

REPORT

Biodiversity Recovery In the Golden Triangle Parishes

Strategy Development 14.7.2022

Prepared for Kempsey PC
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In response to Agenda Item 60, here is DyFRA's report about our work with local parish, district and county councils.

In the last few months much of our work of lobbying for regenerative agriculture, forestry and public estate management, has been jeopardised due to the removal of the £800 million funding allocated to Defra's Landscape Recovery scheme. This has limited its grant schemes to the basic Sustainable Farming Incentive, widely-considered a parlous grant that isn't fit for purpose.

As we come to terms with the reduction of farmers' Basic Payment Schemes as a consequence of Brexit, the cost of living crisis and the conflict in Ukraine, we need to develop another funding approach which will subsidise and protect both our food security and biodiversity.

The Kempsey biodiversity resolution (27 July 2021) which DyFRA has brokered to eleven parishes linked to the Dymock Forest and Newent Town Council, (the Golden Triangle) deserves to be developed further with farmers and landowners.

There are four initiatives which still give cause for optimism.

1) With the support of Forestry England, DyFRA has followed closely and promoted the Severn Treescapes project. The Golden Triangle is a critical link in the wildlife corridor linking the Lower Wye to the Wyre. DyFRA was delighted to receive the good news:

'Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's (GWT) Severn Treescapes project has been awarded a grant from the £6 million Trees Call to Action Fund, led by Defra, the Forestry Commission and The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Severn Treescapes will create a 60 mile corridor of enhanced tree cover to connect two of England's largest semi-natural woodlands - crossing Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The corridor will stretch from the Lower Wye Valley and Forest of Dean in the south, to the Wyre Forest in the north. This project will build on remaining pockets of ancient woodland to create a climate resilient landscape, all within 30 miles of the homes of around 8 million people.' (GWT press release, May 2022).

2) Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and DyFRA have been working together on research funded by Defra for a test and trial programme with twenty farmers in the Leadon Vale. This research to find out what farmers are doing and what they would be prepared to do for Landscape Recovery is invaluable, though the change in national strategy is cause for concern that Landscape Recovery and Regenerative Agriculture may remain a political imperative only at district and county level.

3) Building on the conservation road verges (CRVs) management since 2008, DyFRA met with county highways and environment officers in May and discussed extending management to verges in Dymock, Redmarley and Upleadon. As a result, eleven new stretches will be officially surveyed this summer. The majority of CRVs are in the Cotswolds and this has set an excellent precedent for further survey work this side of the Severn into the Forest of Dean District.

4) At a full council meeting on July 6 2022, Gloucestershire county councillors voted unanimously in favour of a motion to review policies affecting county farms. The strategy has not been reviewed since 2016. The aim of the motion was to raise awareness of this valuable asset and to protect them into the future as well as ensuring that this land is used positively as an exemplar of solutions mitigating climate breakdown, food security issues and equality of access to land.

There is a lot of good work happening already on these farms that the motion sought to highlight and show how important the farms are to GCC and to the county as a whole. The motion to protect the county farms (four of which we have in Dymock) was moved by the Green councillors and passed with a 'friendly amendment' from the Conservative Group, ensuring a 'Task and Finish' cross-party group will review current strategy and report back to Council in the next year.

The focus of the local strategy in the immediate term needs to support the rural business economy alongside protecting the natural environment of our working landscape. The focus should now be on the land management, the water catchment area, and the corridors that link the Ancient Woodlands between the urban centres.