

Proposals/Ideas for testing and trials

Environmental Land Management

Testing and Trials

Proposal/idea

### 1. Please describe your proposal/idea(s) and its key objective(s) [max 300 words]

#### In answering this please consider:

- How does your proposal/idea link in with the 25 year environment plan objectives?
- Is there any evidence and/or past experience to support this proposal?
- Have other options or approaches been considered or tried?

The Foundation for Common Land (FCL) proposes tests and trials to:

- 1) test how future Environmental Land Management schemes will work on commons; i.e. that future schemes are commons proofed and to this end we support the principles set out in the Federation of Cumbria Commoners' proposal though add in evaluation and monitoring of the impacts on public benefit outcomes and farm businesses
- 2) test how multi-partite schemes on commons can be linked with individual commoners' schemes on their own farm to both better integrate the common and the associated farms to secure the commoning system and deliver public benefits at landscape scale.
- 3) trial the delivery of an ELM scheme on at least two commons in both upland and lowland areas and within this trial integrate monitoring and evaluation as essential to measure success and inform adaptive management of these complex sites

The Foundation for Common Land is not looking to deliver trials ourselves but would seek to work with other partners and Defra to enable this to happen. We convene a multi-partner HLF funded project – Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons and have 12 case study commons involved in Dartmoor, Shropshire, Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District. Each case study is working on a vision to improve outcomes and we may, subject to interest from commoners, owners and local partners, be able to link in tests and trials with our ongoing work. We also have close working relationships with the New Forest.

We have experience developing guidance for best practice for environmental schemes on commons and we recommend these are built upon in planning future schemes. We are also aware of the challenges faced in current schemes and how these impact on successful delivery of the public and private interest.

The particular features of Commons agreements that need to be addressed in the tests and trials are:

- A. Land that delivers multiple and high value public benefits where there may be trade-offs required between different benefits
- B. Multiple legal interests; from 2 to over 500 separate legal entities involved
- C. Land that is important to the viability of multiple separate farm businesses
- D. Imbalances of power where some individuals or groups can unduly and unreasonably influence outcomes
- E. Strong sense of public interest in commons and their management
- F. The division of money between commoners often causes huge stresses, investment is required in effective Governance both to provide value to society and to enable effective commoning communities

### **2. Please describe what innovation your proposal/idea(s) bring(s) to the new Environmental Land Management system? [max 250 words]**

In answering this please consider:

- Have you drawn on expertise inside and outside of your organisation?
- Have other options or approaches been considered or tried?
- What is the balance between cost and benefit/quality derived from this proposal/idea?
- Why is this proposal/idea suitable for a test and/or trial?
- What would happen if we didn't test and/or trial the proposal/ideas?

Our innovation is to:

- a) build commoning systems into land management schemes from the outset, which will avoid the need to retrofit schemes to commons.
- b) Integrate adaptive management into schemes to ensure monitoring and evaluation occurs regularly and informs future management

Past approaches have proved to be less than satisfactory for the last 25 years; not only has it caused considerable stress in commoning communities but it has prevented the optimum delivery of public benefits as other issues such as unequal balance of power which has not been addressed properly have arisen.

The Foundation for Common Land is the leading charity in England working to enhance the natural and cultural public benefits of common land and the commoning systems. We have an excellent track record advising government and other partners on the management of common land. We have drawn on the experience of our staff, trustees and partners and our research into schemes in putting together this proposal.

We seek to work in partnership with others and the time frame for this call did not allow for full costings. We would be delighted to work with you to scope this out further. We do though know that current government spending from Pillar 1 & 2 on commons averages about £110/ha or £38 million per year. It would therefore be appropriate to spend at least 2% of this on properly testing and trialling schemes on commons (~£750,000). The public benefits from commons are not yet valued but with over 40 million visits to commons each year even on health and well being these are significant.

The proposal is suitable for testing and trialing as it enables commons to be integrated with other land holdings and this brings wider sustainability benefits for natural capital, cultural heritage of landscapes and farm businesses. It embeds the management of commons in the wider landscape e.g. as proposed by Dartmoor National Park and the Lake District Pioneer Project and has been piloted under Dartmoor Farming Futures since 2013.

### 3. How does your proposal/idea(s) link in with the 25 year environment plan objectives? [max 200 words]

In answering this please consider:

- What specific outcomes will you be targeting / will potentially be impacted? What aspects of your proposal/idea have been informed by the 25 year environment plan?
- What land management practices do you plan to use to deliver these outcomes?
- Have you considered/factored in any potential social/public benefits, as well as the natural benefits within your proposal/idea(s)?

The public benefits of commons are undisputable: While only 3% of England; 21% of our SSSI area is common land, 12% of scheduled ancient monuments are on commons and 39% of our open access land is common land. Getting it right on commons will enable strong delivery on the 25 YEP objectives set out below. These include health and well-being as well as natural environment benefits. Remote rural communities businesses whether farming, tourism or adventurous activities depend on healthy and functioning commons.

#### **Thriving plants and wildlife**

We will achieve a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife.

FACT: 21% of England's SSSI area is common land

#### **Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment**

We will conserve and enhance the beauty of our natural environment, and make sure it can be enjoyed, used by and cared for by everyone.

FACT: 39% of all open access land is common land including our most iconic and well used locations e.g. New Forest, Blencathra, Striding Edge, Dartmoor Tors, Newcastle Town Moor,

#### **Mitigating and adapting to climate change**

We will take all possible action to mitigate climate change, while adapting to reduce its impact.

FACT: ~ 200,000ha of England's peat soils are located on common land.

#### **Clean and plentiful water**

We will achieve clean and plentiful water by improving at least three quarters of our waters to be close to their natural state as soon as is practicable:

FACT: ~70% of our drinking water comes from the uplands and a significant proportion of this is common land.

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### **4. What are the specific risks with the proposal/idea(s) and what are your plans to control or mitigate against these? [Max 250 words].**

Our proposals are about mitigating the risks of recent and current approaches to stewardship schemes so to maximise future benefits to society. The question is really what are the risks of not progressing the tests and trials we propose.

If we do not test and trial schemes on commons then we risk the following:

- Poor use of public money
- Environmental Degradation of some of our most precious natural assets
- Loss of the cultural heritage of the farmed landscape and commoning system
- Bankruptcy of marginal farming businesses
- Reduced public enjoyment and engagement with the natural environment

Risks Identified:

- There is a risk that we would not be able to have the capacity to manage the work but we will mitigate against this by working with partners in Dartmoor, the Lake District and the New Forest to pool resources.
- There is a risk that commoners would not wish to engage but this is seen as low as CS is not universally liked so exploring alternatives will be attractive. Furthermore FCL has extensive and positive networks in both these areas through our Trustees and the Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons network.
- Insufficient time allowed by the trials to produce meaningful results and properly inform scheme development.

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