Background to Natural England - Agri-Environment Schemes

Agri-Environment Schemes (AES) recognise the unique nature of many historic environment assets and both Environmental Stewardship (ES) and Countryside Stewardship (CS) include capital items that farmers can use to fund works that protect, conserve and restore these fragile assets.

Follow-on expert interviews with HAP and HE1 Delivery Specialists and associated review to complement 2021 commissioned project:

‘Are agri-environment schemes bespoke capital items (HAP and HE1) delivering for the historic environment and providing wider cultural capital benefits’

Background to the specific work area relevant to this purchase

Under ES Historical and Archaeological feature protection (HAP) was the bespoke capital item to deliver works to improve and conserve historic features in the landscape. Works ranged from comprehensive parkland plans and restoration of parkland features through to the restoration of smaller assets such as a sheep-wash. It could be underpinned by an implementation plan (PAH) funded at £400 to draw up a specification and costings for the work.

Under CS Historic and Archaeological feature protection (HE1) is the bespoke capital item to deliver physical works that directly contribute to conserving or protecting historic environment features in the landscape. HE1 can be underpinned by an Implementation Plan (PA1 funded at £1,100 per plan) or a Feasibility Study (PA2 funded up to 100% of actual costs) that has identified and specified the required works.

In 2021 a Monitoring and Evaluation project began the task of reviewing uptake of the HAP and HE1 options to help identify the value of these options and related good practice, blockers to delivery were also identified. A project specification for this work is attached (Appendix 1). Work was undertaken by external consultants with a draft final report submitted in 2023. This is in the final stages (October 23) of completion. Omitted from this work were expert interviews with specialists delivering the option whether through ES or CS. This project will now undertake a series of interviews and use information gained to provide added value and an additional independent commentary on option use.

Requirement

Delivery specialists are crucial to the development and delivery of these options. They include Natural England land management advisers with special interests in delivery for the Historic Environment who work to build and deliver agreements, Natural England Historic Environment experts who provides direct advice on projects. Historic England specialists and Association of Local Government Archaeologists (ALGAO) colleagues also provide support from the outset with Historic environment Farm Environment Records (HEFER) management recommendations. Analysis of their roles, work and understanding of scheme and option delivery will provide an essential additional contribution to existing reporting and will be crucial in supporting recommendations to be taken forward into E.L.M.

It is proposed that 20-30 (cost dependent – separate costs should be presented for 20 and 30 interviews) remote interviews be conducted with relevant specialists to appropriate and DEFRA Survey Control Liaison Unit (SCLU) approved standards. A list of delivery specialists will be provided at the outset of the project alongwith a copy of draft reporting from the 2021 project.

The questionnaire to be used must be pre-agreed with Natural England and should include, but not be restricted to, examination of:-

The nature of their specialist delivery role – was this direct or supporting?

Extent of Historic Environment expertise and training,

Extent and nature of projects delivered under HLS using HAP,

Extent and nature of projects delivered under CS using HE1,

How were sites and projects identified as meriting work?

What partnerships – internal and external – were required to deliver projects?

What were the Historic Environment Drivers for the project(s) and how were they met?

What wider environmental drivers were there (eg climate change, protected species or site management, access, education) and how were they met?

What were the challenges of delivering these options – both on the ground and in terms of agreement recording and administration?

How long did project development and then delivery take?

How did the funding package and payments for the project work ( or not)?

Were there unexpected developments and consequences of work?

How successful was completed delivery?

How can value for money (vfm) be identified for projects? How does vfm compare between different types of project (eg large parkland projects vs badger removal from a scheduled monument vs targeted built fabric repair) ?

How easy was it to collate and store all relevant agreement papers supporting option use?

Which would you consider your most successful project and why? Could it be developed into a case-study to support option use?

What recommendations would you make to support the delivery of comparable options under E.L.M?

Why should E.L.M include such options?

How should these options be delivered in E.L.M. and who should lead on delivery?

What are the values of integrating such projects within a wider multi-objective agreement?

How could they be improved to enhance multi-objectivity and support current initiatives including nature recovery and climate control?

Scaling questions could be added to the above list if considered appropriate.

Qualitative analysis of responses should be included to measure differences in opinion on some issues.

Natural England will provide further advice on SCLU Survey requirements.

A separate costing should be presented for preparation of up to 6 4-page illustrated case studies based on above discussion to complement those in the existing report and demonstrate option use in practice.

Sustainability

Natural England protects and improves the environment and is committed to reducing the sustainability impacts of its activities directly and through its supply chains. We expect the Contractor to share this commitment and adopt a sound, proactive sustainable approach in keeping with the 25 yr environmental plan/our commitments compliant with all applicable legislation. This includes understanding and reducing direct and indirect sustainability impacts and realising opportunities, including but not restricted to; resilience to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, water use and quality, biosecurity, resource efficiency and waste, reducing the risk of pollution, biodiversity, modern slavery and equality, diversity & inclusion, negative community impacts.

As a delivery partner, the successful contractor is expected to pursue sustainability in their operations, thereby ensuring the Contracting Authority is not contracting with a supplier whose operational outputs run contrary to the Contracting Authority’s objectives. The successful contractor will need to approach the project with a focus on the entire life cycle of the project

Outputs and Contract Management

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reference | Deliverable | Responsible Party | Date of completion |
| 1. | Data Capture | Contractor | 22/01/2024 |
| 2. | Data Analysis | Contractor | 27/01/2023 |
| 3. | Report Writing | Contractor | 18/03/2024 |
| 4. | Project Management | Contractor | 18/03/2024 |

The successful contractor will be responsible for the management and delivery of the project and will be supported by a Natural England project manager. Natural England will provide specialist contact details and supporting information and advice for any agreed case-studies. At least 2-weekly focussed project meetings will be held to support project development and delivery.

Reporting and Recommendations:

The data collected by the study should be formatted into a clear set of findings with supporting appendices. An executive summary should be provided in the final reporting.

The final report should cross refer to the earlier 2021-start project reporting and provide a clear set of recommendations which can be used for the purposes of scheme development for successor schemes and future grant offers. These recommendations will be underpinned by the evidence that has been collated in the study.

Project Outputs:

The final report should be supported by a two-page summary.

A final project webinar may be required and should be costed for separately.