



## **Landscape Review**

Just over 75% of the South Downs National Park is farmed. The whale-backed landscape that was frozen solid 10,000 years ago, has been colonised by trees, cut and cleared again with flint axes 5,000 years ago, grazed by sheep, cattle and rabbits, and ploughed by oxen, horses, steam engines and tractors ever since. In a geological blink of an eye, man, livestock and machinery have shaped and scarred them almost as much as nature itself. Millions of tons of barley, wheat and lamb must have been harvested from the thin downland soil since man first cleared them. World wars, U-boats, cheap fertiliser, EU agricultural subsidy then .... Boom! 2016.: Brexit, global warming, Isabella Tree, supply chains and the English Channel. Don't panic Captain Mainwaring, they have a plan.

The government has released details on its post-Brexit plan for agricultural subsidies, focusing on the financial incentives for farmers to restore and re-wild their land. There are two schemes: the Local Nature Recovery scheme (LNR), which will pay farmers for locally-targeted actions, such as creating wildlife habitat or planting trees on their land, and the Landscape Recovery scheme (LR), for those who want to enact more widespread change.

The Landscape Recovery scheme is open to any individuals or groups who want to come together to deliver large (500-5,000 hectares) scale projects through land use change and habitat/ecosystem restoration. It will initially focus on biodiversity, water quality and Net Zero. The application process for up to 15 pilot projects is open now focusing on two main themes - recovering England's threatened native species and restoring England's rivers and streams.

These pilot projects are alone expected to deliver at least 10,000 ha of restored habitat and carbon savings of 25,000-50,000 tons a year. DEFRA will announce the chosen pilot projects this summer. Very exciting!

Next, the Local Nature Recovery scheme will take the best of Countryside Stewardship and pay farmers to make space for nature in the farmed landscape and the wider countryside whilst, importantly, also producing food. So adding trees to fields and hedgerows, storing water, restoring wetlands etc will be financially better for the farmer and by a trial and test programme "the sustainable farming incentive" will be extended and improved over the next 5 years in a less bureaucratic and more supportive way. This year there are 3 starting "standards" available for farmers to work towards and they basically promote good soil husbandry. The soils and moorland standards are at the forefront of the scheme because they apply to most farmers in England and will bring significant benefits for Net Zero and biodiversity. Soil is one of our most important natural assets and improvement of soil health, structure, organic matter and biology will promote clean water and improve climate resilience, biodiversity and, of course, food production.

However, the cost of farming inputs have increased by an eye watering 21.86% during the period September 2020 to September 2021. Fertiliser, an essential ingredient for growing crops on a thin chalky soil, has increased by

