1. SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS

1.1 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is to commission a study of the effectiveness of Agri-environment schemes in the protection and restoration of Traditional Farm Buildings. This will form one of a suite of projects to be let under the integrated Agri-environment monitoring and evaluation programme (2000–2006), that will enable the Ministry to report on the contribution of Agri-environment schemes in England to a wide range of policies, including the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and internal reviews and development of individual schemes.

1.2 Under the study, a sample of management agreements that include restoration works undertaken on traditional farm buildings since 1996 will be drawn from both the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) and the Countryside Stewardship (CS) Schemes. The key requirement will be to use this sample to assess the effectiveness of, and value for money provided by, the schemes in the restoration of traditional farm buildings with particular emphasis on distinguishing the role of the scheme provisions, their implementation and application; and to identify areas for improving agreements.

1.3 The study will be carried out between November 2001 and September 2002, and will include an initial period during which the project planning, detailed design and the sampling strategies and method protocols will be finalised. Subject to foot and mouth disease restrictions being lifted, it is anticipated that field visits will be undertaken in late 2001/early 2002. It is envisaged that the sample will be drawn from across England, including a range of contrasting Countryside Character Areas, which will allow the approaches taken within both the ESA and CS schemes to be compared and contrasted.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

2.1 The key objective of the project is to obtain information, which will contribute to:

- an assessment of the effectiveness of the ESA and CS schemes in restoring traditional farm buildings;
• effective implementation and development of the Schemes.

2.2 The study will identify best practice and make recommendations, based on the findings and relevant information from other sources, for improving the effectiveness and operation of the schemes with respect to the restoration of traditional farm buildings.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The ERDP has provided an opportunity for increased support to Agri-environment measures, including the ESA and CS schemes. To inform policy decisions on development of these schemes they are subject to an ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation.

3.2 This study will form one element of the integrated Agri-environment monitoring and evaluation programme (2000-2006) which has been designed to provide both quantitative and qualitative information to enable assessments to be made of the performance of Agri-environment schemes in relation to a range of internal and external targets and reporting cycles. These range from internal requirements such as assessing progress against the environmental objectives of individual ESA's to external requirements such as reporting on the contribution of Agri-environment schemes towards targets laid out in the UK BAP.

3.3 Traditional farm buildings are a key element in the definition of local landscapes through their form, location and the materials used in their construction. They reveal a great deal about the way the countryside has evolved and the changing fortunes of farming through the ages. In addition to their important historical and cultural contribution within the landscape, traditional farm buildings may also have a valuable ecological role as a potential wildlife habitat for various animals including for BAP Priority Species such as Bats and Barn Owls, as well as other declining species such as House Sparrow, Swallow and House Martin.

3.4 Traditional farm buildings often do not fit well with modern agricultural requirements and may be under threat from redundancy or neglect. In recognition of this, and the decline of the traditional craftsmanship required to maintain and restore these buildings, their restoration is an important element of both the CS and ESA schemes.

Traditional Farm Building Restoration

3.5 Most types of non-domestic traditional farm building are eligible for restoration grants. A traditional building is one that uses construction materials and methods historically found in the locality. The key criteria are that the building is in need of restoration and forms an important element of the local countryside, making a contribution to landscape character and/or is of significance to rural history.
3.6 The work undertaken on a farm building restoration is taken to mean restoration to a stable, weather-proof condition. Repairs such as cleaning guttering are not eligible, nor usually, is rebuilding from the ground up where the original form of the building is not known. Traditional materials and techniques are required with modern substitutes only acceptable in exceptional circumstances. The scale of works that is potentially required for restoration of a building is reflected through a significant range in the value of grants awarded.

3.7 Tenderers should be aware that there are a number of differences in the approaches to farm building restoration taken within the CS and ESA schemes (and within the ESA scheme). This is reflected in the need for separate guidelines for applicants and for project officers in both schemes. In undertaking the evaluation required in the current study the contractors will need to take these differences into account. Copies of the current building restoration guidelines for both schemes (both those for applicants and for project officers) will be made available to the successful tenderer.

3.8 Under the CS, grants are typically available for 50% of the cost of building restoration. As the scheme is competitive, grants are aimed at projects which DEFRA considers offer the greatest benefits. This is facilitated by the delivery of CS at the county level within a framework of clearly defined targets ensuring that agreements provide the greatest environmental benefits and value for money.

3.9 Under the ESA scheme, buildings are restored on a wide range of holdings within the area covered by the schemes. Buildings are restored under Conservation Plans which permit a variety of capital works to be undertaken. Regional differences in the importance of traditional buildings in the landscape are reflected in the rates of grant available for restoration of traditional farm buildings within the ESA scheme. In the nine ESA’s which encompass parts of the Less Favoured Area (LFA) grants of 80% of the total cost are available. In the Cotswold Hills and Blackdown Hills ESA’s the rate is set at 60%, whilst in six further ESA’s it is set at 40%. In five ESA’s (Broads, Breckland, North Kent Marshes, Essex Coast and Suffolk River Valleys), traditional farm building restoration is not available as a Conservation Plan item, although in these areas land managers would be eligible to apply for a restoration grant under CS.

3.10 Each ESA has a number of specified objectives and associated performance indicators. Where traditional farm buildings are integral to the objectives of the ESA, the uptake of conservation plans is included as a performance indicator. These uptake indicators are monitored quantitatively through regular analyses of scheme and tier uptake, which DEFRA obtains, as part of the ongoing management of the scheme, using GIS technology and data from administrative databases. These data will, where appropriate, be made available to
the successful tenderer to assist in deciding sampling strategies and to enable the results of the monitoring to be put into a wider context.

3.11 It is clear that the success of individual restoration schemes could potentially depend on a range of contributory factors, including appropriate targeting of projects, the availability and provision of specialist advice and technical specifications, and the use of skilled contractors and appropriate traditional materials.

3.12 The study will, therefore undertake a holistic evaluation of traditional farm building restoration within both schemes, looking at:

- The contribution of the restoration works to the landscape, historical and, where appropriate, the ecological objectives of the schemes. This should take into account the materials used and the appropriateness of the works.

- The overall effectiveness of the restoration works, taking into account the role of the documentation, including specifications or other advice to agreement holders and project officers and the role of Local Authorities and contractors.

- The effectiveness of the agreement process in both schemes in terms of assessments of value for money, specifications, and any other control over the works, either before, during or after the works.

- The implementation of the planned works, particularly looking at the quality of the workmanship and analysing cases where the final restoration differed from the planned works.

- The effect of landscape and site-specific designations (for example Listing, Conservation Areas, Scheduling and local designations) on the works.

3.13 At all stages, examples of good and bad practice should be documented and the final report should make recommendations as to how restoration of traditional buildings within Agri-environment schemes could be delivered more effectively. Conversely, where projects have not succeeded, analysis should be undertaken of why this has occurred. It will be important to identify whether local or scheme factors contributed to any failure.

Previous environmental monitoring

3.14 Although monitoring activities have not previously directly addressed restoration work on traditional farm buildings, contextual information might be drawn from the foregoing Agri-environment scheme monitoring programmes. It is, therefore, important when planning or carrying out any activity under this study, to take account of the findings of

- previous monitoring information;
• any relevant information available from other sources.

3.15 MAFF has commissioned monitoring programmes in support of the ESA and CS schemes since 1987 and 1996 respectively. These have assessed both the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the schemes. The primary focus of most environmental monitoring activities have been on surveys assessing the impact of the schemes on wildlife, landscape and historic features. For each ESA these surveys are reported and the summary reports are included on DEFRA's website. In ESA's, the socio-economic effects were studied in groups, according to the stage of designation. For some stages not all the individual ESA's were studied. The overall conclusions from these studies were that the ESA scheme was successfully meeting its environmental objectives, particularly in terms of maintenance of habitats and associated features.

3.16 The CS monitoring programme has been undertaken in two phases; the pilot scheme was operated, and hence monitoring was commissioned by the Countryside Commission. After DEFRA assumed responsibility for the scheme, a monitoring programme was commissioned which ran from 1997-2000. The work was divided into two modules, involving (i) an appraisal of the agreement process and (ii) an assessment of the overall ecological quality of land under agreement. The former module considered the use of special projects, some of which may have included building restoration. DEFRA will make all relevant monitoring reports available to the successful tenderer.

3.17 In undertaking the current study, unnecessary duplication of other work must be avoided. Tenderers should also be aware that a further component part of DEFRA's Agri-environment monitoring programme (2000–2006) is a contract to review all existing Agri-environment monitoring information and relevant R&D. The results of this study will be reported in early 2002.

4. OUTPUTS

4.1 A brief scoping report indicating the proposed content and structure of the final report by the end of November 2001.

4.2 A final report to be completed by September 2002, with a first draft of the final report six weeks in advance.

5. SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Project Scope

5.1 The study is concerned with an appraisal of the operation and performance of both the ESA and CS schemes with respect to the restoration of traditional farm buildings. It will involve a combination of
file review and field survey work, to undertake a thorough assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of farm building restoration within the Agri-environment programme.

5.2 The study should be completed by September 2002. The first stage of the contract will comprise the project planning and design, including finalising the sampling strategies and method protocols. Data collection (through file review and field survey, including interviews) will take place over the winter and spring, with an analysis of the results and the reporting following on from this.

Sampling Strategy

5.3 It is envisaged that a sample will be selected that is representative of building restoration under both the ESA and CS schemes. It will be drawn from across England, concentrating on a selection of contrasting Countryside Character Areas. The sample, which DEFRA anticipates should amount to around 100-150 restoration projects, should be drawn from projects undertaken between 1996 and 2000. This will ensure that as far as possible the schemes will be evaluated as they are being run now. All agreements in the sample will be assessed in detail.

Data Collection

5.4 The basis of the assessment will be information collated from a combination of field survey (including both assessments of work undertaken and targeted interviews with involved parties such as contractors, FRCA specialists and project officers) and from appraisal of the agreement file, which will contain the costed repair plan.

Evaluation

5.5 The evaluation of the data collected from the study sample will be undertaken with the objective of reporting on the overall success of building restoration projects within the Agri-environment programme. DEFRA expects that this evaluation will be holistic, taking into account, where appropriate, the wildlife and access objectives of the scheme as well as the landscape and historic aspects. An assessment of the value for money provided by restoration schemes, not just in terms of the procedural differences between the CS and ESA schemes, but also addressing factors such as differences in the rate of DEFRA grants and differences between projects of different overall cost (i.e. small-scale projects vs. large-scale projects) will be welcome.

Quality assurance

5.6 DEFRA is looking for a competent approach to quality assessment of the project outputs. This should address not only quality assessment
within the project team but also the interactions with and responses to the customer.

Project Team

5.7 The review will involve the appraisal of a wide range of information drawing on different skills. As well as having a good understanding of Agri-environment schemes and their objectives, the successful tenderer will also need to demonstrate that the team contains, or can draw upon, the technical skills necessary to appraise information from the full range of disciplines covered. In particular, teams will need to demonstrate the ability to assess craftsmanship and use of materials with respect to traditional and local, rather than universal practices. The team will also need to demonstrate that the project will be undertaken by researchers with an appropriate level of experience.