

How effective is Environmental Stewardship in conserving and enhancing historic parklands, and how should funding be prioritised?

Theme Objective: Environmental Stewardship and Historic Parklands

What's the problem?

Historic parklands are complex 'designed' landscapes that have often developed over many centuries and been shaped by the political, cultural and physical environments of the time. Alongside their inherent historic significance, they make a distinctive and important contribution to landscape character, support rich ecological habitats and networks, provide opportunities for access and recreation and act as productive landscapes. Like many other features of the historic environment, parklands are vulnerable to numerous external factors, including changes in farming and silvicultural practices, alterations to land ownership and funding streams, development and visitor pressures, and climate change. Natural England (NE) is committed to the protection of the historic environment, including historic parklands, and it is a primary objective of the Environmental Stewardship (ES) grant schemes it administers on behalf of Defra. Despite this, the full nature of the contribution made by ES to the conservation of historic parklands is unclear, and there is currently no method for prioritising parklands to receive this funding.

What are the aims of the project?

The main purposes of this study were:

- To identify the key features of parklands that give them value and relevance in their own right (for example, woodlands, wood pastures, waterbodies, historic environment, access). Many of these features will contribute to the overall value of individual parklands in any prioritisation exercise.
- To identify the value of the key features of parkland in the context of delivering ecosystem services
- To evaluate the contribution and effectiveness of Environmental Stewardship agreements for the conservation and enhancement of historic parklands, particularly as ES is one of the primary mechanisms for funding the conservation and restoration of historic parklands
- Using the information gathered for the evaluation exercise, to develop a method of prioritisation for future funding of historic parklands under ES, using clear, multi-objective assessment criteria that will guide future engagement and allow the targeting of support within local, regional and national contexts.



Figure 1: An historic Landscape Park © Cookson & Tickner

Which policy areas will the research inform?

Primarily, this project will inform future agri-environment scheme development, specifically:

- Management of the historic environment
- Use of AE agreements to deliver multiple objectives
- Appropriate targeting for funding through agri-environment



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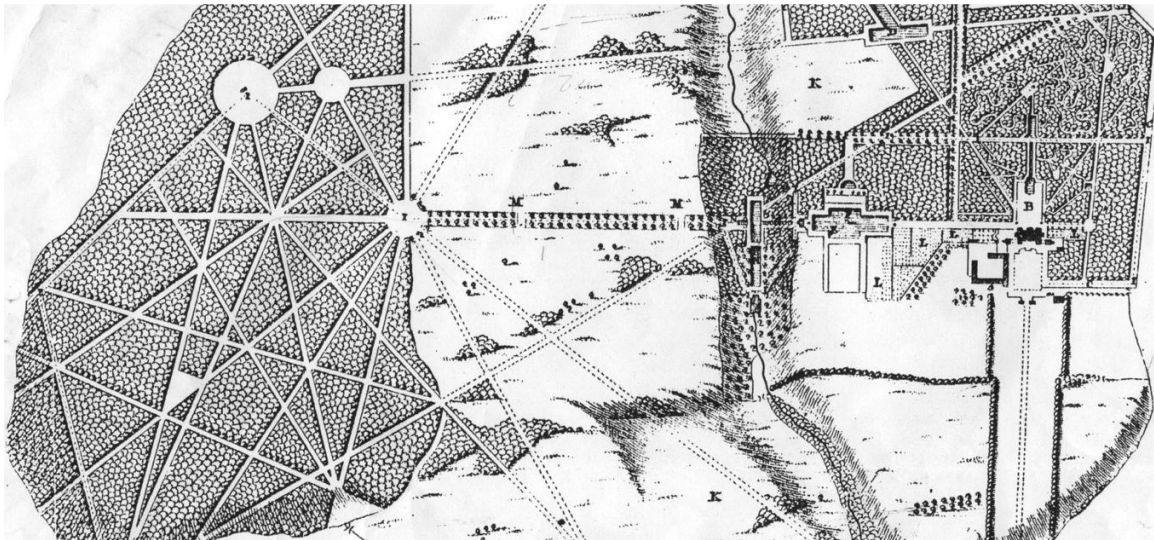


Figure 2: A formal parkland layout © Bramham Park

What are the results from the project and how will they be used?

The report first looks at the 'ingredients' that make up historic parklands, and considers their contribution to the distinctiveness of parklands in terms of their historic, ecological, landscape value, alongside their role in delivering ecosystems services. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are then used to evaluate the effectiveness of ES in conserving and enhancing these elements, using a sample of 25 designated and undesignated historic parklands distributed throughout England, and which are currently signed up to an ES scheme.

The results suggest that where ES is implemented it is largely successful in conserving/restoring historic parkland features. This is supported by the qualitative analysis and agreement-holder perceptions. Overall both analyses suggest that ES is making a significant, albeit partial, contribution to the conservation/ restoration of the parkland as a whole - and without it successful parkland conservation would in most instances not be possible.

In tandem with this, the report also sets out a desk-based methodology that can be used to prioritise historic parklands for funding through ES. It is designed for use by Natural England officers without a specialism in historic landscapes and is complemented by the earlier chapters which summarise the types of parkland and the key features that define them. This makes the report a detailed and informative 'one stop shop' handbook for the conservation of historic parklands in relation to ES.

A series of Key Messages have been extrapolated from the study, and these have been used to inform a set of suggested further actions relating to the use of ES in the

conservation and restoration of historic parklands. These suggestions can be used to help shape the nature of agri environment schemes going forward:

- Parklands should have a high priority for ES funding, as they are heavily dependent on ES for continued delivery of quality outcomes
- For ES agreements to be effective, a comprehensive Parkland Plan should be produced to address the timing as well as the nature of interventions
- The FEP, Parkland Plan and application stages would benefit from being simplified into one operation. This would avoid multiple and sometimes overlapping processes
- Parkland for restoration should be treated as a whole, not as a number of individual features
- Standardised mapping and documentation protocols would improve agreement holder and adviser understanding
- There is a need for a consistent programme of monitoring of agreements, to assess the speed and direction of change
- There is a need for best practice advice on dealing with effects of climate change – such as disease, and combining historic environment and nature conservation objectives (such as dealing with fallen timber)
- A complete series of regional prioritisation assessments needs to be developed

Where can I find further information about this and related research?

The full report can be found on the [Defra website](#). For information on ES and the Historic Environment please contact:
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