How to apply

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Introduction

The 2015 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme application round is now closed. An announcement will be made in early 2016 as to when the 2016 round will be open for applications.

For applications for Improving Public Access, there is a separate opening period (21 March, 2016 to 31 May, 2016 inclusive), and a separate assessment process using different criteria

How to apply for Improving Public Access

Applications for the Improving Public Access item must be made separately from any other application for the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, and cannot be made before 21 March, 2016.

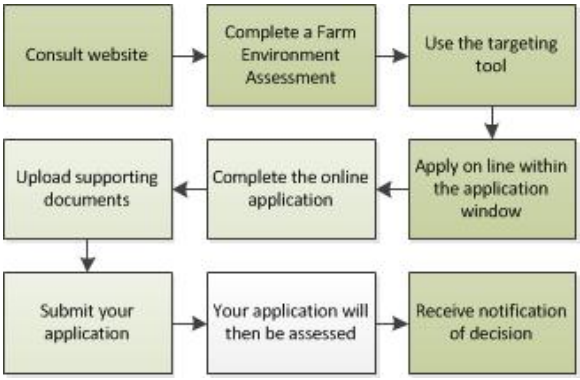
Role of the case officer

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

Online application guidance (PDF, Size: 4.1 MB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/aecs_application_desk_instructions_customers_rm_v4_010615.pdf Guidance for customers submitting an online AECS application.



1. Consult website

You should first check the relevant sections of this website to get a better understanding of the rules of the scheme, and to check that you will be eligible to apply.

2. Complete a Farm Environment Assessment

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

- improving public access
- coastal embankment breaching, lowering or removal
- river embankment breaching, lowering or removal
- restoring (protecting) river banks
- stand alone slurry stores
- organics

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.

Find out more about Farm Environment Assessment here.

3. 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.

Targeting tool

4. Apply on line 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

To make effective use of scheme funds, there will be one call for applications per year, normally January to March. An announcement will be made in early 2016 as to when the 2016 round will be open for applications.

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:

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

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 arising out of approvals under the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund and those applications solely for funding access, organic aid and slurry storage (from 2016 onwards).

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

Along with the information you complete online you will also need to supply additional documents which may include:

- a management map showing the location of the activities you propose to carry out
- a Farm Environment Assessment and Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment, if appropriate
- a specialist management plan (required as part of some management options and capital items, e.g. Moorland Management Plan) – see individual management options and capital items application requirements
- a quotations table and quotes, if you use actual capital costs
- details of the management regimes you are undertaking if required for a management option or capital item
- endorsement from Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency if proposing work outside the target areas
- any consents and licences received from regulatory authorities, where applicable – see consents and licences
- any relevant forms. For example, Landlord Declaration Form, Contractual Licence, Shared Boundary Agreement etc
- letter of approval from Scottish Natural Heritage if required as part of the eligibility requirements of a capital item
- a vulnerable priority species recording form, if appropriate
- any supporting evidence for the scoring criteria

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 Scottish Natural Heritage office.

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.

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 – applications up to £75,000. Applications for this level will undergo an initial assessment by a case officer including a discussion with you which may be made during an on-farm visit depending on the options you have applied for, which is then considered at the local Rural Payments and Inspections Division area office or Scottish Natural Heritage area office for approval or rejection
- level two – applications above £75,000. Applications for this level will undergo an assessment as per level one. After assessment the case will be forwarded to an expert panel constituted on a national basis for approval or rejection

Scoring criteria

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

There are separate sets of criteria for:

- Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications (other than those for Improving Public Access)
- applications for Improving Public Access (to be applied for separately)
- scale of delivery – assessment of how much of the land will be managed under the scheme compared to the total of land on your holding and how many diffuse pollution risks are addressed
- national priorities – nationally important priorities that will receive recognition in the scoring process
- habitat linkage – recognition that managing sites across a holding where there is linkage between them can provide additional benefit, (eg, by providing wildlife corridors)
- long-term benefit – recognising that some options deliver environmental benefit for a period longer than the contract
- value for money – recognising where the delivery of management options with a lower associated infrastructure capital cost is beneficial compared to those that require higher initial infrastructure capital costs
- collaborative approach – recognising that collaboration between different applicants can lead to additional benefits to the environment than if they had acted independently

Additional benefits

- spatial targeting – recognising further targeting of certain options if they are within priority areas, where the option will deliver an increased benefit
- scheduled monuments – that management through the scheme will have a secondary benefit of protecting or reducing the risk of deterioration to a scheduled monument as verified by Historic Scotland

9. Notification of decision

Once your application has been assessed you will be notified as to whether or not your application has been approved or rejected. If your application is approved you will then be sent a contract, which you must sign and return to us.

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

We expect you to return the signed contract to your case officer within 28 days of the date that the contract was issued. If you do not return the signed contract within 28 days, we will send you a reminder letter.

If you do not return the contract within six weeks of issue then we may cancel your contract.

An Agent, acting as an Accountable Person, can only sign on behalf of a business if he / she has the mandated authority to do so.

If you are an agent signing a contract on an applicant's 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.

When the case officer receives the signed contract they will send you a letter confirming receipt. You may only start work when you get this confirmation letter.

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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.

Management diary

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.

The diary for the first year of management will be issued to you at the same time as you receive your contract for signature.

Diaries for the following years of your contract will be sent to you 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.

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.

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.

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.

Recent changes

Section	Change	Previous text	New text
Introduction	2016 dates for Improving Public Access.	For applications for Improving Public Access, there is a separate opening period (17 August, 2015 to 31 October, 2015 inclusive), and a separate assessment process using different criteria – see below for more information on this.	For applications for Improving Public Access, there is a separate opening period (21 March, 2016 to 31 May, 2015 inclusive), and a separate assessment process using different criteria How to apply for Improving Public Access Applications for the Improving Public Access item must be made separately from any other application for the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, and cannot be made before 21 March, 2016.
Sections relating to Improving Public Access - Applications for improving public access criteria - Additional considerations for Level 2 large-scale applications - Improving Public Access applications	Moved to a separate page.		

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