

How to apply

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](#) .

The version of this page applicable to the AECS 2021 restricted round can be found in the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme full guidance archive.

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Introduction

The 2023 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) application round will open for applications on 30 January 2023. 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
Slurry Stores	30 January 2023 - 24 March 2023
Improving Public Access (IPA)	IPA is suspended for 2023
Organic conversion and maintenance	30 January 2023 - 7 June 2023
Agri-environment	30 January 2023 - 7 June 2023

Slurry Storage

Slurry Storage will now be available nationally, with the exception of areas designated as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones. Businesses that currently house livestock on slurry based systems with less than 6 months storage capacity will be eligible to apply. Contracts will be issued **by the end of April 2023** with the anticipation that **work will be carried out in 2023** and claimed by 29th February 2024. Applicants should consider this element carefully before applying, as there will be no ability to defer work to another year.

Organic Conversion/Maintenance

The area caps will be removed for applicants in 2023 for conversion and maintenance. Existing contract holders with land in excess of the caps (on their Schedule of Works in their contract) will have the caps lifted in line with new applicants from the 2024 management year.

Improving Public Access (IPA)

IPA will not be opening for new applications in 2023.

Agri-environment

To maximise the benefits of the scheme in the face of budgetary pressures, we have reluctantly had to suspend or restrict some elements offered through the AECS 2023 round. As such the following capital items will not be available:

- Restoring Drystone or Flagstone Dykes

- Pond Creation and Restoration for Wildlife
- Muirburn and Heather Cutting
- Primary Treatment of Bracken – Mechanised or Chemical
- Follow up Treatment of Bracken - Mechanised or Chemical

In addition, the Creation of Hedgerows option will be restricted to 500 linear metres per application for 2023 applications.

For clarity, the items/options below remain suspended for the 2023 round.

- Creation of Species Rich Grassland
- Heather Restoration
- Heather Restoration – Follow - up Molinia control

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 2023 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. Also, you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot if you are considering applying for deer management. You should make contact as early as possible and at least a month before the closing date to allow time for a response. The same applies if you require a NatureScot endorsement to allow you to apply for an option outwith its target area.

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.

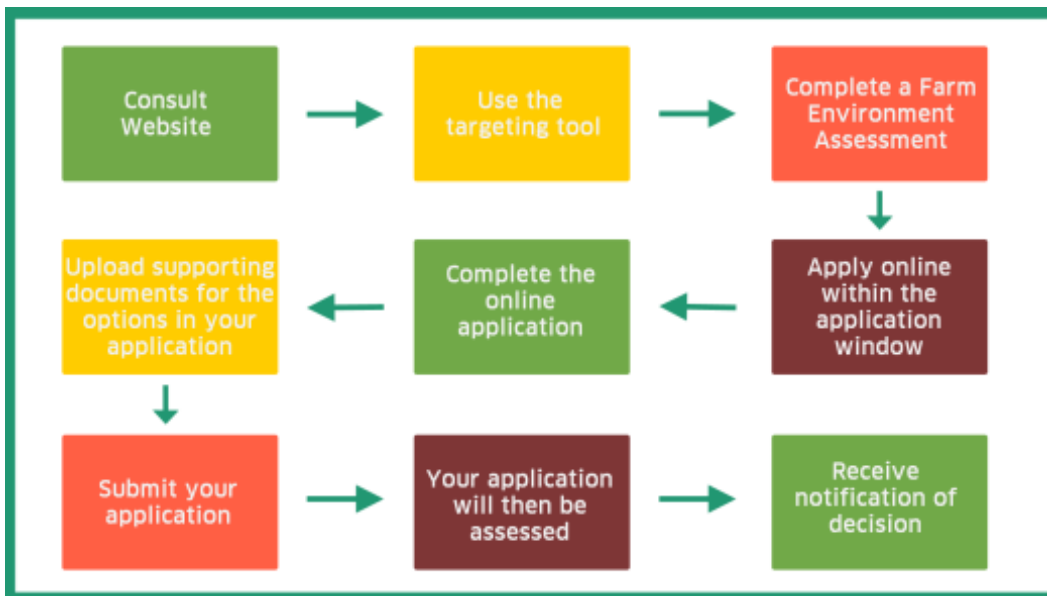
Application process

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 2022 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](#) to ensure that you only apply for options or capital items which are available on your land. If you have several holdings, you will need to enter each of these separately.

For Slurry storage applications, holding codes with land contiguous to the boundary of designated NVZ areas or have land which is part in / part out of a designated NVZ will not have Slurry Storage listed in the Targeting Tool as an option that may be eligible to apply for. In these circumstances, the eligibility for Slurry Storage should be checked with the relevant area office before commencing an application

If you find your location code is not recognised when you enter it on the targeting tool, please contact your local RPID or NatureScot 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 2023 round).

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 should 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 either annual management option payments or payment details for capital items or both (whichever is 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.

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.

- 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.

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-environment applications](#) .

The organic maintenance or organic conversion element of applications will be scored separately.

The Slurry Storage element of applications will be scored separately. See the [targeted slurry storage scoring criteria](#) , agreed with SEPA.

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.

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.

In particular, you should 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. The case officer will formally acknowledge your rejection.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Introduction	Opening and closing dates for 2023 application round. capital items not available / suspended for the 2023 application round , including Improving Public Access. Added information on Organic Conversion/ Maintenance, Slurry Storage and If you intend to apply for management to benefit a designated site (SSSI or European site) for the 2023 round
Application Process	Updated guidance on the process for the 2023 application round. Revised text on Slurry Storage at Point 2 'Use the targeting tool'

Previous versions

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