

16th December 2022

Ms Laura Cutter



Complaint Resolution Team
Customer Engagement Team
Natural England
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

Natural England Complaint CMPT22022/00388 Tier 2 Response

Dear Ms Cutter,

Thank you for your letter of 14th November 2022 addressed to Stephanie Payne. In line with Natural England's complaints procedure, your correspondence has been passed to me for investigation and response at Tier 2.

I have considered the questions you posed in your letter and would like to provide some clarity for you about the matters you raised.

1) Funding

- A. There is funding available for the maintenance of the meadow, via the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS). This funding includes payments for the management of species rich meadows (GS2, GS6) and an annual hay cutting supplement (GS15) and management of ancient hedges (BE3). There are also one-off capital payments available for fencing, gates, water troughs, water supply, hedge restoration, gapping up, wildlife boxes etc. Please see the attached link to further information about the Scheme. [Countryside Stewardship grants - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants) and [Countryside Stewardship: How to apply - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-how-to-apply)
- B. In terms of who is eligible to claim the funding, an application can be made by the landowner (or their authorised agent) or a tenant. For a tenant to be eligible they need security of tenure for the full period of the Countryside Stewardship agreement which is 5 years – if security of tenure is less than 5 years it is possible for them to apply with the countersignature of the landlord.
- C. For monies being claimed via the funding, the grants are paid for the delivery of the agreed management i.e. appropriate hay cutting, grazing and completion of any approved capital works, as set out as part of the legal CS agreement. The requirements are described for individual options in the above links. [Countryside Stewardship grants - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants)
- D. The value of the funding is a set payment rate for each management option. These are paid per ha or length/ no. depending on the items. Examples of relevant options/items in this case would be: GS2- £132/ha GS6- £182/Ha GS15 supplement- £32/ha BE3- £9 per 100m for 1 side of a hedge FG1 £ 4.00 per metre (m). BN5: Hedgerow laying £9.40 per metre (m) BN6: Hedgerow coppicing £4.00 per metre (m)

2) Maintenance

- A. As to whether there will be permanent repairs to the stock fencing, that is a question for the landowner via the land agent: Pippa Wildern pwildern@webbpaton.co.uk. It is their responsibility and, in their interest, to repair the fences.
- B. The hedges are not notified SSSI features so we do not have any legal powers to be able to enforce management for this feature.
- C. Natural England can take 3 steps to help improve the favourable condition of the SSSI if it has declined. Please refer to the following guidance for landowners which is available here [Sites of special scientific interest: managing your land - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sites-of-special-scientific-interest-managing-your-land). It outlines the steps of management agreement, management scheme, management notice and enforcement.

Where possible, Natural England will work with landowners to avoid legal proceedings. Read the section on [enforcement undertakings](#) to find out more. Natural England will use enforcement measures as a last resort and this case would not currently fall into this category – the meadow has been cut in some years; the Wildlife Trust have also had some difficulties with getting contractors with appropriately sized kit at the best time of year. Covid was also a factor

We will keep the Parish Council up to date with any volunteering opportunities to count the orchids as arranged by Natural England and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and highly value community engagement opportunities to do this. There may also be opportunities to help in other ways which we can discuss in due course.

We are currently in communication with the land agent on these matters and awaiting further response. Considering all the above, we feel it important that we follow a constructive approach and work together to secure a longer-term solution, facilitating sustainable management of the SSSI.

I hope I have clarified Natural England's position in relation to your complaint. If you require any further information, please contact us at Customer.Feedback@naturalengland.org.uk and we will be pleased to help.

This investigation at Tier 2 now concludes Natural England's internal complaints procedure.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can request that your local Member of Parliament refers your complaint to the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](#) (tel: 0345 015 4033) within 12 months.

Should your complaint relate to Natural England's alleged failure to implement or comply with environmental law, you can refer your complaint to the [Office for Environmental Protection](#) (tel: 0330 041 6581). The timeframe in which this must be done will depend on when the alleged breach of environmental law occurred. If this was less than nine months before the date of this letter, any complaint to the OEP must be made within a year of the alleged breach of environmental law. If the alleged breach occurred more than nine months ago, any complaint to the OEP must be raised within three months of this letter.

Yours sincerely,
Tom Lord
Manager – Wiltshire