The Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme

Annual payments of between £5 and £500 per hectare, depending on the management tier entered into. Additional payments for allowing new public access on enclosed land or for capital works forming part of a conservation plan.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) are particular parts of the countryside where the landscape, wildlife and historic interest are of national importance. There are 22 ESAs in England covering over 1.1 million hectares. They are shown on the map opposite.

Each ESA has a range of tiers which prescribe different management practices. Payments vary depending on the management required under each tier. Land entered into an ESA may be eligible for an additional payment if new public access is allowed.

Once an agreement is made with the Department, a farmer may apply for a conservation plan on any part of his/her land within the ESA boundary. These plans are aimed at improving particularly valuable features and might include, for example, planting new hedges or restoring ponds or traditional farm buildings. This work, which has to be completed within an agreed period, attracts a specified level of grant aid.

The ESA scheme encourages farmers to help protect these areas. The Scheme involves farmers voluntarily entering into 10 year management agreements with Defra, under which they receive an annual payment on each hectare of land under agreement. Agreement holders have to follow specific management practices designed to conserve and enhance the landscape, historic and wildlife value of the land under agreement.

The ESA scheme is administered by Defra’s Rural Development Service.

Further information on the scheme is available from www.defra.gov.uk.