Important Tips and Guidance for Applications

This is an old version of the page

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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 when first submitted, it's important that it is completed properly, with all the information needed.

Before you start your submission, please take into account the following tips and common errors.

Please also refer to "checklist of Requirements" and " Further requirements for applicants " which expand on the information provided below.

Top tips for 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 which is in place when the 2021 round opens for applications. **Please note** that the 2021 round is restricted to the following application types:

- Applications to benefit protected (designated) areas
- Organic farming
- Vulnerable Priority Bird species - VPS waders, Corncrakes & Corn Buntings
- Slurry Storage
- Improving Public Access
- Designated sites - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Natura sites (SPA or SAC): If you are applying within a designated site, you are strongly recommended to make early contact with NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) 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
- Consult with relevant individuals/bodies to obtain documentation / necessary approval ahead of submitting your application
- 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. Ensure that you use the latest templates (see the checklist of requirements)
- For all management options and capital items which require an individual plan to support your application, (e.g. Grazing Plan, Scrub Control Plan) we strongly advise that you use the relevant plan template.. If you choose to create your own plan, then you MUST provide all 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 removed from your application.

- Ensure maps are created and annotated in accordance with the Mapping and Farm Environment Assessment (FEA) guidance (where applicable). Please note that there are some changes to FEA requirements for the 2021 round. 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 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 Work produced at the time the application is due to be submitted 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 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

For 2021 wader applications outwith designated sites, consult your wader project officer as they must submit written support to accompany your application.

- if an application contains many errors and 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 significant changes within the rules of the scheme

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:

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

Please check the guidance for occupancy of land for more information.

Occupancy of land

A common error regarding the submission of a lease has been when it is submitted for another purpose and it is then used in support of an AECS application.

To clarify, for this to be acceptable, the applicant is responsible for making sure that the lease submitted already meets the AECS requirements.

The applicant 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 – information to be added about the lease's earlier submission to RPID and stating that it is also to be used for AECS.

Including items/options without checking their eligibility

Every option or item has guidance stating when it is eligible. **It is a common error to assume that similar options from previous schemes have retained the same eligibility requirements - see 2021 restricted round details at the top of the page**. Always check the latest AECS guidance.

Also, please pay attention to the best practice that is outlined in the supporting guidance for options and 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
Targeted options		If an option is not on the list for your holding, you cannot apply for it unless you submit an endorsement with your application. Otherwise the whole application may become ineligible. Allow plenty of time to obtain an endorsement from NatureScot to ensure you have it in time for the submission deadline. Please refer to the 'Endorsement' section of the AECS guidance to check when an 'Endorsement' is available, as these are limited to certain options and designated sites.
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.
Management Options	Management options that require capital items	Ensure that only essential capital items are included. 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	For 2021, these options must fall within one of these eligible wader project areas (MS Word, Size: 599.5 kB) . You must complete the Wader Management Plan template (MS Word, Size: 2.5 MB) which requires details for each field entered into management including grazing detail. In addition, you must complete the grazing calender in the online application.
	Habitat Mosaic Management and Species-Rich Grassland Management	If you are applying for these options on hill and upland rough grazing land, you must request an endorsement from NatureScot prior to applying. If the endorsement is awarded, you must submit this alongside your application. Allow enough time to ensure you have this prior to the application round closing.
	Wader management on heath mosaics (within the Heath management option)	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. You cannot apply for this option on land previously managed under the Moorland Management option. For 2021 wader applications in established wader project areas, where the land has not been claimed under agri-environment before, if the site is dominated by health/mire/bog vegetation, it is defined as Moorland and cannot be entered under

		this option. If you are unsure of habitat eligibility, speak to RPID before applying.
Capital Items	All capital items	In this restricted 2021 round, other than for Slurry Stores and Improving Public Access (IPA), only essential capital items will be accepted e.g. those items that are directly required to enable the management option (for example, wild bird seed for farmland birds which requires the Ceation of wild bird seed capital items) and essential complimentary items only (for example, Wader grazed grassland and creation of wader scrapes). Capital items are not eligible when selecting the Organic Maintenance option as this option supports the cost of maintaining an organic management system.
		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 Target tool webpage. (The capital items webpage shows which items are targeted.)
	Actual capital costs	Where there is an actual cost capital item, you must justify 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.
		For 2021 applications 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 considered acceptable.
		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.
	Fencing	Where a new fence is permitted, you must remove and dispose of the existing fence appropriately - at your own cost.
	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.
	Scare fencing	This item is only available alongside Restoring Drystone or Flagstone Dykes. For all other situations apply for temporary electric fencing.
	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.

Previous versions

Recent Changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Updated details for 2021 round

Previous versions of this page