



Species Recovery Plan – Water Lane Farm

Spring 2025



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Document control

Disclaimer

The landowner reserves the right to manage their land as they see fit. This Plan sets out capital works undertaken and requirements for their monitoring and maintenance. There is no obligation on the farmer to undertake the additional works or access the funding outlined in this Species Recovery Plan. The Plan seeks to signpost the landowner to potential opportunities to recover the target farmland species, fund management of their natural assets, diversify their farm business and support the farms transition towards a more sustainable and regenerative future.

This report has been prepared for SRPCGS reporting purposes and sharing or wider circulation should only be done with the express permissions of MEAS project team and the landowner.

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Acknowledgements and thanks

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Project Intro

The Liverpool City Region Farmland Species Recovery Project began in August 2023 and completed in March 2025. Beyond this period up to 2030, Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) with support of the landowner will carry out monitoring and essential maintenance of the capital habitat works undertaken.

Background

The Project is designed as a farmland demonstrator targeting recovery of 10 farmland species including a range of birds, brown hare, water vole and purple rampion fumitory (a plant of arable margins) which are species of principle importance and in a [state of local and nation decline](#). This Project was funded by Natural England's [Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme](#) and Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service. Mersey Rivers Trust and National Farmers Union also provided support on baseline surveys, capital works design, farmer liaison and agri-schemes.

				
Water Vole	Brown Hare	Purple Rampion Fumitory	Skylark	Yellowhammer
Dr John Pinnegar (CC-BY-NC)	Iain Robson	Joshua Styles (CC-BY-NC)	Graeme Baxter (CC-BY-NC)	Nigel Voaden (CC-BY)
				
Corn Bunting	Tree Sparrow	Reed Bunting	Lapwing	Grey Partridge
Graham Clarkson (CC-BY-NC)	Max Carter (CC-BY-NC)	Paul Lewis (CC-BY-NC)	desmodus60 (CC-BY-NC)	Matthew Kwan (CC-BY-NC)

An underlying theme of the project is **work with nature through regenerative and sustainable farming**. Species recovery can go hand in hand with essential food

production and offers an important income stream to help supplement and diversify farm business.

The team has worked tirelessly with local farmers to release opportunities for habitat creation and enhancement whilst also providing wider benefits to farmers such flood storage, soil management and stock-proof hedging whilst increasing biodiversity.

This Species Recovery Plan aims to help signpost farmers to future funding opportunities through a regenerative farming approach working with nature.

Farm Bio

Water Lane Farm is a large scale 486 hectare lowland arable farm and agri business in Knowsley. The farm is predominantly in cereal crop production with winter bird mixes sown in rotation. Soil type is seasonally wet deep red loam and clay.

The surrounding landscape is typically arable farmland with the Knowsley Expressway bisecting the farm joining the urban areas of Tarbock and Widnes to the south. Cronton claypit and the former colliery site lie to the north of Water Lane. This area sits within a green belt of farmland which stretches from the banks of the Mersey Estuary up to the M62 motorway.

Parts of the farm and surrounding land lie within the [Netherley Brook and Ditton Brook Corridor](#) Nature Improvement Area.



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Location Plan

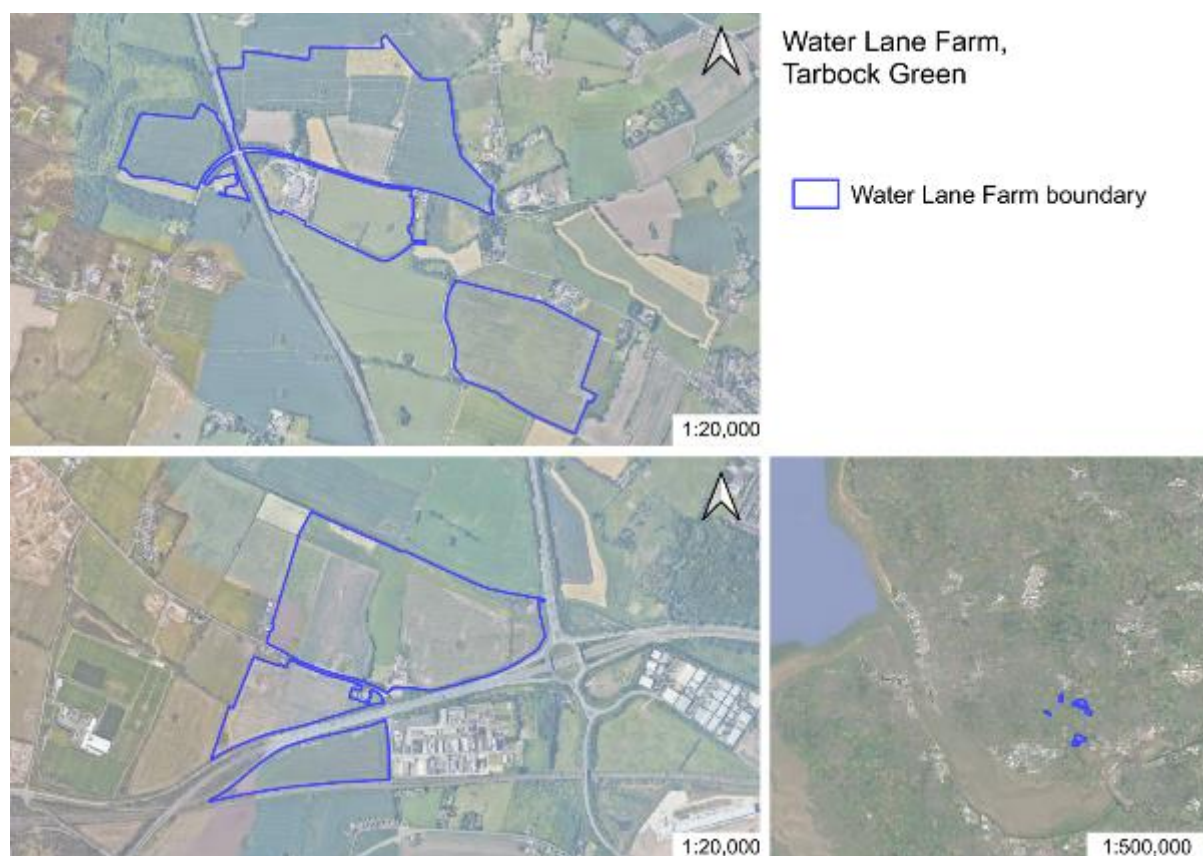


Figure 1: Water Lane Farm location

Baseline Conditions

Target and Notable Species

During surveys of target species several other notable species were recorded including plants of county importance including rye brome, spotted medick, a pondweed hybrid and of local importance, grass vetchling, cornflower, corn marigold and black bryony.

Table 1: Target species presence and likely absence at Water Lane Farm

Target species	Present?	Notes
brown hare	C	Present
grey partridge	C	Present in low numbers
tree sparrow	P	Not recorded on surveys but habitat suitable
Reed bunting	C	Present in low numbers
Lapwing	C	Present in low numbers
Skylark	C	Present and confirmed breeding
corn bunting	P	Not recorded on surveys but habitat suitable
yellowhammer	C	Present



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water vole	P	Not recorded on surveys but habitat suitable and recorded in surrounding landscape
Purple ramping fumitory	P	Not recorded on surveys but habitat suitable and recorded in surrounding landscape
C: confirmed; P: possible; U: unlikely		

Habitats

The project team undertook UKHab survey of habitats within the farm and a botanical walkover was carried out. See Figure 2 and 3 below. The project did survey a wider area of Water Lane Farm, but this Plan focuses on those areas where capital works were undertaken. This included:

1. The area around Water Lane Farm, Tarbock
2. Land adjacent Ditton Brook

The surveys identified most of the farm around Water Lane is arable cropland which at the time of survey was either in temporary grass or cereal production. Smaller areas of mixed scrub and other neutral grassland not in production are also present. Notable oak trees, native species rich and other native hedgerow as well as ditches mark field boundaries and occasional field ponds are found.

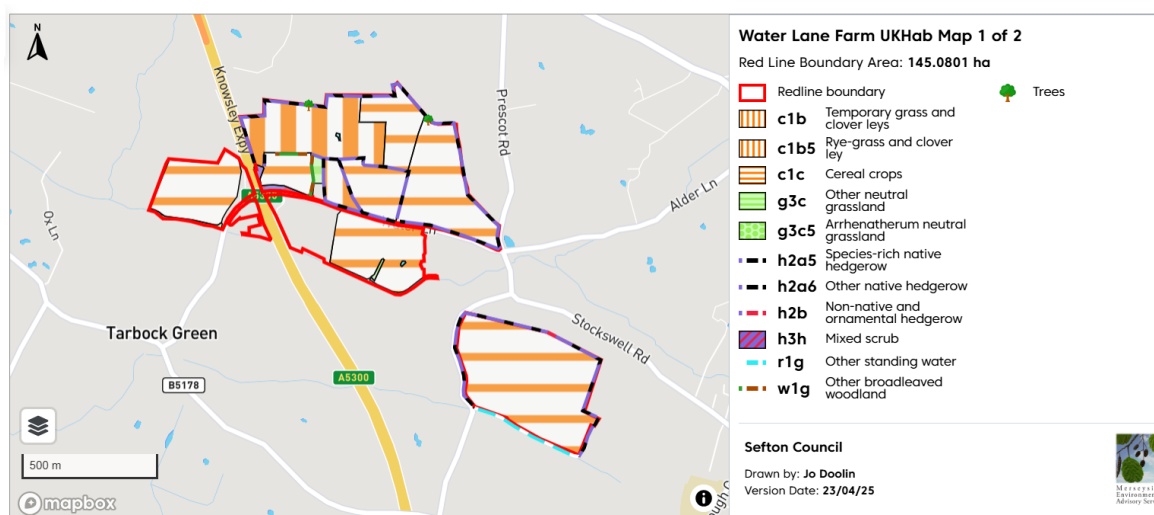


Figure 2: UKHab Survey of the Area of Water Lane Farm

Land adjacent to Ditton Brook is also dominated by cereal crops. Other neutral grassland and modified grassland not in production is present bounded by native hedgerow. A wetland area adjacent to the brook is established comprising reedbed and habitat characteristic of lowland fen. A field pond is also present.

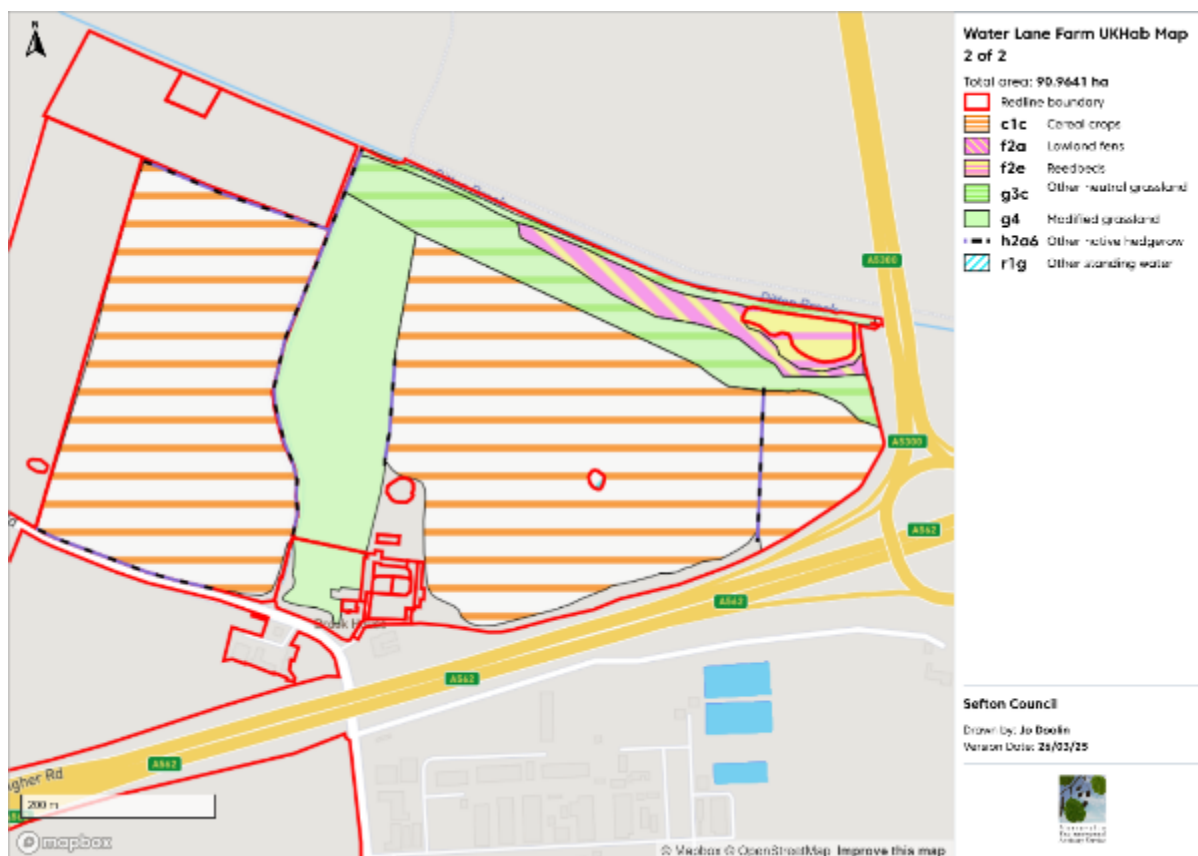


Figure 3: Land adjacent to Ditton Brook

Biodiversity Net Gain units

Based on the UKHab survey the farm comprises the following area and linear habitats and corresponding habitat/hedgerow units which has been calculated using the Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Metric. Habitats of highest value (distinctiveness) include species lowland fen, floodplain mosaic grassland, species rich hedgerow, field ponds and ecologically valuable and notable trees.

Table 2: Baseline BNG habitat units on-site

On-site baseline	
Habitat units	228.85
Hedgerow units	42.89
Watercourse units	0.00

Table 3: Habitat type, size and unit value within the BNG metric

Habitat type	Area (ha) Length (km)	Habitat units
Mixed scrub	0.41	1.64



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Other standing water (non-priority habitat pond)	0.07	0.42
Cropland	81.92	171.65
Other neutral grassland	3.85	4.84
Modified grassland	3.82	8.80
Floodplain wetland mosaic and CFGM	2.73	25.68
Lowland fen	0.81	14.94
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	0.11	1.46
Individual trees	0.07	0.88
Native hedgerow with trees – associated with bank or ditch	0.41	2.85
Native hedgerow – associated with bank or ditch	0.16	1.48
Native hedgerow	3.78	20.24
Native hedgerow with trees	1.15	15.66
Ecologically valuable line of trees	0.12	1.09
Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.10	0.12

Capital habitat works

Overall, capital works has achieved a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) uplift of 0.21 habitat area units and 7.83 hedgerow units¹. This equates to a BNG increase of 0.09% in habitat units and 18.25% in hedgerow on the farm. Works comprised restoration of a pond (see inset) and creation of native species-rich hedgerow with trees.



Additionally, as on all participating farms, tree sparrow boxes have been installed on suitably mature trees.



¹ Biodiversity unit trading prices are currently in the range of £28,000 to £100,000 depending on the habitat type and seller

Brookhouse hedgerow with trees

Tree sparrow boxes

Capital works map

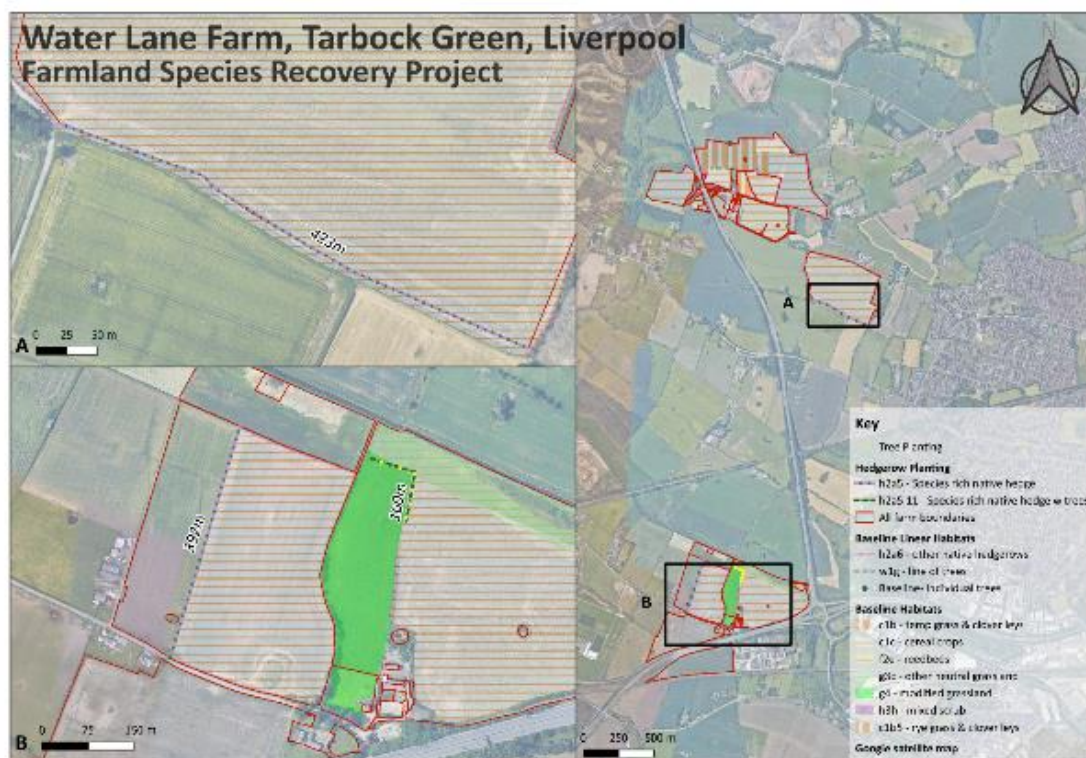


Figure 4: Habitat creation at Kiln Farm

Net change to BNG units

Table 4: Additional units provided from habitat creation work

	On-site baseline	Additional units	Net Increase
Habitat units	228.85	0.21	0.09%
Hedgerow units	42.89	7.83	18.25%

Habitat type	Area (ha)	Length (km)	On-site unit change
Specie- rich native hedgerow	0.81		6.28
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	0.16		1.55
Pond reprofile	0.025		0.21
Sparrow boxes	n/a		n/a

Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan

The project team and landowner have a 5-year obligation period to monitor and maintain capital works to support the recovery of target species.



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During this period to maximise the benefit of these on farm assets for agriculture and nature, the following 5-year management plan is proposed (see Table 6 and 7). This would be delivered by MEAS and the landowner.

Table 6: Proposed maintenance of habitat interventions			
Habitat	Management activity	Frequency	Links to SFI options
Hedgerow	Remove guards	Year 2-3	
Hedgerow	Formative pruning	Winter of year 1 (2026)	CHRW2: Manage hedgerows - GOV.UK
Hedgerow	Regular cutting	Every 2 -3 years, starting in year 3 (2027)	CHRW2: Manage hedgerows - GOV.UK

Table 7: Proposed monitoring of habitat interventions			
Habitat	Management activity	Frequency	Links to SFI options
All habitats	Breeding and winter bird “snapshots”	Annual	
Hedgerow	Inspection for failures and condition	Annual	CHRW1: Assess and record hedgerow condition - GOV.UK
Pond creation	Annual inspection for condition assessment	Annually	
Pond creation	Inspection for invasive species	Annually (Summer)	
Sparrow boxes	Bird box checks	Annually (March to June)	
All habitats	Brown hare survey	Annual (February/March)	

Future opportunities

There is no obligation on the farm to undertake the works or access the funding outlined below. This section seeks to signpost the landowner to potential opportunities to recover the target farmland species, manage their assets and support the farm become more sustainable and regenerative in the future.



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Habitat opportunities

The farm and surrounding landscape is low-lying and seasonally wet loam and clay soils. Further habitat opportunities could include enhancement of existing ponds, creation of scrapes or new ponds in wet areas. Extension of the fen and reedbed adjacent Ditton Brook and enhancement of Dog Clog Brook to support target species and provide flood resilience would also increase farm biodiversity.

There is potential to enhance the hedgerows on site with supplementary planting of hedgerow species such as honeysuckle, guelder rose, hazel and crab apple within the hedge, along with planting more standard trees at a distance of 20 meters between each tree.

Should newly planted hedgerows on site, or other existing hedgerow become gappy or 'leggy', they can be laid to re-establish their function. Hedge laying requires around 2-5m of growth, and hedges should not be cut the year before laying to ensure there is enough material.

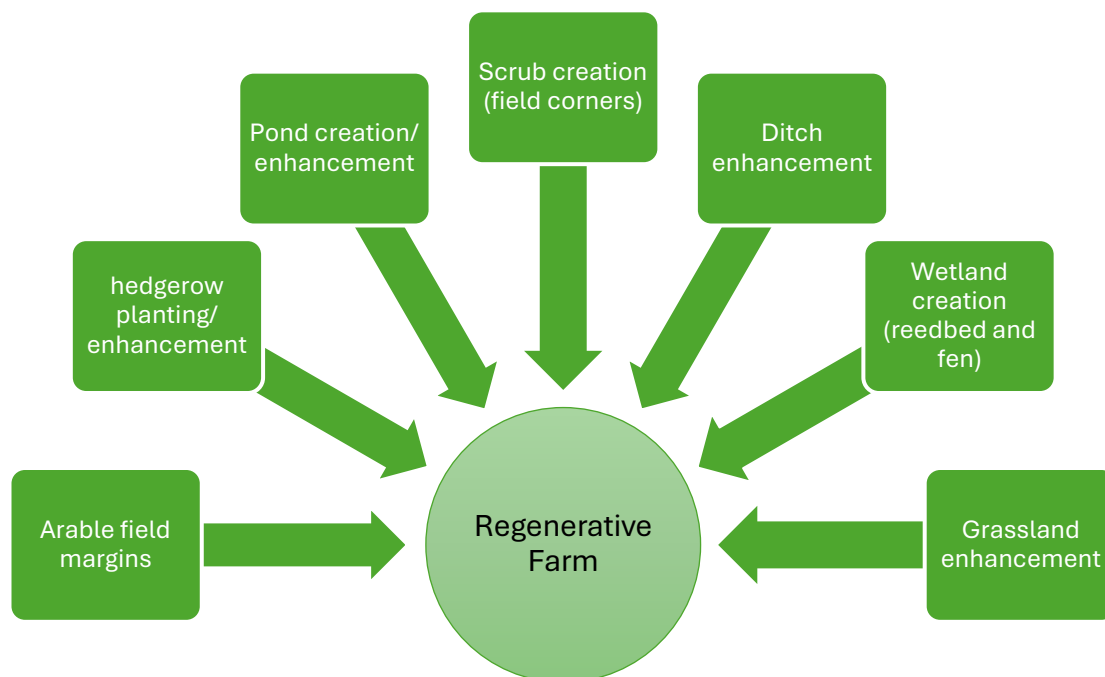


Figure 4: Future opportunities for species recovery

The rare arable plant rye brome (*Bromus secalinus*) was found across much of the site along with patches of cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) in some fields. Rye brome is Near Threatened in England, and cornflower present in its natural habitat is also increasingly rare and indicates good management of cropland. Managing field margins and cropland for arable plants could be carried out on site and may be eligible for payments under SFI code AHW11. This may consist of cultivating margins or field corners, and avoiding the use of pesticides and fertilisers on areas ploughed for arable plants and avoiding pesticides on crop fields. Scrub creation within underused field corners could also provide cover for brown hare and farmland bird species such as grey partridge. Other actions including leaving stubble in fields

overwinter, creation of field margins, and cutting and leaving areas of crop for winter bird food could also help local farmland bird populations.

Funding options

To support medium to long term maintenance of habitat interventions and realise those opportunities shown in Figure 4 the landowner is encouraged to consider the following funding options. The project team at MEAS would be happy to support the landowner should they wish to take up any of the opportunities for regenerative farming.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Register as a Biodiversity Gain Site to receive payments towards habitat creation, enhancement and 30-year management
Link: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-a-biodiversity-gain-site>

Apply for Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) to create, enhance and manage habitats

Link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-farming-incentive-scheme-expanded-offer-for-2024/sfi-scheme-information-expanded-offer-for-2024>

Sustainable Farming Incentive

Capital Grants

Grants for 3-year agreements offering capital works for specific environmental benefits such as natural flood management

Link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/capital-grants-2024/applicants-guide-capital-grants-2024--2>

Scheme pays farmers to manage land in a way that enhances the environment and mitigates climate changes effects

Link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/countryside-stewardship-higher-tier-get-ready-to-apply/countryside-stewardship-higher-tier-preview-guidance>

Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier

Wood Grants and Incentives

Various grants and incentives available for woodland creation and management

Link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-grants-and-incentives-overview-table/woodland-grants-and-incentives-overview-table>

Through the planning system developers have to compensate for impact to farmland habitats and species which are a key priority of the Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The farm could receive payments from the developer via the Local Authority or other restoration fund to provide strategic ecological compensate packages

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Further information

Project website: [Investing in Nature LCR – Investing in nature recovery in the Liverpool City Region](#)



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Contact Us

Liverpool City Region Farmland Species Recovery Project team

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A couple of visitors to the camera trap at Water Lane Farm



A fox creeps by at night.



A hare bounds over the tall grass.



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