

## Restoring diverse grassland: what can be achieved, where, and what will it do for us?

### Workshop 1: Selecting sites and setting objectives – scale and placement, limiting factors, trajectories of progress.

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#### Workshop Questions

Features of a viable site (contributing to Lawton's 'better')

Contains priority (or near priority) habitat, ideally in high quality

Matrix around the site is 'hospitable' (e.g. contains remnant populations of target species)

Proximity to nearby sites (supporting component populations of species metapopulations)

Adequate size for economically-viable management within the farm system

Topographic variability

**What are the features of the site and surrounding land that would suggest it was a good choice for making bigger (Lawton's 'bigger' and 'joined')?**

Landowner attitude and aptitude (although recognising that people can change!)

Availability of appropriate management tool (e.g. grazing)

The added area significantly enhances the site (e.g. adds to topographic or hydrological variation; increase in area is >10%; makes management economically viable)

Presence of priority species at risk of extinction (population reinforcement)

Local stakeholder support (and access)

Contributing to connectivity (e.g. by extending in appropriate direction)

**How do we make the most of Nature Improvement Areas in the context of grassland conservation?**

Aim to employ consistent methodology, making the most of evidence base and past experience

Offer to provide grassland expertise to NIAs, e.g. through hosting a workshop (N.B. UK grassland forum is planning a workshop in September in North Devon)

BES agri-ecology specialist group should be encouraged to engage

Encourage multi-taxa approach to delivery

### **Evidence gaps and research priorities**

Improve our understanding of landscape ecology in multi-species systems (trial in NIAs?)

Grassland inventory gaps

An agreed methodology for priority habitat thresholds

Management requirements for different taxa

### **Other issues arising:**

Potential link to new EU 15% target for GI

Practical delivery issues with current agri-environment schemes – pipeline full; HLS applications are not generally scored on ecological need criteria; current issue with small high, value grasslands slipping out of Countryside Stewardship