

Becoming beaver-ready

Supporting farmers to enable
beavers' return in England

June 2026

This briefing covers:

- The Beaver Management website
- The Sustainable Farming Incentive
- Farmer Facilitation Groups
- Countryside Stewardship & Landscape Recovery
- A new Beaver Mitigation Fund



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Supporting farmers to enable beavers' return

As beavers return to England's countryside, securing the multiple benefits that they can bring – for biodiversity, flood risk, water quality, water resources and the rural economy – will be dependent upon ensuring that farmers are equipped and supported to facilitate that return.

The Wildlife Trusts and Beaver Trust are recommending actions (existing and proposed) through the Sustainable Farming Incentive and wider Environmental Land Management Schemes and through a complementary Beaver Mitigation Fund to ensure that, as a nation, we can reap the benefits that we know beavers' return can provide.

The return of beavers

Beavers play a key role in revitalising river and wetland habitats, changing their surroundings to suit their needs by creating wetlands and slowing down water, and in doing so, creating places where a myriad of other species can thrive.

Their return to our landscape has scope to significantly advance the achievement of the Westminster Government's nature recovery ambitions, and the meeting of international environmental obligations and legally-binding targets, including improving the health of our waters (under the Water Framework Directive Regulations) and halting the decline of species (required by the Environment Act).



Image: Purbeck release, Beaver Trust

Recognising the positive role that beavers can play not only in achieving nature targets but in reducing flood risk and supporting water resources, in early 2025, the Westminster Government approved the **first licensed wild release of beavers in England**, which took place in Purbeck, Dorset.

At the same time, Natural England put a licensing regime in place that will see the further return of these industrious animals to the wild, with expressions of interest invited from organisations and landowners keen to support the release of beavers into catchments across the country. Returning beavers, as well as those already in the wild as a result of accidental or unlicensed release, are now recognised as a European Protected Species, acknowledging their status as a valuable but threatened part of our biodiversity.

As the first releases under the new licensing scheme are happening, **it is an opportune time to ensure that the correct measures, incentives and support mechanisms are in place** to support farmers, businesses and landowners to thrive alongside our returning wildlife.

Supporting farmers via ELMS and beyond

While the return of beavers has the scope to greatly benefit farmers and food production through flood alleviation, water management and drought protection, the activities of beavers in certain contexts can cause disruption to farm operations, and may necessitate intervention.

The Beaver Management website [1] provides a useful central point of advice to help communities to “re-learn what beavers do and how to live alongside them”, collating information on making space for beavers and outlining mitigation and management techniques.

Beyond this, farmers will benefit from site-specific advice as they seek to improve habitat or access funding. Making space along river edges to accommodate beavers and the habitats they create, via support through the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and other means, is central to ensuring that the return of beavers occurs positively and with maximum benefit.

Land manager support will also ensure that the greatest ecological and wider benefits are achieved through the return of beavers, enabling landowners to play a key role in delivering multiple public and environmental benefits.

Elements of the existing ELMS offer go a long way towards enabling this, but tailored adjustments would ensure that support for farmers is accessible, simple and effective, and caters to the dynamic ecosystems that beavers will create.

The ELMS offer is evolving over time in support of sustainable farming. This briefing discusses options presently or most recently available at the time of writing, and suggests improvements to further support farmers who have or would welcome beavers on their land.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is a crucial part of the offer, being (theoretically at least) accessible to all farmers, meaning that simple management options and related capital payments are available to farmers who find themselves with beavers on their land.

The SFI is currently paused, with a revised scheme [2] set to open later in 2026. Applications will open for smaller farms (<50ha) and farms lacking any existing ELM agreement in June, with all farms then able to apply from September.

The options that will be available have recently been published, and it is welcome that options which support farmers to coexist alongside beavers (set out below) have been retained. These should be promoted to farmers, and we recommend that additions or amendments are made to the scheme to ensure that beaver conflict is minimised and farmers are supported to manage any issues that do arise.

Land management options

Watercourse buffer BFS6 6m - 12m habitat strip next to watercourses £742/ha [3]

Uptake of this option can be expected to reduce beaver-land manager conflict significantly, given that the majority of impact upon crops or infrastructure occurs within a few meters of the watercourse.

Whilst other SFI options could also be employed to support beavers' presence, this option provides greatest scope to ensure positive habitat provision, over and above other buffer options. Uptake of this option should be promoted to farmers in areas with existing beaver populations, or where their return is expected.

Grass buffer strips CIGL3, CAHL4 and BFS1 [3]

These options offer funding for the creation of grassed buffers alongside watercourses, ranging from 4 to 24m wide.

Although less effective as habitat provision, they will still serve to reduce any negative impacts of beaver activity by setting improved grassland, arable or horticulture back from the watercourse. They should be promoted as a fallback option to BFS6.

Protection and Infrastructure Grants

BC3 Crop Protection (fencing mesh, £6.34/m) and BC4 Tree Guard (post & wire, £74.74/guard) [4]

Provide funds for protection against beaver damage for assets within 100m of a waterbody.

These items offer a range of options for farmers to protect assets that may otherwise be impacted by beavers or their activities, as stand-alone Protection and Infrastructure grants available alongside or outside SFI or other ELMS tiers. Going forward, it will be important to ensure that the Protection and Infrastructure offer for beavers is responsive, with the above items remaining part of the available offer, and with availability of funds within days/weeks, should a farmer encounter beavers on their land.

BC5 Expert dam management [4]

Provides up to 90% of the cost of beaver dam management by licensed practitioners.

Expert advice and peer support

Farm clusters and other farmer groups have time and again demonstrated the value of collective support and peer-to-peer learning, for everything from legal compliance to innovation to mental health. Advice is available through a range of advisory services, including from The Wildlife Trusts' 200 trained agricultural advisors. By encouraging complementary actions across neighbouring farms, these groups add value to SFI options and help secure landscape-scale outcomes. They also offer a valuable and cost-effective route for delivering advice and support relating to living alongside beavers.

The establishment of Beaver Management and Advisory Groups (BM/AGs) is a requirement of any application for the wild release of beavers. These groups provide expert advice and information to communities and landowners living alongside beavers - supporting coexistence, helping to minimise potential impacts, and maximising the ecological benefits the species provides - and should work with farmer groups to ensure that all members are able to benefit from their advice and support.

BM/AGs encourage farm clusters to adopt a catchment approach to making space for beavers, aligning interventions across multiple farms. Where necessary, these groups will advise on how best to navigate Natural England's 5-step approach [5] to managing beaver activities, offering advice on how land managers can undertake management, become registered under the CL52 Beaver Mitigation Licence and, where necessary, work with suitably trained and experienced persons registered under the CL51 and/or CL50 Beaver Mitigation Licences [6].

The continuation of the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund will see farmer facilitation groups maintained or established, and allow them to benefit from the valuable support of Beaver Management and Advisory Groups.



Image: Matthew Roberts

Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery

In many areas, farmers are already keen to embrace the nature recovery opportunities brought by beavers (see case study below) and it will be crucial for these farmers to access land management payments to support more involved and extensive land management options. Going forward, the Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) and Landscape Recovery components of ELMS offer significant opportunities.

CSHT enables land managers to support river restoration, both through more substantial and tailored options for riparian management than SFI, and through an option that would allow 'room for the river to move', allowing for the dynamic changes that beavers may make. Landscape Recovery offers the opportunity for large-scale, bespoke measures to support nature's recovery.

Land management options

Riparian management, CSW12 make room for the river to move, £1,489/ha [3]

This 20-year option will allow rivers to function more naturally, with the area under management taken out of direct production, reducing the risk of river or beaver activity conflicting with crop or livestock needs.

Requiring engagement from the Environment Agency and alignment with SSSI or River Basin Management Plans, it offers significant funds for nature conservation outcomes.

This option offers the greatest opportunity to land managers to ensure that the huge potential biodiversity benefits of beavers' return can be realised. It should be promoted to farmers in areas with beaver populations currently, or where their return is expected.

CSW22, Connect river and floodplain habitats, £1,242/ha [3]

This alternative 10-year option aims to restore rivers and create a mosaic of wetland habitats that connect the river and floodplain. It can be utilised across a broad range of existing land types, providing a good option for land managers with pockets of arable, grassland, woodland and other habitats keen to deliver a single programme of improvements across all of the river corridor under their management. It requires a river restoration plan to be agreed with Natural England.

The similar but simpler **10-year option CSW25 Manage riparian and water edge habitats, £1,186/ha [3]**

Offers support to those who may not require as significant an intervention as those above, allowing for a 12-24m wide swathe of riverside habitat to be created.

This option should be promoted on land where the above options are not available, and in preference to the similar 5-year option CSW21 6m to 24m 3-dimensional (3D) buffer strip, £1,182/ha, which should instead be taken up where a longer-term agreement is not feasible.

Management supplements

CSP9 Threatened species supplement [7]

This supplement's aim is to create and maintain specific habitats for threatened or priority species, so that their populations can increase. Beavers' status in GB is 'Endangered' meaning that where a habitat action cannot meet their needs, CSP9 should be available to provide additional support.

Natural England advisors should encourage CSHT applicants to include a request for CSP9 funding wherever beavers' needs cannot be met by the habitat options being applied for.

Landscape/catchment-scale action

Proposed

CSHT currently lacks a mechanism to incentivise joined up action to create river habitat corridors across the farmed landscape.

Added incentives should be established to ensure the collective uptake of beaver-supporting options; potential mechanisms to achieve this include a 5% increase on a base action payment for each adjacent landowner who adopts riverside habitat restoration; a fixed added supplement payment for multi-landowner applications; or a 'finder's fee' style payment to reward agreement holders that encourage new scheme entrants to include waterbody options like those above in their CSHT applications.

The CSHT offer should bring forward dedicated guidance and advice, alongside added incentives such as those suggested here, to support farmers and land managers to work collaboratively within river catchments by aligning habitat creation and enhancement actions for beavers.

A farmer's perspective:

Richard Allan, livestock farmer, West Wiltshire

At Groundswell regenerative farming festival, The Wildlife Trusts hosted a panel session on beavers where we heard about Richard's experience of having beavers arrive on his land. He told the audience:

"We have a small family livestock farm on the River Avon, on pretty flat ground where we have spent quite a lot of time planting top fruit trees. We were farming quite happily when beavers turned up. We didn't ask for beavers to turn up, but our job was then to learn to live with them. We experienced everything from pure excitement, to concern for the (then-unauthorised) beavers, to considerable worry about our trees."

"There is a lot of fear about beavers but two messages I would give you are firstly that it's going to be fine, don't panic, and secondly, that the beavers helped us come to the realisation that the biggest problem we face on the farm today is not beavers, but water stress. We have to rectify this by changing 200 years of farming mentality. The way my father thought, my grandfather, my great grandfather, it just doesn't work anymore. The realisation for us has been that we have to do things on the farm to keep water on the land, and this is a perfect coincidence of interest between the beaver and us."

"Beavers arriving on the land was a tipping point in the way we thought about our land and our farming. There will be problems when beavers arrive, when beavers start damming, but all of these are surmountable difficulties and pale into insignificance when compared to water stress; that's our biggest problem."



YouTube: *Are you beaver ready? How beavers can boost your farm resilience* [8]

Supporting farmers to support beavers' return

In discussing his experiences, Richard concluded that farmers are extremely resilient, provided that the right measures are in place to support them.

"There is nothing a beaver can do to a farmer that they will not manage, given the right tools, and crucially, the right money".

In response, the panel discussed learnings from Bavaria, a German region now home to around 23,000 beavers, and the measures put in place there to support farmers who live alongside them. The establishment of a beaver management fund for use in areas where conflict occurs on agricultural land - a system that is used in Bavaria for other wildlife as well - means that farmers can claim financial help for beaver impacts. This sits alongside a wide range of measures that support coexistence and deliver broader environmental benefits – for example, farmers are prohibited by law from farming within 5m of the water. Payments relating to beavers make up around 3% of the overall budget for wildlife damage in the country, indicating that beavers are not considered a major problem. The discussion provided an interesting case study of what coexistence in an intensely populated and farmed landscape with many beavers looks like.

A beaver mitigation scheme

Mitigation funds exist in Scotland and in mainland European countries with the aim of enabling farmers to coexist with beavers and to manage land profitably alongside beavers' activities. We are clear that the Government's priority should be to ensure that appropriate ELMS options support farmers to accommodate beavers on their land, vastly reducing conflict and costs.

Proposed

However, in circumstances where beavers do come into conflict with human activity, including on land where ELMS options are not available, Natural England should provide free expert advice, alongside funding through a beaver mitigation scheme to support land managers seeking to minimise beaver impacts. Such a scheme should be sufficiently agile in circumstances where beavers arrive with little warning, but should not be seen as a long-term solution wherever the uptake of ELMS options would better facilitate action that makes space for beavers.



If the Government look to further prioritise SFI funding in future, packaging options related to water could ensure that complementary actions are delivered for habitats, species, water quality and flood risk, attaining improved value for public money.

Conversely, any restriction on the availability of such options risks creating areas where farmers are unsupported to take action to facilitate beavers' return, and where society will continue to be deprived of the benefits that beavers can bring.

Whilst payment for capital items and beaver mitigation are important, the draw upon these support options will, to some extent, be mitigated by the availability of options which allow landowners to make space for beavers and their activities. As beavers may arrive unexpectedly, it will also be important that land management options are rapidly and readily accessible to the landowners who need to make use of them.

The availability of such options will underpin the future success of Defra's ambitions to return beavers to the wild in England, preventing farmers from needing to rapidly progress through the steps in the mitigation hierarchy towards translocation or lethal control; a short-term approach which can exacerbate human-beaver conflict issues, fails to encourage coexistence with the species, and fails to secure any of the benefits that beavers could deliver.



Relevant links

[1] Beaver Management website: www.beavermanagement.org

[2] <https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2026/02/24/sfi26-details-definitions-and-what-to-expect/>

[3] ELMS options & funds: www.gov.uk/find-funding-for-land-or-farms

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/>

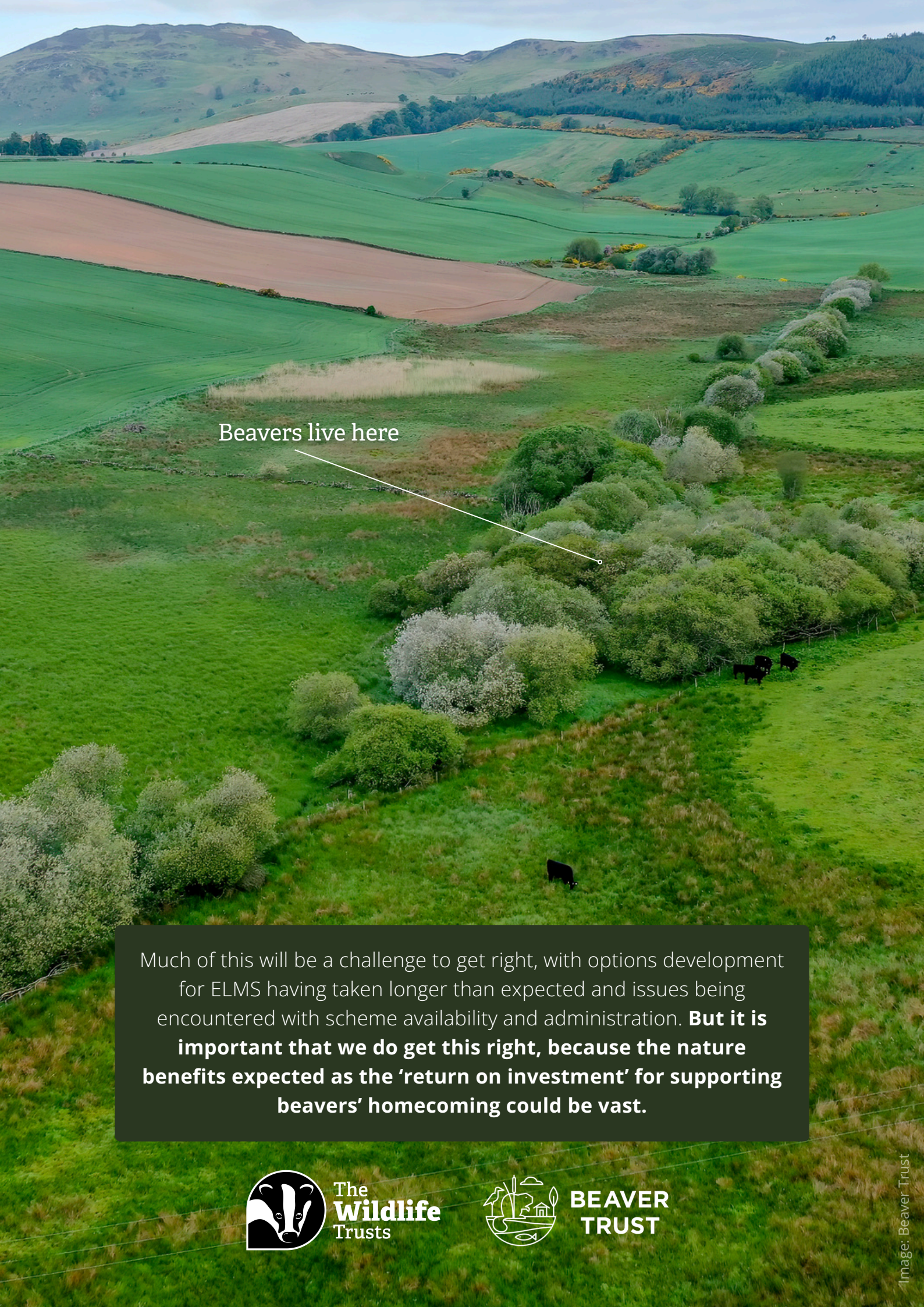
[5] 5-step approach: www.gov.uk/guidance/beavers-managing-beaver-activities-in-england

[6] Mitigation licences: www.gov.uk/government/collections/beaver-reintroduction-and-management-in-england#licences-to-manage-beavers-on-your-land

[7] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-threatened-species-proforma-csp9>

[8] YouTube session from Groundswell: www.youtube.com/live/xe59v5BGvXI?si=0RR5AZvzl6X8j174





Beavers live here

Much of this will be a challenge to get right, with options development for ELMS having taken longer than expected and issues being encountered with scheme availability and administration. **But it is important that we do get this right, because the nature benefits expected as the 'return on investment' for supporting beavers' homecoming could be vast.**



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