

Rationale and criteria for listing “rewilding” in Tier 3 of the Environmental Land Management scheme

1. Rationale

1.1 Rewilding, by the very nature of its restoration of natural processes at scale, delivers a wide range of ecosystem services benefits and a greater diversity and abundance of wildlife. Between them these benefits constitute a significant proportion of the “public goods” that are rightly the focus of ELMS.

1.2 Rewilding encourages a balance between people and the rest of nature where each can thrive. It provides opportunities for landowners and communities to diversify and create nature-based economies; for living systems to provide the ecological functions on which we all depend; and for people to re-connect with wild nature.

1.3 In the last couple of years, there has been a huge increase in interest in rewilding from landowners, including farmers, not only here in the UK but throughout Europe and indeed across the world. Rewilding Britain is very small charity aiming to catalyse rewilding as a viable environmental and economic option for land use in Britain - see <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/> - and in the last two years we have seen a great surge in interest in this option. In that period, we have been involved in advisory visits to app 20 major landholdings who between them are either already rewilding or considering rewilding on app 30,000 ha of land in England alone. This represents an app five-fold increase in interest in the last 2 years. We also receive requests for advice from a larger number of landowners operating at a smaller scale, but for organisational resource reasons, we are focusing most of our attention on larger sites, because scale really matters when it comes to being able to apply rewilding principles effectively. We know from *pers comm* that most of these landowners large and small, are “seeing the writing on the wall” with basic payments being phased out in the coming years. As a result of this huge surge in interest, we will be establishing a Rewilding Network for Britain in 2020.

1.4 As it stands, Tier 3 of ELMS would incentivise individual activities such as large scale tree planting or peat bog restoration or large scale wetland creation etc but society will get a far bigger “bang for the buck” if it incentivises rewilding which involves multiple interventions being carried out in the same large area over the same timeframe. There are several reasons for this:

- (i) There are greater efficiencies to be had from delivering multiple interventions in the same large location because many of those interventions will involve the same people, collaboration, comms activities, skills, machinery, regulatory agreements, etc.
- (ii) Delivering these multiple interventions in the same place will also greatly increase the extent to which public goods, benefitting wider society, are provided in any one

location - eg flood risk management, water quality, carbon sequestration, access, health and wellbeing etc.

(iii) Then there are the associated local economic benefits. Tree planting on its own will not necessarily deliver significant nature-based tourism activities nor will eg peat bog restoration on its own, etc. But if the landowner is delivering multiple benefits in the same overall location there will be much greater opportunity for creating attractive nature-based tourism activities such as glamping, camping and safaris as well as multiple sustainable consumable products from the range of habitats created. This in turn will mean that landowners who are rewilding should become less dependent on ELMS-type payments as time passes.

(iv) Overall affordability is also important. Rewilding involves being less prescriptive and reducing management over time and thus is far more likely to be affordable than just more creation of habitats which need to be managed. Bundling up multiple interventions into rewilding initiatives, will be the most affordable way to achieve the desired public goods without creating an ongoing financial burden on society.

1.5 Rewilding not only involves initial “positive interventions” such as tree planting and wetland creation etc, it also involves “passive interventions” which are at least equally as effective in providing public goods – eg the cessation of intensive grazing and arable cultivation and the allowance of natural regeneration. The latter in particular, is often a highly effective way of increasing tree and other vegetation cover and is a key element of most current rewilding projects. Inclusion of rewilding in ELMS provides the ideal opportunity to incentivise the natural regeneration of native trees and other vegetation to help sequester carbon and reduce flood risk etc.

1.6 There are currently many procedural blockers to rewilding (mainly RPA and Natural England processes), because rewilding was not specifically advocated or even considered when the various current farming, forestry and conservation regulations were created. Mainstreaming rewilding in ELMS will incentivise the removal of these blockers and a transition to a “yes if” approach to rewilding, which will unlock significant action and thus much more widespread delivery of public goods – the fundamental aim of the ELM Scheme.

1.7 Natural England Chair Tony Juniper has stated publicly on more than one occasion that *“rewilding will be a massively important part of the 500,000 ha Biodiversity Recovery Network”* and we at Rewilding Britain are currently working with Natural England Directors and those of other government agencies to try to unblock policy and process obstacles which are preventing landowners from moving up the rewilding spectrum.

1.8 Parliament itself is now openly discussing and endorsing the merits of rewilding. Rewilding Britain secured the parliamentary debate held on 28th Oct in Westminster Hall, entitled *“Restore nature on a massive scale to help stop climate breakdown”* and we backed this up with our report *“Rewilding and climate breakdown: how restoring nature can decarbonise the UK”*. 24 MPs from a range of parties attended that debate and an additional 13 attended a pre-debate briefing session (despite the huge distraction of the General Election debate in the main chamber nearby!) and they were unanimous in their support for large scale nature restoration, including rewilding, to help tackle climate change. Zac Goldsmith concluded the debate by saying *“I congratulate once again, the most honourable member for Cambridge, (Daniel Zeichner, who led the debate) for raising what is perhaps, the most important issue of all”*. This strong support for large scale rewilding to tackle climate change was recently backed up by the announcement of the £640M *Nature for Climate* fund in the March 2020 budget.

1.9 In summary, taking account of all of the above and more, we need (a) top-down policy to catch up with bottom-up landowner ambition on rewilding and (b) rewilding to be incentivised, to ensure that more landowners adopt the approach and do so for the long term. The proposed higher tier of ELMS – *Landscape-scale land-use change scheme* – is the perfect mechanism to achieve these two needs.

2. Definition

Rewilding is the large-scale restoration of ecosystems to the point where nature can take care of itself. It seeks to reinstate natural processes and, where appropriate, missing species, allowing them to shape the landscape and the habitats within.

3. Principles and relevance to ELMS

3.1 People and livelihoods are key. Rewilding is a choice of land use and therefore it relies on people deciding for themselves as to whether they wish to explore and alternative future for the land, for them and for their community. *There is clear evidence from Rewilding Britain's conversations with numerous farmers and landowners in recent years, that the numbers of people willing to rewild their land will inevitably be highly dependent on the financial incentives to do so. These financial incentives would, in an ideal world, be a mix of funding from both the public purse and from private business (eg major carbon emitters, water companies, etc), but there are no strategic nationwide arrangements for private funding for public goods - hence the reason why specific inclusion in ELMS is so critical.*

3.2 Natural processes drive outcomes. Rewilding is not geared to reach any human-defined optimal point or end state. It goes where nature takes it. *For this reason, it is important that inclusion in ELMS does not require prescriptive detailed outcomes, but rather requires (a) the implementation of a range of interventions which can be expected to kick-start rewilding processes and (b) an ongoing reduction in management intensity over time.*

3.3 Rewilding works at nature's scale. In other words, rewilding areas need to be of a sufficient size for nature to be able to reinstate natural processes and create ecologically coherent units. *For this reason there needs to be a de minimis for the size of the area that qualifies as rewilding under ELMS.*

3.4 Rewilding benefits are for the long term. Some benefits will be accrued very quickly, but most will take many years, even decades. The primary aim should be to leave a positive legacy for future generations. *For this reason, there should be a minimum commitment for rewilding schemes under ELMS for at least 10 years and ideally for 25 years.*

4. Recommended qualifying criteria for rewilding payments under ELMS

4.1 The minimum size of contiguous rewilding area should be 400 ha (app 1000 acres) in size. The area can be owned by one or more landowners.

4.2 Land management activities within the rewilding area should either have no effect on, or be wholly aimed at restoring nature and natural processes throughout the entire area.

4.3 Active "very light touch" habitat management will usually be necessary to replace the functions of missing keystone species (eg formerly native carnivores and herbivores) and

thus to enable natural processes to become more self-sustaining in the longer term. This could include grazing with small numbers of a mix of suitable rare breed livestock as proxies for wild species which are either globally extinct or not currently present in the UK.

5. Why ELMS is important to landowners who wish to rewild at scale

Rewilding Britain canvassed opinions from a range of landowners across the country on their views regarding the inclusion of rewilding in ELMS and their responses are shown in italics below. We consider this to be very powerful supporting evidence.

Case example 1

1450 ha (3600 acre) estate in Northumberland – formerly sheep grazing and grouse moor – planning to rewild the entire estate. Grouse shooting terminated. Sheep grazing being phased out. Successful gin production business utilising range of wild botanicals and fresh juniper to produce superb gin (I know because I bought a bottle!) via their onsite distillery in converted farm buildings. Looking to graze with small numbers of grazing animals to produce high quality meat.

*“We are putting ecology at the heart and priority of all management decisions because we want to build self-supporting natural systems, because we believe we can produce the most delicious meat possible using this system and because we believe there are a wealth of other benefits to do with visitor well-being, economic opportunity diversity. Finally, we believe this system will lock up carbon more effectively. **The transition costs are quite high and we will need public subsidy support over this transition.**”*

Case example 2

770 ha (1900 acre) Lincolnshire farm - currently arable and beef – planning to rewild the majority of the farm. Successful farm shop and other franchise outlets on site. Looking to graze with small numbers of grazing cattle, deer and pigs, to produce premium meat, plus honey, foraged fruits and berries and Christmas trees (on the non-rewilding area) for sale in their farm shop and café. Also planning to provide social and green prescriptions; environmental/ natural history education for all ages and abilities; recreational walking and natural history access; access for artists and cultural events; access for scientific and ecological work; low carbon holidays (glamping etc).

*“We feel a huge responsibility as a landowner to be a flagship and play our part in: mitigating climate change / carbon sequestration; enhancing biodiversity and soil health; education about the natural world; providing low-carbon holiday options, wild spaces for recreation, physical and mental health; flood mitigation and so on. We also feel that we have a huge opportunity to have impact way beyond our locality. Our partnership with the University of Lincoln school of agriculture means that we will be able to perform best practice benchmarking and produce peer-reviewed data on key indicators. We already have a huge footfall (250,000 visits a year) to our retail, catering, heritage and cultural sites and events so our rewilding will quickly generate educational and social impact way beyond our local area. **We could not afford to do this without some form of regular payment. With this support we would be willing to make an open-ended, inspected and monitored commitment to provide these sorts of ecosystem and social services.**”*

Case example 3

120 ha (3000 acre) estate in Yorkshire. Currently sheep-grazed. Aiming to rewild the entire estate, initially focussing on planting of up to 300 ha of trees. Extensive Natural Flood Management programme also being developed on the estate by the Environment Agency to help reduce flood risk downstream in Leeds and Skipton etc. This NFM work is being planned in conjunction with the estate's own rewilding programme.

*“As custodians for a 3000 acre Estate in Yorkshire we have a duty to look after it for the nation and future generations. The need to respect the biodiversity crisis and climate emergency means that no time can be wasted. We will incorporate orchards, forest foraging, hedgerows, wetlands, moorland recovery and healthy types of plant-based production. Intervention and non-intervention combined. We will develop eco-tourism, education and places where we can re-establish peoples' relationship with the land - mental health and NHS green prescriptions which we do in parallel with our wellbeing mission. **We do not make a profit from our land and so anything to help from any agency means we can do more, and quickly and influence others to do more. ELMS could be the igniter but government must watch that the agricultural vested interests and single issue groups do not distort it or water it down – we need to focus on big projects which make the difference.**”*

Case example 4

600 ha (1500 acre) estate in Norfolk. Now rewilding 400 ha. Formerly mixed farming and forestry, with nature-based tourism being developed.

*The primary drivers for our rewilding project are (ii) to engender biodiversity renaissance and carbon capture through woodland and scrub regeneration and 2) to diversify away from EU CAP payments and cropping. We aim to produce meat from rewilded land believing that any products we supply will be of the highest quality being the surplus of an entirely natural rearing and grazing system and produced with minimal other costs such as food miles. We will supply a local market with a natural local product. **It would be a real challenge to undertake this without some level of UK government support; it may be that a sustainable tourism, education & mindfulness business could make the overall project self-sustaining one day, but especially during the first ten years, the project would almost be unfeasible without financial support.***

Case example 5

1000 ha (2500 acre) estate in Cornwall seeking to rewild 500 ha of land.

“We are motivated by doing the right thing for biodiversity. We want to enable small tenant farmers in Cornwall to continue when the potentially reduced payments are introduced by farming in a way that will attract maximum support. As Landlord of contiguous holdings, a traditional estate is well placed to co-ordinate land managers (ie farm tenants) to participate in such a scheme, increasing the chance of success and creating a large enough project area. We still aim to produce some food through extensive grazing producing small quantities of top quality food. This could potentially

be through some farmers rewilding part of their holding and continuing to farm traditionally on other (better quality) parts. **Future ELMS payments will be essential. All of the land to be 'rewilded' is currently in AHA/FBT agricultural tenancies; farmers could not afford to go down this route without ELMS, or other, support."**

Case example 6

4000 ha (6000 acre) estate cluster in Norfolk – 5 landowners seeking to rewild 2000 ha of land between them. Currently mixed arable, grazing, woodland and wetland. This view from one of those landowners.

*"As a landowner and farmer, land management is the tool that I have available to make the biggest difference to improving the health of our planet's ecosystem. Rewilding a proportion of the land is the least we can do as farmers to attempt to mitigate some of the damage done by human activity, to provide a haven for insects and an overflowing biomass that will make up for the loss of habitat across our farm that has been the result of intensive agriculture. With the hope that this reserve of natural capital will spill out beyond its boundaries and be of benefit to the farming entity, through improved insect and bug life. The zone will also allow local residents to appreciate an unmanaged landscape that is full of surprises, and hopefully push us into the understanding that the countryside is not a garden to be solely enjoyed and inhabited by humans, for human ends, but a dynamic vibrant ecosystem that we are part of. **Stewardship payments are a useful tool to accomplish this (but not the key driver for us) but they will help to encourage others that this is not too foolish an idea. Similarly, diversification is the method by which we will be able to maintain the zone once the initial grants have ended.**"*

Case example 7

5000 ha (12,000 acre) estate in Northumberland owned by a Trust, considering rewilding 3000 ha in future. Currently sheep and cattle grazing and forestry with some nature-based tourism.

*"We want to rewild as a response to the climate emergency and the loss of biodiversity and to deliver public good. We want to cease forestry and farming and encourage visitors and eco-tourism. **If a landowner agrees to cease commercial activities, other than those deemed to be of public benefit, for a long period of time, then future ELMS payments would be vital. The average commercial farmer turned rewilder could not afford just 'to do it anyway'.**"*

6. How might rewilding fit with other land uses?

A key aim of rewilding is to establish large biodiversity-rich core areas which not only retain the best of what is already ecologically special within those areas but also enable those special habitats and species to expand both within and beyond the boundaries of the core areas. In an ideal world, core rewilding areas (qualifying for Tier 3 funding) would be separated from areas of intensive agriculture and urban development by farmland and forestry "buffer zones" which are in good environmental stewardship (as incentivised by Tier 2 funding) – see Fig 1 below.

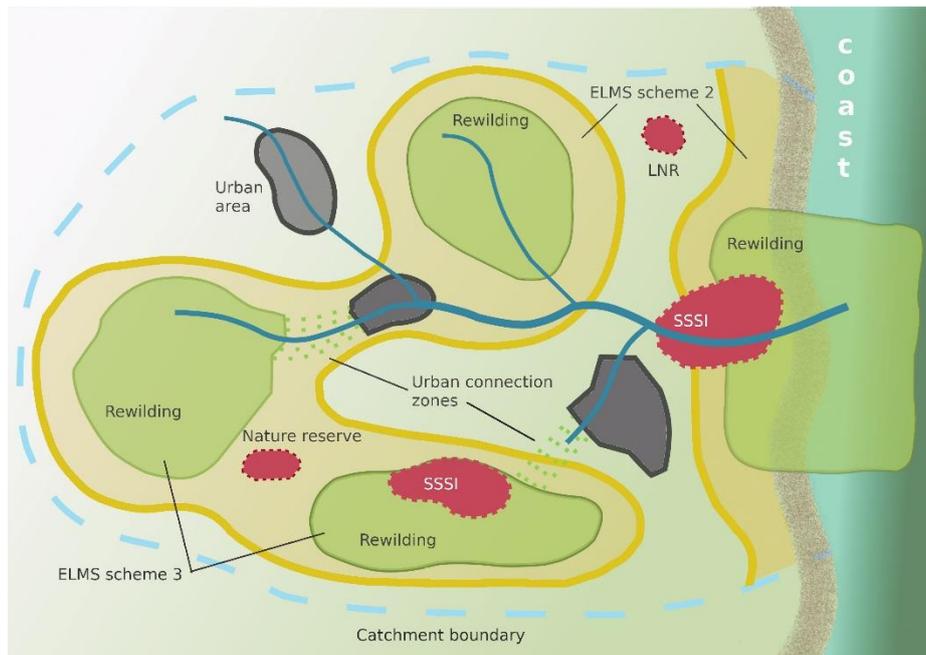


Fig 1 – an example of how rewilding core areas might fit with buffer zones etc

7. Additional recommendations to enable landowners to transition to rewilding through ELMS

(i) Establishment of a network of community based, trusted expert co-ordinators whose role it is to coach, inspire, enthuse, educate, hand-hold, form-fill and connect-up farmers through the transition process. A great example of this is Jenny Phelps MBE and her team at SW FWAG who have developed an amazing network of over 90 champion farmers to deliver “high-end” countryside stewardship in the Cotswolds. The same approach could apply to co-ordinating landowners to help them access ELMS payments to facilitate rewilding at scale.

(ii) Capital one-off payments to enable landowners to switch from traditional farming to rewilding. This funding could cover training and start-up costs, equipment purchase and initial interventions on the ground to kick-start the rewilding process.

8. A final comment

Rewilding in Britain in the 21st century is not about wolves and bears and land abandonment. That is the mythical world of rewilding promoted by “click-baiting” lazy journalism and bears no relevance to the real-world rewilding that increasing numbers of landowners are seeking to embrace, which is as described in the definition and principles above.

It is therefore no longer reasonable for rewilding opponents and sceptics to point to the extremist view of rewilding as the reason for not doing it. We should embrace the word and the definition for what it actually is in reality and in so doing mainstream rewilding as one of many valued options available for future land use. ELMS provides us with a once in a lifetime opportunity to do just that.

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