

**Comments regarding NE statement answering the question “Why has Natural England committed money through agri-environmental schemes to support the rewilding (Wild land) project at Knepp estate?” :-**

The Knepp re-wilding project is a major, nationally leading ecological initiative. Its approach of encouraging natural processes to enhance a whole ecosystem is almost unique in the English lowlands.

The potential benefits from the project in terms of biodiversity could be large. It could deliver major progress towards biodiversity targets for habitats including pasture woodland, fen, marshy grassland and rivers, and for species such as water vole, otter, black poplar and many others. The re-building of an ecosystem in this way also leads to “emergent properties” - the delivery of added benefits that were not planned or predicted but become apparent as the ecosystem evolves. (An example of this is the appearance of barbastelle bat on the estate, one of Europe’s rarest mammals).

Alongside the biodiversity gains from restored ecosystems will come enhancements to ecosystem services. The project provides a rare opportunity to study how large-scale ecosystem restoration can provide these benefits. Ecosystem services are essential for human well-being yet very few (probably just food) deliver any economic benefit to the landowner. It is vital that we find ways of providing financial encouragement to landowners to deliver the essential, yet non-market benefits that we get from ecosystem services. Through this project, the Knepp estate is in an almost unique position in the discussion regarding the nature and extent of ecosystem services that can be provided by de-intensified agricultural land, and how this can be reflected in financial mechanisms to the landowner. Provision of agri-environment scheme support should be seen in this light.

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