

How to apply

This is an old version of the page

Date published: 22 January, 2021

Date superseded: 21 January, 2022

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#) .

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Introduction

The 2021 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme application round opens on Monday 25 January 2021 and is due to close for all applications on Wednesday 30 June 2021. The Improving Public Access option opens on 1 March and closes 30 June 2021.

All Supporting documentation should be submitted by the 30 June 2021 application deadline.

Please note that the 2021 round is restricted to the following categories:

- **Designated sites/Protected Areas:** Management to benefit the qualifying features of Sites of Special Scientific interest (SSSIs) and European Sites formally Natura sites (SAC or SPA)
- **Management for Priority Bird Species outwith designated sites**
 - Management to benefit the five key Vulnerable Protected Species (VPS) **farmland wader species** (Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew, oystercatcher, Snipe) on land included in established grassland wader projects
 - Management of **Corn bunting**
 - Management of **Corncrakes**
 - **Organic farming** (Conversion and Maintenance)
 - **Slurry Storage**
 - **[Improving Public Access \(IPA\) capital item options](#)**

Please see further information on these categories below

Designated sites also known as Protected Areas

Sites of Special Scientific interest (SSSIs) and European sites contain a list of qualifying features. We welcome applications for management that will 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. You can use [SiteLink](#) to find the qualifying features within any designated site. You are also strongly advised to speak with [NatureScot](#) staff before preparing your application. (NatureScot is the new name of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).) Please also read the [Designations webpage](#).

Farmland waders from established grassland wader projects

Applications for wader management (where waders are not a feature of a designated site) must be on land which is part of a recognised, established wader project. A list of these projects and associated map may be found [here \(MS Word, Size: 599.5 kB\)](#) . Applications must include written support from the manager or co-ordinator of the established wader project you are involved with.

You must complete the **Wader Management Plan** and submit this with your AECS application.

If you have no recent (within 5-years) survey data for your farm please complete this **Wader recording form (MS Word, Size: 27.5 kB)** and send it to your project officer



[AECS 2021 - Wader application management plan template \(MS Word, Size: 2.5 MB\)](https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-2021----Wader-application-management-plan-template-updated-Feb21.docx)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-2021----Wader-application-management-plan-template-updated-Feb21.docx> AECS 2021 - Wader application management plan template

For waders the management options and capital items which can be included in these applications are limited to:

- [Wader and wildlife Mown Grassland](#)
- [Wader Grazed Grassland](#)
- [Wader management on health mosaics - land previously managed under AECS Moorland Management is not eligible for this option](#)
- [Creation of Wader Scrapes](#)
- [Cutting of rush pasture](#)
- [Wetland Creation - Field Drain Breaking](#)
- [Wetland Creation - Pipe Sluices](#)
- [Wetland management](#)
- Cattle Management on small units (while cattle retention is available to all eligible applicants, the Introduction of cattle is restricted to applicants who have not had an AECS contract)
- Conservation Management of small units

Please note, no fencing costs will be supported.

Corn bunting and corncrakes

Applications to benefit corn bunting and corncrakes must ensure that they follow the option guidance.

For corn bunting the management options and capital items which can be included in applications are limited to:

- [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](#)
- Cattle Management on small units (while cattle retention is available to all eligible applicants, the Introduction of cattle is restricted to applicants who have not had an AECS contract)
- Conservation Management of small units

Note that the only fencing costs that can be applied for are temporary fencing costs associated with creation of plots for wild bird seed for farmland birds or forage brassica crop creation and only where the enterprise has livestock.

For corncrakes the management options and capital items which can be included in applications are limited to:

- [Corncrake Mown Grassland](#)
- [Corncrake Grazing Management](#)
- [Management of Cover for Corncrake](#)
- [Creation of Cover for Corncrakes](#)
- Cattle Management on small units (while cattle retention is available to all eligible applicants, the Introduction of cattle is restricted to applicants who have not had an AECS contract)
- Conservation Management of small units

Please note, where the holding has already been in receipt of AECS funding for agri-environment, no fencing costs will be supported. For new applications, fencing will only be considered where the existing fencing will not last for 5-years.

Applications for organic farming

Applications can be made for [organic conversion](#) or [organic maintenance](#) . Note that capital investment will only be considered in exceptional circumstances for Organic Conversion. Please refer to [Organic Conversion guidance](#) .

Applications for slurry storage

The Slurry Storage element of applications will be scored separately. The targeted slurry storage scoring criteria, agreed with SEPA, can be found [here \(MS Excel, Size: 14.4 kB\)](#) .

A simple search tool is available to identify the relevant catchment type/name for a given farm code. Before using the [catchment tool \(MS Excel, Size: 208.1 kB\)](#) you must check that slurry storage is available on the farm code where the work is proposed by checking on the [AECS targeting tool](#) .

Note that some farm codes around the boundary of designated NVZ areas may be incorrectly showing as eligible for slurry storage. If a farm code is known to have land in a designated NVZ area the eligibility for slurry storage should be checked with the relevant [RPID area office](#) before commencing an application.

Applications for Improving Public Access (IPA)

IPA applications for capital items are [scored](#) separately and [further information on IPA](#) may be found here.

Role of the case officer

When you submit your application for the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, including Improving Public Access, 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



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

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Online-Application-Guidance.pdf> Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS): Online application guidance for customers

1. Consult website

You should first check the relevant sections of the AECS and IPA 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 restricted round in 2021. 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 at the foot of this web page.

2. Use the targeting tool

Consult the website and enter your holding number into the targeting tool to see which of the targeted options are available on your land. If you have several holdings, you will need to enter each of these separately.

[Targeting tool](#)

If you find your location code is not appearing 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

Please note that the Farm Environment Assessment (FEA) requirements have changed for the 2021 round and you should read the FEA webpage carefully.

Applications to benefit designated sites (SSSIs and Natura sites) and applications to benefit waders, corn bunting or corncrakes require the following:

A Contextual Map and a Farm Environment Management Map (for smaller holdings these could be put on the same map).

Applications for Organic options, Slurry Stores or IPA (Improving Public Access) do not require an FEA.

Diffuse pollution risk assessments: For the restricted AECS 2021 application round there is no requirement for a diffuse pollution field-based or steading risk assessments or maps.

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.

To simplify the administration of the scheme you will normally be limited to a single application per year. However, an exception will apply for the management of the following designated sites:

- Natura Sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

An exception will also be made for certain situations for land managers who have widely separated areas of land (normally at least five miles apart) where it is more appropriate to detail the management under separate applications.

Separate applications will also be allowed for applications solely for funding, organic aid and slurry storage.

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 will need to be used (unless not yet allocated by RPID) and you will need to supply the areas 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.

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 can 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 application deadline 30 June 2021.

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 in order, you will be asked to 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.

Applications can be withdrawn and resubmitted with amendments before the closing date of the particular round of applications. However, no amendments can be accepted to a submitted application after the closing date has passed.

8. Your application will then be assessed

There are two levels of entry to this scheme and applications falling into each category will be assessed 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 for 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 (formally Scottish Natural Heritage) 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 by an expert panel constituted on a national basis for approval or rejection.

See [Application Assessment](#)

Scoring criteria

The scoring criteria for Organic Conversion and Maintenance and Slurry Storage applications is similar to previous application rounds. Improving Public Access scoring criteria have been revised and previous applicants should familiarise themselves with the revised criteria.

Applications for Management for Priority Bird Species outwith designated sites (Corncrakes, Corn Buntings and Waders) will have separate and specific scoring criteria for AECS in 2021.

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

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.

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 bespoke 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 get 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
Application Process	Online Application Guidance update
Introduction	Changes to application window dates for 2019 and added info on collaborative applications
Application Process	Changes to order in which to apply, graphic updated
Introduction	Changes to application window dates for 2018 and added info on collaborative applications
Application Process	Online Application Guidance update
Introduction	Slurry storage scoring criteria and catchment tool added

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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