

NORTHERN UPLAND CHAIN Local Nature Partnership



NUCLNP Secretariat
c/o North Pennines AONB Partnership
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Dear Secretary of State,

Agri-environment funding in the uplands

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership. On behalf of the partnership we would like to ensure that your very welcome promises regarding the need to move agricultural funding support 'up the hill' are implemented. In doing so, I want to highlight the very positive opportunities to support the High Nature Value (HNV) upland livestock farming that takes place across our LNP area.

These HNV farming systems support high levels of biodiversity, are critical to maintaining our magnificent landscape, and deliver other important benefits such as carbon and water storage. However, this sort of farming is economically marginal and difficult. The LNP Board agreed that a new approach to supporting HNV farming in the Northern Upland Chain needs to be developed. As a first step – and with funding support from Natural England – we have, therefore, been developing a series of case studies.

The four protected landscapes — the Nidderdale and North Pennines AONBs; and, Northumberland and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authorities — have been working hand-in-hand with local groups of farmers to identify opportunities for securing a long-term future for these farming systems. These case studies have been completed, and an overall report will be published next month. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the conclusions with you in due course.

However, we have identified a number of opportunities that will not wait because they relate to the implementation of the CAP. These will not be new to you – they very much go with the grain of what you have been trying to do in implementing the CAP in England. What is new, though, is the degree of consensus here between our upland farming communities and the environmental bodies.

The final decisions about the implementation of the CAP have the potential to transform the prospects for upland farming, and more-effectively deliver the environmental outcomes that we all want to see. In summary, these are:

a. SDA/Moorland payments

We very much welcome the intention to increase the basic payment for the uplands (i.e. the 'Severely Disadvantaged Areas') to match the lowland rate. We also know that Defra's modelling has shown that there is a need for a significant uplift in the payment for land above the moorland line. This confirms the evidence from our own case studies. An uplift in the moorland line payment — to at least the level proposed in 'Option 2' in Defra's consultation — will be absolutely critical to the viability of upland livestock farms in our LNP area.

b. NELMS

Again, we welcome many of the Government's intentions announced in February. We believe that maximum environmental and economic benefit will be achieved if the new scheme is more targeted on the uplands. Our upland farmers should receive a greater share of the Pillar 2 agri-environment payments – reflecting the range of environmental benefits these areas provide.

In addition, there are opportunities to improve the detailed operation of the proposed scheme in ways that will more effectively deliver economic and environmental benefits. We would like to see a scheme that:

- i. provides more flexibility to vary prescriptions locally in order to achieve agreed environmental outcomes;
- ii. ensures that all upland farmers are eligible for small capital grants for drystone walling, which is both a significant business cost and a major element of the landscape of the northern uplands;
- iii. provides rates of payment that properly reward farmers for the real costs of the complex management of the uplands;
- iv. provides scope and incentives for groups of upland farmers to work together to negotiate, deliver and monitor agri-environment agreements, with support and facilitation.

c. 'Active farmer' definition

CAP payments are only available to active farmers. Our case studies have revealed instances where payments are not finding their way to those actually doing the work. Active management of the land, and the delivery of the public goods which flow from that management, are a key part of the rationale for the Pillar 1 payments to continue. The payments should, therefore, go to the person *delivering* the scheme requirements.

I hope that our comments are useful and we look forward to delivering an agri-environment programme that both supports the rural economy and protects the critically important environmental resources of the uplands.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Hill' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor David Hill
Chairman