



# MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY AND NORTH SOMERSET NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

Appendix VII: Summary of responses to  
Farmer & Landowner Survey Open Questions

## Context

---

This document provides a summary of the responses received to the open questions of a survey sent to farmers and landowners in August 2023. The survey was intended to inform the development of priorities and focus areas for nature recovery in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

## General

---

There seems to be some misunderstanding as to what the Strategy is and is not. See e.g.:

- 'How do farmers navigate multiple potential sources on environmental income e.g. from defra and LNRS etc'
- 'I think there should be scope for farms outside the areas you have designated to be added in if they are of value to the project'

**There is a need to clearly articulate what the Strategy is and what it is not. E.g. it needs to make clear that it ties in with existing schemes and is not a new funding stream, and that it will help to direct what is already out there.**

## Ideas for priorities

---

Biggest focus on woodland and hedgerows/boundaries, especially where this would create ecological corridors:

- 'Linking wooded areas by hedging and creating wildlife corridors'
- 'Boundaries (hedges, both existing and creation of new)'
- 'Woodlands, hedgerows and ditches'
- 'Restore hedges and habitat improvement for dormice'
- 'More protection and funding to maintain trees and hedgerows already on-farm'
- 'Woods need help recovering from ash die back locally to me'
- 'Restoration of ponds, walls, hedges and woods'
- 'To link the woods that exist along the Mendip Scarp'
- 'Potential routes for improved ecological connectivity or improved migration route for keystone species needing to move in response to climate change. These routes need to link high quality habitats and be capable of effective and resilient delivery in the long term.'

Other points include species-rich grassland/meadows, in-field options (e.g. 'green cover crops, flowering crops', and 'improving productivity to create more space for nature'), and 'restoration of ponds'.

**There seems to be support for improving the value of hedgerows to wildlife, and for woodland creation / on-farm trees. Other questions make clear the need for funding to support this, and the Strategy may need to communicate the need for well-managed woodland and the benefits of more mixed (mosaic) habitats, wood pasture etc. over just woodland.**

## Content

---

Seems to be a desire to get an understanding of what is needed in a particular location:

- 'Highlighting the key issues in our postcode so we know more about our own locations'
- 'Actually decide and tell us what we have to do.'
- 'Give me a better understanding of what is needed and how to pay for it'
- 'Making it easy to access grants and making sure we are doing things on our farm similar to our neighbours'
- 'Increase knowledge and understanding of the particular landscape we operate in. Also to understand what we are aiming to achieve.'
- 'Set goals make a plan and take action. Know what we have on our farms. Have expert advice on what we need to do, how and funding to achieve nature recovery. Bring neighbouring farmers together'
- 'I think there needs to be specific goals for particular areas to make it easier for farmers to participate and action results and then get paid for it'

**This seems to support the approach of providing recommendations for the most effective actions for nature in various areas, and how people's land fits in to the wider context. There is also a clear need to make explicit links between the recommendations and a) guidance on how best to implement recommendations and b) funding that is available for those recommendations.**

## Format

---

'Guidance must be clear, concise and short. links must work and be updated.'

'Better advanced publicity of local meetings/events'

**From the multi-choice questions, there was clear support for an interactive mapping portal that displays the priorities/recommendations for a given area. There was also good agreement that a document would be useful and, given that not everyone will be comfortable using an interactive tool, we may need to provide some documentation alongside the tool. In either format, the recommendations will clearly benefit from being as clear and concise as possible, with links to further detail as needed.**

## Boundaries

Most seem to agree with mapping at the field boundary according to the multiple-choice questions, but some responses suggested that hard boundaries may not be helpful

- 'Hard boundaries often cause unfairness for farmers and often lead to large differences in farming practices. This extreme difference can lead to lower priority areas becoming even worse for the environment. A blanket approach is generally better, however if funds are limited, it might be worth looking at flexibility in boundaries where a need can be proven, particularly if it supports nature recovery in a priority area'.
- 'Depending on what restrictions and opportunities that will bring, there is often an issue with understanding why one side of the hedge is so different to the other and

then disagreements if someone wants in or out. If it is made with 'fluffy' boundaries then more opportunities might become available to support nature and local knowledge could be brought to bear'

- 'I think there should be scope for farms outside the areas you have designated to be added in if they are of value to the project.'

**Given the feedback from the multi-choice questions, mapping hard boundaries for the 'areas that could become of particular importance' would appear to be broadly supported.**

**However, given the written feedback above, we could perhaps provide high-level (i.e. blurry) indication of where the 'biodiversity priorities' for the region are, alongside (or before) the detail of the mapping that areas that could become of particular importance.**

**This might help people understand how they can contribute towards wider priorities. The plans to include recommendations for all areas (not just those that 'could become of particular importance' may also help in this regard, though it would be wise to test this with farmers/landholders.**

## Input and consultation

---

There seems to be a mix of views: being told what is needed so that farmers can incorporate that into decisions versus the need for collaborative input

- 'Feeling we have had an input will be very important - imported experts won't have the nuance that farmers do so inclusion in decisions will be vital'
- 'You need to meet with farmers in the areas you are about to map to get their views on what you are proposing as it after all affects their livelihood and you need to get them on board'

Vs

- 'Actually decide and tell us what we have to do'
- 'I think there needs to be specific goals for particular areas to make it easier for farmers to participate and action results and then get paid for it'

**These two views may not be mutually exclusive. The Strategy can provide recommendations on what to do where that are informed by input from farmers. Therefore, we may benefit from sharing mapping of areas that could become of particular importance with farmers/landholders ahead of the public consultation in Spring 2024.**

**This could be via an interactive map where comments could be added and/or in-person events where people are welcome to come and study a large map of the draft 'areas that could become of particular importance'.**

**This also reiterates the need to be clear on what the remit of the Strategy is, as we will not be planning specific action in any area nor 'forcing' anything to happen. It will just be making clear where action would have the biggest benefit (and is most realistic), although the fact that this provides an uplift in BNG does mean there is a potentially a financial consequence for landowners.**

## Funding

---

Unsurprisingly, there were several comments and concerns regarding funding (or the lack thereof) and how to access it:

- 'The whole thing is so confusing for farmers who have no idea how to access private sector funding from a reputable source.'
- 'Funding that values the work on its own merits rather than based on income forgone must be a priority. If not, then the take up will not materialise'
- 'I would prefer to work with one organisation than a plethora of groups. I just want to get on with working not trawling through endless stuff and filling forms.'
- 'Making it easy to access grants and making sure we are doing things on our farm similar to our neighbours'
- 'Appropriate funding to cover loss of business opportunities (food production) to implement strategies to complement local distinctiveness.'
- 'We have been higher level stewardship for 20 years but missed out on renewal by a small number of points. The last thing we want is to lose the environmental gains we have made but without funding this seems impossible. We are also keen to plant woodland (~1-2ha) but are worried about inheritance tax implications.'

**While some of these concerns are largely out of the scope of the Strategy's explicit remit, the responses do point to a need to clearly link recommendations to funding to make things as simple as possible for farmers and landholders, and to help clarify the muddy waters of funding opportunities for farmers and landholders regarding national and regional funding opportunities.**

**For example, the Strategy will need to point to funding available for woodland management if we are recommending that better woodland management is a priority, as well as best-practice guidance for managing woodlands.**