

# Sustainable Farming Scheme

## Demographic question

Name:

Dr Rob Lennox

Are you responding as an individual or as an organisation?

Organisation - Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

Are you or your organisation based in Wales

No, but I or my organisation operates in Wales

Please provide the first part of your home postcode e.g. CF10

RG6

Please indicate which of these best represent you or your organisation (please select only one).

Environmental

## Framework

**Q1. The Scheme will provide a long-term approach to support for our agricultural sector to respond to evolving challenges and changing needs, contributing to the Sustainable Land Management objectives. In your view, what may strengthen this support?**

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) strongly supports a holistic approach to understanding the landscape; one which requires farmers to consider the landscape and the wider context for their agricultural activities as a core part of their approach to land management. We particularly welcome the inclusion of UA14 on historic environment maintenance and enhancement, as well as other scheme actions which are likely to yield positive secondary benefits for the historic environment (e.g. UA1, UA2, UA6, UA11).

We applaud the fact that Government has been ambitious with its inclusion of active management within the Universal tier of the scheme. We have no doubt that initially some of these actions (e.g. scrub clearance on historic features, historic building and boundary maintenance) will provoke a degree of pushback. However, in the interests of moving Wales forward towards becoming an environmentally sustainable nation, we believe that a scheme like this will support and encourage farmers and land managers get used to the changed requirements from previous Basic Payment system. We understand, however, that this process of behaviour change will take time, there will be a skills learning curve for scheme participants, and likely a negotiation on a case-by-case basis, or more generally as guidance is developed, as to what actions can fall within the Universal tier under this Action.

There will also likely be a number of implementation challenges, such as ensuring that specialist advice is embedded within the system and costed where supplied by outside historic environment organisations such as Heneb: The Trust for Welsh Archaeology (formerly the 4 regional Welsh Archaeological Trusts). It will be crucial that this specialist advice is not taken for granted, given the fact that the SFS implies a far greater volume of historic environment activities which will need to be guided in order to be effective. We outline these points elsewhere in this response.

Nonetheless, the ambition and the broad mindset that farmers and land managers are stewards of the landscape, of Welsh culture and heritage, and of the wider environment, is extremely laudable. It will, in our view, put Wales in a very strong position to deliver the best outcomes possible for its historic and natural environment, while supporting farmers to be the backbone of food production and the rural economy.

## **Universal actions**

Q2. There will be Universal requirements in the SFS to have woodland cover at least 10% of suitable land, and to manage a minimum of 10% of your farm for biodiversity.

a) What are your views on these requirements?

b) What support might you need to achieve them?

a) ClfA recognises the twin climate and biodiversity crises and supports Welsh Government in setting ambitious targets in these areas. However, on these scheme goals, we suspect that there may be a need for flexibility in application depending upon the existing landscape characteristics of a site and its capacity to absorb what in some cases will amount to significant landscape character change as a result of woodland creation. We wonder whether the goal should be clearer that it is flexible enough to allow for factors which may prevent achievement of 10% such as being limited to a lower % where historic landscape sensitivity assessment has indicated adverse impacts, or where other practical barriers have been acknowledged. This would not prevent the pursuing of the 10% goals as far as possible.

We welcome wording which acknowledges that impacts on archaeological features will need to be considered. However, wider impacts on both the historic and natural characteristics of landscapes should also be considerations. For example, landscapes where trees are an existing part of the character may be appropriate for infill planting, or planting to connect tree covered areas. Whereas other landscapes, particularly uplands, may be sensitive to new block planting that is unconsidered or which impacts the setting of historic assets.

b) Specialist guidance will likely be required to assess or provide assistance to farmers to guide delivery under this scheme goal. As stated elsewhere in this response, this specialist advice for the historic environment is likely to come from Cadw and Heneb, the Archaeological Trust for Wales (formally the Welsh Archaeological Trusts). While guidance from NRW and the Woodland Trust, as woodland specialists, will also be critical, there may be a lack of historic environment (including archaeological) specialists in these organisations. As such, existing advice provision will need to be expanded via memorandum of understanding with Cadw and/or Heneb, or by expanding/creating historic environment teams within NRW in order to satisfy the likely vastly increased scale of work that is implied by this becoming a universal goal relevant to all scheme entrants.

While budgetary considerations will be tight, we expect that Heneb will need to expand its staffing resources and seek specific skills in order to be able to deliver the scale of advice required if thousands of woodland creation schemes begin coming through SFS as the scheme is implemented.

Q.3 Aside from the 10% woodland and habitat requirements, will the Universal Actions:

a) Provide benefit for your farm business?

b) Provide an achievable set of actions paid for through the Universal Baseline Payment?

No comment.

Q4. On-farm data reporting allows the Welsh Government to confirm actions are being undertaken and help you to make decisions about your farm. In your view, is the reporting requirement for the Universal Actions appropriate?

We strongly welcome the approach outlined in the proposal for farm reporting. This will be essential to monitor the effectiveness of actions undertaken. It also likely provides the most reasonable, light touch, but comprehensive approach given that most farmers will be undertaking active maintenance work as a result of requirements of the universal actions.

For UA14, requirements to provide geo-tagged digital photographs should be enough to allow specialists to assess quickly whether activities such as scrub clearance have been undertaken satisfactorily, and respond to any concerns.

The exact processes for the monitoring of the farm data need to be worked out. For example, the data should, ideally, be ending up logged within the Historic Environment Record, and assessed by a specialist upon accession into a digital archive. Communication between historic environment specialists and the organisation acting as the first point of contact for farm data will be important, as will the need to stipulate monitoring processes clearly.

Q5. The Stability Payment will provide additional support during the Transition Period. In your view, is this appropriate whilst the Optional and Collaborative Actions are being introduced?

No comment.

## Scheme operation

Q6. We have proposed that applicants should have sole management responsibility for the land for 10 months and ensure completion of the Universal Actions for the full scheme year (12 months). In your view, is the 10-month period sufficient?

No comment.

Q7. We are proposing the use of a single carbon calculator for everyone in the Scheme. Do you agree and how might we best support you to complete this?

No comment.

Q8. To ensure continued high standards on our farms, we have outlined a proportionate approach to controls and sanctions, including compliance with additional legislation as a condition of Scheme payment. Do you have any views on this approach?

No comment.

Q9. Adopting the Welsh Government appeals process will provide an effective and efficient mechanism. Is there any reason we should deviate from this?

No comment.

## Payment methodology

Q10. We would like to know your views on the proposed approach to:

a) the SFS universal baseline payment

b) the SFS stability payment

a) Practical limits under UA14: As previously stated, we strongly welcome the ambition of the new SFS to include active management as part of the universal tier. We believe that basic maintenance of historic features is something that a farmer can do as part of their responsibilities for the universal baseline payment.

However, we admit that we are unsure that a pure per hectare payment won't suffer from limitations due to the fact that farmer may need to spend money to meet requirements, thus becoming a cost/reward trade off which needs to be balanced with great care to suit a range of different farms with different needs/obligations. We wonder whether there will be any ability for farmers to recover additional costs?

Specifically relating to UA14, it will be necessary to clarify at what point 'basic maintenance' actions under become too complicated or costly to be expected to be undertaken as part of the Universal tier. And where this is the case, how issues may get raised to the Optional action tier. For example, historic buildings which are already in a state of disrepair when an applicant enters a scheme may not reasonably be expected to be maintained in the same condition as buildings which are in a good condition but need simple regular maintenance (e.g. gutter clearance). This much may be obvious, but guidance on where the line is drawn will be useful. For example, maintaining a historic field boundary stone wall in good condition may be reasonable under UA14, but if a historic field boundary stone wall is already degraded, or collapses as a result of an accident (e.g. storm damage) is the more substantial repair of that wall something that will be required under UA14? If so, is there additional money available to the farmer for that job? If not, will there be a route to encouraging Optional Actions in order to improve the condition of historic features such that they can then be covered under the Universal tier? We would hope that this would be beneficial as it would gradually mean that more features were brought into good condition and subject to active management, without putting undue financial burdens on farmers.

For certain other interventions, such as erosion management, there is a potential for well-intentioned farmers to cause damage if they pursue actions incorrectly. For this reason, guidance and training should not only include information on how to complete simple maintenance safely, but also how to identify more complex cases where specialists may be required to do the work. In such cases, it may be important to have mechanisms to elevate issues beyond the Universal tier and access to funding for the work.

Detailed guidance on these issues will be necessary.

## Transition period

Q.11. Farmers outside the Scheme may wish to access support for actions similar to those offered in the Optional and Collaborative Layers. In your view, should farmers within the Scheme receive priority support to undertake these actions?

We have no strong view on this. Access to Optional tier funding (e.g. capital grants to repair or stabilise historic buildings which have fallen into disrepair) may be useful for some farms to get them to a level where entry into the Universal tier was possible. However, in such a case of a capital grant for the repair of a listed building to bring it into active economic use, it may be imperative that the recipient of funding is subsequently held to the responsibility of keeping the building in the good condition that it has been restored to. While this could be achieved with reference to existing statutory regulations and conditions of the capital grant, it may also provide leverage to encourage scheme entry.

The counter argument is that with limited resources available for Optional actions, providing priority to Scheme participants may yield additional incentive to farmers and lead to better outcomes.

In short, we support the scheme to aim to produce the maximum sustainable positive outcomes across the 4 legislative goals in whatever way this is best achieved.

Q12. What actions and support within the Optional and Collaborative layers do you believe should be prioritised?

We do not have a view of the prioritisation of actions within the Optional tiers. The legislative goals in the Agriculture Wales Act are not subject to any priority, although we recognise that some practical decisions are likely to be needed about where and how much funding is available under each optional action. We would also caution that any methodology adopted to measure, for example, natural capital, needs to be applicable to the benefits and costs of interventions into the historic environment. We are not aware of any current natural capital accounting methodology which does this fully and effectively.

We recommend that a reflexive approach is taken to monitoring demand for and outcomes resulting from specific actions as the scheme embeds.

For the Collaborative tier, priority should be given to benefits that are least likely to be achieved on an individual farm basis.

## BPS

Q13. Do you agree with the proposed changes to BPS from 2025? This includes:

- a) The rate at which BPS payments are reduced.
- b) Closing the National Reserve to new entrants.
- c) Thresholds for capping.
- d) Restricting the transfer and lease of entitlements.

No comment.

## Regulations

Q14. We would like to know your views on our proposed approach to secondary legislation, which will support BPS and the introduction of support schemes under the powers in the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023.

No comment.

## Evidence

Q15. Economic analysis and modelling will conclude in 2024 and will provide evidence to inform the final decision on Scheme implementation by Welsh Ministers. We would like to know your views on the existing analysis and evidence required.

No comment.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Q16. We would like to know your views on which information and evidence should be used to monitor and evaluate the Scheme.

We note that a 'map of known historic features' will be provided for every scheme entrant. It will be important to understand what datasets this assessment will be being drawn from (primarily the regional historic environment records (HERS)) and recognise their limitations. For example, some datasets will not necessarily be up to date or comprehensive. For example, some data will be made up of 'points' where the feature marked will extend over a wider area, which may not be clear. There may need to be allowances made for updating datasets in time where they are static. Furthermore interpretation and/or qualification of the data may be necessary in order for the map to be of maximum value to farmers. The quality of the data can, of course, be a long term goal for the SFS. It does not all need to be perfect, providing that flaws are mitigated through operational processes (such as providing specialist advice).

We are pleased that historic features and designated sites are to be included in the Habitat Baseline Review. However, we are confused as to the extent to which these features are being recorded in the baseline review purely for their contribution to habitat, or for wider historic or landscape significance, public interest or access reasons. Both are important; however, under UA7 historic features like stone walls and buildings are explicitly excluded from the Action. We are unsure why this is the case, as it is our understanding that stone walls and historic buildings provide important habitat for various species. If historic features are part of the Habitats Baseline Review then we would welcome confirmation that actions taken to, for example, restore historic field boundaries, such as stone walls or dykes, will be recognised for their habitat benefits and reflected in any improvements seen in HBR2 assessments. Furthermore, we would welcome confirmation that if historic boundary features and buildings are excluded from UA7, that any provision for their maintenance under UA14 will be accounted for in HBR1/HBR2 assessment, in order that the benefits of these actions can be properly measured. We want the full value of such actions to be visible to farmers who will be choosing them, and to those operating the SFS and directing resources.

Alternatively, if the HBR is actually assessing broader environmental baseline (including aspects of historic and cultural significance), then we question whether its name ought to be changed to reflect this. For example, 'Habitat and Landscape Baseline Review'.

As stated above, we welcome the reference to 'geo-tagged photographs' being used as a tool to provide monitoring data, but it will be important that the body acting as first point of contact for such reporting is adequately connected with historic environment specialists who will be required to review the photographs in order to identify condition concerns and record photographs in the respective HER databases.

## Other

Q17. What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the SFS on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.

Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?

Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

We note the potential of the Scheme to be a collecting point for traditional Welsh language names of places, including historic field names. We understand that some of this data has been collected by Cadw, but there is a far greater scope for collecting this through the SFS, especially if it is encouraged through CPD training modules.

Q18. In your opinion, could the SFS be formulated or changed so as to:

- have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or
- mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

No comment.

Q19. Do you have any additional comments on any aspect of the consultation document?

Funding for specialist advice: We have stated above that there are several key areas in which it will be necessary for lead bodies administering the scheme to have access to or connections with specialist historic environment advisors in Cadw and Heneb (formerly the Welsh Archaeological Trusts). Given the potential scale of new entrants to SFS, it is likely that there will be a considerable additional burden on these organisations which will require funding for them to provide resources and advice. We would welcome confirmation that Government is willing to explore these needs with Cadw and Heneb as the scheme progresses through its transition phase.

CPD: We are very interested in the opportunities under UA2 for CPD modules to be produced on topics relevant to the historic environment. This may be critical to practical implementation of the Scheme, for instance training farmers how to do scrub clearance on historic features. However, it may also be an opportunity to develop wider skills, for example, encouraging farmers to use the Archwillio platform to record oral histories and local knowledge about the local historic environment. While not directly related to the scheme, it would undoubtedly leverage the reach of the scheme and maximise its potential to deliver against the Agriculture Bill's legislative objectives to promote access and engagement with cultural resources if positive outcomes were sought in relation to issues such as this. Topics like this would have great potential to not only expand the reach of heritage training, but also grow the respect for farmers as sources of knowledge relating to traditional heritage practices on and knowledge of their land – types of knowledge which are of great importance to the historic record. These wider CPD modules could be run in as simple a way as an online webinar, produced by external organisations.

UA7 Habitats exclusion of heritage: As mentioned above, we would welcome clarification for why historic features are excluded from UA7. It would be more helpful if instead of an exclusion UA7 were to note that stone walls and historic buildings are dealt with under UA14, but there should be a connection between actions under UA14 which have cross-cutting benefits affecting UA7 – i.e. a more positive way to prevent overlap but promote understanding of cross-cutting relevance.

## Submit your response

You are about to submit your response. Please ensure you are satisfied with the answers you have provided before sending.

If you want to receive a receipt of your response, please provide an email address.

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