



SPM has recently made two Freedom of Information requests to Natural England: one concerns the HEATH Project and the other mostly Carnyorth Common.

Photo of unlawful HEATH Project cattle grid on Watch Croft

## HEATH PROJECT

I have been attempting to discover whether an audit was ever carried out for the trans-national north-west European HEATH Project that ended on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 and was administered by Interreg in Lille, northern France.

I contacted the European Court of Auditors on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016 who confirmed they did not hold these documents. A week later I contacted the Interreg officer at the Communities and Local Government office in Cambridge – they are still looking. A few days later I emailed the Interreg programme director but he has never had the courtesy to acknowledge or reply. On 27<sup>th</sup> July I made the request to the European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development who responded that they did not hold these documents.

Finally, on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016, having contacted Natural England as lead partner of HEATH, they responded that they had been in touch with the Area Team: “From their recollection it was a condition of the INTERREG scheme that all claims, including the final claim, was audited and signed off by financial auditors. Natural England produced a final report on the project delivery which was reviewed and signed off by INTERREG.” A Freedom of Information request was then made for this document that is promised by 14<sup>th</sup> October.

## CARNYORTH COMMON

A number of claims concerning Carnyorth Common were made to a meeting of St Just Town Council by two Natural England officials in February 2010. I have now followed these up to confirm – or otherwise – whether their statements were correct.

On 16th September 2016 I emailed Natural England's Truro Office:

Reference your email dated 17th July 2015 which concerns monitoring the success of the 10 year HLS agreement on Carnyorth Common, in which you note the 2013 survey undertaken by Hewins Ecology and also state: "We have no immediate plans to undertake a further detailed survey of the site before the end of the agreement".

### QUESTION

1. Will a 'completion' detailed independent survey or audit be carried out once the agreement has finished (summer 2017?) to assess whether the 'indicators of success' have been met, and will this be made available to the public?

I am also interested in the following:

The Minutes of St Just Town Council dated 22nd February 2010 record that it was attended by both Matt Carter, Area Manager, Natural England, and Peter Bowden of Natural England.

It was stated in the Minutes that, in answer to a question from Cllr James as to "what measures were in place to monitor what was being paid for through the agreement was actually being delivered", Mr Carter replied "that audits were carried out by the Rural

Payments Agency [RPA] who carried out visits on a bi-annual basis. NE also carried out adhoc visits to ensure compliance.”

After an FOI request from SPM to the RPA made on the 21st May 2016: “I request EU/Internal audits (reports only) for the undermentioned agreements<sup>1</sup> focused on assuring the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery of the scheme AND physical inspection data on the implementation of HLS [Higher Level Stewardship].” A reply from the RPA was received on 5th July 2016 stating: “RPA has completed its search for the information requested and can confirm that we do not hold the information requested.”

Another request made on 8th August 2016 to the European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development also confirmed they could not find any documents as requested.

## QUESTION

2. Would you please confirm whether any RPA audits and/or NE ad hoc visits have been carried out for the undermentioned agreements since their inception as implied by Mr Carter and give dates.

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<sup>1</sup> For areas covered by our areas of special concern: Trevean Farm (Watch Croft); Bosigran Farm (Carn Galva); Lanyon Farm (Men-an-Tol and Lanyon Quoit Crofts); Carne Farm (Chun Downs); Higher Keigwin Farm (Higher Downs); Sunset Farm (Carnyorth Common).

The same Council minute also records that Councillor Stevens asked whether “any post agreement surveys had been undertaken to determine whether its objectives were being achieved”. Mr Bowden “confirmed that the RSPB would be carrying out surveys to see if there had been increase in the bird species following the introduction of cattle grazing”.

#### QUESTION

3. Would you also confirm whether the RSPB has, or will be, carrying out surveys for Natural England concerning the undermentioned agreements.

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This letter was then passed on by NE (Truro) to Access to Information Legal Services on the same day. An acknowledgement was received by SPM: “Access to information request – Acknowledgement – Request No RFI 3599.

9<sup>th</sup> November 2016