

Rural Development: Agri-Environment Climate Scheme full guidance

Full guidance and rules for the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme

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1 Introduction

Date published: 11 January, 2025

With effect from the 2024 application round, the contents of this page have been incorporated into other AECS guidances pages.

Note: The [AECS homepage](#) gives an overview of the 2025 round and explains how to get help and advice.

The [AECS full scheme guidance page](#) provides links to the individual guidance pages.

Section	Change
Whole page	Contents of page incorporated into other AECS guidance pages.

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

2 Eligibility

Date published: 29 May, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Scheme Eligibility

The Agri-Environment Climate scheme is open to farmers, groups of farmers and other land managers with land in Scotland who are registered with us and have a Business Reference Number (BRN*). The Improving Public Access element of the Scheme will not be open for applications in 2025.

*Not all applicants will be eligible to apply for all options or activities under the scheme. For example, applications for the Organic Conversion and Organic Maintenance options are only open to farmers and crofters.

Find out [how to register your account](#) .

You must be able to demonstrate that you are able, and have the legal right, to carry out the management proposed in your application, for the length of the contract and any associated monitoring period. Please see also our [Occupancy of Land page](#) .

Funding under this scheme cannot be used to support works that you are required to complete as part of a statutory or legislative obligation. This would include for example, applying for AECS management on land subject to a habitat or environmental management plan as an obligation created as part of a wind farm (or similar) planning approval.

Your application must not include any works which you have already started on (including purchase of associated items or equipment). And, if your application is successful, you must not start on any of the works applied for until you have a signed contract in place and an authority to proceed letter has been issued.

Also, you must not apply for funding for work which has already, partly or fully, secured funding from another source. Please see also the [Double Funding and incompatibility page](#) .

Application Eligibility

You will normally be limited to a single AECS application [per business] per year. However, there are some exceptions which are set out below:

A. if you manage any of the following designated sites: SSSIs and European sites (SACs and SPAs): you can submit one application for the designated site management and another for management on other parts of your land

B. Land managers who have widely separated areas of land (normally at least five miles apart) where it is more appropriate to apply for each area separately.

C. Applications for Organic Conversion or Organic Maintenance may be made separately from other AECS applications.

The questions which case officers have to answer in 2025 when checking each applicant's eligibility for the scheme, is provided below:



[AECS Application Eligibility Questions \(PDF, Size: 73.4 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-Application-Eligibility-Questions.pdf>

Please ensure you read the AECS homepage and also the relevant guidance pages covering scheme eligibility and application eligibility.

Management options and capital items eligibility

Before submitting an application, you must also carefully check that you meet the specific eligibility requirements for each individual management option and capital item which you wish to apply for. You can find this information using the links below:

[Management Options](#)

[Capital items](#)

Please also refer to the [Double funding and option incompatibility](#) page

Some of the Agri-Environment-Climate Scheme management options have been spatially targeted in order to make them available in the locations where they will deliver the greatest benefit. The other options are available throughout Scotland.

You can apply for an option if it is listed under your holding and you should use the [targeting tool \(MS Excel, Size: 12.2 MB\)](#) to check this. If it is not listed, you may be able to apply for it if you obtain an endorsement **before** submitting your application, using the process explained in the Endorsements page, and the same applies to capital items.

Please note: to use the targeting tool, you must download the file by clicking the link above, then selecting 'download file'.

Some capital items are also spatially targeted. These are listed in the [capital items page](#). The targeting tool will list the targeted capital items available on your holding. (Note that non-targeted capital items are not listed; these are available throughout Scotland.)

[Recent changes](#)

Section	Change
Whole page	Updated details for 2025 round

[Previous versions](#)

[Previous versions of this page](#)

[Download guidance](#)

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3 Improving Public Access

Date published: 11 January, 2025

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Fund Update

The Improving Public Access option is **not opening for applications in 2025**. The remainder of the guidance on this page relates to previous applications rounds when the Improving Public Access option was last available.

Note 1: All 2022 IPA applicants who have their projects approved must secure planning permission (if it is required) by 30 April 2023 in order for a contract to be issued. A short extension to this deadline may be granted in exceptional circumstances. Existing guidance related to 2022 round applications is provided below.

Note 2: For all current contract holders – applications approved **prior** to the 2022 application round please refer to the 'Previous versions' of this page provided below for further information and scheme requirements related to the relevant round.

The 2022 round will **NOT** include the semi-bound path option and all applicants are reminded that they **MUST** have a **statement from their respective planning authority** stating whether planning permission is required or not for the proposed path project and this must be uploaded as a supporting document on or before 29th April 2022 for the application to be eligible for further assessment.

Further improvements have been made to the 2022 scheme guidance, capital items requirements and the scoring criteria has been adjusted to put more emphasis on the connectivity and accessibility of paths.

Applications for Improving Public Access must be made separately to other applications for the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme which has its own separate assessment process.

The creation of new paths or upgrade of existing paths can bring many benefits:

- Improved access to the countryside, nature and outdoor spaces helps improve people's health and well-being, both physically and mentally as well as bringing social benefits.
- They can contribute to tourism related economic growth through the provision of leisure and recreational opportunities and experiences.
- They can provide for active travel journeys encouraging walking, cycling, riding and wheeling as an alternative to the car.
- They can help land managers with the management of public access on a working estate, farm, croft etc. and can open up economic opportunities linked to diversification.

The Improving Public Access option can be summarised as: -

- Select from a menu of path infrastructure capital items, these have a fixed payment rate linked directly to meeting each capital items specification and requirements.
- Design your path, selecting from the menu of capital items, and prepare an accurate and clear map showing the location of each capital item.
- Complete the schedule of works listing the capital items chosen, quantity and location.
- NatureScot case officers will check for eligibility and then assess all applications and make a site visit
- If successful you must build the path and infrastructure exactly as stated in the contract and in the capital items specification and requirements document. (note that a photographic record is required for most capital items).
- Once built you can claim for payment, the path may be inspected and if all is in order payment is made (this process is led by SGRPID).

Improving Public Access (IPA) projects may be small scale, to enhance a single path or they may tackle larger network improvements or long distance paths.

Aim

The aim of the Improving Public Access item is to support new and upgraded paths for public use, providing:

- improved links and connectivity
- improved path conditions
- accessible paths for all

These new and improved paths will create a path resource that encourages outdoor access for a diverse range of users, and helps to integrate responsible access and recreational use with good land management.

Eligible applicants

This item is open to local authorities and administrations, public bodies, community associations, public-private partnerships, NGOs, private companies, organisations in charge of tourist and recreational development, as well as individual farmers, groups of farmers, crofters and other land managers.

Spatial targeting

This item is available across all rural areas of Scotland, which is defined as land other than settlements with a population of over 3000.

For more details see [How to Apply for IPA](#)

Recent changes

Section	Change
Fund Update	IPA is not opening to applications in 2025.

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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4 Occupancy of land

Date published: 18 January, 2019

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Introduction

To apply to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, you must either own and occupy the land, have a secure tenancy, have a contractual licence or be a grazing clerk submitting an application on behalf of a grazing committee.

If you have a contractual licence you are eligible to apply for capital items only.

You must be able to demonstrate that you have the legal right to carry out the projects to be funded on the land included in your application for the length of the contract and any associated monitoring period.

If you are a landlord or an owner/occupier you can apply for land that is managed in hand or let out on a seasonal basis only. If any land included in the application is let out on a seasonal basis, it will be your responsibility to ensure that all scheme requirements are met.

Tenancies

If you are a non-croft tenant or official sub-tenant of a croft, it is your responsibility to discuss the proposed application with your landlord or main tenant to make sure it does not break the conditions of your tenancy.

You must be able to demonstrate a legal right to carry out the proposed management to be funded on the land included in your application for the full length of a five-year contract under this scheme.

If you propose to apply for capital items, your rights must last for the associated monitoring period, which is five years from the final payment for a capital item.

In order to demonstrate this you must submit with your application, either:

- a signed Landlord Declaration Form (see below) in which your landlord or main tenant confirms that the lease extends beyond the required duration, or
- a copy of the lease

If you elect to submit a lease that has already been submitted to RPID for another purpose, this will only be acceptable provided you make sure that the lease meets the AECS requirements.

You must also make sure that sufficient details are entered in the proof of secure tenancy section of the online AECS application to alert the case officer of this request. This should be information on the lease's earlier submission and that it is also to be used for this scheme.



[Landlord declaration form \(PDF, Size: 155.3 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/aecs_guidance____landlord_declaration_form__18_june_2015_v4---updated.pdf

Contractual licences (third-party applications)

If you are not a landowner or tenant, you can apply to do capital works on land covered by a contractual licence. However, applications will be restricted to capital items which are specifically aimed at works such as stand-alone capital works which are being undertaken across a number of holdings to address, for example, invasive non-native species.

You must have written agreement from all the landowners concerned. To demonstrate this, you must submit a copy of the licence with your application.

It must be in effect before you apply to the scheme and include the following:

- a map of the area covered by the licence

- the duration of the licence
- the details of responsibilities and liabilities
- details of the landowners or main tenants covered by the licence
- details of the activities covered by the licence*

*For capital items, contractual licences must cover the contract monitoring period which is five years from the final payment of the capital item.

Short-term tenancies/contractual licences

Where your tenancy or licence does not cover the required duration, you must submit the Landlord Declaration Form (see above) with your application, in which your landlord or main tenant confirms that they will take responsibility for carrying out the proposed management and capital items for the remainder of the contract and any associated monitoring period (see 'change of occupiers or transfer of land' section below).

You cannot apply for land-based options on seasonal-held land, including arable, if your lease is for a period of less than a full year.

Crofting

If you are a main tenant of a croft with a tenancy which covers the required duration, you do not have to submit any supporting documentation.

If you are an official sub-tenant of a croft, which falls within the jurisdiction of the Crofting Commission, a copy of the letter issued by the Crofting Commission confirming the approval of the sub-let and its duration will also be acceptable as supporting documentation to that referred to at the tenancies section above.

If you are a grazing clerk, submitting an application on behalf of a grazing committee, your application must include the following supporting information:

- the written consent of a majority of the crofters with shares in the common grazing
- evidence that notice of the intention to submit an application and the proposed division of the grant amongst the eligible crofters has been issued by the grazings committee or constable to all shareholders sharing in the common grazings

Please note: any application for funding will not be considered until the documentation outlined within the relevant sections above has been submitted.

Change of occupiers or transfer of land

If there is a change of occupancy or a sale / transfer of the land within the contract agreement period, the onus will be on you, the contract holder, to make sure that the new occupier or owner of the land takes on your obligations under this scheme and that a successor request form is completed.

Where your tenancy or licence does not cover the required duration, the landlord or new tenant must enter into a successor's agreement within three months of the tenancy or licence ending by submitting a completed successors request form.

If these requirements cannot be met, you will normally need to repay all or part of the payments you have already received, plus interest.

You must let your local area office know about any changes affecting the legal occupiers of the land under a contract.

Please also see guidance on withdrawing from the scheme and contract succession.

[Withdrawing from the scheme](#)

[Contract Succession](#)

Recent changes

Section	Change
Contractual licenses (third-party applications)	Guidance update

Change of occupiers or transfer of land	Addition of text on withdrawing from the scheme and added link to Contract Succession page.
Introduction - tenancies	Addition of further guidance regarding submitting your lease. Landlord declaration form replaced with the updated version.
Introduction - crofting	Removal of text relating to change of occupiers or transfers of land. Addition of text clarifying that a letter from the Crofting Commission is needed when croft falls within jurisdiction of the Crofting Commission

[Previous versions](#)

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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5 How to apply

Date published: 29 May, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

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Introduction

The 2025 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) application round will open for applications in early 2025. A summary is below but it is important that you read the detail for each element you wish to apply for as there are important changes

Element of AECS	Application Window
Stand-alone Water-use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon	17 February 2025 – 22 April 2025
Stand - alone Organic conversion and maintenance	03 February 2025 - 31 July 2025
Agri-environment	03 February 2025 – 12 June 2025

Note: If you are applying for Organic conversion and maintenance as part of a single application with Agri-environment management it must be submitted by the 12 June 2025 deadline. Similarly, if you are applying for water-use efficiency irrigation lagoon capital items alongside other AECS management options your application must be submitted in the main Agri-Environment application window 3 February 2025 to 12 June 2025.

Water-use Efficiency – Irrigation Lagoon

This item can stand alone or be part of a wider application. Stand alone irrigation applications will be assessed on their own merits and against other stand alone irrigation lagoon applications if budget pressures constrain our ability to approve applications.

Organic Conversion/Maintenance

The area caps were removed in 2023 for conversion and maintenance. While there is no upper limit for land in organic conversion or maintenance you must be able to demonstrate that the land is used for agricultural purposes.

Improving Public Access (IPA)

IPA will not be opening for new applications in 2025.

Agri-environment

Pond creation and restoration and Creation of Hedgerows are **not** restricted in the 2025 application round.

The items/options below remain suspended for the 2025 round.

- Creation of Species Rich Grassland
- Heather Restoration
- Heather Restoration – Follow - up Molinia control
- The Muirburn element of the Muirburn and Heather Cutting capital item
- Primary Treatment of Bracken - Chemical*
- Follow up Treatment of Bracken - Chemical

*Chemical control of Bracken is no longer funded through AECS following the decision by the manufacturers of Asulam not to pursue authorisation for the chemical in the UK. **Mechanical and manual bracken control are unaffected.**

All supporting documentation should be submitted by the relevant application deadlines as outlined above. Consider early on what supporting documents you will need. Some will require input from other individuals or organisations and it is important that you allow enough time to get these inputs

before the closing date. Failure to submit the required documents by the closing date may result in your application being deemed ineligible.

If you intend to reapply in 2025 on the same land as in your expiring/expired AECS contract you **must** consider the current requirements of the land and not assume that the existing management can simply carry on unchanged. You must submit new information including up-to-date management plans using the latest plan templates provided.

If you intend to apply for management to benefit a designated site (SSSI or European site) you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot before preparing your application.

If you are considering applying for deer management, you **must** contact a NatureScot Wildlife Management Officer before applying. We advise you do this as soon as the application window opens. The deadline for NatureScot pre-application advice on deer is **30 April 2025**.

If you are considering applying for peatland management, you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot at least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your proposals.

If you require a NatureScot [endorsement](#) to allow you to apply for an option outwith its target area you **must** submit the endorsement request form to NatureScot as early as possible and at least one month before the closing date. If it is approved you must upload the endorsement as part of your application.

Please use the relevant [regional mailbox](#) for contacting NatureScot in relation to designated sites, deer, peatland or endorsements.

Role of the case officer

When you submit your application for the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme it will be assigned to a case officer. They will manage the application process from the formal submission to the point at which it has been assessed and presented to the relevant individual or group who will determine whether it should be approved, either in whole or in part.

Please refer to the '[Your application will then be assessed](#)' step of the application process below.

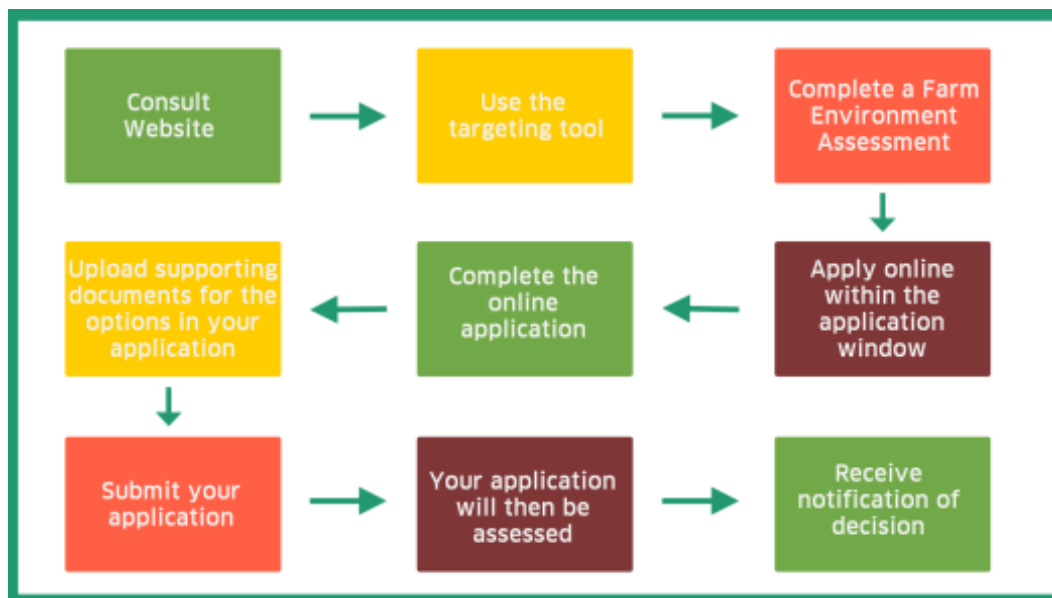
Application process

1. Consult website

You should first check the relevant sections of the AECS website to get a better understanding of the rules of the scheme, and to check that you will be eligible to apply and meet the entry criteria for the 2025 application round. Please read the [Eligibility](#) guidance.

Links to all the individual pages of the full scheme guidance, together with rules and management requirements for each management option and capital item, can be found below:

- [Agri-Environment Climate Scheme full guidance](#)
- [Management options homepage](#)
- [Capital items homepage](#)



2. Use the targeting tool

Enter your holding number into the [targeting tool](#) (MS Excel, Size: 12.2 MB) to check which options or capital items are available on your land. If you have several holdings, you will need to enter each of these separately. In exceptional cases you can [apply for other options or capital items](#) if you have obtained an Endorsement from NatureScot.

If you find your location code is not recognised when you enter it on the targeting tool, please contact your local RPID office to discuss this matter further.

3. Complete a Farm Environment Assessment where necessary

All applications will need to include a Farm Environment Assessment (FEA), apart from applications which are solely for the following:

- Coastal embankment breaching, lowering or removal.
- River embankment breaching, lowering or removal.
- Restoring (protecting) river banks.
- Stand-alone slurry stores.
- Organics.
- Upland habitat impact assessment for deer management (as stand-alone capital item).
- Improving Public Access (not available for 2025 round).
- Water - use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon

The Farm Environment Assessment is a tool to help you to take stock of the important environmental features on your holding and plan what to include in your application.

You can find out more about Farm Environment Assessment on the [guidance page](#). The webpage also explains the requirement to carry out a Diffuse Pollution Assessment and a Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment if applicable.

4. Apply online within the application window

Your application for support under this scheme must be submitted online by registering and logging in to Rural Payments and Services.

[You can register for this service here](#) if you have not registered already.

Please refer to [Eligibility](#) page for information on how many applications can be submitted per business per year.

5. Complete the online application

Once you have logged in to Rural Payments and Services, you will be able to submit an application online.

You can do this by clicking 'Applications' from your customer home page and selecting 'Agri-Environment Climate Scheme' from the drop down list to start a new application.

You will be asked a series of questions about your application. You will also need to enter the management options that you wish to undertake as well as any capital items.

The relevant Land Parcel Identifiers (LPID) will need to be used (unless not yet allocated by RPID) and you will need to supply the areas (hectares) to be managed under the relevant options and capital items.

The application system will prompt you when errors arise during the completion of the application. For example, you will be prompted when information requested at a particular section has not been provided to allow you to progress to the next stage of the application process.

The Online application guidance is provided below.



[Online application guidance \(PDF, Size: 4.1 MB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-2022---Online-Application-Guidance.pdf> (Guidance)

6. Upload supporting documents for the options in your application

Along with the information you complete online you will also need to supply additional documents - see [checklist of requirements](#) .

Any supporting documents should be uploaded directly into the application system. If you have problems doing this or are not sure which documents you need to submit, contact your local [Rural Payments and Inspections Division area office](#) or [NatureScot](#).

Supporting documents must be submitted by the relevant application deadline for the application type you are applying for, as set out in the Introduction above.

7. Submit your application

Once you have completed your application successfully, the system will display a summary of the options or items you have applied for.

A more detailed Schedule of Works will also be available setting out the proposed claim profile of any annual management option payments and payment details for any capital items applicable to your application.

If you are satisfied that the summary and Schedule of Works are accurate and correct, you should then confirm you have read the declarations and undertakings. [View a copy of the declarations and undertakings](#).

You will then be directed to click '**Submit application**'. An acknowledgment of your application will appear on screen along with your application reference number. This reference number can be used to track the progress of your application.

You **cannot** amend an application after it has been submitted. However, an application can be withdrawn and an amended application submitted before the closing date.

8. Your application will then be assessed

There are two levels of entry to the AECS scheme and applications falling into each level will be assessed and scored as follows:

- Level one – this is for lower value applications up to an agreed monetary value for the round. This agreed value is dependent on the amount and value of the applications received. Applications at this level will undergo an initial assessment by a case officer including a discussion with you. The discussion may take place during an on-farm visit, depending on the options you have applied for. Your application is then considered by the Rural Payments and Inspections Division or NatureScot for approval or rejection. In certain circumstances, The National Project Assessment Committee (NPAC), referred to at Level two entry below, may be called upon by the regional

offices to provide an opinion on level one cases which require a decision on a point of principle or value for money issue before the final decision is reached.

- Level two – this is for higher value applications above an agreed monetary value for the round. This agreed value is dependent on the amount and value of the applications received. Applications for this level will undergo an initial assessment as per level one. After assessment the case will be considered for approval or rejection by an expert panel constituted on a national basis titled, the National Project Assessment Committee (NPAC).

The [Application Assessment](#) and [Eligibility](#) pages have more detailed information

Scoring criteria

As the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme is a competitive scheme, we will compare your application against other applications received using scoring criteria.

Please see the scoring criteria for agri-environments applications in [section 2 of the scoring page](#).

The organic maintenance or organic conversion element of applications will be scored separately. (See section 3 of the scoring page).

Standalone Water-use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon applications will be scored separately. (See sections 4 and 5 respectively of the [scoring page](#))

9. Notification of decision

Once your application has been assessed, you will be notified as to whether it has been approved or rejected. If your application is approved you will then be sent a contract. In some cases, only part of your application may be approved.

If your application is unsuccessful you will be provided with the reasons why your application has been rejected. If you are not satisfied with the decision reached you may seek a formal review.

You should read the contract offer letter and all the contract documentation and ensure it is acceptable before formally accepting the contract terms.

You must follow the instructions included both in the contract offer letter and within the contract itself to confirm that you wish to accept the terms of the contract offer.

[View a copy of the standard contract terms and conditions \(PDF, Size: 271.0 kB\)](#).

However, please note that there may be additional conditions included in the contract which are specific to your application.

The contract will specify what the funding is to be used for – this will be based on the information supplied in your application.

An agent, acting as an accountable person, can only accept on behalf of a business if they have the mandated authority to do so.

If you are an agent accepting a contract on an applicants business' behalf, the case officer will contact the relevant RPID area office to request confirmation that you have the authority to sign the contract. Any mandate in place will apply to the office that an agent works from. It does not apply to the agent as an individual.

You may only start work when you have accepted the contract offer and have received a confirmation letter letting you know that you can begin.

You are under no obligation to accept the contract offer. If you decide not to proceed, please tell us and we will cancel the contract offer. The case officer will formally acknowledge your rejection.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Introduction	Opening and closing dates for 2025 application round.
Application Process	September 2024: Point 8 - added sentence to Level one relating to NPAC.

[Previous versions](#)

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6 Checklist of requirements for applications

Date published: 31 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

This page provides a summary of the information that must be submitted **before the submission deadline** as part of an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) application. Missing documents may make your application ineligible.

It should be read in conjunction with:

- [Further requirements for applicants](#)
- [Essential Information for applications](#)

This list is not exhaustive and you will need to check the requirements of your specific application to determine which supporting documentation is required.

Note: When you start the online application process, you will see that the 'supporting documents' screen lists certain documents required for your application and asks you to confirm the method by which you are supplying the documents e.g. electronically uploading the documents or providing them by post or directly to the local area office

Each document listed on the supporting document screen must be supplied. Other documentation not listed should also be supplied where it is pertinent to the application e.g. the submission of a Collaborative Management Plan, where applicable.

Further details on how to upload a document can be found in the Online Application guidance found on the [How to Apply](#) page.

If you are unable to provide any of the documents below for reasons beyond your control please contact RPID **before** the submission deadline to make them aware of the difficulty (taking a note of the method of contact, officer alerted to issue, date and time).

Note that for some items below you **must** use the template provided in the relevant webpage.

All applications

Online data entry (LPIDs, lengths, areas, etc)

Farm Environment Assessment (FEA) - nearly all applications require the items below. Please read the FEA guidance carefully to find out which items you need. Note that these items must show the current situation and not simply be copies of versions submitted with an earlier application.

- Farm Environment Map
- Farm Management Map
- Farm Environment Table
- Diffuse Pollution Field Map (can be incorporated in Farm Environment Map)
- Diffuse Pollution Table (can be incorporated in Farm Environment Table)
- Diffuse Pollution Management Map (can be incorporated in Farm Management Map)
- Certain water quality options require the following:
 - 1) A Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment Map
 - 2) A Diffuse Pollution Steading Management Map
 - 3) A Diffuse Pollution Steading Management table

Moorland options

All moorland applications require the following:

- Moorland Management Plan (using the latest template provided). This **MUST** include an updated, detailed habitat condition assessment of the moorland habitats and must show how this is influencing proposed management.
- Map or maps showing current condition and extent of moorland habitats, at an appropriate scale
- Map of access routes and supplementary feed sites where relevant

- Map or maps showing where the proposed management activities will take place
- Heft map if applicable
- Flock records **must** be submitted at the time of application if applying for Away wintering or Stock Disposal
- Returning applicants must submit their last years AECS Management Diary pages for all LPIDs that were funded for Moorland management showing the full years grazing

Other moorland plans maps and records may be required (using the templates provided):

- Muirburn and Heather Cutting Plan and Map. Only Heather Cutting is available for support in the 2025 application round and it requires a plan and a map of where and when this work will take place. However, if you plan to undertake muirburn at your own expense on a designated site within your AECS application area, during the lifetime of the AECS contract, you **must** submit a Muirburn Plan, so that there is a record of where and when work will take place and, to allow the case officer to assess whether this is appropriate to the site. You can only carry out muirburn on an SSSI if you have NatureScot consent. For non-designated sites, you must provide detail within the Moorland management plan of any muirburn you intend to undertake at your own expense within the AECS application area.
- Ditch Blocking Plan and Map
- Bracken Management Plan and Map - where mechanised or manual treatment is proposed
- Deer Management Plan
- Predator Control Plan and Map. For returning applicants you must submit the last 2 years Predator Control reports from your expiring contract

Note: The [Moorland Management option webpage](#) has examples of maps and plans.

Specific plans and maps for other options and capital items

Other plans/maps required are listed below but you must also check the requirements for the individual options and capital items that you are applying for. If a plan is required there is a template link on the [option/capital item page](#) .

- Wader Management Plan
- Wader survey form, if applicable
- Grazing Management Plan
- Hedgerow Management Plan
- Lowland Raised Bog Management Plan
- Scrub Control Plan
- Chough Management Plan
- Cropped Machair Management Plan
- Bracken Management Plan and Map*
- Grass Strips in Arable Fields – summary template
- Water Margins – summary table
- Predator Control Plan and map
- Invasive Plants Management Plan and map
- Rhododendron Control Plan and map
- Rotation map of arable / grassland options (if too complex to show on management map)
- Ditch Blocking Plan and map
- There are specific plan or map requirements for some capital items. Please refer to the individual [capital item webpages](#) .

*Note: Chemical control of Bracken is no longer funded through AECS following the decision by the manufacturers of Asulam not to pursue authorisation for the chemical in the UK.

Other information that you may need to submit with your application

- Landlord Declaration Form – see [Occupancy of land guidance](#)
- Copy of lease – see [Occupancy of land guidance](#)
- Contractual Licence - for third-party applicants
- Shared Boundary Agreement for march fence or restoring drystone or flagstone dykes

- [Completed Endorsement Form](#) containing an [endorsement](#) from NatureScot if you are proposing to carry out options or capital items outwith their target areas – see targeting tool page and [Endorsements guidance](#) . Endorsements are only available for certain options or where the work is required to benefit the notified features of a designated site. You should submit the endorsement request form to NatureScot at least a month before the application deadline.
- Completed Endorsement Form containing an endorsement from NatureScot if applying for the [Species-rich Grassland Management](#) or [Habitat mosaic management](#) option on hill or upland rough grazing land. Again you should submit the endorsement request form to NatureScot at least a month before the application deadline, along with a habitat survey report as explained in the [endorsement page](#).
- Any consents and licences received from regulatory authorities, where applicable
- Ecological survey report for [protected species where relevant](#)
- Letter of approval from NatureScot or Scottish Environment Protection Agency if required as part of the eligibility requirements of a capital item
- If you are applying for any actual cost capital items, you must submit a Quotations table and the quotes received and also the specification that you provided when seeking quote (for full details of requirements please see Quotes section in ' [Further requirements for applicants](#) ')
- If your application is part of a collaborative project you must submit the Collaborative Management Plan (CMP) and collaborative maps, as provided to you by the person leading the collaborative project – see [scoring guidance](#) .
- To score points for supporting vulnerable species, the Vulnerable Priority Species Recording Form must be submitted and the required capital items and management options applied for - see [Vulnerable Priority Species supporting guidance](#) .
- Where wader options are being adopted, if you include a full wader survey undertaken by a NGO/ Project Officer/ Ecologist within the last 5 years you may score additional points. Please note this is optional.
- Copy of advice received from NatureScot which helped you to put together your Deer or Peatland proposals.
- Note that you will need Approval from your planning authority, under the [Prior Notification and Prior Approval process](#) if you propose to restore peatland through ditch blocking. You will need to obtain this approval before an AECS contract can be issued. Therefore, due to the time this process can take, we advise you apply to your local authority as early as possible.

Crofting applications

Crofting applicants may also need to provide some of the following:

If you are a grazing clerk, applying on behalf of a grazing committee, your application must include the following supporting information:

- the written consent of a majority of the crofters with shares in the common grazing
- evidence that notice of the intention to submit an application and the proposed division of the grant amongst the eligible crofters has been issued by the grazings committee or constable to all shareholders sharing in the common grazings

If you are an official sub-tenant of a croft which falls within the jurisdiction of the Crofting Commission:

- a copy of the letter issued by the Crofting Commission confirming the approval of the sub-let and its duration – this is an acceptable alternative to the landlord declaration or copy of the lease - see [Occupancy of land](#) guidance

Organic conversion and maintenance

Applicants need to consider additional requirements and provide the following at the time of application or as specified:

All Organic Conversion applications

- Farm Map showing the LPIDs to be converted
- Organic Viability Proposal endorsed by an organic certification body
- For organic conversion applications that also include agri-environment options or the organic maintenance option, you will have to submit the required supporting documents for those management options.

- For organic conversion application that also include agri-environment options, you should ensure the options are compatible – see [Double funding and option incompatibility](#) page
- To be allocated extra points against the 'National Priority' scoring criteria at least 25 per cent of your permanently held land will have to be managed under the 'organic conversion' option

Organic conversion applicants also need to note the following:

You must liaise with your organic certification body to ensure you are compliant with the organic requirements before you apply to AECS, before you commence organic conversion and for the duration of your AECS contract. If your AECS application is successful:

1. Your organic certification body will require you to submit to them a full conversion plan for approval, prior to your organic start date
2. Your organic start date must be approved by your organic certification body before you commence conversion, but also refer to the AECS Organic Farming conversion requirements
3. Once you have received your official letter confirming your organic start date from your organic certification body, you should forward this to your local Area Office.

All Organic Maintenance applications

- Farm Map illustrating the LPIDs to be maintained under organic status
- valid Organic certificate
- Current Organic Schedule of LPIDs from your organic certification body
- If your organic maintenance application also includes agri-environment options or organic conversion of additional land, you will have to submit the required supporting documents for those management options.
- If your organic maintenance application also includes agri-environment options, you should ensure the options are compatible
- To be allocated extra points against the 'National Priority' scoring criteria at least 75 per cent of your permanently held land will have to be managed under the 'organic maintenance' option

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7 Essential Information for Applications

Date published: 31 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

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Introduction

To make sure your application is accepted, it's important that it is completed properly, with all the information needed.

Before you start your submission, please take into account the following guidance on essential information to include and common errors.

Please also refer to "[Checklist of Requirements](#)" and "[Further requirements for applicants](#)" which expand on the information provided below.

Essential information when submitting an AECS application

- Familiarise yourself with individual option and capital item guidance and full scheme guidance. Check that you are using the latest version for the 2025 round.
- [Designated sites](#) - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and European sites (SPA or SAC): **If you are applying within a designated site, you are strongly recommended to make early contact with [NatureScot](#), at least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your proposals.** This will help ensure the management you are proposing is appropriate for the notified features of the site and that all issues are being addressed, and will reduce the risk of an application being rejected. If you do not allow enough time to discuss your proposals with NatureScot before submitting your application, you are at risk of having options/capital items removed from the application, which could jeopardise the whole application.
- **Deer management:** if you are considering applying for deer management, you **must** contact a NatureScot Wildlife Management Officer before applying. We advise you do this as soon as the application window opens. The deadline for NatureScot pre-application advice on deer is **30 April 2025**. This will help ensure that deer proposals fit with the scheme requirements. Failure to consult with NatureScot risks having deer options/capital items removed which could jeopardise the whole application. There is a new Deer Management Plan template for 2025 onwards which must be used.
- Peatland management: if you are considering applying for peatland management, you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot at least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your proposals. This will help ensure that peatland proposals fit with the scheme requirements.
- Eurasian Beaver:
 - Eurasian beaver have been reintroduced to parts of Scotland and are a European Protected Species which is protected by law. Information on beavers is available from the [NatureScot website: Beaver](#)
 - All applicants to AECS are encouraged to manage riparian land in an appropriate way e.g. by undertaking the Management of water margins option. Where beavers are present on your land, applicants must consider the best way to take that management forward noting that as ecological engineers, beavers may modify the riparian environment in ways not anticipated in the option outcomes. Beavers can bring many benefits for biodiversity and nature restoration, but some beaver activity may not be desirable. NatureScot can offer advice on mitigation of beaver impacts by contacting: Beavers@nature.scot
 - While AECS can fund traditional tree protection, this may not be effective where beaver are active. Advice on alternative approaches is available from NatureScot. Where beaver activity impacts on work being undertaken under your AECS contract, no penalties will be accrued.
- Consult with relevant individuals/bodies to obtain any necessary documentation or approvals ahead of submitting your application. Check [the further requirements page](#) which has information on consents and licences.

- Complete all sections of the online application correctly. For example, if some of the area proposed for management is held under secure tenancy and the rest is owned, select both options
- Double check that all the required documents accompanying your application meet the specific standards referred to in the scheme guidance and have been uploaded or submitted **before the application deadline**. For documents where we provide a template, ensure that you use the latest version of the templates ([see also the Checklist of Requirements](#))
- For all management options and capital items which require an individual Management Plan to support your application, (e.g. Grazing Plan, Scrub Control Plan) you must use the relevant plan template and provide all the information requested in the template. Failure to do so may result in the plan being deemed not fit for purpose and the option or item being removed from your application. In some cases, it may result in the whole application being rejected.
- Ensure maps are created and annotated in accordance with the [Mapping guidance](#) and [Farm Environment Assessment](#) (FEA) guidance (where applicable). This has been updated for 2025 onwards. You must also meet mapping requirements as set out for each individual management option and capital item.
- Contact your local [RPID Area Office](#) or [NatureScot](#) regional office as early as possible if you have a query about the scheme. RPID Area Offices can also help if you have any difficulties in uploading supporting documents for your application.
- **Check the Schedule of Works** before submitting your application, to make sure that it contains all the management options and capital items you wish to apply for, and that the proposed claim timings are correct. It is not possible to add options or capital items once the application has been submitted.
- It is essential that the application is prepared with the full involvement and understanding of the land manager responsible for delivering the work on the ground. The Case Officer's site visit will include a discussion with this person and if they are unaware of what has been included in the application or cannot deliver some options/items the full application will be rejected.
- All capital items applied for must be delivered and claimed for within the correct claim year. Ensure that you only include items that you are able to deliver.
- If an application or its associated supporting documents contain multiple errors, or if it would require significant changes to make the proposals eligible for funding, it will be deemed not fit for purpose and will be rejected. **Case officers are not able to make or allow significant changes within the rules of the scheme. This is especially important in relation to Moorland Management Plans, where you must ensure that the detail related to flock numbers in the plan aligns to the completed grazing tables and full flock records. Additionally, there must be adequate detail on current habitat condition and adequate explanation of how the proposed future management is reflecting what the habitat needs and takes account of previous management.**
- **Don't wait until the last few days of the application round to upload your supporting documents and finalise your application, instead upload as you finalise your documents to avoid issues with RP&S which may occur when usage is very high.**
- **Fair Work First (FWF):** applicants make sure that they can meet the FWF requirements. If you cannot do so, you must obtain an exemption from RPID **before** submitting your application. You can find more details about the requirements on the [FWF webpage](#).

Common errors

Below are some of the most common errors made when submitting an AECS application. These can result in your application being rejected, so it's worth taking the time to get it right.

Documents required that relate to the ownership/tenancy of the land

A common issue with applications is a failure to submit documents related to the ownership/tenancy of the land. Below are some examples:

- a completed landlord declaration form or copy of lease
- crofting shareholders support/evidence
- a fully completed shared boundary agreement for march fencing.

Please check the guidance for [Occupancy of land](#) for more information.

If a lease document has been obtained for another purpose and it is then used in support of an AECS application the applicant must ensure that the lease submitted already meets the AECS requirements.

The applicant must also enter sufficient details in the Proof of Secure Tenancy section of the online AECS application to alert the case officer of this request. Information about the lease's earlier submission to RPID and that the lease is also to be used for the AECS application should be provided.

Documents required to gain points under the Scoring Criteria

A common issue which can result in the failure to score points under the relevant Scoring Criteria categories is the absence of the relevant documentation. Examples of this are included below:

National priorities - Biodiversity: enhancing biodiversity in the wider countryside by conserving vulnerable priority species (VPS). In order to secure the points for enhancing biodiversity you must make sure that:

- the Vulnerable Priority Species form is submitted (this can be completed by the applicant/agent).
- your application includes the required management options or capital items for the species you have provided supporting information for

Please check the guidance for [vulnerable priority species](#) for more information.

Wader Survey - For applications benefiting VPS waders, additional points can be awarded if recent bird survey data (within last five years) is provided and provides evidence of VPS waders.

The survey for VPS waders **must** meet the methodology standards in the template and can be carried out by any of the following:

- **Non-Government Organisation (NGO)** - The survey should be conducted by an environmental NGO where the person doing the survey is experienced in undertaking wader surveys.
- **Project Officer** - Specialist individuals involved in wader projects. These could include RSPB, Working for Waders, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) etc. The individual must be experienced in conducting wader surveys.
- **Ecologist** - A member of a recognised body such as The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) or an individual with an environmental qualification. The individual must be experienced in undertaking wader surveys.

Collaborative approach

To be awarded points for collaboration, the person leading on the collaborative project must correctly complete a Collaborative Management Plan (using the template in the Scoring Criteria webpage) along with a map or maps clearly showing the extent of the collaborative work proposed. The Plan must be agreed with all parties involved and must clearly demonstrate the contribution each participant applying to (or currently in) AECS will make. A copy of the completed Plan and map(s) must be submitted by each applicant involved in the collaborative project, along with their AECS application.

Including items/options without checking their eligibility

Every option or item has guidance stating when it is eligible. **Always check the latest AECS guidance and do not assume it is unchanged since the last round. This is especially important if you are a returning applicant, as changes have been made to options since AECS launched.**

It is also essential to read the supporting guidance for options and capital items, as this will help ensure that you meet the scheme requirements.

The table below shows common / potential causes of errors relating to options and capital items. If you are unsure, request advice from RPID or NatureScot.

Subject		Comments
Management options general		Ensure the specified supporting maps and tables are submitted

		(as explained on the Farm Environment Assessment webpage), where applicable
Management options general		Your management map(s) must very clearly show which options are being applied for and where. For rotational options, a separate map is useful, to show the location for each year
Targeted options		<p>If an option is not on the list for your holding, you cannot apply for it unless you obtain an endorsement from NatureScot before you apply and then submit this with your application. Allow plenty of time to request the endorsement and you must contact NatureScot at least a month before the application submission deadline. Otherwise, there is a risk that you will not receive the endorsement before the deadline and the option may have to be rejected.</p> <p>Please refer to the 'Endorsement' section of the AECS guidance to check when an 'Endorsement' is available. Endorsements are potentially available for any options that would benefit designated sites, but otherwise they are only available for a limited range of options.</p> <p>If you have an endorsement granted for a previous AECS application and the option and location remains exactly the same, you can upload the previous endorsement to support the new application.</p>
Targeting tool		If you are applying for several holdings, remember that an option may be eligible on the Main Location Code but not on the other Location Codes. Equally, an option could be available on a holding with a sub location code but not on the holding with the main location code
Management Options	Management options that require capital items	Ensure that you include any capital items which are essential to support a particular management option. For example, the Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds option requires the Creation of Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds capital item.
	Water margins options	The summary tables must be fully completed, making it clear where the margins are of varying widths, and excluding the margin width required under GAEC.
	Wader grazed grassland, Wader and Wildlife mown grassland	Complete the Wader Management Plan (PDF, Size: 1.7 MB) to define the grazing regimes in the wader option fields and include photographs of these fields. A link to the plan template is included on the option pages.
	Wader grazed grassland, Wader and Wildlife mown grassland	<p>Do not plant hedges around fields entered for these management options.</p> <p>To be awarded National priority VPS scoring points, you must exclude a 30m margin adjacent to trees, scrub, hedges or woodland in the claim area. This buffer must be clearly marked and labelled on your management map. For further information, please refer to the guidance pages for the individual options.</p> <p>In addition, for Wader Grazed Grassland you MUST complete the grazing calendar in the online application.</p> <p>Take note of restrictions to permitted fencing costs for these options below.</p>

	Habitat Mosaic Management and Species-Rich Grassland Management	<p>If you are applying for these options on hill and upland rough grazing land, you must seek an endorsement from NatureScot prior to applying, using the endorsement request form, supported by survey data proving that the site has the target habitats. If the endorsement is awarded, you must submit this alongside your application. To ensure you receive the endorsement in time, you must contact NatureScot at least a month before the application submission deadline. If you have an endorsement granted for a previous AECS application and the management area remains exactly the same, you can upload the previous endorsement to support the new application.</p> <p>For habitat mosaics, ensure there is a true mosaic and that the site meets the habitat eligibility, clearly set out in the supporting guidance. Sites with more than c25% of heath/bog habitat are not eligible. If the site has a lot of heath/bog, and the aim is to manage for waders, consider the heath management for waders option instead. Where there is a lot of grassland, there must be species rich grassland (not just improved grassland) within the mosaic.</p>
	Wader management on heath mosaics (within the Heath management option)	<p>To apply for this option, fields must fall within the target area for the wader grazed grassland option and you must stipulate in your application which waders your plan will benefit. You must follow the grazing regime stated in the option.</p> <p>You cannot apply for this option on land previously managed under the Moorland Management option. Also, if the land has not been entered into the agri-environment scheme before, but is a large, heath/mire dominated area, then it should be entered under the Moorland management option. Failure to do so will result in the option being removed from the plan, which could jeopardise the whole application. If you are unsure of habitat eligibility, speak to NatureScot or RPID before applying.</p>
	Moorland Management and associated options	<p>You MUST use the Moorland Management Plan template (PDF, Size: 119.3 kB). Ensure the plan clearly describes the moorland grazing across the full year. Flock details in the text and grazing tables must match.</p> <p>A new habitat condition assessment must be undertaken for all land to be entered into moorland management. Proposed management should address any issues found, so a change in management will be required if areas are found to be overgrazed or undergrazed.</p> <p>Submit all flock movement records within the holding register at the time of application. Please note the revised date to be used for flock records if the application includes Away wintering or Stock Disposal.</p> <p>Returning applicants must supply their last year's Management Diary pages for all LPIDs that were funded for Moorland management showing the full year's grazing.</p>

		Ensure any other relevant supporting documentation is submitted alongside your application.
	Predator Control	<p>If you had crow control only in a previous contract, you cannot continue to claim this, as the traps will last more than 5 years.</p> <p>If applying for the hectare based payment for crow and mammal control, the hectare claimed must be clearly justified in terms of the geographical coverage and efficacy of predator control carried out, and we strongly recommend that you consult NatureScot to agree the eligible hectare to claim, which will be assessed on a case by case basis. Contact NatureScot at least a month before the application deadline.</p> <p>Predator control should only be applied for where the notified bird features are being impacted by predation and where an appropriate level of effort within the bird nesting season is proposed.</p> <p>For returning applicants, you must submit the last 2 years predator control reports from your expiring contract.</p> <p>Snaring is now banned in Scotland.</p>
	Management of Buffers areas for Fens and Lowland Bogs	This should be a strip of land. Whole fields cannot be claimed. An effective buffer between the fen or lowland bog and the productive land must be created by allowing vegetation to grow and then managing effectively by grazing.
	Restoration of Species Rich Grassland	<p>This option is limited in terms of land eligibility to only permanent grassland that meets the description in the supporting guidance. Please check this carefully.</p> <p>Ensure an appropriate grazing regime is proposed, in order to allow the plants to establish.</p>
Capital Items	All capital items	<p>For all applications, only essential capital items will be accepted.</p> <p>For agri-environment type applications this would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capital items that are directly required to deliver the management option, such as the capital item Creation of Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds which is essential for the Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds option - Essential complimentary capital items, such as Creation of Wader Scrapes or Cutting of Rush Pasture - Other capital items that are essential to deliver the outcome of your application <p>Capital items are not eligible when selecting the Organic Maintenance option as this option supports the cost of maintaining an organic management system.</p> <p>The Organic Conversion option is to help farmers with the cost of converting their land to organic systems, capital items such as stock fences are not eligible. An exception may be made where the land was previously under a continually cropped arable system which is being converted to an organic system where grass and grazing are being re-introduced. Consequently you must supply a justification for any capital items applied under Organic Conversion, detailing why</p>

		<p>these should be considered as exceptional by the case officer.</p> <p>Some capital items are available throughout the country. However, some are targeted to particular locations. You can only apply for the targeted capital items if they are listed under your MLC in the Targeting tool. (The capital items webpage shows which items are targeted.) Note that non-targeted capital items are not listed in the Targeting tool webpage.</p> <p>Capital work should all be delivered in year 1 of the contract, unless the webpage for a specific capital item says otherwise. For example, for peatland restoration (ditch blocking) if there is significant work, this can be spread over years 1 and 2, but not beyond.</p> <p>The following capital items are suspended for the 2025 round:</p> <p><i>Creation of Species-rich grassland</i> <i>Heather Restoration and associated</i> <i>Follow up Molinia Control</i> <i>Muirburn (but Heather Cutting is available)</i> <i>Chemical bracken control (but mechanised/manual bracken control is available)</i></p>
	Actual capital costs	<p>Where there is an actual cost capital item, you must provide a robust justification of why standard costs cannot be used and provide the quotes and complete the quotations table in line with the scheme guidance. Items with missing or inadequate quotes for actual capital costs will not progress past the assessment stage and, in exceptional circumstances, may risk rejection of the whole application.</p>
	Fencing	<p>If you have already received funding for fencing in your previous AECS contract, or there is a current stock fence in place and it is not derelict and would last the five years of an AECS agreement, then funding for a new stock fence will not be available.</p> <p>For fences funded in the early rounds of the Rural Priorities Scheme (or comparable previous schemes up to 2014) that are not expected to last another five years, applications can be considered for fencing costs on stretches of fence needing replaced, subject to a site visit by the case officer to confirm the costs are justifiable. We recommend you seek advice before submitting your application.</p> <p>In certain circumstances, we may allow funding of a new fence to create a wider water margin where the existing fenced margin is too narrow. This does not apply if the margin was created with Rural Priorities funding and is being increased in width to meet GAEC 1 requirements.</p> <p>Where a new fence is permitted, you must remove and dispose of the existing fence appropriately - at your own cost.</p> <p>AECS does not support fencing costs to facilitate rotational grazing fence off roads, create new hill parks or any fencing primarily to aid business practices.</p> <p>Stock Fencing costs are not permitted for any wader, corncrake or corn bunting</p>

		<p>options. Temporary electric fencing can be applied for under these options where it is justified to deliver management.</p> <p>For Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds and Forage Brassica Crops for Farmland Bird only Temporary electric fencing can be used to enable management where that management is rotated around the farm over the contract period. The temporary electric fencing can be claimed once, but must then be re-used to enable management on subsequent plots.</p> <p>Fencing for forage brassica crops is only available where the site will be grazed by livestock</p> <p>Stock fencing with these options will only be considered where a robust justification can be demonstrated by the applicant business</p> <p>Deer fencing is only funded where it is required to exclude wild deer from an area in management and not for commercial deer enterprises.</p>
	Fence removal	This is only eligible if it is required to deliver benefit to a habitat or is in black grouse or capercaillie core areas. It cannot be used to fund removal of existing fencing so that new fencing can be erected.
	Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation	Plan to undertake all scrub control on a site within the first two years of your contract, to prevent continuous seeding of shrub species.
	Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems Hard Standings Livestock Crossing Livestock Tracks Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems Pesticide Handling Facilities Water-use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon	If applying for any of these options, you must submit a Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment. For Water - see Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon - the Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment is only required where the lagoon will be filled with any water that was collected at a steading
	Sediment Ponds	Where sediment ponds have an integrated sediment trap, they need to be claimed separately as each has a different cost.
Bracken Control		<p>The manual treatment capital item must be undertaken annually and include multiple cuts each season.</p> <p>Only mechanised or manual treatment of bracken can be funded, where appropriate.</p>
Muirburn and Heather Cutting		<p>The Muirburn element of the Muirburn and Heather Cutting capital item is suspended for the 2025 round. If you plan to undertake muirburn at your own expense on a designated site within your AECS application area and during the lifetime of the AECS contract, you MUST submit a Muirburn Plan, so that there is a record of where and when work will take place, to allow the case officer to assess whether work is appropriate to the site. For non-designated sites, you must provide detail within the Moorland management plan of any muirburn you intend to undertake.</p> <p>Heather cutting is not suspended.</p>
Ditch blocking		If you apply for Ditch Blocking for peatland restoration, you will need approval from

		<p>your planning authority, under the Prior Notification and Prior Approval process .</p> <p>You are also strongly advised to contact NatureScot as least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your peatland proposals. This will help ensure they fit with the scheme requirements.</p>
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Recent Changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Updated details for 2025 round

Previous versions

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8 Further requirements for applicants

Date published: 31 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Table of Contents

Introduction

When you apply for this scheme, there are a number of things you need to consider.

The [Essential Information](#) for applications and the [Checklist of Requirements](#) highlights key points to consider before applying to the Scheme. The guidance below explains the following items in more detail:

- The consents and licences you may need.
- Taking account of Protected Species.
- Guidance on quotes for actual cost capital items.

Consents and licences

When you first think of the work that you wish to progress through this scheme, if you consider that a consent or licence may be required, you should contact the relevant organisation for advice as soon as possible.

Their staff or their websites will provide details on consent / licensing requirements in your specific circumstances and advise on how to proceed.

It is your responsibility to make sure that you have any necessary authorisation for the work that you wish to carry out.

Some examples of where you might require a particular authorisation include:

- felling licence from Scottish Forestry for removing heavy scrub under the Control of Scrub / Woody Vegetation capital item.
- abstraction licence from the [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#) (SEPA) under the Water-use Efficiency – Irrigation Lagoon capital item.
- consents from [Historic Environment Scotland](#) (HES) relating to [Scheduled Monuments \(PDF, Size: 799.9 kB\)](#) (Please also refer to the [Designations page](#))
- if you apply for Ditch Blocking for peatland restoration you will need approval from your planning authority, under the [Prior Notification and Prior Approval process](#) .
- licences for trapping of birds or mammals (see below*)

Please note:

If your application includes proposals for land in a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or European site (SPA or SPC), we will consider any effects on these sites. Please refer to the guidance on [designated areas](#). If your application is successful and you are awarded a contract, you will not need consent from NatureScot for the activities covered by the contract.

If you are in any doubt about whether your proposed works will affect a protected species, refer to the guidance on protected species (see below).

If you have already received consent or written approval from a consenting authority you should upload a copy of the relevant documentation to accompany your online application. You should make sure that you keep a copy available for inspection. If you have not received a necessary consent or licence from the relevant authority by the time you submit your application, you must submit evidence that you are in discussion with the relevant authority about this. However, for the avoidance of doubt, you must ensure that you hold any required licence or consent before you start the management for which a licence or consent is required.

* If applying to control birds or mammals under the AECS Predator Control option, check that you can meet the relevant licensing requirements. Please note the following points:

- for crow trapping, under General Licence GL01/2024, trap operators must register with NatureScot and then display the registration number on the traps. Also, if trapping within one of the European sites (SPAs or SACs) listed in Annex 2 of GL01/2024 you must comply with the Standing Conditions for the site
- stoat trapping : trapping of stoats is now controlled through General Licence GL14/2024. Please note, there are changes to the types of traps which can be used to take or kill stoats. Most significantly, Fenn traps can no longer be used to take or kill stoats
- as of 25 November 2024, it is illegal to set any snare in Scotland
- if trapping within one of the European sites (SPAs or SACs) listed in Annex 2 of GL01/2024 you must comply with the Standing Conditions for the site

Protected species

There are several pieces of legislation giving protection to species found in Scotland. In many cases it is an offence to kill or capture animals including birds, or to uproot plants. The law also protects some wild creatures from disturbance or harassment, or disturbance of their nests or resting places. Examples of commonly encountered species are shown below. Further details can be found on the [NatureScot protected species webpage](#).

You should therefore consider whether the management options or capital items you propose will affect any protected species. Please take into account the timings and locations of works (for example avoiding disturbance of birds during the breeding season). You should note the presence of any protected species in your application.

The [interactive tools on NatureScot's SNHi](#) may be helpful, over and above your own knowledge of the land and [NatureScot area staff](#) can provide further guidance where necessary.

You must organise an appropriate ecological survey of the area if you know that your land supports protected species which may be affected by your proposal.

The survey report should include ways to mitigate unavoidable damage or disturbance and suggest ideas to compensate for any losses. The report should also identify any licensing requirements which might allow the work to go ahead in spite of the protected species.

You should also submit the report along with your application.

Please contact the [NatureScot licensing team](#) if you need more advice on survey requirements and licensing.

Commonly encountered protected species include:

- Bats, otters, great crested newts and natterjack toads – these are protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended).
- Wild birds protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
- Red squirrels, pine martens, water voles and other animals – these are listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
- Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (as amended).
- Plants listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
- Beavers are fully protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). This protection also extends to lodges and burrows used for breeding and can apply to dams.

Quotes

Before applying for any actual cost capital items, please read the [Funding under this scheme guidance](#), to check that you meet the eligibility requirements, and please ensure that your application includes adequate justification for the use of actual capital costs. You must submit written competitive quotations for the actual cost items included in your application to demonstrate that the project costs are reasonable.

There must be no conflict of interest between the various suppliers providing the quotes, or between the applicants or their agent and the suppliers. A conflict of interest is a situation where a third party, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably consider that such an interest could unfairly influence actions or decisions. For example, an agent must not tender a quote for works and this also applies to any individual or contractor who has a close connection with the business.

If the cost is £10,000 or less a minimum of two valid written quotations is required. If the cost is more than £10,000, you must submit a minimum of three valid written quotations.

Only in exceptional circumstances is one quotation acceptable and the criteria that must be met is set out under '**Exceptions - acceptance of one quote**' below.

You must submit a Quotations table using the template provided below.



[Quotations table - blank template \(MS Word, Size: 50.7 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-2023-quotations-table---blank-template.docx> Template document



[Quotations table - example \(PDF, Size: 156.6 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-2023-quotations-table-example.pdf> Example table

You must ask all suppliers to quote on a clear specification with works/requirements accurately described, the quotes must refer to this specification, and you must provide a copy of the specification with your application.

For items/services other than water troughs, [Fair Work First \(FWF\)](#) will apply to any goods or services purchased or obtained in relation to your AECS contract if your application is successful. You must ensure that any suppliers and/or contractors involved in servicing the requirements of the contract comply with FWF.

The case officer will be looking for the following:

- a completed quotations table summarising the quotes information - see example
- quotes are addressed to the applicant
- quotes are written / printed, on business headed notepaper and clearly originated from a reputable supplier who can deliver the items or work
- quotes are clear and meet all the tender specifications as they must be comparable on a like-for-like basis
- no missing elements - any costs not included in the total estimated costs on your application will not be eligible for funding
- no ineligible elements
- cost calculations are up to date, correct and precise
- where there is an equivalent standard cost capital item your specification must use the same unit of measurement as the standard cost item.
- for larger projects, the quote must include a schedule which breaks down costs for each of the main stages or capital elements of the work (these can be claimed on completion of each stage of work as these appear in the schedule of works)
- suppliers must confirm for how long the quote is valid
- whether the price includes appropriate VAT rate. Details of any VAT to be paid must be shown against the relevant items. If you are VAT registered you must include the lowest cost in your application net of VAT. If you are not VAT registered and have confirmed this during the customer registration process, you may claim the full cost including VAT
- for capital items intended to benefit the environment and the long term management of scheduled monuments on designated sites (SSSI or European sites - see Funding under this scheme), there must be a justification for using actual capital costs and the quotes must be sufficiently detailed to show the methodology and specialist requirements

When assessing your application, the case officer will consider whether the proposed costs are reasonable, taking into account other cost information for that activity.

If the quotes supplied are insufficient in any way, your case officer will advise you of this. If you do not remedy any deficiencies promptly and supply the case officer with the required documentation the relevant costs may be amended to standard costs, or not be considered as part of the application which may in exceptional circumstances, risk rejection of the whole application.

If your application is successful, funding will be based on the lowest valid quote received (subject to confirmation that the costs are considered to be reasonable). You can choose to proceed with a more expensive company, if you wish, but the amount we pay will not exceed maximum amount / total cost per 'item' shown on the schedule of your work in your contract.

Exceptions – acceptance of one quote

Subject to your case officer's approval, one quote may be admissible when:

1. The specifications are so specialised that only limited suppliers are available and it would be unreasonable or impracticable to find a second or third quote. For example, when the supplier is a contractor required to carry out works in a remote area where only one qualified contractor is available and the scale of works would not attract contractors from further away.

The case officer will still be expected to check value for money against standard rates for similar activities elsewhere, such as those published in the [SAC Consulting Farm Management Handbook](#), whilst taking into account the remote location factor.

2. The individual item value is below £1,000 and you can justify why you have little alternative but to source individual items from a single reputable supplier. You must demonstrate why the work cannot be more easily tendered in larger parts and two or three quotes obtained.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Consents and Licences	Updates regarding predator control and snaring ban.

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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9 Designations: natural heritage, landscape, historic

Date published: 22 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Introduction

If you intend to apply to this scheme on any land that is within a designated site, or will affect a designated site, you must take this into account when preparing your application.

There are three types of designation that may impact on an application:

- **natural heritage designations:**
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI),
 - Special Protection Areas (SPA)
 - Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
 - The Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS)(SACs and SPAs were originally designated under EU legislation and were known as Natura sites but they are now known as European sites.)
- **landscape and recreational designations:** National Scenic Area, Regional Park, Country Park, National Park
- **historic and archaeological designations:** Scheduled Monuments

Natural heritage designations

Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European Sites

You can find details of the SSSIs and European sites on your land using [NatureScot's SiteLink website](#). On the SiteLink home page you can click on a site name to find a list of the features of special interest for which the site was designated; for example, "Corncrake" or "Sand Dunes". You can also find a site map, and a Site Management Statement with information on managing the features. On the SiteLink home page, you can also click on "Map Search" to find sites in your area.

For further information on SSSIs or European sites, or advice on managing these sites, please contact NatureScot.

You are strongly advised to seek advice from NatureScot **before** starting to work up an AECS application for a designated site and at least a month before the application deadline. If you do not, and NatureScot identifies significant issues with the management you propose for the designated site, this may prejudice the success of your application.

[Contact NatureScot](#)

Providing information in your application

In your online application, you will be asked to list any SSSIs or European sites involved and the features for which the sites were designated.

For some options and capital items, you may be required to complete a specialist management plan. You will have to refer to your designated site(s) within such a plan.

Availability of options

You can apply for any management options or capital items which will benefit the special features of an SSSI or European site, even if they do not appear on your list of targeted options. The only exceptions are any options and capital items which are suspended in the current application round and also the Hen Harrier Grassland Management option which is only available in Orkney. **However, if you wish to apply for an option that does not appear on your targeted list then you must first obtain an [endorsement](#) from NatureScot and submit this along with your Agri-Environment Climate Scheme application.**

If you received a NatureScot endorsement under a previous AECS application, for the same option on exactly the same land, you must submit this with your current application, and you do not need to obtain a new endorsement.

Assessment of applications for SSSIs or European sites

Your case officer will consider the effects of your proposed management on the SSSI and / or European site features and consult NatureScot and other relevant regulatory bodies. Management which is likely to damage the site features will not be approved. Management which will benefit the site features will be taken into account when scoring the application.

SSSI consents

You do not need separate SSSI consent from NatureScot for works on or affecting an SSSI which are included in your AECS contract, for the duration of that contract.

It is possible that you have existing consents from NatureScot that are not compatible with the management required under this Scheme; for example, you may have a consent for grazing sheep, but you are applying to graze cattle instead under this scheme. In such cases, the AECS contract requirements take precedence over the existing consent, but only for the duration of the contract.

Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS)

The Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland was designated by UNESCO as a peatland World Heritage Site in July 2024. [A map of the site can be found under the 'Documentation' section on this Flow Country webpage](#) . If your AECS application overlaps with the WHS, your Case Officer will consider how it will affect the WHS, based on advice from NatureScot. Management which is likely to be damaging to the Site will not be approved. Management which will benefit the WHS will be taken into account when scoring the application.

Landscape and recreational designations

There are 40 National Scenic Areas in Scotland, covering 13 per cent of the country. They include mountain areas such as the Skye Cuillins, Ben Nevis and Glencoe, and island landscapes within the Hebrides and the Northern Isles. You can find out more about these areas using the link below, along with information around planning and development.

[National Scenic Areas](#)

Historic and archaeological designations

Scheduled monuments

Scheduled monuments are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979). Historic Environment Scotland encourages positive management of scheduled monuments to ensure these nationally important sites are preserved for future generations to enjoy. Most works on scheduled monuments do however require scheduled monument consent and it is an offence to undertake works without consent. This includes any ground-breaking works, fencing, drainage, tree removal, paths, steps and flooding works.

There is no specific funding for management works on scheduled monuments within this scheme. However, a number of annual recurrent options and capital items have the potential to offer dual benefits to both the environment and the long-term management of scheduled monuments. Where proposed works meet environmental criteria but also include a scheduled monument for which the works will be beneficial, additional points may be gained in recognition of the multiple benefits offered.

The guidance note 'Scotland Rural Development Programme – Management of Scheduled Monuments: Management options and capital items', gives more details on relevant options and capital items. This can be downloaded below.

Not all options and capital items are suitable for scheduled monuments, so it is important that you contact Historic Environment Scotland for advice at an early stage of your planning. Applications to Historic Environment Scotland for scheduled monument consent are normally dealt with within nine weeks.

You can get advice on scheduled monuments and the scheduled monument consent process from:

Historic Environment Scotland

HMconsultations@hes.scot - please use email whenever possible

0131 668 8716

Postal address – for use only if you cannot email:

Historic Environment Scotland
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
EH9 1SH

If you are carrying out any agri-environment options, you may be penalised if inspections show that you have knowingly damaged or destroyed a scheduled monument. You may also have committed a criminal offence and face prosecution. It is therefore important that you are aware of the location, nature and extent of any scheduled monuments on your land. It is advisable to mark these clearly and accurately on any plans you prepare (such as your Farm Environment Assessment) and particularly on any information that you provide to a contractor or other third party working on the land. This is particularly important if you are planning a change in land use.

You may also wish to mark undesignated archaeological sites on your Farm Environment Assessment.

There are a number of sources that can help you to identify both designated and undesignated sites of archaeological and historical interest on your land:

- If you enter your Holding Number into the AECS Targeting Tool it will give details of any Scheduled Monuments present on the holding
- [You can consult Pastmap](#), which is a free online resource. It will provide the location and full extent of a scheduled monument. It also provides the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscape, and provides a central point for a listed building and its curtilage. It will also provide an approximate or central point for recorded unscheduled sites. The written descriptions of unscheduled sites in the National Record of the Historic Environment and local authority Historic Environment Record data will help you to define on the ground the minimum extent of visible remains. (Note: Pastmap is due to be replaced by a new mapping tool during 2025.)
- Information on scheduled monuments is also available via the [HES Portal](#), which also has a map search facility.
- Your local authority archaeology service may be able to provide advice on the management and protection of unscheduled archaeological sites. However, not all local authority areas offer advisory services in relation to the Scottish Rural Development Programme. If you had an archaeological audit of your land for a previous agri-environment scheme, you can refer to this



[HES Guidance on AECS and Scheduled Monuments 2025 \(PDF, Size: 663.7 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/HES-Guidance-on-AECS-and-Scheduled-Monuments-2025.pdf>

Recent changes

Section	Change
Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS)	Information added
Historic and archaeological designations	Updated Management of Scheduled Monuments guidance

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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10 Mapping

Date published: 11 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

You will need to provide some or all of the following maps with your application:

- a Farm Environment Map or Maps*, as part of your [Farm Environment Assessment](#) (FEA), together with maps for the Diffuse Pollution Assessment, if required, as explained in the FEA webpage. You must use the habitat and feature categories specified in the FEA webpage.
- a Farm Management Map or Maps*, as part of your Farm Environment Assessment, showing the location of the management options and capital items within your application. This will form an integral part of your contract
- any maps required as part of the application requirements for individual management options and capital items
- if your application is part of a Collaborative Management Plan (CMP), you must submit the map or maps provided to you by the person leading the collaborative plan as described in section 2.6 of the CMP template below. This must show your holding alongside the other holdings applying as part of a collaborative application. The CMP map should only show works which form part of the collaborative project. If applying for other AECS measures, unconnected to the collaborative project, these should not be included here.



[Collaborative Management Plan \(MS Word, Size: 24.5 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-collaborative-management-plan-oct-2023.docx>

Note that all maps must show the current situation and not simply be copies of versions submitted with an earlier application.

*For large holdings with extensive moorland/upland, it may be necessary to provide separate maps of the inbye (at large scale) and moorland (at smaller scale) so that all the details are easy to read.

Producing your maps

You should produce your maps on either a Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) map or an Ordnance Survey (OS) map as explained below.

Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) Maps

If you are a land occupier and have previously registered your land in order to claim payments under a support scheme operated by the Rural Payments and Inspections Division then you will have been issued with a LPIS map of your land holdings.

If you have not already registered your land and you wish to receive funding, you will need to register with us, in accordance with the [guidance on business registration](#).

Once you have registered, we will send you a digitised map of your land, called your LPIS map. Maps based on your LPIS maps will be acceptable.

To view the online mapping facility, you will need to log on to your Rural Payments and Services account. This will allow you to access your location codes, land parcel details and view / print maps held by us. Further information is available in section 1.8 of our Land Maintenance Form Guidance.



[Land Maintenance Form Guidance \(PDF, Size: 2.1 MB\)](#)

doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/lmf_producer_guidance_161115_v2----oct-2023.pdf

Ordnance Survey Maps

If you do not possess a LPIS map, then your detailed maps must be based on up-to-date Ordnance Survey (OS) maps.

You must use originals or good quality copies (i.e. paper maps) unless you have access to digital mapping software enabling you to produce maps to the required standard. If this is the case, you can submit maps electronically.

Large scale mapping covering the whole of Scotland is [available from Ordnance Survey](#) in various hard-copy and digital formats under the product titles OS Sitemap or OS Landplan.

These products allow you to define your needs and maps can be produced site-centred regardless of National Grid sheet edges and at any size between A4 and AO.

Access to OS Maps

Sitemap and Landplan maps are obtainable directly from the Ordnance Survey's Mapping and Data Centres – Ordnance Survey's retail outlets.

For more details on Sitemap, Landplan and other conventional Ordnance Survey products, contact your nearest Ordnance Survey Mapping and Data Centre or telephone Ordnance Survey Customer Information on 08456 05 05 05.

If you are producing maps from your own geographic information system (GIS) or digital mapping software, you should make sure that plots are based on up-to-date Ordnance Survey MasterMap data or 1:10,000 scale raster data (details of these products can be found on the [Ordnance Survey website](#)).

Copyright

You may use the LPIS map that we have given you, without the need for a copyright licence.

Any organisation or person wanting to copy Ordnance Survey based maps for their own business or private use must either be licensed by the Ordnance Survey or apply for permission each time a copy is required and keep to the terms of that permission.

It is your responsibility (or the Accountable Person – someone mandated to act on your behalf) to ensure that any copyright responsibilities are met.

The Ordnance Survey provides licences to many bodies (for example, local authorities, various professional organisations and business firms) and to individual customers who have a regular need to copy Ordnance Survey material.

To apply for a licence or for further information contact Ordnance Survey Customer Information on 08456 05 05 05.

Marking your Maps

Your maps must be marked clearly and accurately and be consistent with the details in the application.

If you are proposing to carry out a number of operations on the same area, you may need to use more than one map to ensure that the details are clear.

All your maps must:

- show your case title
- show your Business Reference Number and Location Code Number
- be produced on an up-to-date LPIS or Ordnance Survey map
- be at an appropriate scale to show a reasonable level of detail for the types of operations you propose to carry out: for example 1:5000 to 1:10,000 can be suitable for arable parcels while a smaller scale may be more suitable for extensive moorland. But if there is any localised management which cannot be shown clearly on your main maps, you should include additional maps at larger scale for those locations
- not have any map detail hidden by folds, labels or marks
- provide an Ordnance Survey grid reference for your application area or else you must ensure that the individual grid lines are correctly numbered
- **ensure the map legend is easy to read** without having to zoom in

Farm Environment Map

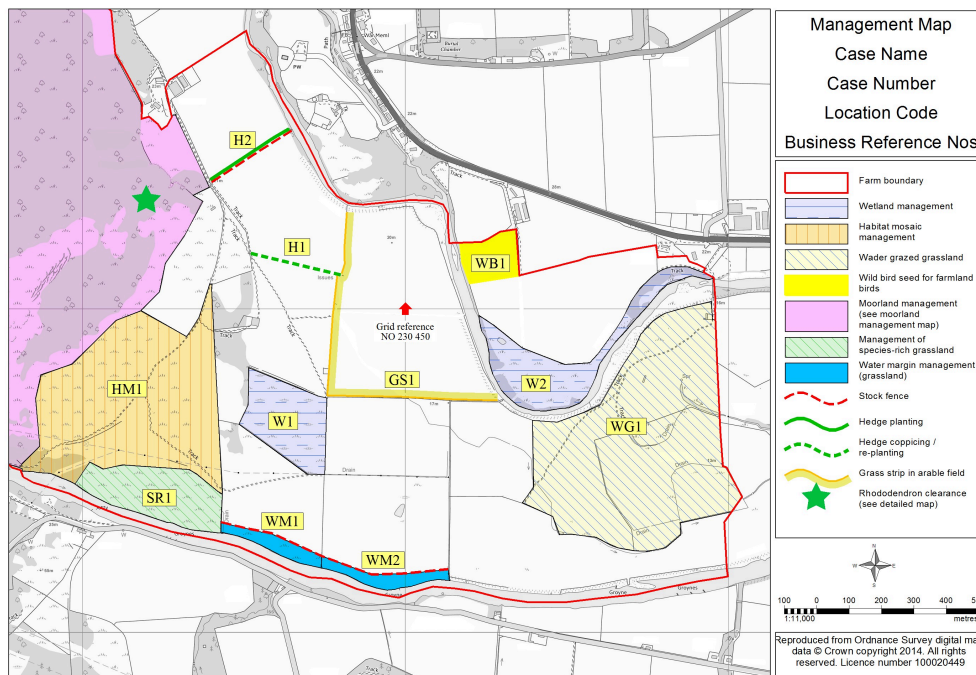
Please read the [Farm Environment Assessment \(FEA\) webpage](#) which explains what is required in your Farm Environment map. It also explains how you could use the Farm Environment Map to help meet the Biodiversity Audit aspect of the Whole Farm Plan requirements for your business.

Farm Management map details

The minimum requirements for displaying details on your map are:

- show each management option or capital item you are applying for, using an easily recognisable colour hatching or symbol on your map
- include a key to all symbols and hatching depicted on your maps. The map colours MUST match the colour key
- label each individual management option area and capital item with a letter and ensure that these correspond to the map letters in your online application. You may use the same map letter if appropriate, for example H1 can depict both a new hedge and any new fence associated with the hedge

An example is shown below.



Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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11 Farm Environment Assessment

Date published: 30 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Introduction

You are required to prepare a Farm Environment Assessment to cover the whole of your holding if you are proposing to apply for any Agri-Environment Climate Scheme management options or capital items, unless you are only applying for the following options:

- * [Coastal Embankment Breaching, Lowering or Removal](#)
- * [River Embankment Breaching, Lowering or Removal](#)
- * [Restoring \(Protecting\) River Banks](#)
- [Organic Farming: Maintenance](#)
- [Organic Farming: Conversion](#)
- [Upland Habitat Impact Assessment for deer management](#) (as standalone capital item)
- [Wildcat friendly predator control](#) , where this is the only option applied for
- *[Water - use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon](#)

*These options will also require a Diffuse pollution risk assessment - [see below](#)

Note:

If your farm business has a Business Registration Number that consists of several Location Codes, the Farm Environment Assessment needs to cover the entirety of any Location Codes included in your application.

Crofting applications:

If you are applying as a common grazing's committee, the Farm Environment Assessment should cover the whole of the common grazing's.

If you are applying as a single crofter with a common grazing apportionment (or designated cropped area), you should include the apportioned (or cropped area) in your Farm Environment Assessment.

FEA payments:

Payment for a Farm Environment Assessment Plan is not available to those reapplying for the same land as in a previously submitted AECS application related to agri-environmental management. However, you can claim payment if you are applying to AECS for a holding, under the same BRN, which has not had any previous AECS applications.

If you are applying for a holding previously applied for, but which now has additional land, you can only claim for the hectareage of the additional land.

Payment is not available if you have had an Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) produced for your farm funded through the Farm Advisory Service. This would constitute double funding.

Please refer to the [Claims and Payments page](#) for full details of eligibility criteria and payment rates

Diffuse pollution risk assessment

All applicants (apart from those only applying for organic farming, Upland HIA for deer management, Wildcat friendly predator control) must undertake a diffuse pollution field-based risk assessment - see Diffuse pollution risk assessment section below. Returning applicants should survey for any new issues and also note where any issues were addressed in the previous AECS contract.

Diffuse pollution stading assessment

If you wish to apply for certain options relating to water quality, you must also prepare a diffuse pollution stading assessment – see Diffuse pollution stading assessment section below.

Farm Environment Assessment

The purpose of the assessment is to identify opportunities for beneficial environmental management through a review of the habitats and species on the farm.

The assessment will also highlight any key diffuse pollution risks on the land.

You will need to produce the following documents:

- Farm Environment Map
- Farm Environment Table
- Farm Management Map

To complete the Farm Environment Assessment effectively you will need to identify basic habitat types and produce a Farm Environment Map showing these.

While mapping the habitats you will also need to consider the impact of current management and the needs of the key species present in these habitats, and any key diffuse pollution risks.

This information should then be added to the Farm Environment Table where you can provide more detail about habitat condition.

The process of collecting this information should help you to identify the priorities for management and the best options to apply for, both for the benefit of the habitats and species, and to manage any diffuse pollution risks.

You will need to show your chosen scheme management options and capital items in a Farm Management Map.

Depending on the size and nature of your land and the risks identified, you may either identify and map the diffuse pollution risks within the general Farm Environment Assessment, or prepare a separate Diffuse Pollution Field Assessment.

Some of the management options or capital items you select may also require a specialist management plan which will ask you to go into further detail.

Farm Environment Map

The map should clearly show the following:

- Farm boundary.
- Existing habitats, using the list provided in the Farm Environment Table template. Please note this list currently aligns with the Habitat and Feature Key agreed for the Whole Farm Plan Biodiversity Audit.*
- Boundaries of the following protected places for nature: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC);
- Any historic sites, e.g. Scheduled Monuments. If this makes the map too complex, you may wish to provide a separate map but this must also show the farm boundary.
- Any diffuse pollution risks identified (unless showing them on a separate map). These should be identified on the map as a dot, line or shape as appropriate showing their location together with a number.
- A key to the colour codes used in the map. **The colours you use in the FEA table must match the colours on your map.**

Provide more than one map if necessary to ensure all the information is clear. For example, a map of the inbye fields and a separate map of the moorland.

If you are applying for Moorland Management, you have to provide a detailed map of the extent of the different moorland habitats. As this is provided as a separate moorland map within the Moorland Management Plan, the FEA map can be simplified for the moorland area, as explained in the FEA table template.

The map below is an example Farm Environment Map where the whole farm has been mapped. This would also meet the Biodiversity Audit habitat map standards (see below).



[Farm Environment example map to meet Biodiversity Audit requirements \(PDF, Size: 147.0 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Farm-Environment-example-map-to-meet-Biodiversity-Audit-requirements---Jan-2025.pdf> Farm Environment example map to meet Biodiversity Audit requirements

*Whole Farm Plan - Biodiversity Audit

If you use the approved key and assign a habitat to all land that you are responsible for, excluding seasonal land but including any land that is not currently mapped and does not have a LPID (white space) then your AECS FEA map can form the basis of the Habitat map required to satisfy the minimum standards for a Biodiversity Audit, as part of your business Whole Farm Plan. Please consult the detailed guidance on the [Whole Farm Plan](#) page.

Farm Environment Table

You must use the template provided below. The table begins with a short summary paragraph describing the farm. This should include details, such as farm type, size, agricultural activities, livestock numbers and type, crops grown and tenure.

Each habitat present should be described in the separate rows provided in the table. Provide a short description of the habitat and its condition, together with any issues, risks or opportunities. You should note the presence of any species of interest, especially any protected species or **vulnerable priority species**.

Where diffuse pollution risks have been identified, list them in the table using corresponding numbers on the map and give a brief outline of the risk (unless identifying them separately in a separate table). If no diffuse pollution risks have been found, state, 'no diffuse pollution risks identified'.

You can download the template for the table and an example of how to complete it below.



[Farm Environment Table template \(MS Word, Size: 45.1 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/FARM-ENVIRONMENT-TABLE-TEMPLATE--2025-onwards.docx> An editable template for the Farm Environment Table



[Farm Environment Table example \(PDF, Size: 226.1 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Farm-Environment-Table-Example.pdf>
An example of how to complete the Farm Environment Table

Farm Management Map

The management map should clearly show where the proposed management options and capital items are to be undertaken on the farm. Please refer to the "Marking your maps" and "Management Map" details on the Mapping page.

Each management activity should be individually labelled with a map letter for identification purposes and shown using a clear coloured map key. These map letters must correspond to the map letters provided in the online application.

For example, **HM1** could be used for existing hedgerow management under the Management or Restoration of Hedgerows option, **HC1** could be used to reflect new hedgerow creation under the Creation of Hedgerows option and **SRG1** could be used for Species-rich Grassland Management.

Associated capital items can have the same map letter to avoid the map becoming cluttered. For example, stock fencing and hedge planting capital items for the same new hedge could be identified by the same map letter.

Similarly, capital items associated with management options can be shown by a line or symbol and have the same map letter. For example, fencing a water margin, as long as the map key clearly identifies the capital items.

The map must include a colour key.

You should provide more than one map if that is necessary to ensure all the information is clear. For example, a large-scale map of the in-bye fields and smaller-scale map of moorland.

You can download an example of a Farm Management Map.



[Farm Management Map \(PDF, Size: 384.9 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Farm-Environment-Management-Map---December-2015-2.pdf> An example of a Farm Management Map

Diffuse pollution risk assessment

The purpose of this is to carry out a basic assessment of the diffuse pollution risks that may be present on your holding.

This will help to identify the options or actions that may be appropriate to help deal with these risks and where they should be located to maximise their effectiveness.

Field Assessment

To complete the field assessment it will be necessary to walk the fields with a view to identifying any diffuse pollution risks and to look for opportunities to reduce these risks.

Field Map

Using a map of an appropriate scale record as a line, point or shape as appropriate any diffuse pollution risks identified.

Depending on the size and nature of your land and the risks identified, you may either identify the risks on the Farm Environment Assessment map or prepare a separate Diffuse Pollution Field Map, as shown in the example below.

Each of these points must be individually numbered on the map and noted in a corresponding table which will describe the diffuse pollution risk found and what action can be taken to deal with it.

The location of all surface waters such as burns, ditches, ponds and wetlands should also be recorded.

Diffuse pollution risk factors will vary depending on the type of farm (arable or livestock) and on local factors such as, proximity to watercourses, slope of land and soil types, access of livestock to watercourses, location of gateways and tracks etc.

Guidance on factors to consider when carrying out a field diffuse pollution risk assessment can be found in the accompanying guidance for the options such as 'Alternative Watering' and the options for 'Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems'.

[Further guidance on diffuse pollution risk assessments.](#)

Diffuse pollution steading assessment

The Farm Environment Assessment should help identify key diffuse pollution risk factors from the land.

However where water quality capital items are applied for, a more detailed assessment must be carried out covering any diffuse pollution risks from the steading.

There is [further guidance](#) on what diffuse pollution risk factors should be considered and how to identify and record them.

The purpose of this exercise is to consider the whole farm, identify potential pollution risks and select the most appropriate options which will help you to manage the risks effectively.

You must complete this if you are applying for any of the following options:

[Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Wetland](#)

[Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Sediment Traps and Bunds](#)

[Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Swales](#)

[Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Pond](#)

[Hard Standings for Troughs and Gateways](#)

[Livestock Crossing](#)

[Livestock Tracks](#)

[Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems](#)

[Pesticide Handling Facilities](#)

[Water-use Efficiency – Irrigation Lagoon](#) Note: The Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment is only required where the lagoon will be filled with any water that was collected at a steading.

Note: The completion of a Steading Assessment can be waived if there is no steading present on the holding. However, the applicant must provide a statement as part of the application, explaining that a steading assessment has not been completed because there is not a steading present on the holding.

[Recent changes](#)

Section	Change
Introduction	Slurry Storage removed Improving Public Access removed.
Farm Environment Assessment	Updated Farm Environment example map. Updated Information about Biodiversity Audit. Updated Farm Environment Table template.

[Previous versions](#)

[Previous versions of this page](#)

[Download guidance](#)

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12 Diffuse pollution risk assessment and Diffuse pollution steading assessment

Date published: 5 October, 2023

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Table of Contents

Diffuse pollution risk assessment

The purpose of this is to carry out a basic assessment of the diffuse pollution risks that may be present by walking over and assessing the whole holding. Returning applicants should survey for any new issues and also note where any issues were addressed in the previous AECS contract.

The assessment comprises of two elements:

- A field assessment map
- A table detailing the Diffuse pollution risks and identifying potential opportunities/actions to minimise these risks. This can include identifying potential AECS options/capital items that could be delivered

This is required for all applications, except where you are only applying for Organic Farming, Upland HIA for deer management, Wildcat friendly predator control (where this is the only option applied for)

This will help to identify the options or actions that may be appropriate to help deal with these risks and where they should be located to maximise their effectiveness.

When assessing diffuse pollution risks it is important to consider whether diffuse pollution is actually occurring or whether there is a real risk of pollution occurring. In order to assess this; it is useful to think along the lines of the Source - Pathway -Receptor approach, as follows:

- 1. Has a **SOURCE** of diffuse pollution been identified? Examples include dirty yard areas, eroded areas at gates etc.
- 2. Is there a clearly identified **PATHWAY** for transporting the potential pollutants from the source to a watercourse? Examples include an open drain/ gulley at a steading which drains to a watercourse or direct run-off from the source area such as a hardstanding and/or track to a watercourse.
- **NOTE:** lightly contaminated run-off which currently discharges onto grassed areas, with no direct run-off to a watercourse, is not generally considered to be a water pollution risk, even if there are underground field drains present.
- 3. Is there a **RECEPTOR** (receiving water). If no receptor has been identified then there is no real pollution risk. (NB. in some cases the receiving water may be outside the farm boundary, however if there is a connection (via drain or ditch etc) a pollution risk may still exist).

A water pollution risk only occurs if all 3 of the above can be identified.

Where SEPA has carried out a farm visit, have they identified a diffuse pollution problem or risk at the steading and/ or out in the fields? There should be a letter from SEPA with a map/ plan identifying the pollution issues found. This could be used as a basis to create your own diffuse pollution assessment for the whole farm.

Field assessment

To complete the field assessment it will be necessary to walk the fields with a view to identifying any diffuse pollution risks and to look for opportunities to reduce these risks.

Field map

Using a map of an appropriate scale record as a line, point or shape as appropriate any diffuse pollution risks identified.

Depending on the size and nature of your land and the risks identified, you may either identify the risks on the Farm Environment map - available where the option/capital items also requires a Farm Environment Assessment or prepare a separate Diffuse Pollution Field Map, as shown in the example below.

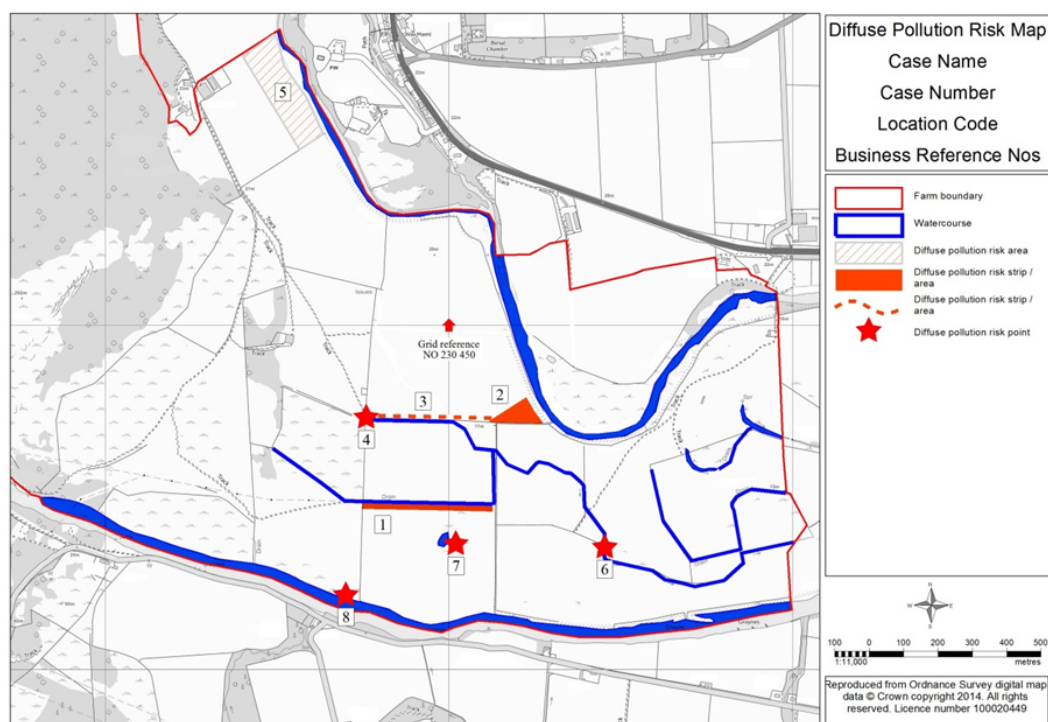
Each of these points must be individually numbered on the map and noted in a corresponding table which will describe the diffuse pollution risk found and what action can be taken to deal with it.

The location of all surface waters such as burns, ditches, ponds and wetlands etc should also be recorded.

Diffuse pollution risk factors will vary depending on the type of farm (arable or livestock) and on local factors such as, proximity to watercourses, slope of land and soil types, access of livestock to watercourses, location of gateways and tracks etc.

Guidance on factors to consider when carrying out a field diffuse pollution risk assessment can be found in the accompanying guidance for the options such as '[Alternative Watering](#)' and the options for the '[Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems](#)'. Risk factors will vary depending on land use. On grassland, diffuse pollution risks may originate from cattle tracks, drinkers or feeders close to watercourses or poaching and erosion on the banks of watercourses. On arable fields, soil erosion is likely to be the principal risk and will be influenced by soil type, cropping, slopes etc.

When the initial assessment is complete the next step is to decide what action and/or options might be appropriate to help reduce diffuse pollution risks.



Number on map	Diffuse pollution risk	Action or potential options (for guidance only)
1	Grass field, cattle have direct access to ditch. Risk of poaching and erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative watering facilities - Water margin in permanent grassland field - Stocking rate low - continue to monitor area and take action if poaching occurs
2	Low corner of arable field. Run-off exit point. Risk of causing erosion in lower field and eroded soil entering burn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural sustainable drainage system - sediment traps and bunds - Rural sustainable drainage system - pond - Creation of low input grassland to convert arable land at risk of erosion of flooding

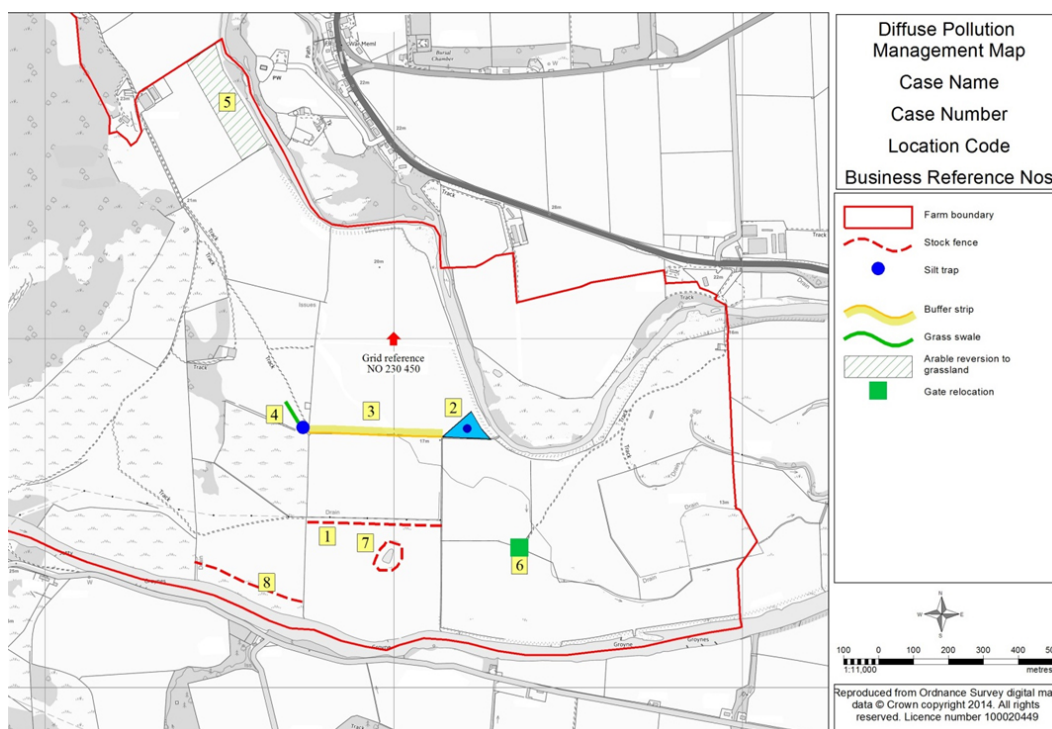
		- Grass strip in arable field
3	Arable field sloping towards burn	- Grass strip in arable field
4	Risk of run-off from track entering ditch	- Rural sustainable drainage system - sediment traps and bunds - Rural sustainable drainage system - swale - Livestock tracks
5	Long uninterrupted slope in arable field. Risk of soil erosion	- Grass strip in arable field
6	Gate close to burn. Risk of run-off from poached area around gate reaching burn	- Hardstandings for troughs and gateways - Rural sustainable drainage system - sediment traps and bunds
7	Grass field, cattle have access to pond. Risk of poaching or erosion	- Alternative watering facilities - Water margin in permanent grassland field - Continue to monitor area and take action if any poaching occurs
8	Grass field, cattle have access to ditch for drinking. Risk of poaching and erosion	- Alternative watering facilities - Water margin in permanent grassland field - Continue to monitor area and take action if any poaching occurs

Management map

On a map and using a similar approach to the risk assessment mark the various actions that are planned to deal with the identified diffuse pollution risks.

Number each of the actions on the map to show their location. On a corresponding table, describe the actions to be taken or the options to be applied for – see example map and table below.

As for the field map, you may not need to have a separate diffuse pollution management map if the actions can be clearly shown in the Farm Management Map - available where the option/capital items also requires a Farm Environment Assessment.



You can either complete the table below or incorporate the information within the map key.

Number of map	Action or option to be applied for (for guidance only)
---------------	--

1	Water margin fencing and alternative watering supply
2	Rural Sustainable Drainage System - Bund and Pond in corner field
3	Water margin
4	Swale and sediment traps to capture run-off from track
5	Grass strip in arable field
6	Move gate away from burn and create a hardstanding around gateway
7	Water margin with fencing and alternative water supply
8	Stocking rate low - continue to monitor area and take action if any poaching occurs

Diffuse pollution steering assessment

You must complete this if you are applying for any of the following options:

- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Wetland
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Sediment Traps and Bunds
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Swales
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Pond
- Hard Standings for Troughs and Gateways
- Livestock Crossing
- Livestock Tracks
- Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems
- Pesticide Handling Facilities
- Water-use Efficiency – Irrigation Lagoon

*For Water – use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon – the Diffuse Pollution Steering Assessment is only required where the lagoon will be filled with any water that was collected at a steading

You will need to produce a:

- Diffuse Pollution Steering Assessment Map
- List/table with all diffuse pollution risks identified and what improvements could be made to reduce diffuse pollution risks
- Diffuse Pollution Steering Management Map
- Diffuse pollution steering management table

Many of the diffuse pollution risks on a steading are associated with surface run-off and drainage. The assessment should focus on the management of surface water run-off, with a view to identifying the potential sources and pathways of pollutants. This should then be used to identify improvements which can be made to reduce pollution risk – see the ‘source -pathway-receptor’ approach outlined above. Good management of drainage at the steading can help to significantly reduce these risks.

Reducing dirty water around the steading can: **Leave more space for slurry** or silage effluent storage. Cutting down dirty and contaminated areas around the steading will reduce the amount of water you have to collect and handle, saving time and costs on storage and application to land.

When assessing diffuse pollution risks from the steading consider the points below:

	Points to consider	Potential options
Steading drainage	Are all guttering and down pipes working effectively?	
	Are there any opportunities to reduce the volumes of dirty water produced through improved clean and dirty water separation?	Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems
	Are there any opportunities to incorporate rural sustainable drainage systems	RSuDS – Swales RSuDS – Pond RSuDS – Wetland

	(RSuDS) to treat run-off currently discharging direct to a water course?	RSuDS – Sediment Traps and Bunds
Slurry storage facilities	- How many months slurry storage capacity have you got? - Would additional storage help reduce pollution risks on the farm?	Slurry Storage
	Were the slurry stores built before 1 September 1991? If yes, have they been significantly enlarged or reconstructed since then?	
Pesticide handling facilities	- Is the pesticide store of sufficient capacity, protected from frost and bunded? - are there any drains or watercourses near the store that pesticide could enter if spilt?	Pesticide Handling Facilities
	Is the run-off from the pesticide mixing, handling and washdown facilities adequate to avoid any risks of pesticide entering a drain or watercourse?	
Silage clamps and silage effluent	- Are the silage making facilities adequate in terms of capacity, permeability and structural integrity? - Is there sufficient storage available to collect and contain silage effluent? - Are silage bales stored in at least 10 metres from watercourses and drains?	Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems
	Is there a risk that run-off from silage bale storage area could enter a watercourse?	
Fertiliser storage	- Is the fertiliser storage area within 10 metres of a watercourse or otherwise pose a risk to the water environment? - Are liquid fertiliser tanks positioned and protected to minimise risk from accidental damage	
Oil storage	- Are the fuel tanks adequately bunded? - Are there any watercourses or drains nearby?	

Diffuse pollution steading assessment map

Create this map to identify the current diffuse pollution issues on the steading.

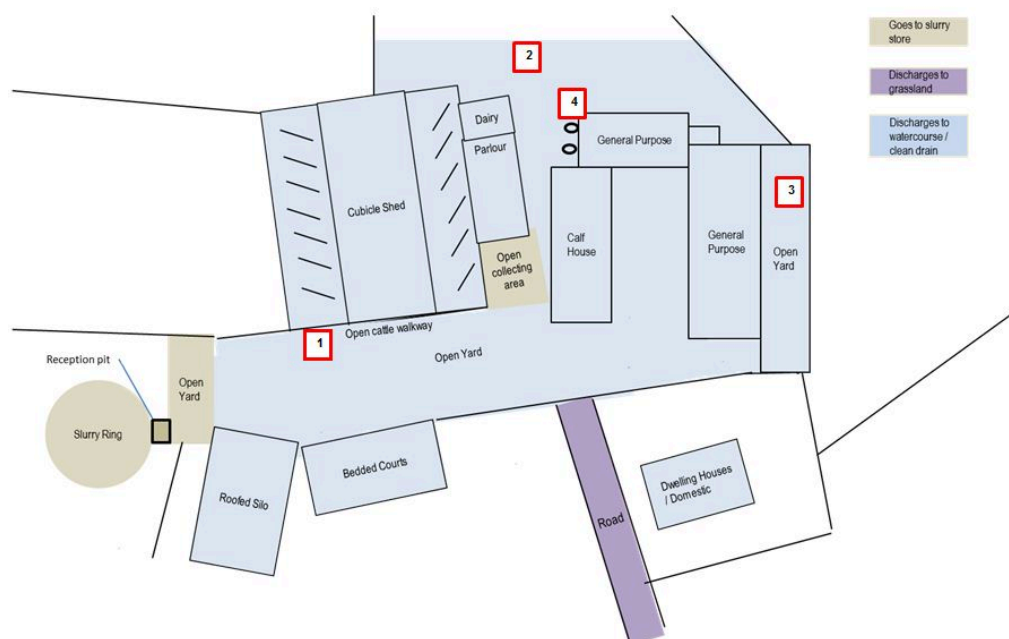
Using an appropriately scaled map of the steading, identify areas which produce:

- clean roof run-off and lightly contaminated yard run-off that currently discharges to a watercourse or clean water drain
- run-off that discharges to grassland
- midden run-off and run-off from open silos and indicate where the drainage goes
- dirty yards and run-off from silos and other drainage that discharges to the slurry or effluent store

Further information on identifying drainage types can be found within the guidance for the option – [Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems](#).

The map will help to illustrate where run-off on the farm originates and where it flows to and will help to identify areas of the farm where steps could be taken to help reduce the volumes of dirty water produced and reduce pollution risks.

Below is an example of how your map may look.



List/table with all diffuse pollution risks identified

Produce a list of any diffuse pollution risks identified and what improvement could be made to reduce diffuse pollution risks, see example table below:

Number on map	Diffuse pollution risk / opportunity	Action or option
1	Cattle walkway discharging to clean drain	Use clean and dirty water separation methods to prevent the slurry produced on the walkway from contaminating the clean yard below. Channel the slurry from the walkway to the slurry storage facility
2	Lightly contaminated yard discharging direct to clean drain	Opportunity to intercept this lightly contaminated drainage and discharge to Rural SuDS swale and pond
3	Lightly contaminated yard discharging direct to clean drain	Opportunity to re-grade this clean concrete yard area to allow the run-off to discharge to a swale and local grassland
4	Fuel store not bunded	Bund fuel store

List/table with all diffuse pollution risks identified - template

A blank diffuse pollution risks identified template can be accessed from the link below:



[Diffuse pollution steering risks identified template \(MS Word, Size: 14.7 kB\)](https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/List-with-all-diffuse-pollution-risks-identified---template.docx)

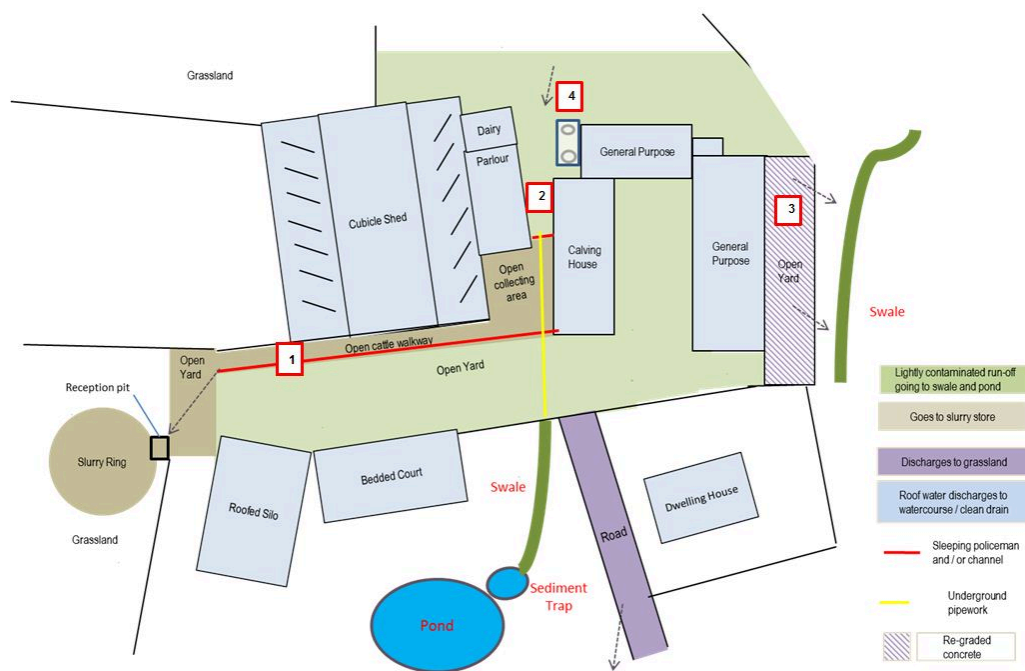
doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/List-with-all-diffuse-pollution-risks-identified---template.docx>

Diffuse pollution steering management map

Create this map to identify the actions you are taking and the locations around the steading where works will happen.

On another map of the steading identify what works are proposed to take place to help improve the management of steading drainage and the location of any rural sustainable drainage systems.

Example diffuse pollution steering management map



Diffuse pollution steering management table

Create a table that references each works or action you propose to do from the steering diffuse pollution management map. Describe on the table how the works or action proposed will address the identified diffuse pollution issue and the option you have selected to achieve that.

Example Diffuse pollution steering management table below:

Number on map	Action proposed	Option selected
1	A sleeping policeman / ramp and a channel will be installed along the length of the cattle walkway to contain and collect the drainage from this area. The sleeping policeman / ramp will prevent the run-off from the walkway contaminating the clean yard below. The channel will collect the run-off and convey it to the slurry storage facilities.	Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems
2	This clean yard area currently discharges direct to a watercourse via an existing clean water drain. A sleeping policeman / ramp will be installed to prevent the lightly contaminated run-off from the top yard flowing through the heavily contaminated collecting area. The lightly contaminated drainage from the top yard will then be collected and conveyed via a new gulley and underground pipework to a new rural sustainable drainage system at the bottom of the yard	Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems
3	This lightly contaminated concrete yard area which currently discharges to a field drain will be re-graded to allow the run-off to flow to local grassland	Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems RSuDS Swale RSuDS Sediment Trap RSuDS Pond
4	Bund fuel store	n/a

Diffuse pollution steering management table - template

A blank diffuse pollution steering management template can be accessed below:



[Diffuse pollution stearing management table \(PDF, Size: 33.5 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Diffuse-pollution-steading-management---editable.pdf>

Recent changes

Section	Change
Diffuse Pollution Risk Assessment	Added text explaining Diffuse Pollution Risk Assessment comprises of two elements: - A field assessment map - A table detailing the Diffuse pollution risks and identifying potential opportunities/actions to minimise these risks. This can include identifying potential AECS options/capital items that could be delivered
Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment	Added text to explain the requirements for the individual elements of the Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment. Also, text to explain that for Water – use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon – the Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment is only required where the lagoon will be filled with any water that was collected at a steading.

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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13 Fair Work First

Fair Work First (FWF) is the Scottish Government's flagship policy for driving high quality and fair work, and workforce diversity across the labour market in Scotland by applying fair work criteria to grants, other funding and public contracts being awarded by and across the public sector, where it is relevant to do so.

Through this approach the Scottish Government is supporting employers who adopt fair working practices, specifically:

- payment of at least the real Living Wage
- provide appropriate channels for effective workers' voice, such as trade union recognition
- investment in workforce development
- no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts
- action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace
- offer flexible and family friendly working practices for all workers from day one of employment
- oppose the use of fire and rehire practice

The Fair Work First criteria seek to address challenges in Scotland's labour market, to make a real difference to people and their communities, business and other organisations and the economy.

Scottish Ministers announced on 6 December 2022 that organisations applying for public sector grants awarded on or after 1 July 2023 will need to pay at least the real Living Wage and provide appropriate channels for effective workers' voice.

It was agreed that the application of [Fair Work conditionality](#) would be implemented from 1 April 2024 to Agricultural grants that meet the criteria of the overall SG Fair Work Policy.

As a result, we are introducing three elements of the Fair Work First policy to AECS applications which are approved for funding from the 2025 application round onwards.

These criteria are:

- for employees to receive at least the real Living Wage
- for workers to be provided with appropriate channels for effective voice
- for confirmation that any sub-contractors who deliver the project supported by AECS funding are also paying the real Living Wage

As part of the contract offer award under AECS, businesses will be required to confirm when accepting their contract offer that, if they have employees, they pay at least the real Living Wage to all staff aged 16 and over (including apprentices) who are directly employed by their business, and that all staff have access to effective workers' voice channel(s). They will also confirm that any sub-contractors they engage to complete the work funded by AECS will also pay the real Living Wage.

Compliance with Fair Work First

The real Living wage is calculated annually and announced in autumn. Employers then have 6 months, until 1 May of the following year, to implement it.

The 'Effective Voice' requires employers to recognise the importance of collective bargaining and social dialogue to give an effective voice to their employees, improving terms and conditions, worker wellbeing and developing progressive and fair work places.

Businesses who wish to apply for AECS should refer to the Scottish Government Fair Work First Guidance to ensure they can meet the Fair Work First requirements.

Successful Applicants must retain all the relevant evidence as detailed in guidance (updating as necessary) that confirms they either meet the FWF guidance eligibility or provides the business with a limited exception from the FWF guidance eligibility. Noting that there is greater [verification](#) required where the cumulative funding award for that business is more than £100 000 in any financial year from RPID over the course of your AECs contract (excluding BPS and LFASS payments received by the applicant business).

Successful applicants will declare that they meet or will meet FWF requirements and can provide evidence to that effect if required to (at any point during the life of the AECS contract) by signing and agreeing the contract offer.

Exceptions

In limited circumstances, SGRPID may consider allowing an exception to these conditions where a business cannot afford to pay the real Living Wage and/or provide employees with access to Effective Voice channels.

Businesses who cannot meet either or both requirements must read the [limited exceptions guidance \(PDF, Size: 106.5 kB\)](#), write to SGRPID to request an exception before submitting an AECS application and complete part A of the [exception form](#).

[Fair Work First Q and A \(PDF, Size: 158.5 kB\)](#)

14 Endorsements

Date published: 11 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Table of Contents

1. Seeking endorsement for options or capital items outwith their target area.

Introduction

In the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, many management options and some capital items are spatially targeted. This means they are only available in parts of the country where they will deliver the greatest benefit. You can find the target area maps in the webpages for each spatially targeted management option or capital item.

You can find out which options are available on the holdings that form part of your farm business by using our targeting tool. Please note that updates to spatial targeting maps may change the options that you're eligible to apply for in this round compared with previous application rounds.

In exceptional circumstances, you may apply for a management option or capital item that is not targeted on your holding. However, you must meet the criteria in Table 1 (below) and you must obtain an endorsement from NatureScot **before** submitting your AECS application, as explained below.

If you include ineligible items in your application it may be rejected. You should read the guidance for each [option](#) or [capital item](#) that you wish to apply for. You should also read the [How to Apply](#) guidance.

Endorsements for protected areas (designated sites)

Designated sites are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and European sites. European sites are Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC); they were previously known as Natura sites.

You can apply for options or capital items that are not targeted on your holding if you have obtained an endorsement from NatureScot that they will benefit the notified features of an SSSI or European site. This can occasionally include works outwith the designated site boundary which will directly benefit the notified features. (Note: endorsements cannot be granted for the Hen Harrier Grassland Management option outwith Orkney.)

You can visit the NatureScot [SiteLink website](#) to check the location of the designated site.

For designated site applications, you are strongly advised to seek advice from NatureScot at least a month before the submission deadline. If you do not, and NatureScot has significant issues with the management you propose for the designated site, this may prejudice the success of your application.

Please also refer to the [Designations guidance](#) .

Endorsements outwith protected areas

You can also seek an endorsement unconnected with a protected area if you meet the relevant criteria in Table 1 below.

How to request an endorsement

If you wish to seek an endorsement then you must submit a request to NatureScot using the form below. You should submit the form at least a month before the AECS application window closes, to ensure NatureScot has enough time to respond to you.

If you are permitted an endorsement, you must submit this as a supporting document alongside your AECS application.



[Request to NatureScot for endorsement of a management option or capital item \(MS Word, Size: 236.2 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-edits-2022---Endorsements-webpage---12-January-2022.docx>

Check Table 1 below to see whether you meet the requirements to seek an endorsement.

In the [endorsement request form \(MS Word, Size: 47.9 kB\)](#), you are asked to explain briefly how each option or capital item meets the criteria for endorsement. NatureScot will clarify whether you need to provide any further evidence.

Please note: If you have already received a NatureScot (SNH) endorsement under a previous AECS application, for the same option(s) **on the same land**, please submit this with your current application. In such cases, you will not need to seek a new endorsement.

If you require any further advice about endorsements please [contact](#) NatureScot.

Table 1

Management option or capital item	Criteria for endorsement outside target areas	Endorsing organisation
Management or Restoration of Hedgerows	The hedgerow has been created under a legacy agri-environment scheme.	NatureScot
Unharvested Conservation Headlands for Wildlife	Presence of corn buntings according to existing records.	NatureScot
Wader Grazed Grassland Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland	<p>You must meet one of the criteria below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you must provide evidence, from records held by an independent national wildlife organisation (e.g. RSPB), that curlew, lapwing or redshank have been recorded breeding on the proposed management areas in at least one breeding season within the last five years. <p>or</p> <p>If records do not exist, you may commission independent surveys to establish that curlew, lapwing or redshank were breeding in the proposed management area in at least one breeding season. The surveys must take place before seeking an endorsement.</p> <p>or</p> <p>You must provide evidence that you are part of an established wader project with confirmation from the wader project officer that the fields entered for management are used for nesting and feeding.</p> <p>For either of the above, you must supply a completed vulnerable priority species recording form setting out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - which waders you are targeting - on which LPIDs - the evidence of the target wader species recorded on each LPID. 	NatureScot
Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland within spatial target area for Corn Buntings Mown Grassland option	You may apply for endorsement to adopt the Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland option instead of the Corn Buntings Mown Grassland option if you provide a statement from local RSPB staff confirming that there are no nesting corn bunting that would be affected by the earlier cutting dates. You must include this statement when submitting the endorsement form to NatureScot.	NatureScot

Moorland Management Stock Disposal Away Wintering Sheep Summer Hill Grazing of Cattle	Presence of a habitat on your holding that would benefit from management under one or more of these options, including blanket bog and wet heath. Robust justification will be required if you want to adopt associated options such as Stock Disposal, Away Wintering Sheep, Summer Hill Grazing of Cattle.	NatureScot
Tall-herb Vegetation Management	Presence of tall herb vegetation which would benefit from management under this option.	NatureScot
Control of Invasive Non-native Plant Species	The land on the holding is part of an area-wide, coordinated strategy for controlling invasive plants, or you are the first land manager in your area to have the invasive plant species on your land.	NatureScot
Rhododendron Control	The land on the holding is part of an area-wide, co-ordinated approach for controlling a whole population of rhododendron; and work is essential to control or prevent invasion of a notable site (Special Area of Conservation, Site of Special Scientific Interest or ancient semi-natural woodland site); and/or necessary to secure another investment in controlling a population of rhododendron.	NatureScot
Any management option or capital item to benefit a designated site (SSSI or European site)	The choice and location of option(s) and/or capital item(s) will benefit the feature(s) of the designated site and the land meets the option eligibility requirements.	NatureScot
Any management option or capital item to benefit freshwater pearl mussels	The choice and location of options and/or capital items will benefit freshwater pearl mussels outwith a designated site.	NatureScot
Any management option or capital item to benefit the Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS)	The choice and location of options and/or capital items will benefit peatland within the Flow Country World Heritage Site.	NatureScot
Wildcat Friendly Predator control	The Saving Wildcats project will release wildcats bred in captivity within the Cairngorms Connect area and it's likely that some of the released wildcats will move into surrounding areas. If you are within or near the Cairngorms Connect area contact the NatureScot mammals advisor to discuss whether you can apply for an endorsement	NatureScot

2. Seeking endorsement for Species-rich Grassland Management or Habitat Mosaic Management options in hill or upland rough grazing land

Please use the form below to submit a request for endorsement after taking account of the criteria in Table 2. You should submit the form at least a month before the submission deadline, to ensure NatureScot has enough time to respond to you. If you are permitted an endorsement, you must submit this as a supporting document alongside your AECS application.



Request to NatureScot for endorsement of a management option or capital item (MS Word, Size: 236.2 kB)

doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-edits-2022---Endorsements-webpage---12-January-2022_1.docx

Table 2

Management option	Criteria for endorsement	Endorsing organisation
-------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Species rich grassland Habitat Mosaic	<p>If the land proposed for management under either option is hill and upland rough grazing, you can only apply for these options if you are awarded an endorsement from NatureScot.</p> <p>The endorsement application requires you to provide supporting evidence that target habitats are present, by submitting either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Phase 1 habitat survey that demonstrates the presence of the target habitats, or • an existing National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey demonstrating the site contains the target habitats <p>This evidence must accompany your Endorsement request form.</p>	NatureScot
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Recent changes

Section	Change
Seeking endorsement for options or capital items outwith their target area.	Added a box for the Flow Country WHS.
Seeking endorsement for Species-rich Grassland Management or Habitat Mosaic Management options in hill or upland rough grazing land	

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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15 Application assessment

Date published: 10 September, 2024

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Initial assessment

Once an application is received by the due deadline it will be assigned to a case officer from RPID or NatureScot to assess against the Scheme requirements.

The initial assessment process is broken down into two stages:

- stage one – completion of basic application eligibility checks
- stage two – completion of full application eligibility checks and the assessment of the selected options and /or capital items

Stage one Assessment

This requires the case officer to answer the first seven questions in the application eligibility checks, to ensure the application meets the basic scheme eligibility requirements.

Application eligibility

A failure at this stage will result in an automatic rejection of the application and it will not progress to stage two for the further detailed assessment.

Applicants will be issued with a letter setting out the reasons for rejecting the application.

Stage two assessment

The case officer works through the remainder of the eligibility questions and also assesses the eligibility/suitability of each option and capital item applied for. They also check whether all the necessary documents, including management plans, have been provided and are fit for purpose.

This part of the assessment will include a discussion with the applicant and may also include a site visit.

In order for the application to progress, case officers must be satisfied by the end of the visit / discussion that the applicant has an understanding of the option requirements and how the plan will fit with their current land management.

For example, stock exclusion dates versus forage requirements.

By 'applicant', we mean any individuals responsible for delivery of the contract.

For Agri-environment schemes, this could be, for example, the farmer / crofter, the farm manager or the estate factor.

It is unlikely that the agent completing the Agri-environment Climate Scheme application is going to be the individual responsible for day-to-day management of the contract.

If a site visit is carried out, this may include a check of the accuracy of submitted maps, the eligibility of certain options or site linkage across the holding.

Previous non-compliance with previous AECS contracts will be checked prior to any site visit and we will wish to discuss and address any issues with the applicant to ensure this isn't repeated.

Applicant's comments

If an on-site visit is undertaken, the applicant will be invited to enter comments and sign the report.

The signature is recognition of the fact that the applicant was present at the site visit and the comments are an accurate record of what was discussed.

If a site visit is not undertaken and a discussion is held by telephone, the case officer will record a brief description of the main points discussed. An electronic copy of these comments can be made available to the applicant on request.

Types of acceptable amendment

Only small changes to a submitted application can be made by the case officer after the application deadline has passed and the assessment process is underway, for example:

- correction of Land Parcel Identifiers (LPIDs). For example, where a hedge is proposed between two fields and the wrong LPID is used
- correcting typographic or arithmetical errors
- transposition errors, for example mixing up numbers like 3, for 8 or 5

And, for applications that reach Stage two, we cannot accept the wholesale change of the plan, or significant amendments.

We cannot accept removal of ineligible options or changing the location of options because the applicant has not understood what was being applied for at the time of application.

For example, removing a field from the wader-grazed grassland option because insufficient land has been left clear for grazing livestock or changing a field from one management option to another.

If significant changes are required, the application will be deemed as not up to standard and will be rejected.

We therefore strongly advise you to consult with RPID or NatureScot before submitting your application, if you have any queries; for example, regarding land eligibility for particular options.

Final assessment

Once all applications are assessed fully and scored, budgetary restrictions may result in some applications being approved whereas others are part approved or rejected, either by the Approving Officer or by the National Project Assessment Committee, as appropriate.

Notification of decision

Applicants will be notified of the decisions reached and (where applicable) be provided with the reasons why an application is part approved or rejected.

Reviews

If an applicant is not satisfied with our decision following the Initial or Final elements of the assessment process they may wish to ask us to undertake a [formal review](#).

The [How to Apply](#) and [Eligibility](#) pages have more detailed information.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Initial Assessment	Added text below Stage 2 Assessment heading to explain case officers also check whether all the necessary documents, including management plans, have been provided and are fit for purpose.
Final Assessment	September 2024 - added sentence referring to How to Apply and Eligibility pages for more detailed information.

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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16 Scoring criteria for 2021 AECS application round

Date published: 23 January, 2021

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Note – The scoring criteria for 2015-2019 is on a separate page and the scoring criteria for Improving Public Access is on a separate page.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This section describes the scoring criteria we will use to assess AECS applications received in 2021. Due to the nature of this round, applications will be scored separately for:

- Protected Areas (Designated sites)
- Applications to manage priority bird species outwith designated sites
- Farmland waders on established grassland wader projects
- Corncrake
- Corn bunting
- Organic farming
- Slurry storage
- Improving Public Access

If you have any queries please contact your local [RPID office](#) or [NatureScot](#) (formerly SNH)

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme scoring criteria

This section describes the scoring criteria we will use to assess all Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications received in 2021.

Protected Areas (designated sites i.e. SSSIs and European sites*) *formally known as Natura sites.

SSSIs and European sites contain a list of qualifying features which can be accessed through SiteLink and applications must demonstrate how the management proposed will directly benefit these features. Normally such management will be within the designated site boundary; however, occasionally features such as birds or freshwater will require management of land outwith the boundary and this is also eligible for funding.

Applications for protected areas (designated sites) in AECS 2021 application round will potentially be non-competitive and only require scoring if the scheme is oversubscribed.

Applications to manage for Priority Bird Species outwith designated sites

Farmland Waders in established grassland wader projects

In AECS 2021, applications to benefit farmland wader birds are restricted to existing and new participants in established recognised wader restoration projects within the [wader target areas as listed](#). (MS Word, Size: 599.5 kB)

Applications will be considered under the following categories

1. Continuity

This category seeks to secure well established management practices within wader projects. Points are awarded for those applicants returning from an expiring 2015 or 2016 prefixed AECS contract which included management for waders. For clarity, no points will be awarded to applicants who rejected the opportunity in 2020 to extend their contract for a further year

2. Collaboration

Points will be awarded based on the number of holdings that you are collaborating with and the locations of collaborators must be within 5km of your holding at the nearest point as the wader flies. Each collaborator must hold an active AECS contract from the 2017, 2018 or 2019 application rounds or else they must be a new or returning applicant to AECS in 2021.

3. Vulnerable Priority Species

Points will be awarded for the diversity of wader species on your holding. The vulnerable priority species are: curlew, lapwing, redshank, oystercatcher and snipe. This information must be confirmed by staff from the wader project you participate in or else you must submit survey records (from within the last 5 years) from BTO or from an NGO/project officer/ecologist.

4. Suitability

Points will be awarded for plans where the proposed sites meet the optimum requirements for waders. Waders prefer open sites.

5. Grazing management for wader grazed grassland fields

Points will be awarded for management that reduces the risk of trampling of nests by livestock.

[Score sheet for waders. \(PDF, Size: 228.7 kB\)](#)

Corncrakes

Applications will be considered under the following categories

1. Continuity

This category seeks to secure well established management practices to benefit corncrakes. Points are awarded for those applicants returning from an expiring 2015 or 2016 prefixed AECS contract which included management for corncrakes. For clarity, no score will be awarded to applicants who rejected the opportunity in 2020 to extend their contract for a further year

2. Collaboration

Points will be awarded based on the number of holdings that you are collaborating with and the locations of collaborators must be within 5km of your holding at the nearest point as the corncrake flies. Each collaborator must hold an active AECS contract from the 2017, 2018 or 2019 application rounds or else they must be a new or returning applicant to AECS in 2021.

3. Corncrake beneficial options

To be awarded points you will need to include some or all of the following key options for corncrakes: Corncrake Mown Grassland, Corncrake Grazing Management, Management of Cover for Corncrake

4. Optimum management for Corncrake mown grassland

Points are awarded in recognition of a longer management period before mowing as this increases the likelihood of a second corncrake brood in the breeding year

[Corncrake score sheet \(PDF, Size: 48.3 kB\)](#)

Corn Buntings

Applications will be considered under the following categories

1. Continuity

This category seeks to secure well established management practices to benefit corn buntings. Points are awarded for those applicants returning from an expiring 2015 or 2016 prefixed AECS contract which included management for corn buntings. For clarity, no score will be awarded to applicants who rejected the opportunity in 2020 to extend their contract for a further year.

2. Collaboration

Points will be awarded based on the number of holdings that you are collaborating with and the locations of collaborators must be within 5km of your holding at the nearest point as the corn bunting flies. Each

collaborator must hold an active AECS contract from the 2017, 2018 or 2019 application rounds or else they must be a new or returning applicant to AECS in 2021.

3. Corn bunting beneficial options

To be awarded points you will need to include some or all of the following key options which benefit corn buntings: Corn Buntings Mown Grassland, Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds, Grass Strips in Arable Fields, Beetlebanks, Retention of Winter Stubbles for Wildlife and Water Quality, Unharvested Conservation Headlands for Wildlife, Forage Brassica Crops for Farmland Birds, Species rich grassland management.

Additional points will be awarded if your options are targeted where they would best support corn buntings on your land and you have a written [endorsement \(PDF, Size: 707.3 kB\)](#) from the RSPB corn bunting recovery project officer before submitting your application. Advice when considering drawing up your application is available from RSPB by emailing Yvonne.Stephan@rspb.org.uk who will also provide the written endorsement.

4. Participation in the corn bunting recovery project

To be awarded points you will need to be in the corn bunting recovery project area and have had your proposal endorsed in writing by the [RSPB corn bunting project](#) officer before you submit your application. The RSPB project officer must be contacted in good time and can be reached at Yvonne.Stephan@rspb.org.uk.

[Score sheet for corn bunting \(PDF, Size: 152.9 kB\)](#)

Scoring criteria for organic farming

Organic applications will be assessed on the following criteria:

Scale of delivery

In 2021 points will be awarded based on the proportion of your holding that will be managed organically.

Additional points will be awarded based on the amount of land on your holding that will be managed under organic conversion or organic conversion.

[Score sheet for organics \(MS Word, Size: 47.4 kB\)](#)

Scoring criteria for slurry stores

The slurry storage element of applications will be scored separately. Targeted slurry storage scoring criteria, agreed with SEPA, can be found below.



[Slurry storage scoring criteria \(MS Excel, Size: 14.1 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Slurry-storage-scoring-criteria---score-sheet---30-May-2017.xlsx> Criteria for slurry storage

Download guidance

Click 'Download this page' to create a printer-friendly version of this guidance that you can save or print out.

17 Scoring criteria

Date published: 22 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Within the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS), the following categories each have their own scoring criteria:

Agri-environment: The scoring criteria for the 2025 round are described in Section 2 below.

Organic Conversion and Organic Maintenance: The scoring criteria for the 2025 round are described in Section 3 below.

Water-use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon: The scoring criteria for the 2025 round are described in Section 4.

You can find the scoring page for the 2024 round using the archive.

2. Agri-Environment scoring criteria

This section describes the scoring criteria we will use to assess the Agri-Environment category within AECS applications in the 2025 round.

The score sheet template for 2025 is available separately for download (see below).



[Agri-Environment Climate Scheme score sheet \(MS Word, Size: 85.5 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Agri-Environment-Climate-Scheme-Score-Sheet-doc.docx> Agri-Environment Climate Scheme score sheet

2.1 Scale of delivery

In-bye and moorland management

The more land on your holding that you propose to manage under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, in comparison to the total area of your holding, the more points you will be allocated.

We will separately assess the proportion of in-bye and the proportion of moorland in your application in relation to the total areas of in-bye and moorland on your holding.

We will allocate points on a sliding scale depending on the percentage to be managed.

Diffuse pollution risks – Only applicable to new (first time) agri-environment applicants or returning applicants with new land that was not included on the preceding contract Farm Environmental Assessment

Where diffuse pollution risks are identified within the [Farm Environment Assessment](#), the more of these you address through Agri-Environment Climate Scheme management, the more points you will be allocated.

We will only carry forward the highest score between in-bye, moorland or diffuse pollution risks.

2.2 National priorities

We will allocate extra points for applications which help to deliver at least one of the following national priorities:

National priorities

Protected nature sites: enhancing the condition of designated features of SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and the Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS).

Biodiversity: enhancing biodiversity in the wider countryside by conserving vulnerable priority species.

Climate change: enhancing carbon stores through peatland restoration.

Water environment: contributing to the 'good status' of water bodies under the Water Framework Directive.

Protected nature sites: Enhancing the condition of designated features of SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and the Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS).

You will be allocated points if you meet all of the following requirements:

- Your application includes land on or adjacent to a designated site. Exceptionally land adjacent to the designated site where the management is essential for the designated site feature(s) may be considered.
- The proposed management is considered by NatureScot to benefit the features of the designated site:
 - A 'feature' is a habitat, species or earth science interest which has been identified as of particular importance in the citation for the designated site.
 - 'Benefit' means maintaining the features in favourable condition, or helping the features to recover if their condition is unfavourable, for those parts of the features that are under your control.
 - For the Flow Country WHS there must be benefit to the peatland habitat.

Information on designated sites and features of SSSI, SACs and SPAs can be found using [Sitelink](#). For the Flow Country WHS, [a site map can be found under the 'Documentation' section on the Flow Country World Heritage webpage](#). You are strongly advised to contact [Nature Scot](#) to discuss your designated site proposals, well in advance of preparing an application. Please see also the [Designations webpage](#).

Biodiversity: enhancing biodiversity in the wider countryside by conserving vulnerable priority species (VPS)

You will be allocated points if your application will directly benefit the population of at least one of the vulnerable priority species in the table below. Additional points can be scored if the management proposed will benefit additional vulnerable priority species.

You must refer to the [Vulnerable Priority Species supporting guidance](#) pages to ensure you meet the species specific criteria.

You must submit a Vulnerable Priority Species recording form containing the information requested below with your application. Failure to do so will result in no points being awarded in this category.



[Vulnerable Priority Species recording form \(MS Word, Size: 116.5 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-VPS-reporting-form-oct-23.docx>
Recording form template

Farmland waders

- curlew
- lapwing
- oystercatcher
- redshank
- snipe

Other species with significant Scottish population declines which depend on appropriate management.

- corncrake
- corn bunting
- chough
- twite (on in-bye only)
- black grouse
- hen harrier

- marsh fritillary
- great yellow bumblebee
- great crested newt
- freshwater pearl mussel

In order to score points under this criterion, you must

- Confirm that the management option / capital item proposed is within the appropriate mapped zone for the vulnerable priority species (where applicable) or, in the case of freshwater pearl mussel, associated with one of the key rivers named.
- Include management options and / or capital items in your application which will benefit the species, located appropriately within the holding, as indicated in the [Supporting guidance](#) for each vulnerable priority species.
- For farmland waders, the undertaking of one or more of the capital items required can be waived if you provide evidence that significant capital work has already been undertaken or provide survey data showing that the area already supports significant populations of waders. The survey data must meet the requirements explained below*.

For applications which receive points for VPS waders, additional points will be awarded if recent bird survey data (within last 5 years) is provided, as explained below*, proving that there are breeding waders on your land.

*The survey for VPS waders **must** meet the methodology standards in the template and can be carried out by any of the following:

- Non-Government Organisation (NGO) – The survey should be have been conducted by an environmental NGO where the person doing the survey is experienced in undertaking wader surveys.
- Project Officer – Specialist individuals involved in wader projects. These could be funded by RSPB, Working for Waders, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) etc. The individual must be experienced in conducting wader surveys.
- Ecologist - A member of a recognised body such as The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) or an individual with an environmental qualification. The individual must be experienced in undertaking wader surveys.

The template to be used for wader surveys is provided on the wader option pages.

Note: Applications that do not warrant wader VPS points cannot be awarded points for provision of wader survey data.

Climate change: enhancing carbon stores through peatland restoration

You will be allocated points if you meet both of the following conditions:

- your application includes management to restore peatlands using one or more of the following capital items:
 - [Ditch Blocking – Peat Dams](#)
 - [Ditch Blocking – Plastic Piling Dams](#)
 - [Control of Scrub - Follow up treatment](#)
 - [Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation – Primary treatment – Intermediate and Heavy Vegetation](#)
 - [Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation – Primary treatment – Light Vegetation](#)
 - [Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation – Removal from Site of the Cut Vegetation](#)

and

- the management will be undertaken within a peatland area.

Points are only awarded for ditch blocking where ALL drains within a discrete hydrological unit on the land that you manage are to be blocked. Where you have more than one hydrological unit on your land, you must address at least one in your application to be awarded points.



[Peatland area map \(PDF, Size: 2.4 MB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Maps-for-website---national-priorities---peatland-map-area.pdf> Peatland area map – national priorities

If you are unsure whether your holding is within this area, please contact your [local RPID office for advice](#).

If you propose to carry out Ditch Blocking on land outwith the peatland area map, you can be awarded points if your Case Officer is satisfied that the land is actually peatland. Again it is recommended that you seek confirmation pre-submission that the location is peatland. If you have obtained this from NatureScot, you should attach this with your AECS application.

It is recommended that you seek advice for the scale, nature and methodology of the restoration work you intend to do from NatureScot before applying for Peatland restoration, and include the advice in your application.

Water environment: contributing to the ‘good status’ of water bodies under Water Framework Directive. This is primarily aimed at new applicants that have identified Diffuse Pollution risks and are using AECS to mitigate those risks for the first time. Returning applicants with new land that was not previously in an AECS contract can also access these points if Diffuse Pollution issues are identified on that new land and are being mitigated by the proposed AECS options.

You will be allocated points if your application will contribute to improving water quality in the diffuse pollution priority area which comprises Scotland's diffuse pollution priority catchments and focus areas.



[Diffuse pollution priority area for SRDP \(PDF, Size: 1.3 MB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/87332-AECS-Review---2018-map---WQ-Diffuse-pollution-priority-area.pdf> National priority: water environment

Applications must:

- Be supported by a [Farm Environment Assessment](#) to identify diffuse pollution risks and target options appropriately.
- Include measures needed to address all diffuse pollution risks on the land holding (or justify why not).

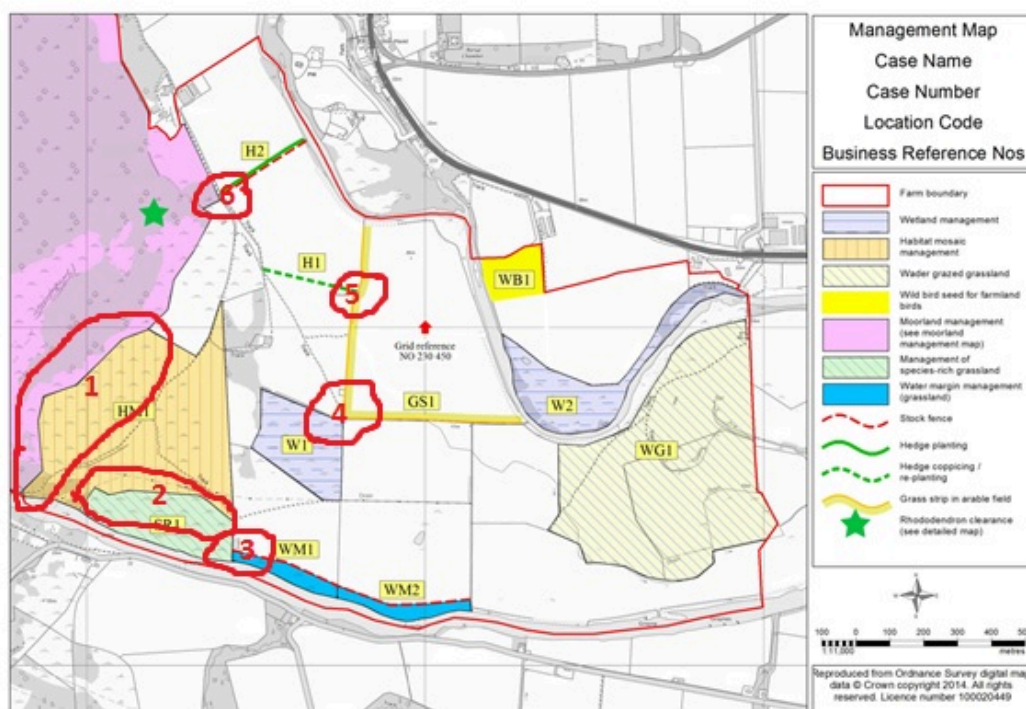
2.3 Habitat linkage

This recognises that managing habitats across a holding, where there is linkage between them, can provide additional benefits; for example by creating wildlife corridors.

We will assess the linkage across the holding and allocate points accordingly. The greater the linkage across the holding the more points will be allocated.

The habitats may already exist and not be proposed for specific funding under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme but so long as the habitats are marked on the farm environment map and a proposed Agri-Environment Climate Scheme option links those habitats together, then a score may be justified. See further guidance below.

For example,



In this case example, there are [6] habitat linkages as a result of habitats proposed for management in the application (noting that there could be other linkages with existing habitats which would be taken into account as well).

They include the following examples;

- moorland linked to inbye habitats such as habitat mosaic, species rich grassland
- habitat mosaic linked to species rich grassland linked to water margin
- wetlands linked by grass strip in arable fields
- grass strip in arable fields linked to hedgerow management

While this criterion is about the creation of physical linkage of sites, if you can make a fully justified case for site linkage across a holding where the sites are not physically linked then points may be allocated. You must demonstrate additional environmental benefit beyond what would otherwise be achieved as individual standalone sites. For example, pockets of species rich grassland, habitat mosaic or wetland where you have evidence that Marsh Fritillary butterfly has been present in the areas proposed for management. This species usually exists in discrete populations dispersed across pockets of habitat containing its favoured food plant: devils bit scabious. Habitats can be within a 2 – 5km radius e.g. within a glen or coastline containing predominately cattle grazed pasture.

Habitat linkage across neighbouring holdings

If habitat linkages across neighbouring holdings are being claimed then the holdings involved need to be part of a collaborative application that meet the collaboration scoring criteria.

Links with open or running water

Any connection between open or running water and an adjacent habitat, which is being managed as part of the AECS proposal, will count towards the habitat link score.

Please note however that there will only be one link per option type connected. For example, if the application contains five unconnected water margins they don't each count as one link to the water. There will only be one link awarded to the connection between water margins and open/running water for example. The same applies to other options which connect to water.

Where habitat links should not be counted

Hedgerows or woodlands between fields managed as wader grazed grassland or wader mown grassland do not qualify for habitat linkage points as shrubs and trees attract wader predators and therefore can be detrimental to waders. It is best practice not to site boundaries of habitats managed for waders less than

30 metres from a hedgerow or woodland edge and so there should not be a physical link between these two types of habitat anyway.

Habitat linkages should be between different habitats. Where the same habitat is made up of more than one adjoining LPID this is considered to be a single habitat area and therefore links between those LPIDs will not be counted.

2.4 Long-term benefit

This is designed to recognise that some options deliver environmental benefit for a period longer than the duration of the contract.

There are five categories listed below. For each category, you will score points if your application includes one or more of the management options or capital items listed and if you also meet the other requirements listed.

Habitat management or structural works to improve water quality or reduce flood risk

- Converting arable at risk of erosion or flooding to low-input grassland
- Management of floodplains
- Management of existing species rich grassland and restoration of SRG where appropriate (can be within a habitat mosaic)
- Wetland management, where the proposal is to create a new wetland and/or manage an existing wetland (can be within a habitat mosaic)
- Hard Standings for Troughs and Gateways
- Livestock Crossing
- Livestock Tracks
- Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems
- Pesticide Handling Facilities
- Restoring (Protecting) River Banks
- River Embankment Breaching, Lowering or Removal
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - Pond
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - sediment trap and bunds
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - swales
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - wetland
- Water-use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon
- Wetland Creation - Field Drain Breaking
- Wetland Creation - Pipe Sluices

For the species rich grassland and wetland options listed above, these need to be adjacent to a water course or water body in order to demonstrate improvements to water quality or flood risk mitigation.

For the avoidance of doubt, fencing to create a water margin will not qualify for long term benefit score.

Restore dykes using the “Restoring drystone or flagstone dykes” capital item:

Greater than 5% of the dykes on the holding must be restored under the application to score points. This % will be calculated on the basis of the dykes as recorded on the Farm Environment Assessment maps.

Sand dunes management using the “Planting of dune grasses” capital item.

Creation and/ or Management of wetland and Management of existing species rich grassland or restoration of SRG where appropriate (minimum 1 ha)

Qualifying options are:

- Restoration of species rich grassland
- Management of species rich grassland
- Habitat mosaic management (where minimum 1ha is existing species rich grassland or wetland)
- Wetland management, where the proposal is to create a new wetland and/ or manage an existing wetland.

Capital works benefiting peatlands and moorlands

Qualifying capital items are:

- Ditch blocking - peat dams*
- Ditch blocking - plastic piling dams*
- Scrub control
- Non-native invasive species, rhododendron control where the entire extent of the species cover in the managed area is proposed to be removed

* Points are only awarded for ditch blocking where ALL drains within a discrete hydrological unit on the land that you manage are to be blocked. Where you have more than one hydrological unit on your land, you must address at least one in your application to be awarded points.

2.5 Value for money

This recognises that management of habitats delivered at a lower capital infrastructure cost provides better public value for money than those applications which require higher capital infrastructure costs. In other words, more money is spent on management of habitats than on associated capital items.

Applications under the value of £20,000 delivering at least one national priority will attract additional points under this scoring criteria. This is in recognition that applications of this size can offer value for money but otherwise not score highly against other criteria.

Where relevant we will deduct points under this criteria when assessing applications greater than £20,000. The deductions are based on a sliding scale depending on the percentage of capital infrastructure compared to total application costs for the capital items listed below-

We also recognise that there are some standalone capital options that should not be considered in this calculation as they deliver significant environmental outcomes in their own right.

Therefore the only capital items to be included in this value for money calculation are:

- Stock Fence
- Deer Fence
- Gates
- Restoring drystone or flagstone dykes

2.6 Collaborative approach

This recognises that collaboration between applicants can lead to better environmental outcomes, for example by delivering management at a landscape scale. Within a collaboration, each of the collaborators must be from a separate business with its own Business Reference Number.

To be eligible for collaboration points, the person leading on the collaborative project must correctly complete a Collaborative Management Plan (using the template below) along with a map or maps clearly showing the extent of the collaborative work proposed.



[Collaborative Management Plan \(MS Word, Size: 27.0 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Collaborative-Management-Plan.docx>
Plan Template

The Plan must be agreed with all parties involved. It must list all participants and must clearly demonstrate the contribution each participant applying to AECS will make.

A copy of the completed Plan and map(s) will be provided by the lead person to each AECS applicant. It must be submitted by each AECS applicant involved in the collaborative project, along with their AECS application.

Those identified as collaborating partners must be AEC Scheme participants or applicants (unless the collaborative project is to be carried out by a third party – see below*).

The initial collaborators must apply in the same year; however, once they have contracts in place, other land managers may join in the following years.

Points will be allocated on a sliding scale according to the number of collaborators. Whilst older AECS contracts can be included in the general information about a Collaborative project, only AECS contracts

arising from 2024 applications and applications submitted in 2025 will be considered, when awarding collaboration points this year. This is due to the fact that contracts must be run more or less concurrently to ensure activities are being undertaken collaboratively over the lifetime of the contract between all farms.

Simply referencing a neighbouring applicant also managing land under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme will not be sufficient to score points under this criterion.

Collaborative Management Plans must demonstrate that there will be greater environmental benefit than would be achieved if the individuals involved were to act independently.

For example, extra benefit due to creating contiguous and complementary management and improving habitat connectivity.

It is also desirable for the collaborative project to include any of the following:

- The sharing of resources (e.g. staff time and machinery)
- Contributing to a strategic environmental management plan
- Involving an existing group of land managers with a track record of working together

Below are further examples of situations which may be relevant to collaboration, as long as they also meet the requirements noted above.

1. Taking part in an existing partnership project e.g. a wader management project
2. Holding sits within and likely to contribute to a strategic landscape scale planning area e.g. a river catchment management plan
3. Part of a species management plan e.g. Deer Management Group – Deer Management Plan Area
4. More than one applicant working together to increase the area of habitat for a local population of one of the vulnerably priority species e.g. Black grouse or Corncrake
5. More than one applicant managing either side of a single area of habitat like a wetland, species rich grassland or bog
6. More than one applicant collaborating over the same management activity e.g. predator control, shared grazing.
7. Applications made under a Contractual Licence involving multiple partners. For example, an NGO applying to carry out a catchment-scale project for control of Invasive Non-Native Species on land belonging to multiple RPID registered businesses. Each participating land manager would be considered a collaborator.

*If you are a third party applicant, with a contractual licence to carry out collaborative capital works on a number of land holdings, you will be the sole AECS applicant for the collaborative project. Your Collaborative Management Plan must identify the land holders involved and points will be awarded for each participating land manager provided they are also signed up to the contractual licence and have a valid Business Reference Number.

2.7 Additional points

This criterion rewards certain activities that will increase environmental outcomes.

2.7.1 Spatial Priorities

Points will be awarded if the application includes management to benefit water quality, peatland or black grouse as described below.

Water quality:

Undertaking any of the following management options and capital items within priority areas for water quality, as shown in the map.

- [Water Margins in Arable Fields](#)
- [Water Margins in Grassland Fields](#)
- [Converting Arable at Risk of Erosion or Flooding to Low-input Grassland](#)

- [Management of Floodplains](#)
- [Alternative Watering](#)
- [Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Sediment Traps and Bunds](#)
- [Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Swales](#)
- [Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Pond](#)
- [Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Wetland](#)



[Priority areas for water quality map \(PDF, Size: 1.3 MB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/87332-AECS-Review---2018-map---WQ-Priority-area-for-water-quality.pdf> Priority areas for water quality map

Peatland:

Undertaking any of the following management options within peatland areas:

- [Moorland Management](#)
- [Stock Disposal](#)
- [Away Wintering Sheep](#)
- [Lowland Raised Bog](#)
- [Management of Buffer areas for Fens and Lowland Bog](#) (where this relates to a Lowland Bog)



[Peatland area map \(PDF, Size: 2.4 MB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Maps-for-website---spatial-priorities---peatland-map-area.pdf> Peatland area map – spatial priorities

If you propose to carry out the above options on land outwith the peatland area map, you can be awarded points if your Case Officer is satisfied that the land is actually peatland. If you have obtained verification of this from NatureScot you should attach this with your AECS application.

Predator control:

Undertaking the predator control management option within the range of the declining black grouse population in the south of Scotland.



[South of Scotland black grouse map \(PDF, Size: 452.1 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/72748_70563_Black_grouse_data_March_2015_North_South_recreated-2018.pdf South of Scotland black grouse map

If you're not sure whether your holding is within these areas, please [contact your local RPID office](#) for advice.

2.7.2 Scheduled Monuments

Where proposed works meet environmental criteria and will also benefit a Scheduled Monument, additional points may be gained in recognition of the multiple benefits offered.

You can use the Targeting Tool webpage to check if there is a relevant Scheduled Monument on your holding.

The guidance note 'Scotland Rural Development Programme – Management of Scheduled Monuments: Management options and capital items', provides details on relevant options and capital items which can be used to benefit the Scheduled Monument.



[HES Guidance on AECS and Scheduled Monuments \(PDF, Size: 663.7 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/HES-Guidance-on-AECS-and-Scheduled-Monuments-2025.pdf> HES Guidance

You will score additional points if you propose to benefit the Scheduled Monument by undertaking these management options and / or any relevant capital items, and if you have also provided an endorsement from [Historic Environment Scotland](#) . **You can request this endorsement by contacting HMC consultations@hes.scot.**

3. Organic Conversion and Organic Maintenance scoring criteria

3.1. Scale of Delivery

In-bye and Moorland Management

The score awarded will reflect the portion of your land that you propose to enter into the Organic Conversion or Organic Maintenance sub-options in that application. We will separately assess the proportion of in-bye and the proportion of moorland proposed for organic sub-options in your application in relation to the total areas of in-bye and moorland on your holding. We will allocate points on a sliding scale depending on the percentage managed.

3.2. National Priorities: Organic farming: maintaining or increasing the area of organically managed farmland in Scotland

You will be allocated points if at least 25 per cent of your permanently held land will be managed under the 'organic conversion' sub-option, or at least 75 per cent will be managed under the 'organic maintenance' sub-option.

This calculation will be determined on declared areas, as per the most recent SAF declaration and includes conversion or maintenance areas from any active contracts held by the applicant business. Also, it may be the case that the business applying has more than one holding. If the current application covers only one of these holdings then it is only the land on that holding that we consider.

Please note that applications seeking organic conversion or maintenance on large areas of naturally kept moorland or rough grazings may also be subject to a value for money assessment by the National Project Assessment Committee. That assessment will consider the agricultural output from the business against the 5 year cost of the application.

The score sheet template for Organics is provided below.



[Score sheet for Organic Conversion and Organic Maintenance \(PDF, Size: 66.4 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Score-sheet-for-Organic-Conversion-and-Organic-Maintenance.pdf> Organic score sheet Template

4. Water-use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon scoring guidance and scoring criteria

Guidance on Water-use Efficiency – Irrigation Lagoon scoring and the Scoring Criteria are provided below.



[Irrigation lagoon scoring guidance \(MS Word, Size: 15.6 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Irrigation-Lagoon---Scoring-guidance.docx>



[Score sheet for Water-use efficiency irrigation lagoon \(MS Excel, Size: 14.8 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-2024-Score-sheet-for-water-use-efficiency-and-irrigation-lagoon.xlsx>

Recent changes

Section	Change
Introduction	You can find the scoring page for the 2024 round using the archive .
Organic Scoring Criteria	Updated for 2025

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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18 Funding under this scheme

Date published: 11 January, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page

Introduction

The funding under AECS will help to:

- deliver the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy by supporting appropriate management for vulnerable and iconic species and habitats, strengthening ecological networks, controlling invasive non-native species and enhancing the condition of protected nature sites
- contribute to Scotland's world-leading climate change targets by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and securing carbon stores in peatlands and other organic soils
- meet obligations to improve water quality under the Scotland River Basin Management Plan by reducing diffuse pollution
- control flooding through natural flood risk management
- support organic farming
- preserve the historic environment
- improve public access (*note the Improving Public Access element is not available for 2025 round applicants*)

Funding falls into two categories:

- annual payments for management options
- payments for capital costs

Please also refer to the [Claims and Payments page](#) .

Separate funding is also available towards the cost of the following types of plan:

- Farm Environment Assessment (FEA)
- Moorland Management Plan
- Lowland Bog Management Plan

However, you may only claim funding for the above plans if you meet the conditions which are explained in the [Claims and Payments page](#) . The web page also lists the payment rates for these types of plans.

Annual payments

Successful applicants will receive annual payments for the [management options](#) in your contract. These payments will be set at a standard cost in your contract as per the standard rates detailed in the [management options webpages](#).

Capital items

[Capital items](#) are one-off activities that can be claimed for and paid once they have been satisfactorily completed. Virtually all capital items are funded on the basis of a standard cost, as shown within the rules for each individual capital item.

Any capital expenditure incurred before your contract is in place is ineligible.

For all applications, only essential capital items will be accepted.

For agri-environment type applications this would include:

- Capital items that are directly required to deliver the management option, such as the capital item Creation of Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds which is essential for the Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds option
- Essential complimentary capital items, such as Creation of Wader Scrapes or Cutting of Rush Pasture
- Capital items that are essential to deliver the outcome of your application

It is not anticipated that applicants returning to the scheme from expired or expiring AECS contracts would seek funding for the same capital items in the same locations as in the original contract. The exception would be where the same capital item is required in order to deliver essential ongoing management under the new application.

Some capital items are available throughout the country. However, some are targeted to particular locations. You can only apply for the targeted capital items if they are listed under your MLC on the Targeting tool webpage (note that non-targeted capital items are not listed). The [capital items webpage](#) shows which items are targeted.

Actual costs capital items

There are three exceptions to standard capital costs, where actual capital costs may be used instead:

1. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and European sites (Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation)
2. Scheduled Monuments located on designated sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and European sites)
3. Other capital items where there are no standard costs available

For actual cost capital items the [guidance on quotes must be followed](#).

1. Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European sites

The Scottish Government is committed to bringing designated sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European sites) into favourable condition. In certain circumstances the standard payment rates for capital items are unlikely to cover the real costs of the works for these sites.

These circumstances include:

- remoteness of the area of land on which the work will be undertaken or awkward / rough terrain getting to site – for example island location, lack of local contractors resulting in travel and subsistence for contractors when undertaking the works, longer time to access work site, difficult to deliver materials
- awkward, rough or fragile terrain on site making it necessary to, for example, use specialist contractors, work at a slower rate, avoid disturbance to neighbouring areas, use matting to protect ground
- other conditions – for example vegetation removal from a large area of cliff which has very small area on a map

In such exceptional circumstances we will consider supporting higher, actual capital costs, where all of the following conditions apply:

- these activities support action on, or adjacent to, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European sites (designated sites) aimed at bringing the special features of interest into favourable condition, or maintaining favourable condition of features. Your case officer will confirm this with relevant staff in NatureScot
- you provide an adequate demonstration of the circumstances which justify why the standard payments rates are not sufficient. For larger projects, where there are different distinguishable elements, you may have to use standard costs for those elements for which you cannot provide an appropriate justification for the use of actual capital costs
- you provide a detailed breakdown of the work required, the associated costs and supporting quotes [in line with the guidance on quotes](#)
- you provide a comparison with the standard payment rate for the same activity, which demonstrates that the cost of undertaking the required activity is significantly higher than this
- the item must be in the list below

A specification for each activity is provided below:

- [Ditch Blocking – Peat Dams](#)
- [Ditch Blocking – Plastic Piling Dams](#)
- [Control of Scrub / Woody Vegetation – Primary treatment – Light Vegetation](#)
- [Control of Scrub / Woody Vegetation – Primary treatment – Intermediate and Heavy Vegetation](#)
- [Control of Scrub / Woody vegetation – Removal from Site of Cut Vegetation](#)

- [Matting to Prevent Damage to Bogs](#)
- [Moving or Realigning Ditches](#)
- [Deer Census – Helicopter Counts](#)
- [Upland Habitat Impact Assessment for Deer Management](#)
- [Primary Treatment of Bracken – Manual](#)
- [Primary Treatment of Bracken – Mechanised \(Formerly Mechanised or Chemical\)*](#)
- [Manual Eradication of Rhododendron – Light, Medium or Difficult](#)
- [Mechanised Eradication of Rhododendron – Light, Medium or Difficult](#)
- [Rhododendron Control – Foliar Spray / Treatment](#)
- [Rhododendron Control – Stem Injection Eradication – Medium or Difficult](#)
- [Scare and Temporary Electric Fencing](#)
- [Stock Fence](#)
- [Enhancing or Modifying a Stock Fence](#)
- [Rabbit-proofing an Existing or New Stock or Deer Fence](#)
- [Deer Fence](#)
- [Enhancing or Modifying a Deer Fence](#)

*Chemical control of Bracken is no longer funded through AECS following the decision by the manufacturers of Asulam not to pursue authorisation for the chemical in the UK.

Please note that we will usually only fund standard costs for fencing. Actual costs will only be approved in exceptional circumstances.

You should discuss any such proposals with [NatureScot](#) at an early stage **before** submitting your application, to ensure that what you are proposing is appropriate for the designated site features so that you can confidently proceed to getting quotes for the work.

2. Scheduled Monuments located on designated sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European sites) In exceptional circumstances we will consider supporting higher, actual capital costs where the method of work required to avoid damaging a Scheduled Monument site is complex and can be justified as incurring a higher financial burden. For higher actual costs to be considered under such circumstances, all of the following conditions apply:

- these activities, in the form of one of the capital items listed below, support action on, or adjacent to, Scheduled Monuments on designated sites which aim to have a long term positive benefit / impact on the environment and the condition / management of scheduled monuments and to also have a long term wider environmental benefit.
- you should include a letter of support from Historic Environment Scotland, as certain works require scheduled monument consent. Your case officer will confirm this with relevant staff in Historic Environment Scotland
- you provide an adequate demonstration of the circumstances which justify why the standard payments rates are not sufficient. For larger projects, where there are different distinguishable elements, you may have to use standard costs for those elements for which you cannot provide an appropriate justification for the use of standard costs
- you provide a detailed breakdown of the work required, the associated costs and supporting quotes in line with the guidance on quotes
- you provide a comparison with the standard payment rate for the same activity, which demonstrates that the cost of undertaking the required activity is significantly higher than this
- the item must be in the list below

A specification for each activity is provided below:

- [Control of Scrub / Woody Vegetation – Primary treatment – Light Vegetation](#)
- [Control of Scrub / Woody Vegetation – Primary treatment – Intermediate and Heavy Vegetation](#)
- [Control of Scrub / Woody vegetation – Removal from Site of Cut Vegetation](#)
- [Primary Treatment of Bracken – Manual](#)
- [Primary Treatment of Bracken – Mechanised \(Formerly Mechanised or Chemical\)*](#)
- [Manual Eradication of Rhododendron – Light, Medium or Difficult](#)
- [Mechanised Eradication of Rhododendron – Light, Medium or Difficult](#)
- [Rhododendron Control – Foliar Spray / Treatment](#)
- [Rhododendron Control – Stem Injection Eradication – Medium or Difficult](#)
- [Rabbit-proofing an Existing or New Stock or Deer Fence](#)

*Chemical control of Bracken is no longer funded through AECS following the decision by the manufacturers of Asulam not to pursue authorisation for the chemical in the UK.

You should discuss any such proposals with Historic Environment Scotland at an early stage before submitting your application, to ensure that what you are proposing is appropriate for the site so that you can confidently proceed to getting quotes for the work.

3. Other capital items where no standard costs are available There are seven capital items where no standard costs are available and you will have to claim actual costs. These are:

- [Coastal Embankment Breaching, Lowering or Removal](#)
- [River Embankment Breaching, Lowering or Removal](#)
- [Restoring \(Protecting\) River Banks \(engineered log jams\)](#)
- [Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems \(installation of kerbs / channels / cross drains\)](#)
- [Pesticide Handling Facilities \(drive-over biobeds\)](#)
- [Alternative Watering \(electrical powered pump system\)](#)
- [Alternative Watering \(water trough\)](#)

You must provide a detailed breakdown of the work required, the associated costs and supporting quotes in line with the [guidance on quotes](#)

[Recent changes](#)

Section	Change
Whole page	Updated details for 2025 round

[Previous versions](#)

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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19 Double funding and option incompatibility

Date published: 22 September, 2023

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Double Funding

There are two different situations where double funding may happen:

- through different Agri-Environment Climate Scheme options or other grant schemes
- by funding agri-environment options that are used to meet Greening requirements under the Basic Payment Scheme

Double funding between and within agri-environment schemes or other grant schemes can arise:

- where two or more similar options are funded on the same area of land, through a contract under this scheme and a contract under another scheme*, with the result that the same activity is funded twice
- where two incompatible options are funded under this scheme on the same area of land. For example, Wetland Management and Management of Buffer Areas for Fens and Lowland Bogs

*other schemes can include NatureScot management agreements, NatureScot Goose Schemes, Peatland Action, Nature Restoration Fund (NRF), Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS).

Compatible and incompatible options

In order to claim payment for an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme option it must be compatible with everything else that is declared or claimed for the same piece of land. This includes:

- other options from the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme or the Forestry Grant Scheme
- continuing claims under other schemes (see above *)

Examples of incompatibilities are:

- an option that is only eligible on grass and an option only eligible on a crop
- two options where the management requirements, such as grazing dates, are in conflict

If you currently receive payments under other schemes, you can still submit an application for this scheme on the same piece of land.

However, this can only be done when the management options you are applying for are compatible with your existing commitments under the other schemes and do not relate to similar activity that is already being funded under the other scheme(s).

Identifying incompatible options between and within agri-environment schemes

The following spreadsheet can be used to check if options are compatible with each other. It can also be used to check if options are compatible with land uses and Ecological Focus Area options.



[Compatibility checker \(MS Excel, Size: 357.2 kB\)](https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Compatibility--Checker---Jan-2023.xlsx)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Compatibility--Checker---Jan-2023.xlsx>
Template

When entering options into your application you will get an error message if the options do not all fit within the land parcel because they are not compatible.

For example, if you have a five hectare land parcel on which you enter five hectares of Agri-Environment Climate Scheme - Ancient Wood Pasture and you already have four hectares of Forestry Grant Scheme Sustainable Management of Forests - Native Woodland - you will get the following error:

"The Ancient Wood Pasture option is applied for on the Land Parcel AB/12345/12345. However, the total proposed area of all option(s) for 2022 in this application and any previous contracts on this Land parcel is 9.0 ha which is more than the BPS Eligible Area of 5.0 ha. The Show LPID details link displays all area based option/capital items on this Land Parcel. Please reduce the area on this Land Parcel to clear the error or suppress the error and add the appropriate comments."

If you were to enter one hectare of Agri-Environment Climate Scheme - Ancient Wood Pasture and you already have four hectares of Forestry Grant Scheme Sustainable Management of Forests - Native Woodland - you would not get an error as the system assumes these options are on separate pieces of land and will both fit within the five hectare land parcel.

There may be some options that are compatible only under some circumstances. These will be recorded as incompatible and will create an error. When submitting your application you have the ability to justify the error and add the reason.

This should be only done with confirmation from a Rural Payments and Inspection Division area office that the options are compatible.

Dealing with double funding or incompatible options

It is possible that contracts may be issued that result in double funding, which is only found when the case is given further scrutiny or at inspection.

In all cases where a double-funded activity is identified, or an incompatible option, it will be removed from your contract and any payment previously made for such activity under that contract will be recovered.

Contract variations

If we decide that we need to vary your contract, we will send you a letter. It will give you:

- a written explanation of the reasons for the proposed variation
- the opportunity to make written representations about the proposed variation

You should forward any written representations to your case officer within 28 days of the date of our written notification to vary your contract.

The case officer will then forward your representations to the scheme manager to consider.

If you don't respond within the 28-day period, then we will write to you again confirming that we will make the variation to your contract and recover payments as appropriate.

Payments for all other funding you receive may be delayed if you do not reply.

Double funding of agri-environment options linked to Greening requirements under the Basic Payment Scheme

If you claim for an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme option that also helps you meet the Ecological Focus Areas requirements of the Greening payment – as part of your Basic Payment Scheme claim – you cannot be paid twice.

To avoid this, we have identified options in this scheme that are of a similar nature to Ecological Focus Area activities.

This is relevant to:

- land managers who want to use an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme option to meet their Ecological Focus Area requirements
- organic land managers, who are exempt from undertaking Ecological Focus Area activities due to land being certified as organic that would otherwise be required to carry out an Ecological Focus Area activity if they were not organic and who manage an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme option that delivers Ecological Focus Areas requirements

Ecological Focus Area comparison

Agri-environment measure	EFA practice	Direct payments
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		weighting factor
Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds	Fallow	1
Beetlebanks	Fallow	1
Water Margins in Arable Fields	Buffer strips	1.5
Water Margins in Grassland Fields	Buffer strips	1.5
Converting Arable at Risk of Erosion or Flooding to Low-input Grassland	Fallow	1
Creation of Hedgerows	Hedge	10m2 or 5m2

If you choose to use all or part of one of the above Agri-Environment Climate Scheme options to meet your Ecological Focus Areas requirements, we need to remove the income foregone element from your agri-environment payment.

This will be done by assessing if the areas claimed for the Agri – Environment Climate Scheme options are on the same areas as used to meet the Ecological Focus Areas requirements. Your Greening payment will not be altered.

We will check this each year before paying your agri-environment options. If the options include management costs (as well as income foregone) these will be paid.

If you have any additional agri-environment commitments similar to Ecological Focus Area practices, payments for these will not be reduced. If you meet your Ecological Focus Areas requirements through other activity not covered by an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme contract, then your payments will not be affected.

This approach will also be adopted for organic farms who, without the Greening exemption, would otherwise be required to carry out Ecological Focus Areas activity.

Deductions for double funding will be made if an organic farm undertakes one of the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme options that are of a similar nature to an Ecological Focus Areas practice.

The double funding rules do not affect the land managers conversion or maintenance payments. Land managers who claim for the Basic Payment Scheme but who do not need to meet Ecological Focus Areas requirements and those who receive no funding under Pillar 1 will face no reduction in payments for this scheme.

This is because there is no risk of double funding.

These rules will apply to new contracts from 2015 onwards.

Practical example of dealing with double funding linked to Greening

A land manager with 100 hectares of arable cropped land who needs to meet the Ecological Focus Areas requirement on five per cent of their arable land (five hectares).

The land manager has commitments to manage seven hectares of wild bird seed for farmland birds under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme.

He chooses to use five hectares of the wild bird seed to meet his Ecological Focus Areas requirement.

Wild bird seed is one of the compatible options that is of a similar nature to Ecological Focus Area fallow. The management option payment calculation for Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds is based entirely on income foregone, with a separate capital item to establish the wild bird seed

The Ecological Focus Area weighting factor for fallow is one. Therefore, to meet the Ecological Focus Areas requirement, the land manager must declare five hectares as fallow on his annual Single Application Form declaration.

Under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, the land manager still claims the full seven hectares of wild bird seed annual management payments.

When the claim is being processed, the claim is restricted to the balance of the wild bird seed not used to support the Ecological Focus Areas (7.00 hectares – 5.00 hectares = 2.00 hectares).

Double funding will therefore be avoided. The capital item associated with establishing the wild bird seed habitat will be paid in full. If the land manager has other agri-environment commitments of a nature similar to Ecological Focus Areas practices these will not be reduced.

[Recent changes](#)

Section	Change
Double Funding	Reference to Nature Restoration Fund (NRF), Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS).
Whole page	Formatting changes to section headings

[Previous versions](#)

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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20 Management diaries and advice on calculating stocking densities

Date published: 21 December, 2017

If you are awarded a contract under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, you will find that, for a number of management options and capital items, you must keep an up-to-date diary to record the management activity you undertake.

Management diaries for your contract will be sent to you at the beginning of each year. This should ensure that we can take account of any mapping changes that occur over the period of your contract and provide you with the most up-to-date information. You must complete the official diary that you are sent and have this available at inspection.

If your contract is varied part way through the year you can request an updated management diary, however, if you want to continue to use your original diary please ensure that you update it with the new LPID numbers and areas.

The diary will contain the management requirements for each of the relevant management options and capital items in your contract.

The diary must be completed each time you undertake any action that relates to the management of the option. For example, dates of establishing [Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds](#) or dates when grass has been mown.

When entering stock information for fields with a grazing plan, you must adhere to the grazing regime detail, (which defines livestock units, livestock type and grazing dates), contained in your approved grazing plan.

You may be asked to make the diary available to us at any time of the year. If we inspect your holding, the inspector will check that the diary is accurate and up to date. You should also have your grazing Plan to hand to show the inspector.

The inspector will also check that the information entered confirms that the correct management has been undertaken.

Failure to complete the diary or the recording of inaccurate information may lead to reduction or recovery of some or all payments. Please see the [Breaches and Penalties Guidance](#) for more details.

An example of a completed management diary can be found below.



[Management diary example \(MS Word, Size: 118.3 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-Updates---management-diary-example---24-January-2017.docx> example of an agri-environment climate scheme management diary

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

How to calculate stocking density

Several management options require stocking density to be recorded in the management diary as part of the “activities” within a land parcel.

This section provides information on how to correctly calculate the stocking density.

The number of livestock units should be calculated using the information below:

Livestock units

Livestock Type	Number	LU per animal	LU
----------------	--------	---------------	----

Number of bulls, cows and other bovine animals over two years		x1.0	=
Number of equine animals over six months		x1.0	=
Number of bovine animals from six months to two years		x0.6	=
Number of bovine animals below six months		x0.4	=
Number of sheep		x0.15	=
Number of goats		x0.15	=
Number of breeding sows > 50KG		x0.5	=
Number of other pigs		x0.3	=
Number of laying hens		x0.014	=
Number of other poultry		x0.03	=
		Total LU	=

Stocking density

Total Livestock Units (Total of LU column)	=	LU
Total Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) Eligible Area (how to calculate your BPS eligible area)	=	Ha
Stocking Density (Total Livestock Units ÷ Total BPS Eligible Area)	=	LU/Ha

All livestock maintained on the area in question, including other stock, should be included in the calculation.

The stocking density is arrived at by dividing the total number of livestock units by the eligible area (in hectares).

So, for example, if a land parcel has 23 eligible Ha and contains: 50 ewes, 10 cows, 6 heifers (26 months old) and 10 calves (8 months old), then the following calculations apply:

$$50 \text{ ewes} * 0.15 \text{ LU} = 7.5$$

$$10 \text{ Cows} * 1.0 \text{ LU} = 10$$

$$6 \text{ heifers (26 months old)} * 1.0 \text{ LU} = 6$$

$$10 \text{ calves (8 months old)} * 0.6 \text{ LU} = 6$$

Then the stocking density of the land parcel is

$$(7.5+10+6+6)/23 \text{ Ha} = 1.28 \text{ LU/Ha}$$

This stocking density should be within the range stated in the grazing plan. Any time stock are added or removed from the land parcel, the event should be recorded (indicating what livestock was moved) and the new stocking density should be calculated.

Grazing plans that utilise more than one land parcel at the same time

If you have a grazing plan that uses more than one land parcel at the same time, then when livestock are added or removed, the detail of the event (including stocking density update) should be recorded for each of the land parcels being utilised.

So, if stock can move freely between three different land parcels then each time that stock are added or removed you should specify on each of the three land parcels the details of the stock added or removed and record the new stocking density.

LPIDS entered into AECS management run with adjacent fields

In these instances, make clear in the diary where LPIDs are run together and calculate the stocking density based on the total hectarage available to graze.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Minor text changes

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

21 Inspections

Date published: 13 September, 2023

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Note:

With effect from the 2021 round, any reference to EU legislation is to be read as referring to the version of the legislation as it exists in domestic law.

If your application to join the scheme is successful, you will be subject to our inspections programme. This is based on the European Commission's regulatory requirements, which are provided below:

- under Article 32 of the EC Control Regulation 809/2014 there is a requirement that at least three per cent of beneficiaries who have annual recurrent commitments (agri-environment and forestry – except establishment) under the Scottish Rural Development Regulation (SRDP) must be selected for an on-the-spot inspection each year.
- under Article 50 of the EC Control Regulation 809/2014 there is a requirement that at least three per cent of the public expenditure on capital items declared to the Commission each year and three per cent of the public expenditure over the whole programming period must be selected for an on-the-spot inspection each year. These capital items will be inspected prior to payment of the final claim.
- under Article 48 of the EC Control Regulation 809/2014 there is a requirement that there is a 100 per cent administrative check (invoices) on all investment operations (capital items).
- under article 52 of the EC Control Regulation 809/2014 there is a requirement that at least one per cent of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) expenditure under a five-year commitment be selected for an ex-post inspection (after the final payment).

As part of the on-the-spot compliance inspections, Cross Compliance checks will be carried out on one per cent of all beneficiaries of agri-environment (including organic farming), animal welfare, first afforestation on agricultural land and forest-environment payments. [Find out more about Cross Compliance.](#)

It is a condition of entry to this scheme that you must allow us to inspect your holding to check that the scheme rules are being met.

Inspections to check compliance will be carried out on a percentage of claims, chosen by risk analysis, prior to payment. Inspection visits will be co-ordinated by the relevant organisations to help reduce disruption at your farm or business.

Ex-post inspections for capital items are designed to ensure that the item is still there and being used for the purposes it was funded. Such checks may be undertaken at any time during the monitoring period, which is five years from the final payment.

Award holders are therefore required:

- not to make any modification or change that will substantially affect the nature, usage or location of the capital item purchased
- not to sell, exchange, give away or otherwise dispose of the capital item purchased

without the prior written approval of the scheme administrators.

Further information

More details on the types of inspections undertaken are available.

[Inspections](#)

Recent changes

Section	Change
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	<p>Revision to percentage rates in first two bullets on page.</p> <p>Removal of wording related to on site visit at the end of the third bullet.</p> <p>Revision of wording to paragraph covering Cross compliance checks, including addition of link to cross compliance landing web page and removal of link to Cross compliance inspection selection.</p>
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[Previous versions](#)

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22 Contract variations

Date published: 25 November, 2022

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Variations to Agri-Environment Climate Scheme contracts fall into two categories.

These are:

- variations initiated by beneficiaries
- variations initiated by scheme delivery partners – Rural Payments and Inspections Division and NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage)

Variations initiated by beneficiaries

If, once your Agri-Environment Climate Scheme contract has been issued, you find you are unable to keep to the expected timetable of capital works, the areas or lengths needed are slightly different to what was expected, and / or you are unable to manage a particular area as planned in your original application, a variation may be considered to allow changes to the schedule of works included within your contract.

You must notify your case officer or local area office in writing by letter or email **as soon as possible** if you become aware that a change is needed to your contract - see 'Changes must adhere to the following general principles' section below.

Any difference between your claim and your contract could result in a delay in your payment so it is essential that variation requests are made ahead of claims.

Changes may also occur:

- between approval and contract signing (pre-signing adjustment), or
- after you have signed and returned your contract (contract variation)

Changes must adhere to the following general principles:

- if the adjustment to the timing of works proposed changes the claim year, or the particular areas to be managed, there must be an exceptional circumstance or something unforeseen that has caused the delay or change. This is particularly important given the limited budget available for the programme period and because, unfortunately, we cannot transfer unspent funds from one financial year to another. **Variation requests will normally only be accepted for consideration in these circumstances where the request is received before the claim year (01/01 to 31/12) shown on the Schedule of Work for the option/item affected by the variation, has ended.**
- the proposed change must not affect the delivery of the contract
- the effect of the change must not bring an application score below the approved scoring threshold or remove the reason for approving the application below the threshold. Any variation request that takes the application score below the approved scoring threshold will be subject to scrutiny to assess if the work initially proposed was simply to attain a higher score. A request to remove that work after approval may be considered as a circumvention to attain approval and will likely result in the contract being withdrawn, with previous payments associated with that contract being recovered
- if a contract is changed after a land inspection or claim adjustment there should be no overall increase in the total area for an option, or length / area / quantity for a capital item approved in the original contract. We may consider it acceptable to 'balance' different areas of management of the same option where some are found to be larger than expected and others found to be smaller than expected

Variation requests must be submitted in writing by letter or email, and once considered can be:

- approved in full
- approved in part
- rejected

Types of acceptable variations

It is expected only the following types of variation will be considered:

- changes to timing of work / claims due to exceptional weather conditions that prevent the project from proceeding as planned or other circumstances outwith the control of the applicant – depending on consideration of the full circumstances
- force majeure (as defined by Article 2(2) of EC Regulation 1306/2013)
- adjustments to reduce the amount approved in the contract, for example, fencing or other standard capital items not required to achieve the desired outcome. We may consider it acceptable to 'balance' different areas of management of the same option where some are found to be larger than expected and others found to be smaller than expected (hedge A reduced from 100 m to 90 m and hedge B increased from 200 m to 210 m)
- correction of Land Parcel Identifiers (LPIDs)
- correcting typographic or arithmetic errors
- transposition errors. For example, mixing a '3' for an '8' or '5'
- application details affected by delays in issuing the contract
- application details affected by changes to scheme guidance after the application was formally submitted
- where a standard cost capital item has been deferred due to exceptional circumstances the associated first year's management must be deferred
- you may request to move areas of management if there are sound environmental reasons. This is especially true if the type of management undertaken can produce the same benefits on different areas of land. This is allowed in the context that many options specifically allow the rotation of options. You will need to clearly demonstrate why you require to deviate from the original application. Each request will be considered on its merits

When variations are not allowed

- variations to contracts are not allowed if they reduce the ability to deliver the selected national targets or if they stem from mismanagement. For example, requests to remove or substantially reduce options entered into the application in order to secure ranking points
- requests made following notification of an inspection
- requests to swap the value of unused items for others not included in the initial application. For example, swapping a fence gate for a stile
- requests to include new options or capital items. These should be included in a separate application
- requests to move or defer agri-environment areas not managed due to errors that were caused by you when completing the application process. If you have not managed an area because of an omission or error on your part (for example, sown in an inappropriate crop), this cannot be varied.

Notification of decision / beneficiary's liability

Once your variation request has been considered you will be notified whether your request has been successful in full or in part or if it has been rejected.

If a variation is accepted and is the result of pre-signing contract adjustment, you will receive two copies of the revised contract, including adjusted schedule of works, maps and additional conditions (where applicable). You will also receive a revised management diary if the changes applied affect the details in the diary.

If a variation is accepted and is the result of post-contract signing variation, you will receive two copies of the adjusted schedule of works, maps and additional conditions (if any of the maps and / or additional conditions have changed following the variation) and two copies of the signing pages. You must return one complete signed set of documents to your local office, confirming you are content with the details in the varied contract.

If you reject the variation then the originally approved contract still stands. If you do not comply with the original or amended contract, you risk being found in breach of contract. This may result in recovery action with penalties being applied and / or your contract being withdrawn.

Variations initiated by scheme delivery partners – Rural Payments and Inspections Division and NatureScot

The Rural Payments and Inspections Division and NatureScot have the legislative authority to vary a contract at any time, including any additional conditions, whether or not at the request of the beneficiary.

For example, a variation may be carried out by a member of staff processing the application where errors are found, e.g. wrong Land Parcel Identifiers (LPIDs) in the original schedule of works. It may also be required following the inspection or processing of claims.

Management diaries

If your contract is varied part way through the year you can request an updated management diary. However, if you want to continue to use your original diary please ensure that you update it with the new LPID numbers and areas.

[Management diary page](#)

Recent changes

Section	Change
Whole page	References to Scottish Natural Heritage changed to NatureScot

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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23 Breaches and penalties

Date published: 25 November, 2022

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Note: With effect from the 2021 round, any reference to EU legislation is to be read as referring to the version of the legislation as it exists in domestic law.

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If you do not follow your contract terms and conditions we will call this a breach.

A breach may be identified through the automatic checking we carry out against your application, claim, land or allowances, through an inspection or following a check of any supporting documentation relating to a claim.

It is your responsibility to ensure that all contract conditions are fulfilled and that all information in your application and claim is accurate.

If you have breached your agreement, future grant payments will be reduced or withheld and sums previously paid will be recovered.

The scheme is subject to different provisions in the European Union regulations depending on whether your contract has management or capital items as described below.

Capital Items – over-declaration of expenditure

These items are covered by Article 63 of Commission Regulation (EU) No. 809/2014 and Article 35 of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No. 640/2014

Under Article 63, once we receive your capital claim we will establish:

- (a) the amount that you are due based on what you have claimed and
- (b) what you are due after an examination of the eligibility of the expenditure of your claim and supporting documentation

If what you have claimed exceeds what you are due after the examination of your claim by more than 10 per cent, an administrative penalty equal to the difference between the two amounts will be applied to the amount that you are eligible to be paid.

For example, if you have an item in your contract approved for £1,000 but you submit a claim and invoices for £1,200, your eligible costs will be £1,000 with a penalty of £200 which means that you will receive a payment of £800.

The maximum reduction we can impose is 100 per cent of the claim. For an explanation of Article 35, see the section headed Capital and Management Items.

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Management Items – over-declaration of area

These items are covered by Articles 16, 19 and 35 of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No. 640/2014

The management items in your contract are claimed as part of the Single Application Form and must comply with the rules of the Single Application Form.

In accordance with Article 16, if you fail to declare all the land you have on your Single Application Form and there is a difference between the total areas declared and the total land that you should have declared, your payment will be reduced as below:

Difference between land that is declared and what is found	Size of penalty
Up to 3% of the area determined	No penalty

More than 3% and up to 20%	1%
More than 20% and up to 50%	2%
More than 50%	3%

In accordance with Article 19, over-declarations are calculated at crop-group level. A crop-group is formed of all areas which receive the same rate of aid under the same measure. If, within a crop-group, we find a difference between the area declared and the area found, your payment will be adjusted as below:

Size of over claim	Size of penalty
Up to 2 hectares or 3%	No penalty – payment will be reduced to area determined
More than 2 hectares or 3% but not more than 20% of the area determined	Twice the difference of the over claim
More than 20% but not more than 50% of the area determined	No payment will be made on the crop group
More than 50% of the area determined	No payment will be made on the crop-group and a further penalty will be added based on the difference between area declared and area found

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Cross Compliance

Any breach of cross-compliance rules anywhere on your holding may result in a penalty being applied. In most cases, this penalty will be applied to all area-based payments being claimed.

You can find out more about Cross Compliance using the link below.

[Cross Compliance](#)

Capital and Management Items – breaches of agreement

In accordance with Article 35, we will refuse or withdraw in full or in part any support, both for capital and management items, in cases of non-compliance or where the eligibility criteria or the conditions and obligations of your contract have not been met. This includes your commitment to complete a management diary.

If we assess that there has been a serious non-compliance, the support will be refused or withdrawn in full. You will also be excluded from the same measure or type of operation for the calendar year of the finding and for the following calendar year.

For commitments extending over a number of years, breach actions will result in a reduction and/or recovery being applied to amounts paid in previous years as well as the current year.

In determining the level of reduction we will consider how the breach should be classified against the following factors:

Classification	
Severity	The severity will depend on the importance of the consequences of the breach taking into account the objectives of the agreement or option
Extent	The extent will depend on the effect that the non-compliance has on the agreement as a whole and reflects the amount of agreement breached
Duration	The duration shall depend on the length of time the effects of the breach lasts and whether it is possible to rectify the breach by reasonable means
Re-occurrence	A breach will be determined as a re-occurrence where similar non-compliances have been found during the last four scheme years

The maximum reduction in any one year is 100 per cent of the option payment. Please see the below matrix to see how non-compliance will be treated.



[Breaches matrix \(PDF, Size: 88.6 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-Breaches-Matrix---Feb-2016.pdf>
A matrix displaying how breaches will be treated



[AECS Management Diary non-compliance matrix \(PDF, Size: 160.4 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Management-Diary-Non-Compliance-Matrix--15-June-2017.pdf> Matrix displaying penalties for non-compliance

If we seek to recover payments from you, we will write to you explaining why, with the amount due which will also include interest. Interest will begin to accrue from 60 days from the date of our letter and will continue to accrue until the time of repayment.

The letter will also give advice on how to appeal our decision. You will have 60 days from the date of this decision letter to either repay or to seek a review of the decision. If you do neither by the 60 day deadline, we will offset your debt from future payments from any SRDP scheme within three calendar years following the calendar year of the finding of the scheme breach.

More information on appeals can be found in the following appeals section.

[Appeals](#)

We may accept that you may have been prevented from meeting certain obligations of your contract due to a force majeure event. Force majeure relates to exceptional circumstances. Examples of a force majeure event are:

- the death of the scheme beneficiary
- the long term incapacity of the beneficiary
- a severe natural disaster gravely affecting the holding
- the accidental destruction of buildings such as slurry stores
- an epizootic or a plant disease affecting part or all of the beneficiary's livestock or crops respectively

To seek an exception to any withdrawal of support or financial penalty on the grounds of force majeure, you must write to your area office within 10 working days of the event happening. You should send us as much evidence as you can to support your case, including proof that the event occurred. Each case will be considered on its merits.

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Section	Change
Note	Revision of 2021 round statement to cover future rounds

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24 Claims and payments

Date published: 9 April, 2025

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

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Making a claim

Claims for payment can be made either by you as the scheme beneficiary or an accountable person acting on your behalf.

This accountable person will need to be mandated on the [PF05 - Business mandate form](#) before we can accept a claim from them on your behalf.

Although an accountable person can claim on your behalf, any errors on the claim which may result in us seeking to recover payments or impose a financial penalty will be applied against you as the holder of the contract. So it is in your interests to make sure that any claim submitted is correct.

You can only claim for the capital items set out in your contract once your work has been completed. Any difference between your claimed amount and the amount scheduled on your contract could result in a delay to your payment and / or penalties being applied.

If, once you receive authority to start work, you find that you are unable to keep to the expected timetable of capital works, the areas or lengths needed are slightly different to what was expected and /or you are unable to manage a particular area as planned in your original application, you must submit a variation request and await the decision before making your claim. [Please refer to the Variations guidance](#)

The types of claims available are:

- Claims for Management Options.
- Claims for Capital Items.
- Claims for Farm Environment Assessments and Management Plans.

Further details on each are provided below.

Management options claims (for existing scheme participants)

To make a claim for annual management options in your contract you must declare the land on which you undertake these options on the Single Application Form (SAF) using the Permanent Land Data Sheets (IACS3).

The primary route to complete and submit your SAF25 application is via our online application system. To do this, you must be registered with [Rural Payments and Services](#) . Your local office can offer assistance in getting online, applying online and can help answer any questions or concerns you may have.

A hand written paper SAF25 will only be considered by RPID in a very limited range of exceptional circumstances. To request a blank form you must write to your local area office stating your exceptional circumstances that prevent you or a mandated representative from submitting an online application in 2025.

Further information is provided in the [Single Application Form 2025 guidance](#) .

The deadline for the receipt of a Single Application Form will be 15 May, 2025.

We will still accept your form up to 25 calendar days after the closing date but will reduce your payments for all schemes covered by the Single Application Form unless you had force majeure /exceptional circumstances that prevented you from submitting your SAF. For AECS this will be by one per cent for each working day your form is late during the 25 calendar day period. We cannot accept your form if we receive it after midnight 9 June 2025 and no payments will be made.

If you fail to declare your management options on your Single Application Form you will not receive payment for your management options for the year in question.

You should not assume that because you have a contract that you are under no obligation to claim. Your contract is not a claim for payment.

You should refer to your schedule of works when completing your Single Application Form.

It is your responsibility to complete the Single Application Form correctly with your management options declared even if you employ an accountable person to act on your behalf.

Capital items claims (for existing scheme participants)

Capital investments are available to support environmental objectives such as fencing, hedges and habitat creation.

Capital items can be supported on either a standard cost or actual cost basis.

For both, you can only claim for the area / length / quantity actually completed and you cannot exceed the amounts indicated in your contract or exceed what is on the ground. If you or your accountable person claim for work that has not been completed we will consider this as an overclaim and breach penalties may apply.

For example, if you have a LPID in your contract for a scheme year for 600 metres of fencing then you must claim all of the 600 metres in one claim.

You cannot claim for 400 metres on one claim and 200 metres on another claim at different dates. You must wait until the entire length / area of an item in a LPID is complete before you submit a capital claim

Any capital expenditure incurred before your application to join the scheme has been submitted will not be eligible for payment.

All capital claims will be paid in full.

You do not need to submit invoices with standard cost items but you do need to submit further evidence for actual cost items providing the following details - either as hard copy or electronically as scanned documents or photographs.

- Suppliers name and address and VAT registration number if appropriate.
- Claimant's name and address which should be the business name in the approved contract who is the scheme beneficiary.
- Detailed description of services provided or goods supplied, separately costed, to include serial numbers for any equipment purchased.
- Date on which the services or goods were supplied.
- Total amount due for payment by the customer with the VAT element clearly detailed.
- Amount paid with details of any discount awarded which fully explains the difference between the amount due and the amount paid.
- Date paid.
- Method of payment used.

In addition, when you submit an original invoice either as hard copy or electronically as scanned documents or photographs you must also back it up with other evidence of payment, such as:

- The original bank or credit card statement.
- The original bank giro credit transfer slip.
- An accountant's report.
- A certified extract from the business accounts.
- If your invoices are paid by electronic banking we require a copy of the bank statements showing the defrayed expenditure and also copies of the electronic transaction between businesses.

The evidence of payment can be submitted in hard copy or electronically as scanned documents or photographs. You must ensure that all the required information is provided whatever submission method is used, where submitted evidence is missing the required detail your claim may be rejected.

Claims for capital items must be submitted by the end of February of the calendar year following the year stipulated in your contract.

So, if you have a claim year of 2025 in your contract, your claim must be submitted during 1 January 2025 to 28 February 2026. Additionally, all the capital works claimed must be completed by 31 December 2025.

The financial amounts in your contract for the year in question cannot be transferred to another financial year.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you submit your claim by the deadline set-out in this guidance. We will not write to you in advance of the closing date to remind you.

If you submit a claim after that period it will not be accepted unless there are extenuating circumstances which prevented your claim being submitted. If you receive notification that we will not accept a late claim for payment you can contact your area office to discuss.

You will not be able to submit a request to review this decision under the Rural Payments (Appeals) (Scotland) Regulations 2015 as the regulations do not apply in these circumstances.

If you are unable to undertake the work in the year designated in your contract then you must write to us requesting a variation. Please see further guidance in the variation section.

To make a claim for capital items, use [PF16 - AECS capital items claim form](#). Guidance on completing the form is also available.

Farm Environment Assessment and Management Plans claims

You must use the [PF15](#) specialist plan claim form to claim payment for a Farm Environment Assessment or Moorland or Lowland Bog management plan. Claims must be submitted to your local RPID office by 28 February 2026.

Payment is not dependent on the success of your application; however, we will only reimburse you where your Farm Environment Assessment, Moorland Management plan and Lowland Bog plan is fit for purpose.

For **Farm Environment Assessment** claims, please also note:

- payment is **not** available if you are reapplying for the same land / holding as in a previously submitted AECS application related to agri-environmental management
- however, you may claim payment if you are applying to AECS in 2025 for a holding, under the same BRN, which has not had any previous AECS applications
- you may also claim payment if you are applying for a holding previously applied for through AECS, but which now has additional land. In such case you can only claim for the hectareage of the additional land

Payment is **not** available if you have had an Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) produced for your farm funded through the Farm Advisory Service. This would constitute double funding.

The payment rates are as follows:

Area (ha)	Rate (£) per application
Less than 50ha	200
50ha up to 200ha	400
Greater than 200ha	600

For **Moorland Management Plans** your claim should be based on the area covered by the Plan as below:

Area (ha)	Rate (£) per application
Less than 50ha	100
50ha up to 100ha	200
Greater than 100ha and up to 200ha	400
Greater than 200ha	600

For **Lowland Bog Plans** your claim should be based on the area covered by the Plan as below:

Area (ha)	Rate (£) per application
10 ha or greater	300

For Moorland and Lowland Bog Management Plans please note:

You cannot claim a plan payment if you received a free site assessment report from a source such as NatureScot and if the report was sufficiently detailed that you or your agent did not need to carry out a site assessment when preparing the Management Plan.

In this situation, claiming the Moorland or Lowland Bog Management Plan payment would constitute double funding.

Payments for management options and capital items

Payments will be made as follows:

- Management options – these are paid annually in the spring of the year following submission of your Single Application Form. For example, if you submit a claim in 2025, your management payment will be paid in the spring of 2026 once all the inspections for annual management measures have been completed.
- Capital items – these will be paid upon receipt of a valid claim with any relevant supporting documentation. A valid claim is a claim that is wholly completed and signed and encloses all supporting documentation as required.

Payments will only be made once all administrative checks have been carried out on the claim to ensure that the work claimed is suitable, matches what is in your approved contract and that the claim has been completed correctly.

If your claim has been selected for inspection, your claim will only be paid once the inspection has been carried out and the inspection result is satisfactory.

It is a condition of the scheme that you must allow us to inspect your holding to check that the scheme rules are being met.

[You can find out more about inspections here](#)

You will receive payment by BACS into your nominated bank account. All payments will be made in sterling. We aim to have your payment into your bank account within 10 days from the date we authorise the payment.

If you change your bank account you must inform us as soon as possible by completing [PF03 - Register your bank details - sterling](#) form to avoid payments being issued to your closed account. Alternatively, you can do this online at <https://www.ruralpayments.org>

Payments for Farm Environment Assessments and Management Plans

Payments for Farm Environment Assessments, Moorland Management Plans and Lowland Bog Management Plans will be made after we have received your PF15 Claim Form and assessed the eligibility of your claim.

This is subject to your claim form being received by the 28 February 2026 deadline referred to at the Farm Environment Assessments and Management Plans section above.

Appeals

If you are unhappy with any decisions regarding payments, you can find information about appeals on our [Appeals page](#).

Recent changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Updated details for 2025 round.

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25 Contract succession

Date published: 1 August, 2024

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

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Introduction

A succession takes place when:

- an individual or business gives up the ownership, occupancy, tenancy or contractual licence of land and/or capital items that are covered by an AECS contract to another IACS or legal business and
- the new owner or occupier agrees to take on some or all parts of the AECS contract

As part of this process, the individual or business leaving the land will be referred to as the 'outgoer' and whoever is taking on the land will be referred to as the 'incomer'.

Successions will be appropriate when contracts, which involve area related options managed over a period of five years, are to be transferred to an incomer, prior to the end of the five year commitment.

In this situation, the areas being managed will be transferred to the incomer for the remainder of the contract term as these areas will continue to provide environmental benefits.

Contracts solely for capital works - for example slurry store and Improved Public Access - are more complex.

Outgoers who own assets can sell these if they wish. However, they should not benefit from the sale of a capital asset funded by the taxpayer. Therefore, if assets which were grant funded are sold or transferred, recovery of the grant in full is the most likely outcome.

Where a succession is requested for a contract related to capital only, there must be some exceptional circumstances or force majeure which make the transfer of the grant aided project inevitable or unavoidable.

For example, long-term professional incapacity or the transfer of land subject to a contractual licence.

Change of occupier or transfer of land

If you have a contract as part of this scheme and decide to transfer, lease or sell all or part of land covered by the contract, you must let us know of this within three months.

You should do this in writing to either the Rural Payments and Inspections Division or NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage).

[Contact details](#)

For further information, see 'What the outgoer/incomer needs to do' below. If you, as the outgoer, fail to notify us within three months of the change of occupation, we may reclaim all or part of your AECS payments, with interest.

More information on breaches and penalties can be found in our dedicated section.

[Breaches and Penalties](#)

You cannot apply for land-based options on seasonal-held land, including arable, if your lease is for a period of less than a full year.

Types of succession

There are two types of succession:

- full transfer of AECS contract to a single or multiple incomers:

The incomer(s) agrees to take over the entire AECS contract and the outgoer has no further obligations under the AECS contract.

- partial transfer of AECS Contract to a single or multiple incomers:

The incomer agrees to take over some elements of the AECS contract – for example the original contract holder retains some of the land and is obliged to fulfil the remaining commitments of their AECS contract.

Full or partial transfer to tenants

If the incomer is a tenant but the tenancy agreement is shorter than the remaining period of the AECS contract, the owner or principal tenant (in the case of a sub-tenancy) and the incomer must undertake jointly to take over the succession.

The tenant and the owner or principal tenant must complete the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme landlord declaration form as well as any other documents required as per this guidance.

[Landlord declaration form](#)

Full or partial transfer between Contractual Licensees

If the incomer and outgoer are both contractual licensees then the incoming contractual licensee must supply a copy of the new contractual licence between themselves and the owner or principle tenant.

Where the duration of the licence does not cover the remaining period of the contract, a new landlord declaration must be submitted, as per the occupancy of land guidance.

What the outgoer and incomer need to do

The outgoer should notify their local RPID or NatureScot regional office, in writing, of the change of occupancy, within three months of the transfer of the lease or sale of part or all of the land covered by their AECS contract. This should be accompanied with the completion of the following forms:

- [Land Maintenance form](#) – to be completed jointly by outgoer and incomer giving us details of the land transferred or purchased. If not already IACS registered, the incomer will also need to register their business and any other land they occupy using this form
- [BACS form](#) – incomers registering for the first time must complete this form so that we are able to make payments
- [Succession Request Form](#) (SRF) – to be completed jointly by outgoer and incomer

Change of occupier before AECS contract is signed

Where an application is submitted by a business and occupancy of all or part of the land covered by that application passes to another business before the AECS contract undertakings are signed, the action to be taken depends on the transfer type:

- Full Transfer of AECS application

The details of the unsigned contract can be transferred to the new owner or lease holder. The incomer will not need to submit an AECS application but will take over and sign the contract initially intended for the outgoer.

This will be dependent on RPID and/or NatureScot being satisfied that the expected objectives will still be delivered, that the incomer meets all relevant eligibility criteria and that the full assessment of the application was successfully completed including the site visit/land manager discussion.

To allow this assessment process to get underway we would require the current applicant to provide us with the initial details of the outgoer/ incomer transfer including an indication of whether or not the incomer wishes to take over any potential contract.

This should be provided within the equivalent time frame to that set out at the 'What the outgoer and incomer need to do' section above.

If the incomer does wish to take over any potential contract we would require the Land Maintenance Form and Succession request form with any additional documents the incomer may need to support their

eligibility to be submitted immediately after the outgoer has been notified that the application has been successful.

A written explanation would need to be provided if this notification period and forwarding of the necessary documentation has not been met.

- Partial Transfer of AECS application

The original application by the outgoer would be adjusted to remove the land subject to the succession and then reassessed by RPID or NatureScot. The incomer would need to submit an application covering the land they now occupy. Applications must be submitted by the closing date of any AECS application round still open or within the application window of future rounds.

Assessing a succession request

Following the receipt of the required succession documentation, the case officer will assess the succession request.

The case officer's decision will be based on the successful completion of the AECS contract to date by the outgoer* and the incomer's ability to meet the application and option eligibility criteria, (which is detailed in the AECS application guidance) and their ability to deliver the commitments in the outgoer's application / contract.

* Applicable where the contract has been signed by the original applicant (outgoer) and the authority to start work letter has been issued.

Part or no transfer of contracts

If the incomer does not wish to take on all or any elements of the AECS contract on the transferred or purchased land, then the outgoer may be liable to repay all or part of the payments received, with interest.

If the succession request form and associated documentation is not submitted to RPID or NatureScot within three months of sale or transfer, we may be obliged to reclaim all or part of any payments made, with interest, from the outgoer.

We would not seek recovery where we accept evidence from the outgoer that the reason for the incomer not taking on the undertakings meets the conditions of force majeure or exceptional circumstances.
([LINK](#))

An example of this would be where a large part of a holding is compulsorily purchased and this could not have been anticipated at application stage.

Outgoer's obligations

If we agree the full succession of the contract to the incomer, and the incomer have agreed to take it on, we will issue you with confirmation that your contract has ended and that you have no further legal responsibilities under that AECS contract.

If we agree the partial succession of the contract to the incomer, and the incomer agree to take on part of the contract, the contract commitments will be split accordingly between the incomer and outgoer and all parties will have legal responsibility for their own contracts.

What can be claimed

Outgoer

If the outgoer occupied the land on 15 May and claimed the AECS annual recurrent options on their Single Application Form (SAF) that year, then they will receive the annual recurrent payments for that scheme year (year ending 31 December), provided the contract conditions are met.

If the outgoer has already submitted a capital claim, we will pay that to them provided that we received the claim before the date of change of occupier.

If any breaches are discovered at the time of a compliance inspection, we will apply any penalty to who ever made the claim.

Incomer

On or after the date of change of occupier, only the incomer will be entitled to claim payments for the transferred options, even if the work was carried out by the outgoer. Please note you must manually add the annual recurrent items to your subsequent SAF claims.

This is on the understanding that if the date of transfer to the Incomer is after 15 May in any given year, then any annual recurrent management grant payments, for that year, would be paid to the outgoer. If any breaches are discovered at the time of a compliance inspection, we will apply any penalty to whoever made the claim.

After a successful succession, your land maybe subject to option area and payment limits. For example, organic options are subject to a total limit of 1,000Ha per business. Within that, there is a 300Ha limit for arable land, improved grassland and fruit and vegetable taken together or separately.

Notifying you of our decision

Approval

- Incomer (full and part transfer)

The incomer will receive two copies of a full contract. The incomer must sign and date both copies returning one to the local RPID or NatureScot within 28 days from the contract issue date.

- Outgoer (part transfer to incomer)

The outgoer will receive two copies of their new schedule of works and map(s), if applicable, which details the commitments they have retained. A management diary, again where applicable, will also be enclosed. The outgoer must sign and date both copies returning one to the local RPID or NatureScot within 28 days from the contract issue date.

- Outgoer (full transfer to incomer)

The outgoer will get a letter to confirm transfer of contract to the incomer and that their responsibilities under the contract have ceased.

Refusal

If we refuse a succession request we will write to all parties involved to inform them of this along with any implications.

Recent changes

Section	Change
What can be claimed - Incomer	The incomer must manually add the annual recurrent items to your subsequent SAF claims.

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

26 Publicity

Date published: 18 January, 2021

To see the recent changes to this guidance, [check the bottom of this page](#).

Note: The guidance in this page does not apply to applications approved after 31 December 2020

As part of any successful application, you will be required to inform the public about the support you receive. How you do this may depend on how much you receive for your capital items.

For capital funding of any amount, you must place a short description about the project on any related websites, where a link between the purpose of the website and the support provided to the project can be established and highlighting the financial support received.

If you receive capital funding of more than €50,000, you must put up at least one poster or plaque with information about the project (minimum size A3) highlighting the financial support from the European Commission at a location readily visible to the public, such as the entrance area of a building at the holding.



[Example of A3 publicity poster \(MS Word, Size: 70.0 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-POSTER-Final.docx>

All plaques must include:

- the European emblem in accordance with the standards detailed in EU Commission Regulation 808/2014 Annex III Part 2
- the statement “The European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas”
- a description of the project which shall take up at least 25 per cent of the plaque

The emblem should be as per the standards presented on the [European Union website](#).

If you fail to erect a poster or plaque we may seek the recovery of payments made to you for the project in question.

For capital funding of more than €500,000 you must erect a billboard of significant size at a location readily visible to the public.

Examples of suitable wording for plaques and billboards:



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in Rural Areas

Providing moorland management for livestock and deer,
and seed and crops for farmland birds

Recent changes

Section	Change
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Note

Statement regarding approval of applications beyond December 2020

[Previous versions](#)

[Previous versions](#)

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27 Withdrawing from the scheme

Date published: 25 November, 2022

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Note: With effect from the 2021 round, any reference to EU legislation is to be read as referring to the version of the legislation as it exists in domestic law

If you want to withdraw from a scheme option that has a five year undertaking, you must write to your local area office immediately explaining why.

However, unless you can meet the force majeure or exceptional circumstances criteria, you will normally need to repay any payments you have already received plus interest.

You can find out more about force majeure or exceptional circumstances below.

Force majeure or exceptional circumstances

If you find you are no longer able to meet the conditions of your contract, you should write to your Rural Payments and Inspections Division area office or case officer within 15 days of being able to do so.

You must explain the reason why and supply any relevant evidence.

You may have to pay back some or all of the payments we have made to you, plus interest.

However, we would not seek recovery where you can provide evidence that the reason for the failure meets the strict conditions of force majeure or exceptional circumstances.

The criteria for this is set out in European Commission Regulation (EC) No 1306/2013 – Article 2.2 – and could be one of the following:

- the death of the beneficiary
- long-term professional incapacity of beneficiary
- a severe natural disaster gravely affecting the holding
- the accidental destruction of livestock buildings on the holding
- an epizootic or a plant disease affecting part or all of the beneficiary's livestock or crops respectively
- expropriation of all or a large part of the holding if that expropriation could not have been anticipated on the day of lodging the application

Recent changes

Section	Changes
Note	Revision of 2021 round statement to cover future rounds

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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28 Reviews

Date published: 19 February, 2016

What is a review?

The review process is used when an applicant, or their agent, is not content with the approval decision relating to an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme application. It may also occur where the contract offered does not include all of the management options or capital items that were originally applied for.

A complaint against the manner in which the assessment of the application has been handled should be considered through the appropriate complaints process.

[Complaints](#)

Requesting a review

If you are not satisfied with our decision, you may wish to ask us to formally review our decision. When reviewing a case, we can only consider the information that was originally submitted and will not consider new additional documentation.

To request a review you must submit a written request to the address provided in the decision letter or the contract offer, and within the timescale provided in the decision letter or the contract offer – quoting your case reference number.

The review request will be considered by an approving officer who was not involved in the original decision on the case. We aim to respond in writing within 28 days with a decision. This letter will either confirm, amend or alter our original decision and explain what the implications of the new decision will be.

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29 Appeals

Date published: 18 January, 2021

Updates to last version:

- the previous request for review form (RFR1) has been replaced with 'PF19 - Appeal on rural grant: Request for review form'

Table of Contents

Making an appeal

If we have written to tell you we have already – or soon will – refuse, reduce or recover your payment and you are not sure why we have made this decision, you should urgently contact your area office for more information.

[Contact us](#)

If after this you are not satisfied with our decision, you may wish to ask us to formally review our decision under the Rural Payments Appeals procedure.

To do this you must submit a written request to your area office no later than 60 days (legal timescale) from the date of our original decision letter on a request for review form (see below).

[PF19 - Appeal on rural grant: Request for review form](#)

Area office staff will then arrange to meet with you – or phone you if you prefer – to formally review your appeal in more detail. By law we must do this no later than 60 days from the date we receive your request for review.

This conversation will give you the opportunity to explain to a senior member of staff why you think our decision is incorrect, provide additional evidence, ask any related questions and seek relevant clarification.

Our area office member of staff will explain why the initial decision was taken, the relevant legislation and, if relevant, why we applied a penalty.

The area office must then send you a written report of the review meeting within 60 days. The report will either confirm, amend or alter our original decision, or revoke it entirely and substitute a new decision.

You can download [the request form](#) or copies are also available from our area offices.

Further action

If the review upholds the original decision and you wish to continue with your case, you need to submit a formal appeal directly to the Scottish Land Court.

The court will then make its own arrangements to deal with it.

Your appeal to the court needs to be made within 60 days of the day that you received the written report of the review meeting.

Find out more information on the Scottish Land Court.

[Scottish Land Court](#)

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Previous versions

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30 Complaints

Date published: 8 July, 2022

To see recent changes to this guidance, [check the bottom of this page](#).

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with our standard of service, procedures, or processes that you feel requires a response or explanation from us. You or your representative can complain in person by phone, by email or in writing.

All complaints will be treated seriously by us and you will receive a full response.

Our complaints procedure has two stages:

- stage one – frontline resolution
- stage two – investigation

Stage one – frontline resolution

Frontline resolution aims to quickly resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Under this part of the procedure you should direct your complaint to the officer in charge of the staff you have been dealing with.

This person is likely to be located in your area office or in our office in Edinburgh. They may be able to answer your concerns to your satisfaction. We aim to address your stage one complaint in five working days.

[Contact us](#)

If you are dissatisfied with our response you can ask us to consider your complaint at stage two.

Stage two – investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at stage one. We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they are complex or need detailed investigation before we can resolve the issue.

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days. For stage two complaints we will appoint an independent investigating officer who has an in-depth knowledge of the issue you are complaining about and you will receive a report at the end of the investigation.

We aim to issue this report as soon as possible but no later than 20 working days.

You can obtain further information about our complaint handling procedure by visiting the Scottish Government website or by [emailing us](#).

[Scottish Government complaints procedure](#)

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If you are not satisfied with the decision reached in the Stage Two report, you or your representative have the right to ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to investigate your case.

The SPSO cannot normally look at:

- a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure
- events that happened, or that you became aware of, more than a year ago
- a matter that has been or is being considered in court for example the Scottish Land Court

The SPSO may, however, consider that in certain cases there are 'special circumstances' that mean a complaint is considered even though it has breached the time limit. Further guidance on 'special circumstances' that may be taken into account can be found on the SPSO website.

You can contact the SPSO in the following ways:

- by post - Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, Bridgeside House, 99 McDonald Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4NS (If you would like to request a Freepost envelope contact the telephone number below))
- by phone – Freephone 0800 377 7330
- by general enquiries [contact form](#)

[Scottish Public Services Ombudsman website](#)

[Scottish Forestry and NatureScot complaints](#)

If your complaint relates to Scottish Forestry or NatureScot, you can contact them directly through their own complaints procedures.

[Scottish Forestry complaints procedure](#)

[NatureScot complaints](#)

[Recent changes](#)

Section	Change
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	Updates to the contact details for Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
Scottish Forestry and NatureScot complaints	Name change for NatureScot from Scottish Natural Heritage. Relevant webpage links also amended to direct to NatureScot website.

[Previous versions](#)

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