**Historic Landscape Project
 **

**Implications of Natural England’s Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) for historic designed landscapes**

**Background**

* CSS is the successor to the previous Environmental Stewardship Schemes (which included the Higher Level Stewardship scheme).
* It will run from 2015-2020.
* Funding will be prioritised on two main criteria: biodiversity and the Water Framework Directive.
* CSS also incorporates what was the Woodland Management Grant scheme (WMG), run by Forestry Commission England.
* In terms of historic designed landscapes, those on the English Heritage Register are marked high priority, while those of local designation are medium priority.
* Those landscapes on the English Heritage At Risk Register will also be high priority.

**Opportunities and threats for historic designed landscapes**

* Opportunities: clearly, we need to look to a historic designed landscape’s ecology and water bodies for a hook to catch CSS funding that may benefit the site as a heritage asset as well as a natural environment. If a historic designed landscape has areas that support high priority species and has ponds, lakes, streams etc then it could be eligible for CSS funding.
Obvious examples are pastures, woodlands, and lakes. It may be possible to tie in some of these parkland opportunities with Capability Brown Tercentenary projects.
* Threats: less positively, we also need to be alert to the danger of proposals being put to NE for funding that are beneficial to the ecology of a landscape but perhaps detrimental to its significance as a heritage asset (for example inappropriate management of grass areas, or inappropriate tree planting or water body creation).

**Opportunities for County Gardens Trusts**

Natural England is working with Local Nature Partnership groups (LNPs) to map priority areas for funding.

It would be immensely useful to ensure that this priority area mapping includes the unique data that CGTs hold on historic designed landscapes, especially those of local importance.

The system for pulling in expertise from groups such as CGTs is evolving but currently it would seem that Natural England (NE) intend to mainly use information from the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England dataset (SHINE), which is compiled from local authorities’ Historic Environment Records (HERs). In order to be included, such landscapes need to be mapped as polygons on the HER ie shapes which define the likely boundary of the historic designed landscape. This emphasises the importance of CGTs continuing to build relationships with their local HERs and ensuring that their research is housed there.

**Conclusion**

Unlike the HLS strand of the previous stewardship schemes, CSS does not give prioritisation to historic designed landscapes simply because they are the historic environment. In this sense, NE funding for the restoration and conservation of historic designed landscapes will be harder to tap.

Yet CSS does hold opportunities for funding for historic designed landscapes if we can approach them from a perspective of ecology and water management. Unfortunately, it also brings the risk that well-meant schemes looking at helping the natural environment may have a detrimental impact on the heritage environment. This was also the case with HLS and why it was important that CGTs began to work more closely with NE officers and owners.

The emphasis of CSS is a useful nudge to build better and valuable relations with our counterparts in the ‘wildlife’ sector.

In the short term, it is likely to be difficult to access CSS funding, or protect against threats that it may pose, until the datasets for priority funding have been updated. CGTs need to work to make sure information on local designed landscapes is on their HERs, and that their HER officers understand the need to channel these into SHINE if CSS funding is to be forthcoming for these sites.

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