



**Farm
Advisory
Service**

Specialist Advice Report

Biodiversity, Habitat and Landscape Management

Farm Name: Eat, Sleep, Ride CIC

Farm BRN: 269112

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1. Introduction

Eat, Sleep, Ride CIC are an accessible, community-led social enterprise based in Southeast Scotland. They support people on their journey to wellness and empowerment through therapeutic, educational and community initiatives. Biodiversity, conserving and improving the natural habitat around them is an important part of the business, and every operation is done with this in mind.

2. Business Details

The company moved to this current location in 2022, it is 24 acres in total, comprising of mainly unimproved grassland paddocks, a small quarry, a horse arena and infrastructure for horses and people. Previously a scrap yard, all roads and infrastructure have been built to provide facilities and give access and parking. Currently they home 21 horses.

3. Current Biodiversity, Habitat and Landscape

3.1 Landscape

The site sits 250 meters (m) inland, the land is sloping, and the highest point is just over 100m above sea level. The grassland is unimproved with a high number of docks and other broadleaf weeds present. The largest paddock has an area of rushy wet grassland which sits wet for the majority of the year. Trees have been planted across the site, bordering the access road and around the arena, unfortunately the hedgerows which were planted in the paddock have been destroyed by the horses.



Picture 1 – Large grazing paddock



Picture 2 – Wet lying area

A small quarry sits behind the buildings, it is overgrown, and the gorse and steep slopes make it difficult to access. There is a smaller paddock and beginning of a sensory garden to the west of the site, along the access road. A pond has been created here to encourage wildlife. There are plans to expand upon the sensory garden and create an allotment for visitors and the local community.



Picture 3 - Quarry



Picture 4 – Sensory garden



Picture 5 - Pond

3.2 Climate

Being close to the coast the climate of the area is cooler compared to the rest of the Scottish Borders. Daily temperatures average 6.1 °C in winter and 17.2°C in summer, with annual rainfall totalling 711 millimetres in a typical year. Lamberton has high sunshine totals, with 1462 hours of sunshine recorded in a normal year.

3.3 Wildlife

The site currently has a variety of wildlife taking up residence. Many birds can be seen throughout the year including, swallows, house martins, great tits, blue tits, skylarks, and oyster catchers. Small mammals live in the quarry and surrounding woodlands. Roe deer pass through occasionally. A small butterfly garden was planted behind the offices, this has attracted a few different species of butterflies and insects.

4. Maps



Map 1 – Site layout



Map 2 – Grazing paddocks

5. Potential Biodiversity, Habitat and Landscape Creation

5.1 Grassland

The farm is principally organic, though not formally registered, but no pesticides are used on the grass. Controlling the weed burden across the grass sward will be down to cultural methods which can be more labour intensive. Ragwort levels have been drastically reduced by removing plants by hand, this needs to be maintained to keep on top of levels. A high number of docks are visible throughout the grass sward and controlling these will allow better grass growth. Cultural control methods are limited, very labour intensive and time consuming. The best time for carrying out this work is the early spring and through into the summer when the weeds are actively growing. Due to the size of the fields, it could be considered to use one of a number of non-glyphosate-based weed killers that are available to domestic users for gardens. Alternatives are digging but it needs to be ensured that the deep tap root is also removed, otherwise regrowth is unfortunately guaranteed. Once weeds are controlled steps can be taken to enrich the species diversity and introduce wildflowers into the grassland.

Carrying out soil analysis will help determine the nutrient levels of the soil. Certain species survive better in certain conditions so ensuring the soils are in the correct condition for the species you want to grow is vital.

There is currently funding through the Preparing for Sustainable Farming scheme (PSF). This funds up to £30/ha of Region 1 land and 20% of the farm can be claimed per year. Due to the size of the holding there is a slight deviation in that a payment of £300 per year can be claimed per year which would allow for a number of samples to be taken across the holding. A Carbon Audit needs to be carried out as part of this scheme in order to get the funding. This is something the business is already underway with.

Depending on the analysis that is carried out, it should be possible afterwards to have a clear understanding of the soil type, as well as the biological, physical and chemical properties and then be able to plan on how these properties can be influenced and changed to meet the requirements of the grassland sward that is required.

Selecting sites near to existing species-rich grasslands to begin with, will allow plants and insects to colonise naturally. To add more seeds there are two main methods to consider. Harvesting and spreading 'green hay' (a hay crop taken green once seed has ripened but not dispersed) from a nearby

wildflower-rich area or by purchasing wildflower mixes and broadcasting these into an open sward allowing for seed to soil contact. When purchasing seeds, you must ensure these are native species of UK provenance and ideally of local origin. The horses can be used to graze the grass bare to allow space for seeds to germinate. This should be followed by a light raking/harrowing to create a small amount of tilth into which the seeds can fall when spread. These will then need compacting with a roller to ensure good seed-to-soil contact and give best opportunity for the seeds to germinate. Although the horses could be left in the field to help with consolidation, it is probably best that the horses are removed whilst this process is carried out to ensure that the new seedlings are not damaged once germinated.

Seeds can be introduced in phases as some plant species are much easier to establish than others. Yellow rattle is a parasitic plant which feeds off the roots of grasses, this could be used initially to reduce the vigour of grasses for a later introduction of wildflower seed. Once established the wildflower meadows will be effectively managed by the horses as they are selective grazers and will often select the grass species, allowing the flowers to flower and set seed. The species rich grass will not only provide food for insects, but it also has equine health benefits, providing them a much more fibrous diet, and the different rooting depths of species will draw up a wider range of minerals and nutrients from the soil.

Currently all feed for the horses is purchased and therefore the grassland only needs to be able to support grazing by the horses and no requirement for hay production. With this in mind it might be an option to try and divide the field up to create different habitats based on what is naturally there. Utilising the wetland area to create scrapes, ponds and rushy patches could make better use of the area for wildlife, however, by doing this it is likely that the area would be unusable by the horses and put more pressure on other areas of grassland and require further feed to be purchased at a cost.

5.2 Hedgerows and Trees

Key management of the grassland area would require it to be sectioned off so that it can be rotational grazed and managed differently according to its intended use. Many trees have been recently established across the site with varying success. To establish trees within the grazing paddock fencing is required. There is [Forestry Grant Schemes](#) run by the Scottish Government which could help to establish agroforestry in the large grazing paddock. This would help cover the cost of fencing and purchasing of trees.

Fencing is likely to cost between £7-£18/m depending on the type of fencing installed. This is a big expense and considering that all hedges would need to be double fenced in order to protect the growing plants it is a huge cost that would need factoring into planning of the splits. This may also determine the timescale in which this work is carried out. If the walkways are not to be used by free-grazing horses, it may be possible to only fence the field side of the hedge to protect the plants with the track being unfenced as horses will be guided?

By splitting up the grazing areas it would allow for better grass growth and help with the management of horses. Agroforestry is the process of farming vertically as well as horizontally. Add the extra dimension of trees gives opportunities for fruit and nut trees that provide produce as well as shade for the horses. Hedges could be planted around the horse arena and car park, providing food and shelter for wildlife.

5.3 Ponds and Wetland Creation

To the southwest of the site there is an area which sits quite wet for most of the year. Potentially a wetland area could be created here to help drain the land and increase biodiversity. This would sacrifice grazing land for the horses, so the size and design of this would need to be carefully considered. It could potentially provide a valuable habitat for a range of mammals, amphibians, birds and insects.

5.4 Habitat Creation

Simple things can be done to create habitat for wildlife on site. Leaving areas around the buildings overgrown with grass, creating piles with logs and branches make perfect homes for insects and small mammals. Bird boxes can be made or purchased and put up in appropriate places around the site.

6. Summary/Recommendations

Currently there is a good amount of biodiversity and habitat already present at Eat, Sleep Ride. Small steps can be taken to improve the current landscape initially. The grassland is a huge area under utilised in terms of biodiversity and productivity. By controlling the weeds and introducing wildflowers, herbs and legumes this should improve species diversity as well as improving resistance to drought and climate change.

If possible, planting trees throughout the paddocks would be a great addition for biodiversity. Creating undisturbed areas of long grasses, logs and branches are great for wildlife. The small wetland areas at the back of the site will make use of a damp, unproductive area. Some of these recommendations will require capital but there is funding out there through Scottish Government Forestry Grant Schemes and [Nature Restoration](#). These should be full researched and applied for to help ease the financial burden.

With any small holding, there is always a compromise between productivity and biodiversity. The business needs to decide where the priority is in order to ensure that aims can be achieved. If biodiversity is key then reduced stock on the fields would be required which means less horses, and/or more purchased feed. However, not having the horses means that there's is a conflict when it comes to the main business of horse riding.

A clear objective needs to be set so that opportunities for improved biodiversity can be planned and implemented accordingly.



Farm Advisory Service

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