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| <b>Title of report:</b>                                                                                              | <b>Baseline Survey Summary Report</b>     |
| <b>T&amp;T number:</b>                                                                                               | <b>174a</b>                               |
| <b>T&amp;T name:</b>                                                                                                 | <b>Breckland Farmers Wildlife Network</b> |
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| <b>Date submitted:</b>                                                                                               | <b>31/01/22</b>                           |
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| <p>This report is submitted to Defra as part of the Environment Land Management Schemes Test and Trial programme</p> |                                           |

## Summary

### **Background:**

BFWN is a farmer led group of land managers in Breckland NCA, recently formed during a previous DEFRA Test and Trial, 174. A baseline survey was carried out prior to future workshops on Landscape Recovery policy questions. 45 members of the network responded to a written survey designed to collect demographic information and opinions to inform the workshop plans.

### **Results:**

#### Demography, land designations and AES schemes

Half of the land managed by respondents is in arable/field vegetable production, with a mix of farming types in the remainder. Most are larger than 500ha and a high proportion have irrigation. Most land managers are male and 45 - 54 years old. A large proportion have statutory land designations on their land and the most frequent BAP priority habitats are arable field margins, hedgerows, river and streams, lowland deciduous mixed woodland, and ponds. All had previously participated in AES with most now in CS Mid-Tier or HLS. 13% are currently not in a scheme. Over half reported knowing little about ELMs.

#### Incentive for participation and outcomes from this Test

Interest in environmental improvement, more knowledge and input into ELMs, and concern about the loss of BPS income were the main drivers for participation. Three quarters would like to see improvement in Brecks biodiversity and conservation as an outcome from joining BFWN. Nearly all wanted to see improved biodiversity as an outcome from this Test and nearly all saw the prospect of improving the natural environment as an incentive to work with other farmers. Nearly all respondents supported a collaboration bonus to complete the network of cultivated margins (AB11) which were the output of the previous Test. A landscape management plan which includes the cultivated margins, and financial support for the plan, were highly supported.

#### Long term agreements

Loss of flexibility of land use was seen as a key barrier to long term agreements, although a very high proportion believed that longevity of agreements allowed improvements in habitats and biodiversity to be seen.

#### Monitoring and outcomes

Most believed that inspections should be aimed at guidance to improve, and that payment should be made regardless of outcomes if the advised management has been carried out. Monitoring was still seen as important by nearly three quarters of respondents.

#### Alignment with other DEFRA initiatives.

Around three quarters supported using a landscape management plan to identify appropriate areas for other DEFRA initiatives.

#### Advice and Guidance

Nearly three quarters believed that advice/guidance would be best delivered through farmer groups and a high proportion thought this should be funded by DEFRA through ELMs.

## Acronyms and definitions

| Acronym | Meaning                            |
|---------|------------------------------------|
| AES     | Agri-environment scheme            |
| BAP     | Biodiversity Action Plan           |
| BFWN    | Breckland Farmers Wildlife Network |
| CS      | Countryside Stewardship            |
| HLS     | Higher Level Scheme                |
| NCA     | National Character Area            |
| UEA     | University of East Anglia          |

## Introduction

Test 174a is taking place in the Breckland NCA<sup>1</sup> with BFWN, a group of 55 farmers and land managers with a farmer leader and facilitator. BFWN is split into four geographical mini clusters with cluster leaders. BFWN expanded rapidly in 2020-21 to take part in Test and Trial 174 which supported a project with the UEA using the Breckland Biodiversity Audit<sup>2</sup>. This evidence base identified cultivated margins as the best conservation intervention for biodiversity in Breckland. Dr Rob Hawkes from UEA developed an analytical tool to produce a map of cultivated margins in core locations on each participating farm and a network throughout Breckland in optimal locations linking dry open priority habitats<sup>3</sup>.

A baseline survey was conducted with 45 responses from member businesses during December 2021 and January 2022. 6 completed it as a mini cluster, 30 alone and submitted by email, and 9 with support from a cluster leader. Most questions involved making choices from options (to encourage completion), with two free text questions.

The survey was a starting point ahead of five workshops responding to policy questions, and intended to collect:

1. *Land holding information – land type, land use, tenure, priority habitat, designations*
2. *Previous engagement with agri environment*
3. *Current level of knowledge about Environmental Land Management*
4. *Thoughts and ideas about the future management of their holdings*
5. *Their incentive for participating in the Test*
6. *Attitudes towards long-term agreements for Landscape Recovery*
7. *What outcomes they would like to see*
8. *Participant insights into the policy themes*

The policy questions to be addressed at the workshops are :

### Workshop 1:

- *What is the best approach to setting payments for Landscape Recovery?*
- *How do we determine appropriate payment mechanisms?*
- *How to incentivise land manager participation and collaboration in Landscape Recovery projects and determine appropriate payment mechanisms.*

**Workshop 2:** *What could a landscape plan for a farmer group look like?*

### Workshop 3:

- *How to construct long-term agreements (30+) years, potentially incorporating conservation covenants, to safeguard investments in land use change and associated environmental outcomes?*
- *How to construct agreements for different land ownership e.g., individual and group agreements, tenants, MOD, and commons?*

**Workshop 4:**

- *How to monitor the delivery of projects and associated environmental outcomes to ensure compliance?*
- *How to align Landscape Recovery projects (as distinct from Local Nature Recovery projects) to wider Defra initiatives such as Net Gain and Nature for Climate projects which may also deliver land use change?*

**Workshop 5:**

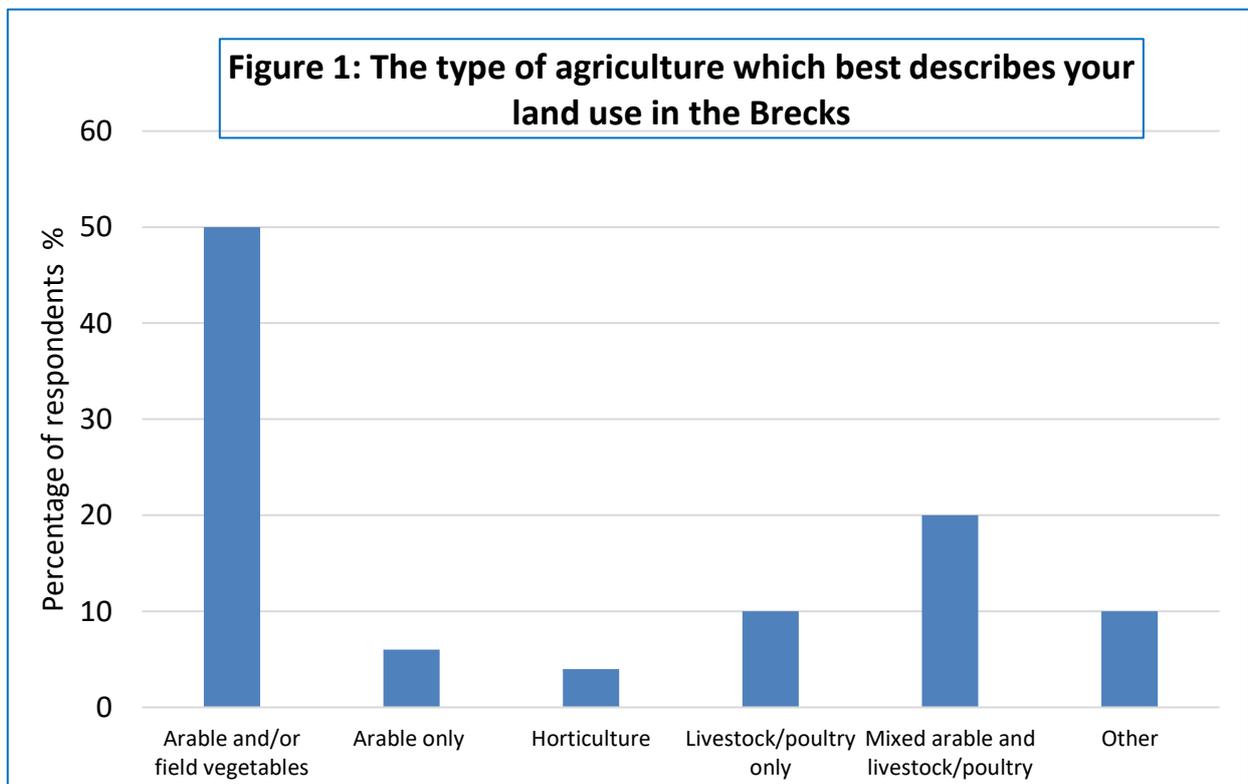
- *What would make paying for advice for E.L.M. most worthwhile?*
- *Where is the greatest need for advice in the application process?*
- *Can guidance replace the need for advice?*
- *If we provided any support towards the cost of advice, how would that best be delivered (e.g., grant, loan, voucher)?*

## Findings

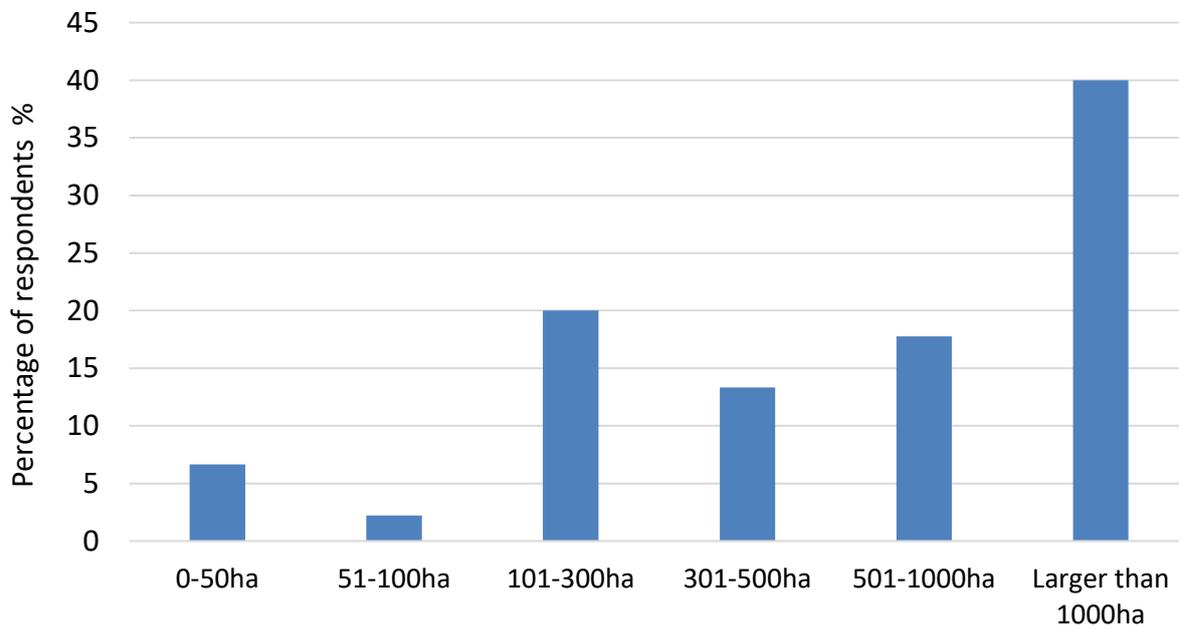
Summaries of the survey question responses are detailed below mainly as simple bar charts or tables which are self-explanatory. Key points are highlighted.

### 1. *Land holding information – land type, land use, tenure, priority habitat, designations*

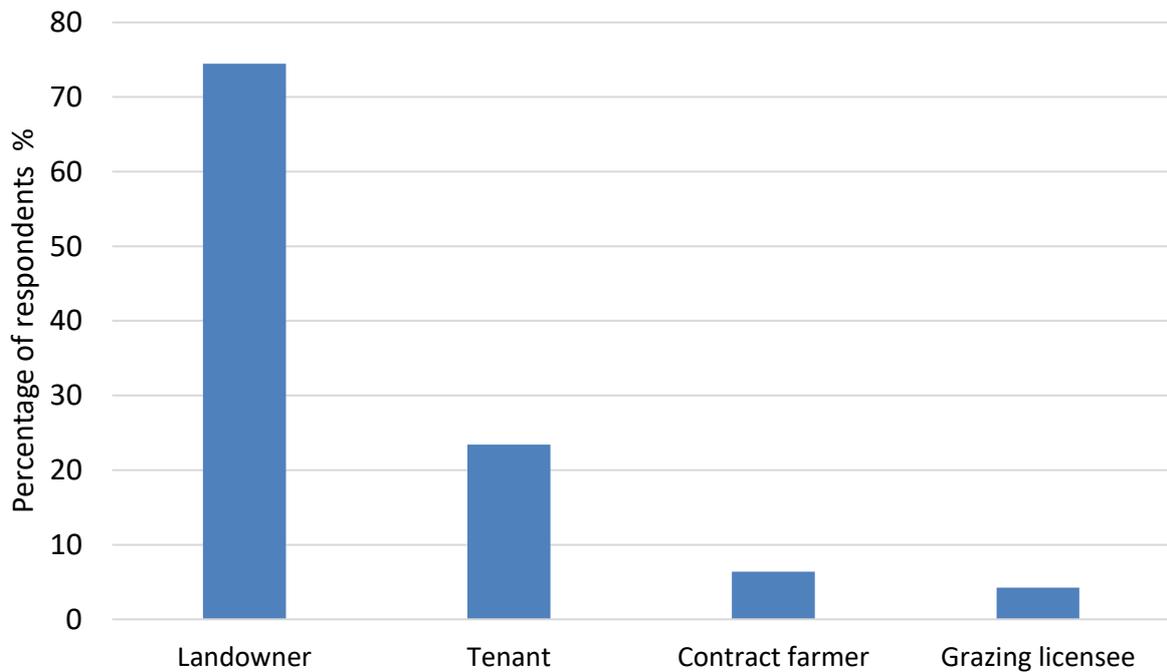
50% of respondents reported land use as arable/field vegetables (Figure 1), 40% have land holding larger than 1000ha, 18% 501-1000ha (Figure 2), and 78% of holdings have an irrigation licence. These results reflect the agricultural landscape in the Brecks which is dominated by large scale irrigated vegetable production with a mixture of other farming types. 74% of respondents own the land (Figure 3) .

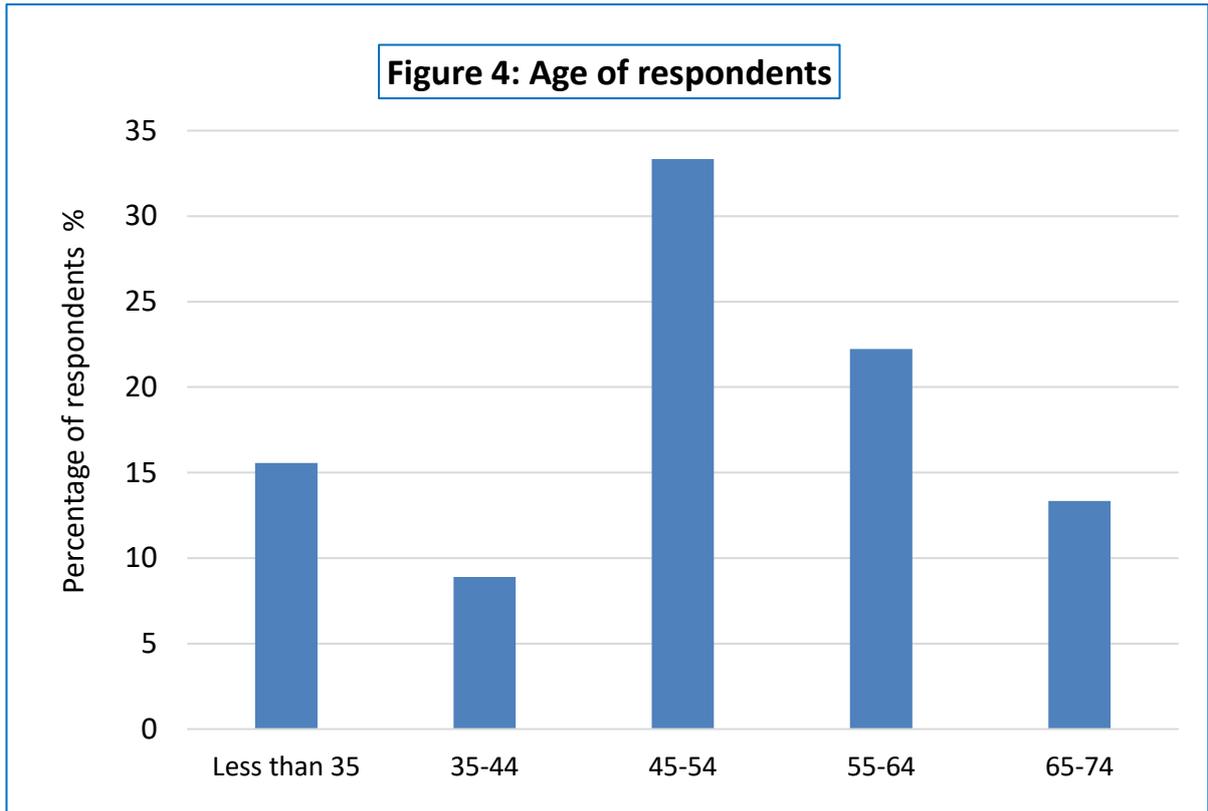


**Figure 2: Land holding size in the Brecks**

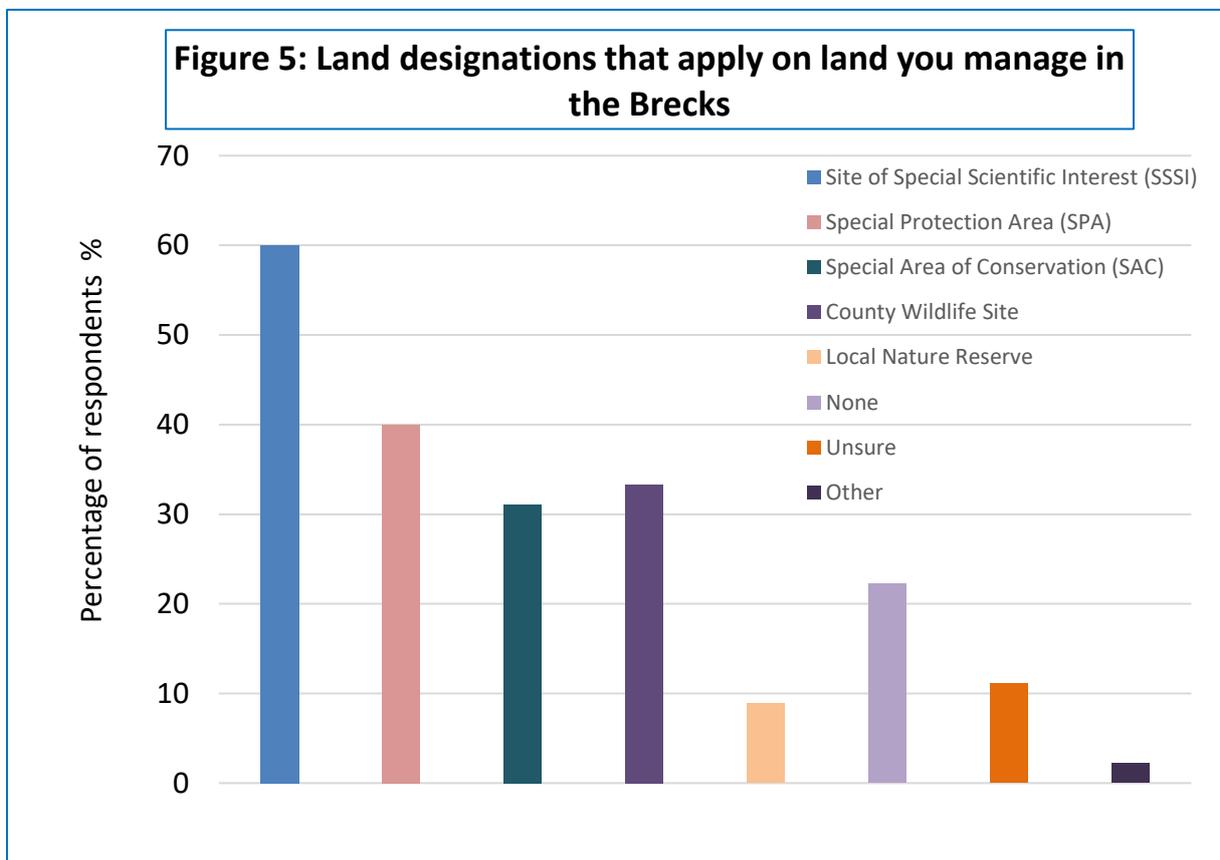


**Figure 3: Land tenure on your farm in the Brecks**





The average age of UK farmers is 53 years<sup>4</sup> and the modal group in BFWN respondents is 45-54 years (Figure 4). 93% of respondents were male and 7% female.



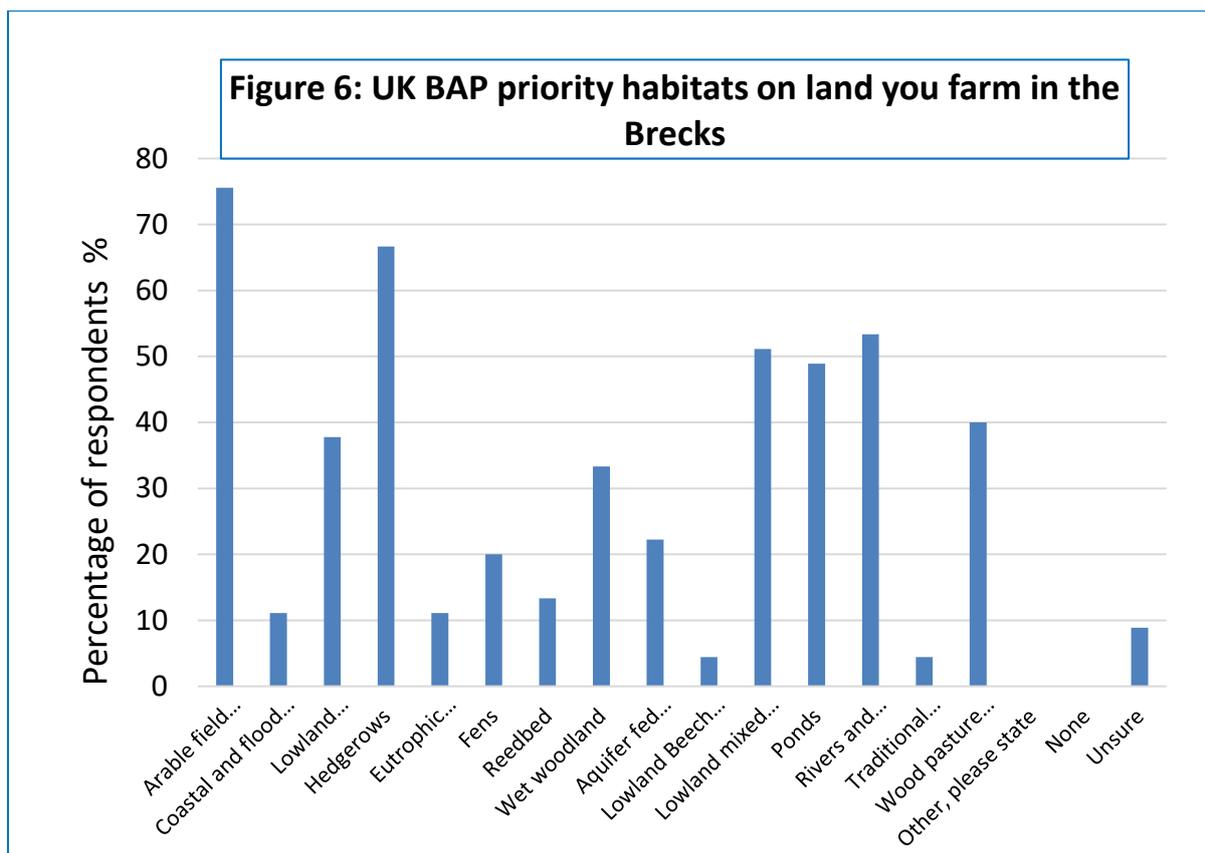
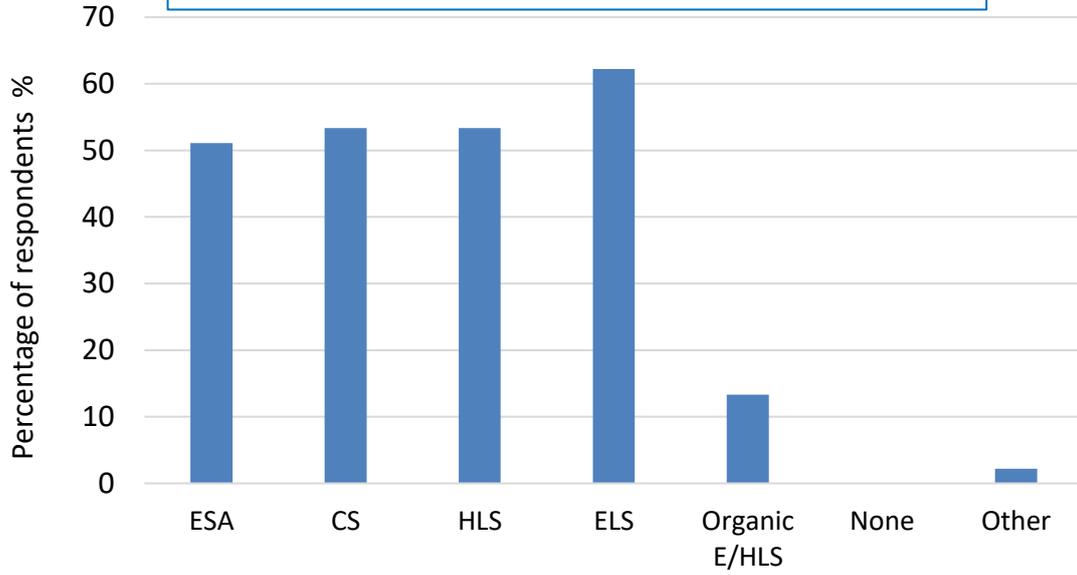


Figure 5 shows that 60% of respondents reported an SSSI on the land they managed, 40% with a Special Protection Area, 33% with County Wildlife Sites and 31% with a Special Area of Conservation. Figure 6 shows the most common BAP priority habitats reported were arable field margins (76%), hedgerows (67%), rivers and streams (53%), lowland mixed deciduous woodland (51%) and ponds (49%). There was some confusion over BAP priority habitats which may have resulted in misreporting and four respondents were unsure.

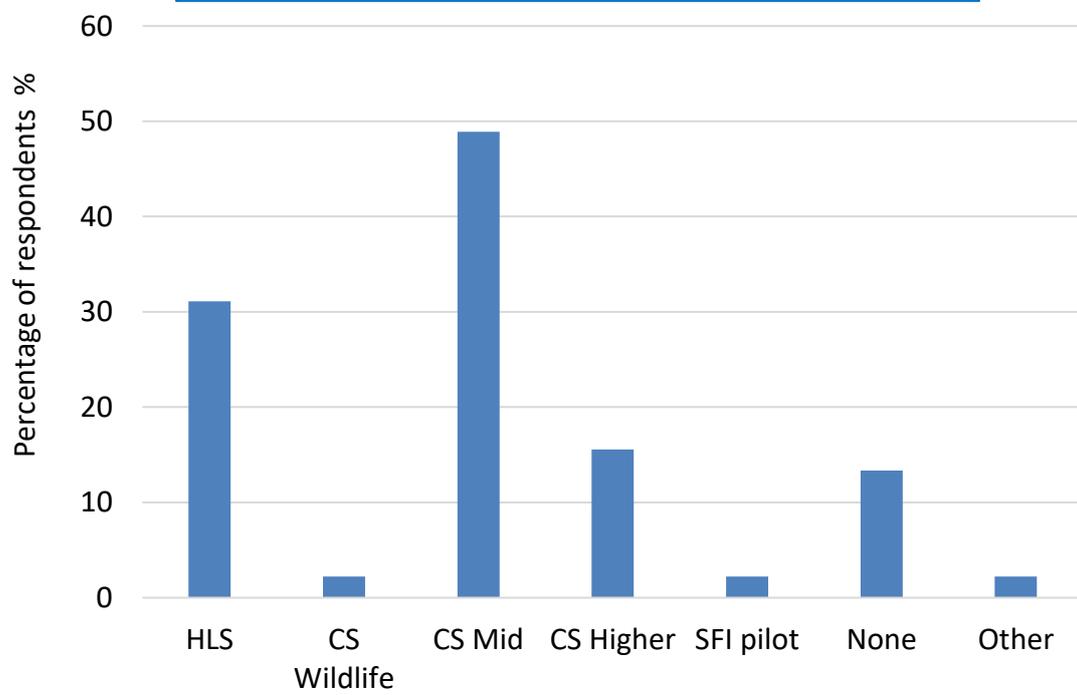
## 2. *Previous engagement with agri environment*

All respondents stated they had previously been in AES (Figure 7 shows the range of schemes). At the time of the survey 13% were not in a scheme. Anecdotal evidence from within the group cites current uncertainty, inappropriate SFI standards for field vegetable production and insufficient reward as the reasons for non-participation. 49% of respondents reported current participation in CS Mid-tier and 31% in HLS including two awaiting confirmation. 73% of respondents reported having some cultivated margins on their farm.

**Figure 7: Previous participation in agri-environment schemes in the Brecks**



**Figure 8: Current participation in agri-environment schemes in the Brecks**



### *3. Current level of knowledge about Environmental Land Management*

56% of respondents reported knowing little about ELMs and 40% reported being reasonably well informed. The remainder reported knowing all they need to know or being well-informed.

### *4. Thoughts and ideas about the future management of their holdings*

This was captured in a free text question asking respondents to share thoughts and aspirations around the future management of the land managed. Ten participants did not respond to this question. 71% mentioned the environment or biodiversity in their response and 37% of responses were on the theme of integrating agriculture and biodiversity. 34% had specific environmental goals for their farm e.g., funding for flood alleviation and habitat for wading birds, ambitions for a no-till arable system, no fungicides/insecticides use on farm, a reduction in synthetic nitrogen use by 50%, restoration of grass habitats along the River Wissey, improve pingo site, improve organic matter, continue to improve habitat for specific bird species. 14% highlighted food production, 14% mentioned the network of cultivated margins with the need for payment to reflect the true cost of removing land from production cited. Sustainability, a fair price for food, long term, consumer confidence, a reduction in bureaucracy and climate goals were all mentioned in individual responses.

### *5. Their incentive for participating in the Test*

Participants were asked what encouraged them to take part in this DEFRA Test. The most popular reasons, from 91% of respondents, were reported as a desire to find out more about future policy and ELMs, and to see environmental improvement in the Brecks. Many others were popular choices; a desire for opinions to be considered in future DEFRA policy, the importance of environmental concerns, and concern about the loss of BPS income and business viability. Payment for participation did not appear to be a key incentive to take part as only 20% of respondents reported being influenced by this.

**Table 1:**

| <b>What has encouraged you to take part in this DEFRA Test?</b>              | <b>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| I am interested in environmental improvement across the Brecks               | 91       |
| I want to find out more about future policy and ELM schemes                  | 91       |
| Environmental concerns are important on my farm                              | 80       |
| I want my opinions to be considered in future DEFRA policy                   | 80       |
| I am concerned about the loss of BPS income and the viability of my business | 78       |
| I would like to take part in future environmental schemes                    | 76       |
| I have been encouraged to do so by BFWN                                      | 73       |
| I would like to collaborate more with other land managers                    | 69       |
| I would like to discuss issues with other farmers                            | 60       |
| I enjoy getting together as a group                                          | 44       |
| I will be paid £125 per full day workshop                                    | 20       |
| My neighbours are involved, and I don't want to miss out                     | 16       |

Participants were also asked what they would like to get out of being a member of BFWN as this may have engaged farmers in joining the Test. The reasons reported for belonging to the network showed enthusiasm for the Brecks and improvement in biodiversity. Responses on the most common themes are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:**

| <b>What you would like to get from being a member of BFWN</b> | <b>%</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Environmental benefit/biodiversity/conservation               | 74       |
| Working as a group/cooperation/collaboration                  | 44       |
| Linkage/linked/network/landscape scale                        | 33       |
| Knowledge sharing and access/advice                           | 33       |
| Income/payment/viability                                      | 23       |
| Strength in a group/one voice                                 | 21       |

Comments included the possibility of having direct information from DEFRA and the desire for DEFRA to understand that optimal environmental management in the Brecks NCA must compete with high value agricultural rents and incomes, in particular for AB11, the option for cultivated margins, and that the Test could just be a start to achieve these outcomes.

6. *Attitudes towards long-term agreements in Workshop 3 below.*

7. *What outcomes they would like to see*

Table 3 shows that 93% of respondents would like to see improved prospects for biodiversity in the Brecks as an outcome from the Test. A high proportion wanted to learn more about ELMs and have a landscape management plan for the Brecks; 84% and 82% respectively, with reservations expressed that a plan can be an outcome at this stage. 73% of respondents hoped to learn more about future income for their business and 71% that collaboration in the Brecks improves.

**Table 3:**

| <b>What outcomes would you like to see from this Test?</b>                                        | <b>%</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Improved prospects for biodiversity in the Brecks                                                 | 93       |
| I will have learnt more about future ELM schemes                                                  | 84       |
| We will have a landscape management plan for the Brecks                                           | 82       |
| I have learnt more about possible future income for my farm business                              | 73       |
| Collaboration among land managers in the Brecks has improved                                      | 71       |
| We will have provided realistic information about payments to DEFRA                               | 64       |
| We will have come up with some ideas on monitoring and outcomes                                   | 60       |
| We have had the opportunity to talk through many of the problems and uncertainty ahead as a group | 58       |
| We will have fully explored the potential for long term agreements                                | 51       |
| I will have made some good contacts                                                               | 40       |

## 8. Participant insights into the policy themes

### Workshop 1:

- What is the best approach to setting payments for Landscape Recovery?
- How do we determine appropriate payment mechanisms?
- How to incentivise land manager participation and collaboration in Landscape Recovery projects and determine appropriate payment mechanisms.

Participants were asked questions on possible incentives to work with other farmers on Landscape Recovery in the Brecks, shown in Tables 4 and 5. 93% respondents were in favour of a collaboration bonus, for example, to complete the network of cultivated margins (the output of Test 174). Financial support for a landscape management plan (LMP) was chosen by 76% of respondents; there was also support for having an LMP in other questions. Comments included that financial support should compensate for income lost from arable cropping and that payment by results and increased administration or land agent costs in schemes would be a serious deterrent.

**Table 4:**

| <b>What financial incentives would encourage you to work with other farmers towards LR in the Brecks?</b>     | <b>%</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| A bonus for collaboration e.g., completing the network of cultivated margins                                  | 93       |
| Financial support for a Landscape Management Plan                                                             | 76       |
| Financial support paid to the network to deliver landscape scale recovery                                     | 69       |
| Funding for shared equipment and resources to manage options (this could include staff to manage and monitor) | 64       |
| Adequate recompense for individual interventions in ELMs would encourage collaboration                        | 62       |
| Financial support for group meetings and workshops                                                            | 58       |
| Financial support for training in monitoring species                                                          | 58       |
| Financial support for knowledge exchange meetings in management of environmental options                      | 53       |

Table 5 below shows opinions on various non-financial incentives to work with other farmers towards LR. The prospect of improving the natural environment is clearly the best incentive from those suggested with 89% of respondents agreeing. Having a landscape plan is again a popular choice along with the possible reputational benefits and good publicity for agriculture, both chosen by 71% of respondents.

**Table 5:**

| <b>What non-financial incentives would encourage you to work with other farmers towards LR?</b> | <b>%</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| The prospect of improving the natural environment                                               | 89       |
| Having a landscape plan for the Brecks                                                          | 71       |
| Good publicity for agriculture, reputational benefits                                           | 71       |
| Belonging to the network                                                                        | 67       |
| Feel-good factor of societal benefits                                                           | 49       |
| Well-being benefits                                                                             | 42       |

## Workshop 2:

What could a landscape plan for a farmer group look like?

**Table 6:**

| <b>What could a potential Landscape Plan for a farmer group look like?</b>                            | <b>%</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| It should include the network of cultivated margins developed by Rob Hawkes                           | 87       |
| Help and/or advice will be needed to complete it                                                      | 82       |
| The network should create a Landscape Management Plan for the Brecks                                  | 82       |
| The plan should intend to increase natural capital in the Brecks through collaboration                | 80       |
| Creation of a plan should be paid for as part of ELM schemes                                          | 76       |
| The plan should include a baseline assessment of species present on farms                             | 76       |
| Digital and paper versions will be needed                                                             | 64       |
| The same plan should inform all ELM schemes                                                           | 60       |
| It should include all features eg water, data records, CS participation, archaeology, community areas | 60       |
| The plan should include the natural capital recorded on individual farm eg bird survey data           | 60       |
| Soil carbon mapping should be part of a landscape plan                                                | 53       |
| It should be completed with other stakeholders eg NGOs, local council                                 | 42       |
| The same plan should guide privately or blended finance projects                                      | 40       |

The most popular choice among options given for a landscape management plan was reported as the inclusion of the network of cultivated margins developed in Test 174. Comments included “best way to get to landscape scale”, “key species benefit, but other options need to be promoted”, “science led approach will lead to measurable outcomes”, not necessarily all have to be adopted”, “if funded properly”.

With 82% reported as agreeing that help and/or advice will be needed, comments included that it would be needed for consistency between farms, suggested further UEA support, that facilitators will be required to ensure a joined-up approach along with support and advice for individual landowners, and particularly for very small businesses, because of the increasing complexity of farm management.

82% of respondents also agreed that the network should create a Landscape Plan with comments that “the network’s views and opinions should heavily influence the content of the plan”, “Using the science led approach”, “provided it isn't so prescriptive”, “flexibility is the key to success”.

Comments on the increase in natural capital through collaboration, which was supported by 80% of respondents, included “essential to attract higher level of payment, “main objective”, “collaboration should be prioritised over individual options where there are clear benefits”, and “should have benefits both financial and environmental”.

76% agreed that creation of a plan should be funded in ELMs with comments in favour ( “obviously!”) and more guarded (“not necessarily”), (“depends on level of intervention”).

76% also responded in favour of including a baseline assessment of species on farms with some reservations in the comments; “at least priority species”, “a large task, who pays?”, “one

way of measuring improvement”, “a major undertaking”, “most farmers have this already”, “if funded adequately”.

**Workshop 3:**

- How to construct long-term agreements (30+ years), potentially incorporating conservation covenants, to safeguard investments in land use change and associated environmental outcomes?
- How to construct agreements for different land ownership e.g., individual and group agreements, tenants, MOD, and commons?

**Table 7:**

| Possible barriers to long-term agreements                                   | %  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Loss of flexibility of land use                                             | 89 |
| Economic uncertainty                                                        | 78 |
| It might not be possible to change the land use at the end of the agreement | 71 |
| Commodity price volatility                                                  | 64 |
| I might lose control of my land                                             | 51 |
| I want my children to be able to have choices about land use in the future  | 49 |
| Short term tenancies                                                        | 49 |
| Previous long-term agreements have been financially detrimental             | 33 |
| I don't know enough about the possibilities to comment                      | 20 |

Table 7 showing some possible barriers to long-term agreements, demonstrates that loss of flexibility of land use is seen as an important reservation about long term agreements with 89% expressing this as a concern. The related issue, whether land use change would be possible at the end of the agreement, was also a concern with 71% agreeing this could be a barrier. Comments included “can't have this” and the prospect of suppressed land values was raised. An observation was made that the agricultural community currently has a naïve view that long term environment agreements, such as re-wilding, are in competition with food production and security.

**Table 8:**

| Possible benefits of long-term agreements                    | %  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Long enough to see improvements in habitats and biodiversity | 87 |
| Certainty of income                                          | 73 |
| A long-term environmental management plan can be made        | 69 |
| Index/commodity price linked payments may be possible        | 60 |
| Long term relationships can be built                         | 51 |
| Ability to have a long-term business plan                    | 51 |
| Financial security                                           | 47 |
| I don't know enough about the possibilities to comment       | 9  |

In Table 8, showing the possible benefits, 87% supported the suggestion that long term agreements would be long enough to see improvements in habitats and biodiversity and having certainty was seen as a benefit to 73% of respondents.

#### Workshop 4:

- How to monitor the delivery of projects and associated environmental outcomes to ensure compliance?
- How to align Landscape Recovery projects (as distinct from Local Nature Recovery projects) to wider Defra initiatives such as Net Gain and Nature for Climate projects which may also deliver land use change?

**Table 9:**

| Ideas around monitoring, compliance, and delivery of environmental benefits            | %  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Inspections should be aimed at guidance to improve                                     | 82 |
| If the advised management is carried out payment should be made regardless of outcomes | 80 |
| Monitoring is important to see if environmental features are improving                 | 73 |
| Monitoring should be paid for in ELMs                                                  | 64 |
| Monitoring must be done to inform future management and research                       | 60 |
| Experts should monitor outcomes of ELMs features                                       | 53 |
| Many other things affect environmental success so monitoring may not be fair           | 53 |
| Outcomes should be assessed                                                            | 49 |
| Compliance inspections are important                                                   | 42 |
| Financial penalties should be made for non-compliance                                  | 36 |
| Other                                                                                  | 13 |

The responses on monitoring and compliance most favoured inspection aimed at guidance to improve (82%) and payment for carrying out advised management regardless of outcomes (80%) However monitoring was still considered important to assess whether management is working by 73% of respondents and 64% believed this should be funded in ELMs. Less popular were financial penalties with 36% of respondents agreeing with that option. Comments on financial penalties included that they should be used with discretion, where continued non-compliance is evidenced, only in a last resort, in cases of blatant flouting of the rules, and not for genuine oversights. The inspirational value of positive outcomes should not be underestimated was one comment which supports monitoring outcomes. 58% already have estimated or accurate numbers of birds on their farm with a range from 31 up to 148 recorded species.

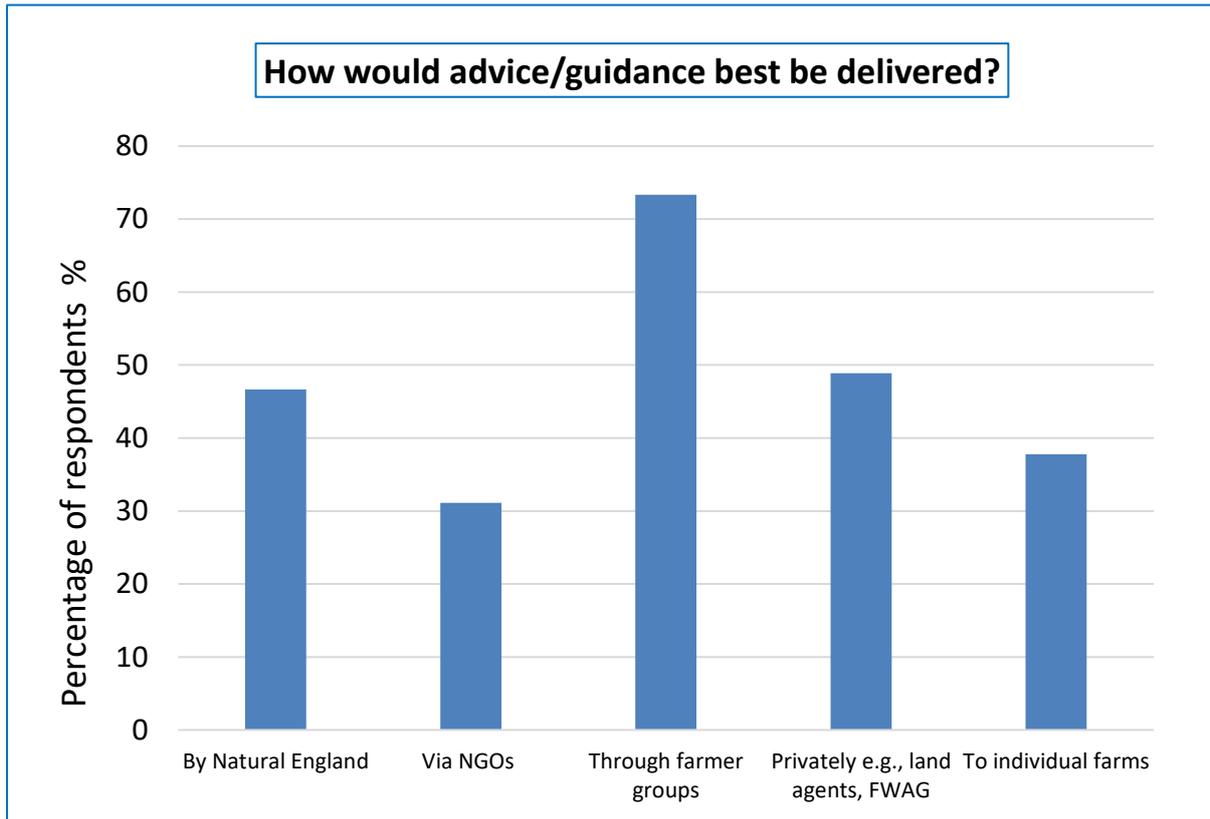
#### Aligning LR projects in the Brecks with Biodiversity Net Gain

76% of respondents reported that a Landscape Plan could identify the most appropriate areas for possible biodiversity net gain. 58% reported that a landscape plan could be used by a farmer group to work with councils and developers on biodiversity net gain and have an integrated approach. There were two strong opinions expressed against the use of a landscape plan for this. 40% believed that it is up to individuals to find areas for biodiversity net gain on land if they want to. It was suggested that the group could access net gain finance to increase AB11 payments, targeting critical areas of connectivity or competition with arable income.

## Aligning LR projects in the Brecks with The Nature for Climate Fund

69% of respondents thought that a Landscape Plan could identify the most appropriate areas but 62% believed that it is up to individuals to identify areas. 42% thought a farmers group could work with councils and developers to have an integrated approach. Comment observed that peat exists (particularly in river valleys), that the right trees should be planted in the right places, and Brecks priorities must be understood.

### Workshop 5:



73% of respondents chose advice/guidance through farmer groups, with all other options chosen by less than 50% of respondents. Other suggestions included conservation agronomists and specialist advisors with practical farming awareness and knowledge.

### How could advice/guidance be financed?

87% of respondents believed advice/guidance should be funded by DEFRA through ELMs. 40% thought that the network should be funded to coordinate local delivery. This is at odds with the result of the previous question in which 73% favoured advice/guidance through farmers groups and needs to be addressed in the workshop. 18% felt that individual farms should pay for advice.

## References

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