year. It offers grants between £1,000 and £25,000 for specific items of equipment to increase productivity, boost environmental sustainability and improve animal health and welfare. The grants go towards the cost of specific items from a prescribed list – including items such as rainwater gauges and harvesting equipment. You can view it like a shopping list – have a scroll through and consider if there's any items you might be looking to purchase anyway. It's important to remember that the item would need to be approved before it is purchased, then once paid for, the claim can be submitted. I recently suggested to a viticulture client they considered sourcing UV water →

treatment systems, cameras for monitoring the farmyard, mobile frost fans and rainwater harvesting kit. Other items, such as smaller tractors and cultivation machinery suitable for a vineyard, could also secure funding.

2. The Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme

The Woodland Trust charity offers financial help for planting new woodland if you're considering 500-plus trees on at least half a hectare. A woodland advisor will visit your site, help design your woodland, create a bespoke species mix, supply the agreed trees and tree protection, and cover up to 75% of costs as a one-off capital payment. They can also arrange and contribute to the cost of a contractor, if you use one for the planting. This scheme can be perfect for small plantations or buffer strips and doesn't all need to be in one woodland, so you could make an application comprising various shelterbelts and field corners, for example. Some viticulturalists may plant trees purely for environmental reasons, but they can also increase a site's amenity, biodiversity and visual value, potentially making it more attractive as a visitor destination.

3. English Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO)

This is a Forestry Commission initiative supporting woodland creation and tree planting across England on areas as small as one hectare, offering up to £13,000/hectare. The application stage is more involved than a MOREwoods application, but also offers payment uplifts if a plan has additional desirable 'outcomes' such as improvements in biodiversity or water quality. As well as the maintenance payments, capital payments are also available, such as for fencing. Any type of tree planting is a long-term commitment so we always advise clients to make sure they are comfortable tying land up in this way, but there are going to be more payments for environmental goods and carbon offsetting so woodland planted now could yield additional public or private funding in future.

4. Countryside Stewardship (CS)

If you manage farmland alongside your vineyard, the CS scheme is worth exploring. Just one example of the many 'options' is to plant a winter bird food seed mix in blocks or strips (known as AB9) which pays £732/ha/year. The nectar

flower mix (AB8) pays £673/ha/year. There have recently been some encouraging increases to some of the annual and capital payment rates. To make stewardship work, you might want to opt for a suite of options, but the capital grants can stand alone. The deadline for 'Mid Tier' schemes, starting January 1, 2024 is August 18 this year.

5. Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)

SFI is a new government scheme split into 'standards' which prescribe certain land management practices in return for a per hectare payment. The current standards available include 'arable and horticultural soils', 'improved grassland soils' and 'moorland and rough grazing'. More are to be released in 2023 including ones for hedgerows, integrated pest management, nutrient management, agricultural and horticultural land standards, improved grassland standard and low-input grassland. In time, each will have three levels of ambition (introductory, intermediate and advanced). We are finding that many clients are already meeting most of the criteria for the standards and so it is worth considering this scheme for your land.

CONTACT US

We are a 20-strong team including land agents, business consultants, planners, valuers, environmental experts, agriculturalists, ecologists and property experts. For more information about the topics in this issue, please get in touch with your existing CLM adviser or, for new enquiries, contact one of our directors.



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about CLM and how we
can help you.

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