Designations: natural heritage, landscape, historic

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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 Conservations (SAC)
    - The Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS)
    - Nature30 Sites

(Note: 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.

Nature30 sites

The Nature30 sites recognition process was launched by Scottish Government in August 2025. These Nature30 sites sit alongside Protected Areas in contributing to Scotland's international and national obligations to have 30% of land and sea safeguarded for nature by 2030. Further details about Nature30 . If an AECS application includes land within a Nature30 site, and the proposed management will benefit the biodiversity values of the site, this will be taken into account in the assessment process.

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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. Find out more about National Scene Areas , along with information around planning and development.

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
- 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 (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
Nature30 sites	Information added

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Historic and archaeological designations	Updated Management of Scheduled Monuments guidance

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