



Countryside Stewardship Manual

Applies to all multi-year and Water Quality capital grant agreements commencing on 1 January 2016

Revised November 2017

Contents

1. Scheme overview	3 >>
2. How it works	4 >>
3. Who can apply	11 >>
4. Getting consents and permissions	34 >>
5. How to apply	38 >>
6. Selecting the best management options and capital items	52 >>
7. Agreement management	70 >>
8. Scheme requirements and procedures	72 >>

Introduction

This manual provides the information needed to apply for the new Countryside Stewardship scheme and additional requirements and processes which must be followed.

Mandatory elements of the manual

A Countryside Stewardship agreement will comprise:

1. the scheme Terms and Conditions (available separately);
2. the Agreement Document (which sets out agreement holder specific details) and;
3. the supplementary documents referred to in the Agreement Document.

The Terms and Conditions refer to, amongst other things, the mandatory elements of this Manual that agreement holders must comply with. The sections that contain mandatory text are:

- Section 3: Who can apply
- Section 8 : Scheme requirements and procedures

See the main **Countryside Stewardship** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management) page for:

- Countryside Stewardship forms
- Terms and conditions
- Higher Tier expressions of interest
- the common land and shared grazing supplement
- woodland capital grants 2015
- facilitation fund grants 2015
- water capital grants 2015

1. Scheme overview

Countryside Stewardship priorities and the organisations running and funding the scheme.

Countryside Stewardship ("the scheme") provides incentives for land managers to look after their environment. The scheme is open to all eligible farmers, woodland owners, foresters and other land managers through a competitive application process.

Unlike previous rural development schemes, applications for most elements of Countryside Stewardship are competitive, which means that applications will be scored against criteria, and that not everyone who applies will be successful. Targeting and scoring will encourage applicants to choose options that help achieve the environmental priorities in their local area. See sections [2.2](#), [5.9](#) & [5.10](#) for more information about how applications will be scored.

The main priority for Countryside Stewardship is to protect and enhance the natural environment, in particular the diversity of wildlife (biodiversity) and water quality. Other outcomes include:

- flood management;
- the historic environment;
- landscape character;
- genetic conservation; and
- educational access.

The scheme will be jointly run by Natural England, Forestry Commission England and the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) on behalf of Defra. All supporting scheme guidance material can be found at www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management.

This single scheme supersedes the following schemes which are now closed to new applications:

- Environmental Stewardship (ES) including organic and upland strands;
- the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS); and
- capital grants from the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) programme.

There are three main elements within Countryside Stewardship:

- **Mid Tier:** multi-year agreements for environmental improvements in the wider countryside, including multi-year management options and capital grants;
- **Higher Tier:** multi-year agreements for environmentally significant sites, commons and woodlands where more complex management requires support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission, including management options and capital grants; and

- **Capital Grants:** a range of 1-2 year grants for hedgerows and boundaries, improving water quality, developing implementation plans, feasibility studies, woodland creation (establishment), woodland improvement and tree health.

The scheme also provides support for organic conversion and management and access to a Facilitation Fund.

2. How it works

The main elements of the scheme, how to choose management options and capital items, agreement duration and support for organic farming.

2.1 Choosing management options and capital items

Countryside Stewardship offers a range of management options and one-off payments towards the costs of certain capital items or activities. These can be applied for in different combinations.

Applicants can review the management options and capital items available using the **Countryside Stewardship Grants** tool online (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants). Through this, applicants can filter the complete list of management options and capital items according to their availability by scheme element, land use or value, and can access full details about what each requires. The greatest range of management options and capital items is available through the Higher Tier.

Applicants are encouraged to select options and capital items that are closest to the environmental priorities for their area, as described in the **Statements of Priorities** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities). These cover the whole of England. Applicants can use them to:

- identify the priority features and issues being targeted in their area; and
- choose which options to include as part of an application.

2.2 Scoring

The scheme is competitive with Mid Tier, Higher Tier and Capital Grant applications being scored and ranked according to their score. The highest scoring applications will, subject to the available budget, be offered agreements for the applicant's consideration and potential acceptance. (See [5.9 for further details on Mid Tier scoring](#) and [5.10 for further details on Higher Tier scoring](#))

An exception to the competitive process is applications for organic conversion and management options. These are not scored and all eligible applications will be accepted subject to the availability of budget.

2.3 Mid Tier

Mid Tier aims to address environmental issues in the wider countryside, such as:

- reducing diffuse water pollution from agriculture; and
- improving the farmed environment for farmland birds and pollinators.

Multi-year management options and capital items, including the water capital grants in this Tier are designed to deliver environmental improvements in the wider countryside. Applicants can select from 133 management options and capital items. Mid Tier agreements must have a total value of at least £5000 in options over 5 years.

2.4 Higher Tier

Higher Tier agreements are for the most environmentally significant sites and woodlands. These sites will usually need complex management such as:

- habitat restoration and creation;
- woodland improvement;
- woodland creation and associated maintenance;
- measures for priority species, and vegetation mosaics; and
- measures for the historic environment.

Land managers will need one-to-one advice and support from Natural England or Forestry Commission advisers to help them to build their application for Higher Tier. Applicants can select from the full range of the 244 scheme options and capital grants available.

2.5 Capital grants

There is a limited range of standalone capital grants to support the delivery of environmental outcomes. These are separate to the capital grants offered through the Mid Tier or Higher Tier application process.

Standalone capital grants are for:

Hedgerows and boundaries

Grants will be available from early 2016 onwards. They are for small-scale restoration of boundary features, like hedgerows and stone walls to a maximum of £5,000.

Water quality grants

These grants are only available in CSF priority catchment target areas and need Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer (CSFO) endorsement. Applicants need to contact the CSFO at least 6 weeks before submitting an application. The maximum grant available for capital items associated with soil and water protection is £10,000. Existing Environmental Stewardship agreement holders can also apply.

Feasibility studies

These will be available year round from early 2016 onwards. Feasibility studies can be funded to assess the potential success of a proposed project, for example intertidal habitat creation and water management plans for the deployment of sustainable drainage options.

Implementation plans

These will be available year round from early 2016 onwards. Implementation plans can also be funded: these detail the activities, costs and timings to achieve a project, for example hay meadow restoration.

Woodland tree health issues

There are two elements of support available in response to tree health issues:

Both of these grants can be applied for all year round.

- **Woodland tree health: restoration**

Applicants can be paid for the restocking of trees, following felling due to specific tree health issues.

Tree health restoration requires the use of the capital item: **Tree Planting (TE4)**
www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/supply-and-plant-tree-te4

This provides funding to supply, plant, weed and protect young trees.

- **Woodland tree health: improvement**

Applicants can be paid for the removal of immature trees and rhododendron in response to specific tree health issue(s)

Tree Health improvement requires the use of the following capital items:

- **Scrub control & felling diseased trees (SB1)**
www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/scrub-control-and-felling-diseased-trees-sb1
- **Rhododendron control (SB6)**
www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/rhododendron-control-sb6

Woodland management plans

Support for woodland management plans can be applied for all year round. Applicants can get support to prepare a new woodland management plan using the Forestry Commission woodland management plan template through the capital item; **Woodland Management Plan (PA3)**.
www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-management-plan-pa3

Woodland creation establishment

Support for woodland creation establishment will be open in a separate application window to the other capital items, from February to April each year. Applicants can also include a woodland creation maintenance multi-year option with their application (see following details).

Applicants can be paid for planting trees to create new woodland. Woodland creation requires the use of the capital item **Tree Planting (TE4)**.

www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/supply-and-plant-tree-te4

This provides funding to supply, plant, weed and protect young trees. Tree planting can be supported by other capital items such as tree shelters and fencing – for details, please refer to TE4.

If eligible, applicants can also include the following multi-year option; **Woodland creation maintenance (WD1)**.

www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-creation-maintenance-payments-wd1

This is an annual payment to support successful planting of new woodland through activities such as:

- replacing individual trees that die;
- maintaining fencing; and
- removing competing vegetation.

2.6 The wild pollinator and farm wildlife package

The package includes a range of options aimed at supporting wild pollinators, farmland birds and other farmland wildlife. Applications will score more highly if they bring together the right combination of options, to provide essential food, shelter and nesting sites for wild pollinators and farm wildlife throughout the year. (Full details are provided at [section 6.3](#))

2.7 Organic conversion and management

Organic conversion and management applications are not competitive. All eligible applicants will be offered an agreement containing the relevant conversion and management options, subject to the availability of sufficient budget.

The organic conversion & management options can be used alone by applying through the Mid Tier process or in combination with other options within the Mid or Higher Tier.

The scheme provides 11 options that are only available to organic farmers and land managers. These include options for conversion to organic status and to continue to manage organic land once it becomes fully converted. Other scheme options and items can be used with organic systems if they are compatible with organic status.

Conversion payments will be paid for 2 years, except for permanent crops such as fruit trees where a 3 year conversion period applies.

For the duration of the agreement applicants must be:

- registered with an **Organic Control Body (OCB)**, www.gov.uk/organic-certification-and-standards; and
- when applying for Organic Conversion options (OR1 to OR5) and Management payments (OT1 to OT6) must be registered with the RPA as an active farmer on **Rural Payments**. Link to Rural Payments homepage: www.gov.uk/rural-payments

In addition:

- land parcels must be in the first year of conversion at the start of the agreement to be eligible for conversion support; and
- to be eligible for conversion, these parcels must not have been entered for, or received any payments in respect of, conversion by the applicant or the applicant's business. This applies whether or not conversion was completed at any time in the past.

Phased conversion will be allowed and further details will be provided in a later update.

Applicants will also need to:

- have completed a Farm Environment Record (see [section 5.4](#)) (this will also inform the OCB) for the land to be entered into conversion or maintenance;
- have completed a conversion plan for any land they are intending to claim conversion support on, which must be approved and signed-off by their OCB; and
- have a viability plan for land which doesn't have a signed-off conversion plan at the time of the application.

2.8 Facilitation funding

Facilitation funding is available on a competitive basis to people or organisations that help farmers and land managers work together to deliver Countryside Stewardship priorities across landscapes. It will be allocated to people and organisations that:

- can help groups of farmers to work cooperatively; and
- have experience of environmental land management.

The members of the group will need to manage an area of land which:

- is sufficient in size to deliver scheme priorities set out in the statements of priorities for the area; and
- covers at least 2,000 hectares, unless there is an obvious smaller environmental boundary; and
- can be spread across at least 4 adjacent holdings.

For more information refer to the **Guide to Countryside Stewardship: facilitation fund**.
www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-countryside-stewardship-facilitation-fund

2.9 Water quality options

This package (See [section 6.4](#)) includes a range of options to improve water quality in CSF priority catchment target areas. The water quality grants will be supported by CSFOs will provide support and guidance to applicants in these areas.

2.10 When to apply

- Some elements of the scheme can be applied for at any time of the year whilst others have set periods in which applications can be submitted. The table below provides details of the application periods in 2015 (including multi-year agreements starting on 1st January 2016).

	Mid Tier	Higher Tier (inc. woodland improvement infrastructure and capital)	Water Quality Capital
Potential applicants discuss options with advisers	N/A	From April	N/A
Application period opens	July	July	July
Application period closes	30 Sept	31 October	30 Sept
Applications scored, ranked and selected	October	November	October
Agreements offered to applicants	Oct to November	November	Oct to November
Agreements Start	1 January	1 January	1 January

Other scheme elements have different scheme windows, these are:

- woodland creation – apply February to April;
- woodland Management Plans & Woodland Tree Health – apply at any time;
- feasibility studies and implementation plans – will be available all year round from early 2016; and
- a further application round for the Facilitation Fund is planned for January 2016 and January 2017.

The application period for Mid Tier agreements closes on 30 September 2015 for agreements starting on 1 January 2016. The application period for Higher Tier agreements closes on 31 October for agreements starting on January 1st 2016.

All agreement offers must be accepted and the signed declaration returned to Natural England by 15 December 2015.

2.11 Agreement duration

All Mid Tier and most Higher Tier agreements will last 5 years. Standalone Capital only agreements will be shorter, and generally last a year.

Some Higher Tier agreements may be longer and further detail is provided in the table below where a Higher Tier agreement of greater than 5 years will be offered:

What the agreement is for – examples	Option Agreement duration is 10 years unless otherwise stated
<p>Coastal re-alignment, wetlands,</p> <p>salt marsh creation,</p> <p>peat restoration,</p> <p>blanket bog</p> <p>Species rich grasslands, traditional orchards, woodland creation and afforestation</p> <p>Where complex changes which have long-term impacts on the environmental conditions and land use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of coastal sand dunes and vegetated shingle (CT2) • Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat on arable land (CT4) 20 years • Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat by non-intervention (CT5) 20 Years • Creation of wet grassland for breeding waders (GS11) • Creation of wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl (GS12) • Raised water level supplement (SP2) • Making space for water (SW12) 20 Years • Management of moorland (UP3) • Creation of reedbed (WT7) • Creation of fen (WT9) • Creation of traditional orchards (BE5) • Restoration towards species-rich grassland (GS7) • Creation of species-rich grassland (GS8) • Creation of grassland for target features (GS14) • Restoration of forestry and woodland to lowland heathland (LH2) • Creation of heathland from arable or improved grassland (LH3) • Woodland creation - maintenance payments (WD1) • Restoration of wood pasture and parkland (WD5) • Creation of wood pasture (WD6) • Take historic and archaeological features out of cultivation (HS2) 5 + 2 years
<p>Land subject to complex tenure arrangements – Upland and lowland commons where the negotiation process amongst the interested parties is often complex, contentious and time-consuming but secures significant environmental outcomes in areas of high environmental importance.</p>	<p>Can be defined by customer registration process and the need for a separate SBI for commons and shared grazing.</p> <p>Duration 10 years.</p>

2.12 Agreement claims

Payments for multi-year land management options must be claimed by 15 May.

Capital payments may either be claimed in full once the work is completed and paid for or, if part of a multi-year agreement, in stages according to the schedule in the agreement (interim claims must be for a minimum of £500 of work completed and paid for). **See [section 7](#) for details.**

3. Who can apply

Land and applicant eligibility requirements and the relationship between Countryside Stewardship and other sources of funding.

The Countryside Stewardship Terms and Conditions require Agreement Holders to comply with the mandatory requirements set out in this Manual. These mandatory requirements are set out in the following chapter and also at chapter 8.

Countryside Stewardship is open to all of the following land managers:

- owner occupiers;
- tenants (including farmers who may have an agreement with the landlord labelled as a licence but who in practice have wider land management responsibilities);
- landlords;
- licensors; and
- Commons' Councils, Commons Associations or Statutory Commons Management Bodies on behalf of common land rights holders.

3.1 What land can be entered into the scheme

To be eligible for payments under the scheme the land must be within:

- an agricultural area defined as any area taken up by arable land, permanent grassland or permanent crops; or
- a woodland, defined as an area of land being a minimum of 0.5 ha and minimum width of 20m under stands of trees with, or with the potential to achieve a height of 5 metres and crown cover of more than 20% of the ground.

In addition, the following areas are also eligible:

- protected sites including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) www.gov.uk/protected-or-designated-areas or land which is a European site under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (which includes Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), proposed SACs and Special Protection Areas (SPA) or proposed SPAs); and Ramsar sites (see [section 3.18](#)) www.gov.uk/protected-or-designated-areas#european-sites; and
- land that is a terrestrial Priority Habitat jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5718 or supports a Priority Species jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5717.

There is no minimum area that must be entered into the scheme, although there are minimum areas for individual options.

Financial limits apply to certain types of application:

- for Mid Tier there is a minimum multi-year value of £5000 over 5 years;
- for the hedgerow and boundaries capital grants there is a minimum of £1000, and a maximum of £5000 per agreement; and
- for water quality capital grants the maximum is £10,000 per agreement.

3.2 Ineligible land

The following land is ineligible for the scheme and must be excluded from an application:

- developed land and hard standing (including permanent caravan sites and areas used for permanent storage). The exceptions to this rule are traditional farm buildings that are eligible for grants under Countryside Stewardship and yards that will be included for water capital items;
- significant areas (1 ha or more) of permanent standing or running water, with the exception of intertidal habitats;
- land that is already subject to another scheme; [see section 3.22](#)
- land that is already subject to another obligation which is incompatible with Countryside Stewardship;
- any land parcels entered into the scheme which are not entirely within England. Parcels that are either partly or entirely within Scotland or Wales are not eligible for Countryside Stewardship; and
- land where the applicant does not have management control for the duration of the agreement and is unable to have an application countersigned by the landowner.

Some BPS ineligible features can be eligible for CS option payments, [see section 3.13](#).

3.3 Applications and agreements from land managers operating multiple farm businesses

If a business covering a number of farms is managed as a single unit, or uses a single vendor or Single Business Identifier (SBI) number, it is treated as one farm business. In most cases the management or production unit and the SBI will be the same farm or woodland area. Scheme rules allow more than one application for a multi-year land management agreement per year from the same SBI. In 2015, if applicants submit more than one application on land registered under the same SBI, these must all be in the same tier.

3.4 Application and agreement areas

There are scheme rules regarding which land parcels can be included in an application.

To be eligible for the scheme, a land parcel must not have an existing multi-year land management obligation, such as ES or EWGS in force. Equally, the applicant must have full management control of the land for the full duration of the agreement, or be able to submit a counter-signed application.

Land managers must include within a Mid Tier or Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship application:

- any land parcel that will include a paid management option or capital item at any time during the agreement; and
- any land parcel which contains SSSI land or land within a Scheduled Monument, unless already under an existing agreement.

Applications for standalone woodland capital agreements will use the Woodland Management Plan requirement to ensure SSSI and Scheduled Monument management is considered

Natural England will check applications to confirm regulatory and scheme rules have been met but it will remain the applicant's responsibility to only apply for and claim for areas and parcels that are eligible.

After scoring, successful applicants will be made an offer and, once signed and accepted by the applicant, this will become the Countryside Stewardship agreement.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Scheduled Monuments

Any land parcel including an SSSI or Scheduled Monument on the farmed land or woodland **must** be included in a Mid Tier or Higher Tier application unless it is already being managed under another agreement. For any SSSI land or Scheduled Monument within a proposed application Natural England will need to consider proposals at an early stage to assess the agreement's impact on the SSSI and or Scheduled Monument. Applications for Mid and Higher Tier agreements that harm or do not meet the management requirements for the SSSI or Scheduled Monument will be rejected.

Appropriate consent from Natural England or Historic England to cover management of the SSSI or Scheduled Monument must be in place before an agreement can commence.

For European sites as described in section 3.17, any activity on, or next to these sites, will require a Habitats Regulation Assessment to be undertaken before any agreement offer is issued. An application may be refused if the assessment undertaken by Natural England indicates the proposed activity would adversely impact on the European site.

Publicly funded bodies have legal responsibilities to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs. As such, where an application is being made by such a body, the applicant must contact their Natural England adviser before applying.

Grazing management

The following table lists Countryside Stewardship options which limit grazing activity. If any of these options are included in an agreement there is a requirement to avoid over-grazing and under-grazing across the whole grazed area of the holding. Stock must be distributed across the grazed area of the holding to ensure this is the case.

The average stocking density of grazing livestock must not exceed a defined limit across the farm or production unit where the agreement is located.

Option code	Title
AB1	Nectar Flower mix
AB6	Enhanced overwinter stubble
AB7	Whole crop cereals
AB13	Brassica fodder crop
BE4	Management of traditional orchards
BE5	Creation of traditional orchards
CT1	Management of coastal sand dunes and vegetated shingle
CT2	Creation of coastal sand dunes and vegetated shingle on arable land and improved grassland
CT3	Management of coastal saltmarsh
CT4	Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat on arable land
CT5	Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat by non-intervention
CT6	Coastal vegetation management supplement
CT7	Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat on intensive grassland
GS1	Take field corners out of management
GS3	Ryegrass seed-set as winter food for birds
GS4	Legume and herb-rich swards
GS6	Management of species-rich grassland
GS7	Restoration towards species-rich grassland
GS8	Creation of species-rich grassland
GS9	Management of wet grassland for breeding waders
GS10	Management of wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl
GS11	Creation of wet grassland for breeding waders
GS12	Creation of wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl
GS13	Management of grassland for target features
GS14	Creation of grassland for target features
GS15	Haymaking supplement
HS7	Management of historic water meadows through traditional irrigation
LH1	Management of lowland heathland
LH2	Restoration of forestry and woodland to lowland heathland
LH3	Creation of heathland from arable or improved grassland
OP1	Overwintered stubble
SP1	Difficult sites supplement
SP6	Cattle grazing supplement
SP7	Introduction of cattle grazing on the Isles of Scilly
SP8	Native breeds at risk supplement
SW3	In-field grass strips

Option code	Title
SW4	12m to 24m watercourse buffer strip on cultivated land
SW7	Arable reversion to grassland with low fertiliser input
SW8	Management of intensive grassland adjacent to a watercourse
SW9	Seasonal livestock removal on intensive grassland
SW10	Seasonal livestock removal on grassland in SDAs on land next to streams, rivers and lakes
SW12	Making space for water
SW13	Very low nitrogen inputs to groundwaters
UP2	Management of rough grazing for birds
UP3	Management of moorland
UP6	Upland livestock exclusion supplement
WD4	Management of wood pasture and parkland
WD5	Restoration of wood pasture and parkland
WD6	Creation of wood pasture
WD7	Management of successional areas and scrub
WD8	Creation of successional areas and scrub
WD9	Livestock exclusion supplement - scrub and successional areas
WT7	Creation of reedbed
WT9	Creation of fen
WT12	Wetland grazing supplement

3.5 Management control

Applicants must have control of all the land and all the activities needed to meet scheme requirements and the capital obligations or prescriptions of the management options they select for the full duration of the agreement.

If an applicant does not have full control of the land and all such activities they must also obtain the written consent of all other parties who have management control of the land for the entire duration of an agreement (but see [section 3.15](#) about 'dual use').

3.6 Landlords: eligibility and scheme rules

Landlords can apply for Countryside Stewardship but they must ensure that both they and their tenant(s) sign the declarations on the application form.

Provided landlords can demonstrate they have sufficient management control over the land, they can apply for an agreement on land that has been let to a tenant (but see [section 3.15](#) about 'dual use').

As the Agreement Holder, landlords must give their tenant a copy of the Countryside Stewardship agreement. Landlords may be required to provide evidence, if requested, that they have given the tenant a copy of the agreement. It is the landlord's responsibility to make sure that any tenant does not breach the terms of the agreement.

If a landlord undertakes to take over a Countryside Stewardship agreement from a tenant once the tenancy has ended, the landlord must be eligible to do so; for example, they must not be an ineligible public body or, for organic schemes, they must be an 'active farmer'.

3.7 Tenants: eligibility and scheme rules

If an applicant is a tenant under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986, Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 (a Farm Business Tenancy) or equivalent, it is their responsibility to check that by joining Countryside Stewardship they do not breach the terms of their tenancy.

Tenants applying for an agreement in their own name must have:

- control of all the activities needed to meet the scheme requirements for the management options and capital obligations of the chosen Countryside Stewardship options;
- management control of all the agreement land for the duration of any commitments (which may extend beyond the agreement period); and
- security of tenure for the full duration of the agreement. If that is not possible, they must obtain the countersignature of the application by their landlord. If a countersigned application is not possible on a part of the tenant's land that particular area of land must be omitted from the application.

(see also [section 3.15](#) about 'dual use').

3.8 Partnerships: eligibility and scheme rules

Business partnerships can apply for Countryside Stewardship. All partners in the farm business, or their agents, must sign the application form. One person can be authorised to act as their representative, and this can be recorded when completing and submitting the scheme application forms.

3.9 Contractual licensee: eligibility and scheme rules

In certain circumstances contractual licensees may be eligible if they can demonstrate full management control of the land for the duration of the agreement.

3.10 Licensors: scheme rules

If a licensor applies for a Countryside Stewardship agreement, it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the licensee does not breach the terms of the Countryside Stewardship agreement.

Applicants must ensure the licensee is aware of the requirements of the agreement, as relevant to the license, and to include these in the license agreement.

3.11 Land owned by public bodies: eligibility and scheme rules

If the land is owned or run by a public body, the tenant applicants will need to check with their landlord if the land is eligible for Countryside Stewardship.

Countryside Stewardship cannot pay for any environmental management that is already required by statutory duty through:

- payment from Exchequer funds;
- grant aid from any other public body; or
- any other form of legally binding obligation.

This means Crown bodies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are not eligible for the scheme, and nor are Trading Funds that do not receive funding direct from the Exchequer. Crown bodies include all government departments and their executive agencies. These include the:

- Ministry of Defence;
- Forestry Commission; and
- the Royal Parks.

NDPBs are public bodies that have a role in the processes of national government but are not a government department, nor part of one. These include:

- the Environment Agency;
- Natural England;
- Historic England (formerly English Heritage); and
- the National Forest Company.

Parish councils and former college farms are not considered to be public bodies and so are eligible to apply for Countryside Stewardship.

The following table provides more detailed eligibility criteria for public bodies:

Landowner	Eligibility	Comments
Government departments, executive agencies and NDPBs, (eg Ministry of Defence, Forestry Commission)	Ineligible	Forest managed by a private manager or municipality may be eligible for support.
Other public bodies, (eg local authorities, national park authorities and public corporations)	Eligible	Provided the work does not form part of their obligations as a public body
Parish Councils	Eligible	Ineligible where the work is already a requirement of the tenancy agreement. Tenants must have security of tenure for the full term of the agreement, as the public body cannot countersign the agreement.
Tenants of eligible and ineligible public bodies	Eligible	

3.12 Common land and shared grazing: eligibility and scheme rules

Common land and shared grazing is eligible for Countryside Stewardship. An appropriate individual must sign the application and be responsible for maintaining any resulting agreement. Applicants must read the common land and shared grazing supplement www.gov.uk/government/publications/countryside-stewardship-common-land-and-shared-grazing-supplement which sets out the requirements, and complete the additional Common land and shared grazing Supplementary application form. www.gov.uk/government/publications/countryside-stewardship-common-land-and-shared-grazing-supplementary-application

3.13 Relationship with the Basic Payment Scheme

Land used to claim the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) may also be entered into a Countryside Stewardship agreement. Land that is ineligible for BPS may also still be eligible for Countryside Stewardship.

Applicants must read the rules on compatibility and checks will be made against any BPS claims on agreement land to ensure Countryside Stewardship management is compatible with the BPS land use entered for each parcel. However, it remains the responsibility of the applicant to ensure they only apply for and claim on land which is eligible.

Applicants interested in establishing new woodland may still be able to claim BPS on the land being planted, provided the area was used to activate Single Payment Scheme entitlements in 2008. Maintenance payments will be available for 10 years following planting to assist with the cost of establishing the trees. BPS will only be available for the duration of the woodland creation Countryside Stewardship agreement.

Due to the kind of management required under some Countryside Stewardship options, land may become ineligible for BPS by the end of the agreement, for example woodland creation and creation of intertidal wetland options. That is because these options constitute a conversion from agricultural land, to land that cannot be readily returned to agriculture.

When completing a Countryside Stewardship application, note that:

- some Countryside Stewardship grassland options can only be located on land already classed as permanent grassland on the associated BPS claim;
- arable options can only be located on land currently under arable BPS land use codes; and
- applicants can have more than one option next to each other within a land parcel without affecting the Rural Land Register Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) details, providing there is no permanent boundary between the options.

For further details on BPS compatibility rules, land use codes and definitions, please refer to the **BPS Handbook 2015 (and any supplements)** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/basic-payment-scheme) or contact the RPA on **03000 200 301**. Cross compliance rules also apply to Countryside Stewardship.

3.14 Countryside Stewardship and greening: double funding

Rural Development Programme (RDP) funding must not pay twice for the same activity (known as double funding). For this reason, nineteen Countryside Stewardship options will have their payment rate reduced

where the land is also used to meet Ecological Focus Area (EFAs) requirements for the BPS, to remove the double funding element. The table below shows the way the reduced rate is calculated for these options:

Option title	Option code	A	B	C
		Income foregone £/ha or *£/plot	Double-funding element	Reduced rate C= A-B
Woodland edges on arable land	WD3	323	306	17
Take historic and archaeological features out of cultivation	HS2	425	334	91
4 to 6 metre buffer strip on cultivated land	SW1	353	274	79
Buffering in-field ponds and ditches on arable land	WT2	501	428	73
Cultivated areas for arable plants	AB11	532	367	165
Nesting plots for lapwing and stone curlew	AB5	524	428	96
Winter bird food	AB9	677	404	271
Enhanced overwinter stubble	AB6	436	428	8
Nectar flower mix	AB1	511	404	107
Beetle banks	AB3	573	428	145
Skylark plots	AB4	9*	5*	4*
Winter cover crops	SW6	114	114	0
In-field grass strips	SW3	557	463	94
12 to 24 metre watercourse buffer strips on cultivated land	SW4	512	416	96
Making space for water	SW12	646	440	206
Flower rich margins and plots	AB8	539	330	209
Autumn sown bumblebird mix	AB16	550	404	146
Two year sown legume fallow	AB15	522	378	144
Organic wild bird seed mixture	OP2	773	398	375

The double funding reduction will be applied where it takes place on the ground in any one year, the Countryside Stewardship payment rate will be reduced wherever any of the 19 affected options overlaps with an EFA feature of a similar nature. The BPS payment stays the same. If there is no overlap between EFA choice and choice of CS option, the full Countryside Stewardship rate will be paid.

3.15 Applying for Countryside Stewardship where someone else is claiming BPS on the same land ('dual use')

In certain limited situations land may be included in a CS agreement by one person and that same land used to claim BPS by someone else at the same time. This is known as 'dual use'.

The CS applicant has to be able to meet the CS eligibility rules, including having management control of the land, whilst at the same time the BPS claimant must be able to demonstrate having

the same land 'at their disposal' under the BPS rules. For example, a landlord may be able to have management control of the land for CS purposes whilst the tenant has the same land at his disposal to claim BPS.

Where a tenant is eligible for, or holds, a CS agreement a landlord would not be eligible for BPS. This is because they would not be able to demonstrate that they have land at their disposal for BPS purposes.

The fact that a person may have an agreement with another party who will use the land to apply for payment does not mean that person has the land at their disposal. It is the rights and responsibilities held in relation to the land, and how they operate in practice, which determine this.

Applicants applying for a CS agreement on the same land that another farmer or land manager is using to claim BPS must have a written record which shows the respective rights and responsibilities of each party. This written record should set out how the applicant has management control for CS and how the other party meets the BPS scheme rules, including having the land at their disposal. This must include evidence that the applicant has given a copy of the CS terms and conditions to the other party and that they have been required to meet them (unless the applicant can show that they are carrying out the required activities themselves). This written record could be a tenancy agreement, a letter or both, containing the required information, which must be signed and dated by both parties in advance of the BPS application deadline (usually 15th May). An inspector may ask to see a copy of this. Applicants may want to get independent professional advice relating to their circumstances, especially if they previously had a verbal agreement with the other party.

For further details, please refer to the current Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) Handbook 2015.

Please note: In 2016, dual use is not permitted for Mid Tier agreements. Applications may not therefore include any land parcels which will be in dual use in 2016.

Where Mid Tier applications already submitted to Natural England include dual use land, applicants must either:

- Withdraw the entire application and consider applying next year, when dual use will be available for Mid Tier agreements; or
- Remove any parcels with dual use from their application: these could go into a separate agreement starting on 1 January 2017 (subject to the eligibility rules applying next year).

Where dual use parcels are removed, applicants should consider any potential impact this might have on their application, for example in meeting the minimum requirements for the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package.

3.16 Crops already in the ground on 1 January

Most crops which are in the ground at the start of an agreement (1 January) do not need to be destroyed to establish a chosen option, but can be managed and harvested as normal farm crops. Some, however, may be subject to restrictions on their management from 1 January, for instance where the agreement requires that they must not receive any fertiliser, pesticide sprays or other inputs. This will be detailed in your agreement.

Where agreement options involve work that can only take place at certain times of the year or under certain conditions (for example fencing, or creating beetle banks), the work must be completed, and any option requirements met, during the first 12 months of the agreement.

3.17 European Sites

Land designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA), or proposed SACs are collectively known as 'European sites'. For the purposes of the scheme Ramsar sites and potential SPAs are given the same protection as European sites.

These designations place an additional duty on Natural England to assess any possible significant impacts resulting from the operations proposed under a potential agreement. These will be taken into account by the Natural England or Forestry Commission adviser when drawing up a Higher Tier agreement. This duty will also be taken into account when assessing Mid Tier and capital grant applications. Action necessary for the conservation of the special features of the European sites will usually be allowed. However, there may be some options, such as capital works to preserve historic features which need to be assessed in more detail by Natural England.

Management options on land next to, and which will impact upon European sites and SSSIs, may also be important to buffer, link and extend habitats and for certain important species. These will often be a priority for funding through Countryside Stewardship.

3.18 Protected species

Where protected species are present on an applicant's land, the applicant will need to consider protection requirements which apply to those species before undertaking management activities. Choosing appropriate scheme options can help to maintain suitable habitats for protected species.

Some species are partly or fully protected by legislation. Examples of the most commonly encountered protected wildlife include:

- all wild birds and their eggs and nests that are in use or being built are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981; and
- bats, otters, dormice, great crested newts, and other species of more restricted distributions are protected by Part 3 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. These European Protected Species are protected, amongst other things, from disturbance and from damage to the places they use to rest and shelter (for example, bat roosts and otter holts).

3.19 Heather and grass burning

Where you have the legal right to carry out burning, and intend to do so, you must follow ***The Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2007***

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2007/2003/pdfs/ukxi_20072003_en.pdf

and the ***Heather and Grass Burning Code***.

webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20150429000001/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5399638840442880

If heather or grass burning is to be included in a Countryside Stewardship agreement, the Natural England adviser will discuss and agree an appropriate burning plan with the applicant.

3.20 Woodland management plans

A Forestry Commission (FC) approved, UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) compliant Woodland Management Plan, is an eligibility requirement for all Countryside Stewardship agreements on existing woodland. There are some exceptions and criteria to be aware of:

- tree health option groups will be exempt from the requirement;
- for woodland equal to or greater than 10ha in area a “full” Woodland Management Plan will be required;
- for woodland areas less than 10ha a “small” Woodland Management Plan would meet the requirement;
- funding may be available for the development of full Woodland Management Plans for areas over 3ha, through the Woodland Management Plan; and
- for the woodland creation option group, a Woodland Creation Plan is required. This plan will form part of the application process. Full Woodland Management Plans, completed on the FC template, will be funded, subject to meeting the eligibility requirements, by the capital item for Woodland Management Plans (PA3). See www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-management-plan-pa3.

An FC agreed management plan must be in place before applying for the Woodland Improvement Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship options. A draft plan is not acceptable. Once a plan is approved an application can be made either for the current application window or to be considered as part of the ‘pipeline’ for subsequent years. The need to have an approved Woodland Management Plan in place may mean that for a given holding an application for area-based agri-environment options is made in one year and an application for woodland improvement options follows the next year (when the management plan is in place).

3.21 Solar panels

Land parcels which contain solar panels for the purposes of off-farm electricity generation are ineligible for Countryside Stewardship. Panels cannot be erected on agreement land where there are management options. If the panels are concentrated at one end of a field, the rest of the land can be eligible if the 2 areas are registered as individual land parcels and separated by a permanent boundary.

Solar panels supporting electric fencing for livestock control or water pumping to support the achievements of the agreement objectives are permitted.

3.22 Land receiving other funding

Countryside Stewardship cannot be used to pay for any environmental management that is already required:

- by statutory duty;
- through payment from Exchequer funds;
- through grant aid from any other public body, or
- through any other form of legally binding obligation.

The most frequently occurring alternative schemes and obligations are listed below. Applicants must check this section to see if any of these apply to their land. Countryside Stewardship grants cannot be used for capital works or annual land management which an applicant is required to carry out under other grant schemes or requirements such as:

- Environmental Stewardship;
- English Woodland Grant Scheme;
- Agreements made under section 15 of the Countryside Act 1968;
- Wildlife Enhancement Scheme;
- Conservation Enhancement Scheme;
- Energy Crops Scheme;
- Habitat Scheme;
- Heritage Lottery Funding;
- Scheduled Monument grants;
- Listed Building grants;
- Fruit and Vegetable Producer Organisation Aid Scheme;
- Inheritance Tax Exemption;
- National Park Authority Grant Schemes; and
- new capital grants under new Countryside Productivity, Growth and LEADER schemes.

Other closed schemes may also exclude areas from Countryside Stewardship.

Environmental Stewardship

If an applicant already has an Environmental Stewardship agreement covering some of their land they cannot apply for Countryside Stewardship on the same parcel. If a land parcel will be under agreement on 1 January of the following year, the applicant will not be able to include that parcel as part of the application area.

Early transfer or conversion from Environmental Stewardship to Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship

There are specific European regulations relating to the early transfer of land management agreements into new schemes such as Countryside Stewardship. These apply to any land under an Environmental Stewardship agreement being considered for the Higher Tier. The specific requirements are that:

- there must be significant environmental benefits from the transfer;
- the commitments of the existing agreement must be reinforced in the new agreement;

- the new agreement must offer value for money; and
- the transfer must be agreed by the Natural England adviser.

Agreement holders considering an early transfer from Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) must discuss this in detail with their Natural England adviser before considering making an application for Countryside Stewardship.

Early transfer or conversion from Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) into Countryside Stewardship is not possible, except for commons under an Upland ELS applying for Higher Tier CS.

Early transfer from ELS or HLS into Mid Tier Countryside Stewardship is not possible.

Relationships between Countryside Stewardship scheme elements and current ES and English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) agreements

It may be possible to apply for Countryside Stewardship on other parcels and areas of the holding. Some possible combinations are explained in the following tables. Please note that most scheme elements are competitive and there is no guarantee any application will be successful.

Relationship between existing ES and EWGS agreements and Countryside Stewardship applications in 2015

Applicant has now:	Applicant would like:	Possible to apply?	Notes
ELS, UELS and OELS agreements expiring on or before 31 December 2015	Countryside Stewardship with a 2016 January start	Yes, most likely Mid Tier	The agreement starts 1 January 2016 The expectation is that most holdings in ELS, organic or uplands ELS would move to the Mid Tier rather than Higher Tier.
ELS, UELS and OELS agreements expiring after 31 December 2015	Countryside Stewardship with a January 2016 start	No	There are some limited situations eg on commons where UELS agreement holders may be invited by Natural England to join Higher Tier
HLS agreement expiring in 2016	Countryside Stewardship with a January 2016 start	Only to Higher Tier	HLS agreement holders will be contacted by Natural England to discuss if their existing agreement meets the objectives of the new scheme and the criteria for moving to it.
EWGS agreement expiring in 2015	Countryside Stewardship	Yes, (not Mid Tier if woodland management included)	Yes, if the EWGS obligations on any parcels submitted within the Countryside Stewardship application have expired by end December in the year before the January start date. Discuss with Forestry Commission adviser

Possible combinations of ES and EWGS agreement types and Countryside Stewardship capital grant elements 2015

Applicant has now:	Applicant would like:	Possible to apply?	Notes
ELS, OELS, UELS and HLS, or EWGS	Hedgerow and Boundaries grant	No	Not available until 2016
ELS, OELS, UELS and HLS, EWGS	Feasibility studies and implementation plans	No	These items are not available until 2016
ELS, OELS, UELS and HLS, EWGS	CS Woodland tree health	Yes	Application period now open
ELS, OELS, UELS and HLS, EWGS	CS Woodland management plan	Yes	Application period now open
EWGS	CS Woodland creation 2015	Possibly	Applicants can only apply on parcels within the estate that don't have an existing commitment Application window now open.
ELS (including UELS and OELS) and HLS expiring after 31 Dec 2015	CS Woodland creation 2015	Possibly – discuss with Forestry Commission and Natural England	An amendment will be required to remove those parcels where woodland creation will take place - such an amendment may require a reclaim. Planting could conflict with the appropriate management of some features that had been supported under ELS
ELS, OELS, UELS and HLS or EWGS agreement	2015 water grant	Yes	Now open, closes end April 2015

Currently in place:	Can CS elements be added?
ES agreement	2015 water capital grant Yes
ES agreement	2016 onwards standalone water grant Yes
ES agreement	2016 onwards Mid Tier multi-year agreement No (unless it expires before 1 Jan 2016)
EWGS	2016 onwards Mid Tier multi-year agreement Yes - if it relates to different parcel(s) on your land
2015 water grant	2016 Mid Tier multi-year agreement Yes
2015 water grant	2016 Hedgerows and Boundaries Yes
Mid Tier multi-year agreement	2016 standalone water grant Yes - if it relates to different parcel(s) on your land

Conservation Enhancement Scheme, Wildlife Enhancement Scheme or section 15 Management Agreements

Land designated as a SSSI may be receiving payments under Natural England's Conservation Enhancement Scheme (CES), Wildlife Enhancement Scheme (WES) or a section 15 management agreement. Generally, Countryside Stewardship options cannot be located within land parcels covered by one of these schemes where the SSSI land is in receipt of CES or WES or section 15 grant payments.

Energy Crops Scheme (ECS)

Countryside Stewardship options cannot be located within land parcels covered by an ECS agreement. However, boundaries surrounding ECS parcels may be entered into Countryside Stewardship boundary management options. Land parcels in receipt of ECS support are ineligible for organic options.

Habitat Scheme

Countryside Stewardship options cannot be located within land parcels covered by a Habitat Scheme agreement. However, it may be possible to enter boundaries into a Countryside Stewardship boundary management option, unless the specified management is detailed in the Habitat Scheme Management Plan.

Heritage Lottery Funding

Some Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) applications can be considered for Countryside Stewardship as a source of matched or partnership funding towards securing grants for further works, but only where the Countryside Stewardship payments are for separate works that are not subject to prior conditions. Where Countryside Stewardship agreements within an area-wide project have been signed less than 12 months prior to the HLF application, the payments will be viewed as matched funding.

Scheduled Monuments

Land designated as a Scheduled Monument may be receiving payment from Historic England (formerly English Heritage) to help manage the site appropriately under a Management Agreement for Field Monuments or a Repair Grant for Heritage at Risk. Such land may also be eligible for Countryside Stewardship provided the Historic England grant is not funding the same activity. Land designated as a Scheduled Monument may be receiving payment from a local authority to help manage the site appropriately under a Monument Management Scheme. Such land may also be eligible for Countryside Stewardship provided the Monument Management Scheme grant is not funding the same activity.

Fruit & Vegetables Producer Organisation Aid Scheme

The Fruit and Vegetable Producer Organisation Aid Scheme operates under Pillar 1 of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Management funded under the Fruit and Vegetable Producer Organisation Aid Scheme (for example, Operation Bumble Bee) cannot also be funded under Countryside Stewardship.

Inheritance Tax or Capital Gains Exemption

Countryside Stewardship options and capital items may be available on land designated by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) as conditionally exempt from Inheritance Tax or as the object of a Maintenance Fund, depending on the specific undertakings and proposed options or capital items. The following tables show whether options and capital items are always eligible, or never eligible, or need checking to make sure that options do not overlap with the obligations of the undertakings. Please contact Natural England before applying for an item that requires checking.

Applicants with **woodland** on land designated by HMRC as conditionally exempt from Inheritance Tax (Heritage Relief property) or as the object of a Maintenance Fund should discuss their proposals with Natural England to establish whether the proposed works are not required as part of the Heritage Relief undertakings and therefore would be eligible for funding.

Always Eligible - 130 options (mostly arable, organics and soil & water options) never overlap

Option	Code
Nectar Flower mix	AB1
Unharvested cereal headland	AB10
Cultivated areas for arable plants	AB11
Supplementary winter feeding for farmland birds	AB12
Brassica fodder crop	AB13
Harvested low input cereal	AB14
Two year sown legume fallow	AB15
Autumn sown bumblebird mix	AB16
Basic overwinter stubble	AB2
Beetle banks	AB3
Skylark plots	AB4
Nesting plots for lapwing and stone curlew	AB5
Enhanced overwinter stubble	AB6
Wholecrop cereals	AB7
Flower-rich margins and plots	AB8
Winter bird food	AB9
Management of hedgerows	BE3
Hedgerow supplement - top binding and staking	BN10
Stone wall supplement - Top wiring	BN13
Stone wall supplement - stone from quarry	BN14
Earth bank creation	BN3
Hedgerow supplement - substantial pre-work	BN9
Creation of coastal sand dunes and vegetated shingle on arable land and improved grassland	CT2
Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat on arable land	CT4
Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat by non-intervention	CT5
Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat on intensive grassland	CT7
Wooden field gate	FG12
Badger gate	FG14
Water gates	FG15
Invisible fencing system	FG6
Anti-predator combination fencing	FG7

Option	Code
Anti-predator temporary electric fencing	FG8
Creation of wet grassland for breeding waders	GS11
Creation of wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl	GS12
Creation of grassland for target features	GS14
Ryegrass seed-set as winter food for birds	GS3
Legume and herb-rich swards	GS4
Creation of species-rich grassland	GS8
Creation of heathland from arable or improved grassland	LH3
Cattle grid	LV1
Livestock Handling Facilities	LV2
Hard bases for livestock drinkers	LV3
Hard bases for livestock feeders	LV4
Pasture pumps and associated pipework	LV5
Ram pumps and associated pipework	LV6
Livestock troughs	LV7
Pipework associated with livestock troughs	LV8
Overwintered stubble	OP1
Wild bird seed mixture	OP2
Supplementary feeding for farmland birds	OP3
Multi species ley	OP4
Undersown cereal	OP5
Organic conversion - improved permanent grassland	OR1
Organic conversion - unimproved permanent grassland	OR2
Organic conversion - rotational land	OR3
Organic conversion - horticulture	OR4
Organic conversion - top fruit	OR5
Organic land management – improved permanent grassland	OT1
Organic land management – unimproved permanent grassland	OT2
Organic land management – rotational land	OT3
Organic land management – horticulture	OT4
Organic land management – top fruit	OT5
Organic land management - enclosed rough grazing	OT6
Implementation Plan	PA1
Feasibility Study	PA2
Resurfacing of gateways	RP1
Silt filtration dams/seepage barriers	RP10
Swales	RP11

Option	Code
Check dams	RP12
Yard - underground drainage pipework	RP13
Yard Inspection pit	RP14
Concrete yard renewal	RP15
Storage tanks underground	RP17
Above ground tanks	RP18
First flush rainwater diverters/ downpipe filters	RP19
Relocation of sheep dips and pens	RP20
Relocation of sheep pens only	RP21
Sheep dip drainage aprons and sumps	RP22
Installation of livestock drinking troughs (in draining pens for freshly dipped sheep)	RP23
Lined biobed plus pesticide loading and washdown area	RP24
Lined biobed with existing washdown area	RP25
Biofilters	RP26
Sprayer or applicator load and washdown area	RP27
Roofing (sprayer washdown area, manure storage area, livestock gathering area, slurry stores, silage stores)	RP28
Self-supporting covers for slurry stores	RP29
Watercourse crossings	RP3
Floating covers for slurry stores and lagoons	RP30
Equipment to disrupt tramlines in arable areas	RP31
Livestock and machinery hardcore tracks	RP4
Cross drains	RP5
Installation of piped culverts in ditches	RP6
Sediment ponds and traps	RP7
Constructed wetlands for the treatment of pollution	RP8
Native Breeds At Risk supplement.	SP8
Administration of group managed agreements supplement	SP10
4- 6 m buffer strip on cultivated land	SW1
Making space for water	SW12
Very low nitrogen inputs to groundwaters	SW13
Nil fertiliser supplement	SW14
4 - 6 m buffer strip on intensive grassland	SW2
In-field grass strips	SW3
12-24m watercourse buffer strip on cultivated land	SW4

Option	Code
Enhanced management of maize crops	SW5
Winter cover crops	SW6
Arable reversion to grassland with low fertiliser input	SW7
Management of intensive grassland adjacent to a watercourse	SW8
Seasonal livestock removal on intensive grassland	SW9
Coppicing Bankside Trees	TE10
Tree surgery	TE11
Creation of dead wood habitat on trees.	TE13
Identification of orchard fruit tree varieties	TE14
Tree guard (tube and mesh)	TE6
Tree guard (wood post and rail)	TE7
Tree guard (wood post and wire)	TE8
Small wildlife box	WB1
Medium wildlife box	WB2
Large wildlife box	WB3
Woodland edges on arable land	WD3
Creation of scrapes and gutters	WN2
Buffering in-field ponds and ditches in improved grassland	WT1
Buffering in-field ponds and ditches in arable land	WT2
Countryside Educational Access Visits Accreditation	AC2
Planting new hedges	BN11
Planting standard hedgerow tree	TE1

Never eligible - 10 options that always overlap with Inheritance Tax Exemption general undertakings to maintain the land and preserve its character

Option	Code
Protection of in-field trees on arable land	BE1
Protection of in-field trees on intensive grassland	BE2
Maintenance of weatherproof traditional farm buildings	HS1
Scrub control on historic and archaeological features	HS4
Management of historic and archaeological features on grassland	HS5
Maintenance of designed/engineered water bodies	HS6
Management of historic water meadows through traditional irrigation	HS7
Maintenance of weatherproof traditional farm buildings in remote areas	HS8
Management of wood pasture and parkland	WD4
Restoration of wood pasture and parkland	WD5

Need Checking - 95 options need a manual check by Inheritance Tax Exemption staff for overlaps against undertakings and baseline condition

Option	Code
Access capital items	AC1
Management of traditional orchards	BE4
Creation of traditional orchards	BE5
Veteran tree surgery	BE6
Supplement for restorative pruning of fruit trees	BE7
Stone-faced bank repair	BN1
Stone wall restoration	BN12
Stone wall supplement - difficult sites	BN15
Stone-faced bank restoration	BN2
Earth bank restoration	BN4
Hedgerow laying	BN5
Hedgerow coppicing	BN6
Hedgerow gapping-up	BN7
Hedgerow supplement - casting up	BN8
Management of coastal sand dunes and vegetated shingle	CT1
Management of coastal saltmarsh	CT3
Coastal vegetation management supplement	CT6
Educational Access	ED1
Fencing	FG1
Stone gate post	FG13
Sheep netting	FG2
Permanent electric fencing	FG3
Rabbit fencing supplement	FG4
Management of geodiversity features	FM1
Major preparatory works for Priority Habitats (creation and restoration) and Priority Species	FM2
Take field corners out of management	GS1
Management of wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl	GS10
Management of grassland for target features	GS13
Haymaking supplement	GS15
Rush infestation control supplement	GS16
Lenient grazing supplement	GS17
Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDAs)	GS2
Permanent grassland with very low inputs in SDAs	GS5
Management of species-rich grassland	GS6

Option	Code
Restoration towards species-rich grassland	GS7
Management of wet grassland for breeding waders	GS9
Historic and archaeological feature protection	HE1
Historic building restoration	HE2
Removal of eyesore	HE3
Take historic and archaeological features out of cultivation	HS2
Reduced-depth, non-inversion cultivation on historic and archaeological features	HS3
Restricted depth crop establishment to protect archaeology under an arable rotation	HS9
Management of lowland heathland	LH1
Restoration of forestry and woodland to lowland heathland	LH2
Rainwater goods	RP16
Gateway relocation	RP2
Earth banks and soil bunds	RP9
Scrub control and felling diseased trees	SB1
Scrub control - difficult sites	SB2
Tree removal	SB3
Chemical bracken control	SB4
Mechanical bracken control	SB5
Difficult sites supplement	SP1
Raised water level supplement	SP2
Bracken control supplement	SP3
Control of invasive plant species supplement	SP4
Shepherding supplement	SP5
Cattle grazing supplement	SP6
Introduction of cattle grazing on the Isles of Scilly	SP7
Threatened species supplement	SP9
Seasonal livestock removal on grassland in SDAs next to streams, rivers and lakes	SW10
Riparian management strip	SW11
Stump grinding	TE12
Planting standard parkland tree	TE2
Planting fruit trees	TE3
Parkland Tree Guard - welded steel	TE9
Enclosed rough grazing	UP1
Management of rough grazing for birds	UP2
Management of moorland	UP3
Management of moorland vegetation supplement	UP4

Option	Code
Moorland re-wetting supplement	UP5
Upland livestock exclusion supplement	UP6
Creation of wood pasture	WD6
Management of successional areas and scrub	WD7
Creation of successional areas and scrub	WD8
Livestock exclusion supplement – scrub and successional areas	WD9
Grip blocking drainage channels	WN1
Construction of water penning structures	WN10
Ditch, dyke and rhine restoration	WN3
Ditch, dyke and rhine creation	WN4
Pond management (first 100 sq m)	WN5
Pond management (areas more than 100 sq m)	WN6
Restoration of large water bodies	WN7
Timber sluice	WN8
Brick, stone or concrete sluice	WN9
Management of lowland raised bog	WT10
Wetland cutting supplement	WT11
Wetland grazing supplement	WT12
Management of ditches of high environmental value	WT3
Management of ponds of high wildlife value (100 sq m or less)	WT4
Management of ponds of high wildlife value (more than 100 sq m)	WT5
Management of reedbed	WT6
Creation of reedbed	WT7
Management of fen	WT8
Creation of fen	WT9
Fencing supplement – difficult sites	FG5

National Park Authority grant schemes

National Park Authority grant schemes can include both annual payments for land management and capital works. Generally Countryside Stewardship can't be combined with other sources of funding for the same annual land management or capital works in the same location. However, National Park grant schemes are designed to fund management not covered by Countryside Stewardship or other schemes, or for measures over and above the requirements of other schemes. Please contact your National Park Authority adviser for details.

3.23 Land that is under another obligation such as planning permission or section 106 requirements

Countryside Stewardship cannot fund works that must be undertaken as a requirement of any planning permission, a section 106 agreement or equivalent or fund works required to restore or remediate any works undertaken illegally.

3.24 Agricultural activity in woodland areas

Any woodland under an agreement in receipt of multi-year payments must not be used for any agricultural activity, including grazing, during the period of that agreement. Woodland is defined as at least 0.5ha in size, a minimum width of 20m, comprised of trees that are (or have the potential to reach) 5m in height and having 20% or more canopy cover.

3.25 Business Viability Test

For certain kinds of applications, particularly for significant capital expenditure, Natural England may make additional checks on the financial health and viability of an applicant. Further details will be notified to those who will be affected.

To ensure applicants are able to fulfil their agreement commitments, Natural England may check that applicants aren't in financial difficulty. It is also important that we can demonstrate that public investments are financially viable, and for significant capital expenditure we need to ensure that grant funding is given to businesses able to undertake the commitment.

- for all applications, a check against an insolvency register will take place.

For applications including capital expenditure of over £50,000, we need to check that the applicant is financially viable.

- for all applications including more than £50,000 of capital items, the applicant must submit a statement from a chartered accountant confirming that the business or SBI has the resources from trading profits, reserves or loans to undertake the works according to the proposed agreement schedule.
- for all applications including more than £500,000 of capital items, in addition to the above requirement, Natural England will review 3 years of accounts to confirm that the applicant has the administrative, financial and operational capacity to fulfil the agreement conditions.

Applications which are judged not to be financially viable may not be offered an agreement.

4. Getting consents and permissions

Consider if consents or permissions are required before applying for Countryside Stewardship grants.

It is the applicant's responsibility to **check the criteria** (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants) for and review the details of each option or capital item they are applying for to see if any consents or permissions are needed.

The requirements for any consents, permission, permits, exemptions and written advice will need to be identified by the applicant and progressed with the relevant bodies as soon as possible in the application process. This will allow time for a formal decision to be made. Where required these will need to be in place prior to any formal agreement being offered.

A non-exhaustive list of the kinds of consents, or permissions that may be relevant is set out below. This information is provided for guidance only. It is the applicant's responsibility to determine what consents or permissions are needed for the options and capital items they are applying for, obtain them, and comply with them.

4.1 Consents

Consents are likely to be needed if work takes place within a:

Site of Special Scientific Interest (including National Nature Reserves)

For Higher Tier applications one-to-one advice on any management or changes needed to bring the SSSI into favourable condition will be available from Natural England advisers. This will include advice on the process for obtaining SSSI consent.

For unsupported Higher Tier, Mid Tier and Capital grants applications one to one advice is not available.

Scheduled Monuments

For Scheduled Monuments, the local Historic England officer can give advice on any management or changes needed to bring the monument into favourable condition. Natural England will work with Historic England where a HEFER consultation response has been received. Scheduled Monument Consent from the Government (advised by Historic England) may also be needed for some work. Historic England can advise whether the proposed works are likely to be acceptable in relation to:

- Listed Buildings;
- Registered Parks and Gardens; or
- Registered Battlefields.

Work affecting water

Land managers will need Environment Agency or Internal Drainage Board consent for management that will affect any watercourses. This includes work both to, and within, 8m of a watercourse or work within the flood or coastal plain, such as the installation of sluices to raise water levels, or excavation works such as ponds or scrapes, which may require land drainage consent, a discharge consent or an abstraction licence. If these are required they should be sought well in advance as they can take two months to obtain. The establishment of arable margins does not require consent.

Works associated with pesticide treatment, water extraction, and the storage of slurry, silage or fuel oil may need consent from the Environment Agency. Applicants should **contact their local EA office** (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency#org-contacts).

Where farmland has significant erosion problems, or is causing pollution, the applicant will be required to rectify this situation before being considered for an agreement, particularly in sensitive river catchments.

Work on trees and hedges

Applicants may need permission for work on trees that are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). For instance, during hedge restoration applicants must consult the Local Authority or National Park Authority. A Forestry Commission Felling Licence may be required if applicants are:

- planning to remove trees; or
- managing overgrown hedges (that involves felling more than 5 m³ of timber in a calendar quarter).

Guidance is available from the Forestry Commission website on **Tree Felling – getting permission** (www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/treefellingaugust.pdf/%24FILE/treefellingaugust.pdf).

Listed buildings

If any works to listed buildings are proposed, applicants must discuss these proposals with their Local Authority or National Park Authority, who can advise if Listed Building consent is required.

Conservation Areas

The Local Planning Authority or National Park Authority must be consulted if any part of the holding is located within a Conservation Area and particularly if any work is proposed to trees, buildings, boundaries or structures.

Work affecting Public Rights of Way

Applicants require authorisation from the local Highways Authority before a new fence or other boundary is to be erected that crosses a Public Right of Way.

Common Land

If works are likely to affect a common, applicants must check whether consent is required.

Guidance is available on the Planning Inspectorate website at:

www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/countryside/commonland/commonland

Before applying for consent, applicants must consult stakeholders in accordance with guidance in *A Common Purpose; a guide to agreeing management on common land* at: webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160311000001/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/730889.

[nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160311000001/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/730889](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160311000001/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/730889).

For operations that also require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and planning permission these must normally be obtained before seeking consent for works on the common, and consultations must take place before any permission are sought.

4.2 Woodland consents

Felling licences

Land managers who wish to fell any trees, whether they are in woodland or not, or where the management of overgrown hedges is part of the Countryside Stewardship agreement, may need a Forestry Commission Felling Licence. Guidance is available in the document **Tree Felling: Getting Permission** ([www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/treefellingaugust.pdf/\\$FILE/treefellingaugust.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/treefellingaugust.pdf/$FILE/treefellingaugust.pdf)) or from a Forestry Commission adviser (www.forestry.gov.uk/england-areas).

Where required, land managers must obtain a felling licence before an agreement offer can be issued.

Consultation for woodland schemes

The consultation process includes placing the application for felling or new planting on the **public register** (www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6U8JKU) and **consultation** (www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6df18y) with statutory or non-statutory consultees. This process also helps the Forestry Commission to decide whether consent is required under the **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations** (www.forestry.gov.uk/england-fellinglicences).

4.3 Permissions

Applicants may need to apply for permission to carry out certain activities related to a Countryside Stewardship application.

Applicants can get informal advice on whether a proposal needs planning permission or General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) consent from the local planning authority or National Park Authority. There is also **general guidance** on planning available at:

planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk

Planning permission

Most routine agricultural operations do not require planning permission because:

- they are not regarded as ‘development’ under planning legislation; or
- they are ‘permitted development’ that is ‘reasonably necessary’ for agriculture. However some operations do require consent under the GPDO.

For some activities, such as the creation of new ponds, wader scrapes or tracks, the planning requirements may not be straightforward. A Local Planning Authority or National Park Authority can provide informal advice on proposals and whether planning permission or GPDO consent is required.

The Government guide in relation to planning in general (not farm specific) can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/plain-english-guide-to-the-planning-system

NFU Members can also refer to the planning guide found here:

www.nfuonline.com/science-environment/planning/nfu-guide-to-the-planning-system/

4.4 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations

Agriculture

These regulations aim to protect environmentally significant areas, specifically uncultivated land and semi-natural areas, from being damaged by works which increase the agricultural productivity of the land. **Guidance** is available on GOV.UK at:

www.gov.uk/eia-agriculture-regulations-apply-to-make-changes-to-rural-land

Where any of the following activities on uncultivated or semi-natural land form part of a proposed Countryside Stewardship application Natural England must be contacted for further advice via the Environmental Impact Assessment Helpline on 0800 028 2140. Works include a wide range of activities or works that increase the productivity of the land for agriculture.

The screening process for an application under the EIA Regulations has a timescale of 35 calendar days, from receipt of an application to informing the applicant of the decision. Any screening decision lasts for 3 years and the work needs to commence within that period. If the work does not occur within 3 years, a new application is needed.

Forestry

Where trees are being felled in order to change land use, or support for woodland infrastructure is being sought the Forestry Commission will need to consider the environmental impact of the change. The Forestry Commission will do this automatically where a licence to fell the trees is applied for, but a separate opinion may be required where clearing young trees that are too small to need a licence. Local **Forestry Commission advisers** (www.forestry.gov.uk/england-areas) can provide guidance, and general guidance on EIAs can be found at: www.forestry.gov.uk/england-eia

5. How to apply

How the different elements of the scheme operate. Get information on applying to the Mid Tier, Higher Tier and for capital items

5.1 Register with Rural Payments

All applicants must register themselves on **Rural Payments** (www.gov.uk/rural-payments) before applying for Countryside Stewardship. They will receive a customer registration number (CRN) once registered.

Applicants who are new to schemes being paid through RPA will also be given a 'single business identifier' (SBI).

5.2 Support and guidance

All **scheme guidance material** is available on GOV.UK at www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management. For applicants who have been invited to apply for the Higher Tier, advice and support will be available from Natural England advisers and Forestry Commission woodland officers to help them develop their application.

Advice may also be obtained from **Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers (CSFOs)** (www.gov.uk/government/publications/catchment-sensitive-farming-officer-contacts), who operate in **Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) target areas** (www.gov.uk/government/publications/catchment-sensitive-farming-priority-catchment-areas) around the country where reducing diffuse pollution from agriculture is a priority.

It is unlikely that there will be direct support for developing a Mid Tier application from Natural England or Forestry Commission advisers.

Support will also be made available where applications involve options that are difficult to control and verify such as livestock options and options that require reduced or no inputs of fertilisers or pesticides.

Natural England will handle all initial Countryside Stewardship enquiries (including enquiries regarding woodland options and grants). Contact Natural England by:

- telephone: **0300 060 3900**
- email: enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

- post: Enquiries team, Natural England, Block B, Government Buildings, Whittington Road, Worcester WR5 2LQ

For land in a National Park, the National Park Authority (NPA) can provide advice and information on, for example, local historic and archaeological features, to help build a stronger application.

5.3 How the elements of the scheme work

This section explains how the different elements of the scheme operate.

Scheme rules allow more than one application for a multi-year land management agreement per year from the same SBI. In 2015, if applicants submit more than one application on land registered under the same SBI, these must all be in the same tier as explained at section 3.3.

For those who have successfully applied for woodland creation, their associated land based woodland creation maintenance option will be included as part of any CS application they make later in the year.

Applying for the Mid Tier

The Mid Tier is competitive, which means that not everyone who applies will be successful. Targeting and scoring will encourage applicants to choose options that help to achieve the environmental priorities in their local area.

The options and capital items available in the Mid Tier are those that require less complex, yet still effective, environmental management. This element of the scheme does not support woodland management.

To help draft a successful application, applicants should read the **Statement of Priorities** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities) for their area and review the options and capital items available through the Mid Tier using the **Countryside Stewardship Grants** tool (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants) and the tables to address water quality and biodiversity issues at [6.4](#) and [6.5](#).

A scoring process based on environmental benefit will be used to select the highest scoring applications. Choosing the options and items that most closely address the environmental priorities set out in the local **Statement of Priorities** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities) will lead to a higher score than choosing those that do not address the priorities. The chance of success will be improved for applicants who:

- are part of a **facilitated group** (www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-countryside-stewardship-facilitation-fund);
- who receive endorsement from a **CSFO** (www.gov.uk/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution) in a **CSF target area** (www.gov.uk/government/publications/catchment-sensitive-farming-priority-catchment-areas); or
- meet the requirements of the **Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package** (see [section 6.3](#)).

The highest scoring applications from that application round, within the available budget will be offered agreements. Unsuccessful applicants may re-apply the following year.

Applying for the Higher Tier

The Higher Tier is competitive. It is targeted at environmentally significant sites, commons and woodlands that need more complex management and support.

Land managers with Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements expiring in 2016 may be eligible to apply in 2015 for a Higher Tier agreement. Natural England advisers will contact HLS agreement holders to discuss this opportunity.

Countryside Stewardship has over 240 land management options and capital items available under the Higher Tier; details are available in the **Countryside Stewardship Grants** tool (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants). The choice of options and capital items in each agreement will depend on the environmental outcomes to be delivered.

The initial application process differs depending on whether the Higher Tier application is only for an agri-environment or mixed scheme, or only for woodland support.

Applicants applying for agri-environment support or woodland support as part of a mixed Higher Tier agreement beginning 1 January 2016 must express an interest in applying by 30 June 2015.

See the **expression of interest process for Higher Tier**.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/countryside-stewardship-higher-tier-expression-of-interest

The expressions of interest will be assessed and those that offer the best environmental value will be offered direct Natural England adviser support to help develop a Higher Tier application.

Applicants applying for only woodland support (i.e. no agri-environment elements) do not have to submit an Expression of Interest, and instead will need to fill out a Higher Tier application form. Unlike the Expression of Interest, this does not have to be submitted by the 30 June 2015, but will need to be submitted in time for the Forestry Commission Woodland Officer to conduct a site visit.

For this deadline please see **Countryside Stewardship: woodland capital grants 2015**.

www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-woodland-capital-grants-2015

Natural England and the Forestry Commission will create an annual 'pool' of potential Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier sites or applications by:

- considering expiring HLS, CSF and EWGS agreements, and new proposals from land managers using the Expression of Interest form, and appraising the relative importance of the environmental benefits they offer;
- looking at spatial data in the targeting framework to identify 'hot spots' for water quality issues and biodiversity priority areas not previously under management, and appraise them in the same way; or
- considering sites which are referred for Higher Tier, for example by other agencies or by land managers or their agents, and appraise them in the same way.

Applicants for agri-environment elements who are not included in this pool will be notified and if they wish can choose to apply for a Mid Tier agreement instead. Alternatively they can still develop a Higher

Tier application after the deadline for expressions of interest, but on the understanding that support from Natural England will be limited and their application may not be accepted if it does not score highly enough.

Higher Tier applications on agricultural land require a survey of the environmental features to be included in the application, called the Baseline Evaluation of Higher Tier Agreements (BEHTA). This will be carried out by Natural England and used to set an environmental baseline to inform future monitoring of the agreement (if the application is successful). It will also inform the tailoring of option prescriptions and Indicators of Success as the application is developed.

For all woodland options in the Higher Tier a Forestry Commission approved Woodland Management Plan will be needed to support applications.

All applications will undergo a final assessment at the end of the application development period. Successful applicants will be offered an agreement which, if accepted, will start on 1 January in the year following submission.

Applying for capital Items

The scheme offers a range of capital items. These can be combined with land management options or in some cases form a separate capital agreement.

Capital grants on their own may be applied for by any applicants, provided they meet the eligibility criteria, with no direct support from Natural England.

A capital works programme (CWP) as part of a Mid or Higher Tier agreement last for one or two years in duration. Once agreed a CWP cannot be amended or works rescheduled. Once all the works in a CWP have been completed it might be possible to apply for further works provided they contribute to the delivery of the environmental outcomes for the agreement.

Capital agreements can be developed for:

- hedgerows and boundaries (open early 2016 for applications);
- woodland management plans (open all year for applications);
- woodland tree health, restoration and improvement (open all year for applications);
- woodland improvement capital (open July to September for applications);
- woodland improvement – infrastructure (open July to September for applications);
- woodland creation (open February to April for applications);
- water capital (opens July to September for applications) and
- feasibility studies and implementation plans (open early 2016 for year round applications).

There will be a range of application periods.

Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified whether or not they have been successful shortly after the application period closes.

The capital items available to support capital grants can be seen using the **Countryside Stewardship Grants** tool (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants).

Hedgerows and boundaries grants

These will be available from early 2016. Payments are for small-scale restoration of boundary features, such as hedgerow and stone wall restoration, up to a maximum of £5,000.

Woodland tree health and management plans

These capital items are available to support woodland tree health restoration and woodland tree health improvement, and are open for applications all year round. Capital items support restocking a woodland following felling due to a tree health issue. Support is only available if trees have been infected by **ash dieback** (www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara) or **Phytophthora ramorum** (www.forestry.gov.uk/pramorum). Eligibility does not depend on the age of the trees.

Woodland tree health improvement supports removing rhododendron and felling diseased trees. The current eligible tree health issue for felling diseased trees is removal of immature larch infected with **Phytophthora ramorum** (www.forestry.gov.uk/pramorum).

Woodland improvement

There are three elements of support available for Woodland Improvement, all open for higher tier applications during the 1 July to 30 September application window. The support required will be based on a pre-existing Forestry Commission approved Woodland Management Plan.

- **Multi-year:**

Applicants can apply for Woodland Improvement multi-year support if the work falls under one (or more) of the following objectives:

- restoring plantations on ancient woodland sites;
- enhancing priority habitats;
- enhancing priority species; or
- improving resilience to climate change through continuous cover forestry.

More details on these objectives, and the requirements for each, are described in the option **Woodland Improvement (WD2)**.

www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-improvement-wd2

- **Infrastructure:**

Applicants can apply for a stand-alone grant for woodland improvement infrastructure. This supports making woodland accessible by road allowing timber and other forest products to be moved more easily. More information can be found under **Woodland Infrastructure (FY2)**, www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-infrastructure-fy2. This can

be applied for as a standalone grant and does not need to be associated with a multi-year application. Applications will be scored.

Applications for woodland improvement infrastructure will be open from the 1 July to 30 September. They do not have to be associated with a multi-year agreement.

- Capital:

Woodland improvement capital items support improving the biodiversity of woodland and address water issues through one-off payments toward the cost of certain items or activities. These can be applied for as a standalone grant and does not need to be associated with a multi-year application. Applications will be scored.

Woodland creation

Applications are open each year for woodland creation from February to April. Thresholds apply for the creation of new woodland. In most circumstances these are:

- minimum area per application 3ha; or
- minimum block size 0.5ha.

Where woodland creation is clearly identified as part of a suite of actions to address water quality and flood risk issues the thresholds are:

- minimum area per application 1ha; or
- minimum block size 0.1ha.

If eligible, applicants can also apply for the woodland creation maintenance option. This is an annual payment to support successful planting of new woodland.

Water quality

Water quality capital grants for infrastructure works will be available in combination with land management options, or as stand-alone capital agreements in areas being targeted to reduce diffuse water pollution from. These 'Water Capital only' agreements will last 1 year.

Mid tier agreements with annual options and capital works will last for 5 years (with a 2 year capital programme).

Farmers and land managers applying for these grants must get advice from the local CSFO supporting the **Catchment Sensitive Farming** (CSF, www.gov.uk/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution) programme. Some high value water quality options are only available with CSFO endorsement. All applications will be assessed and scored against local priorities and those that score highest will be successful. Applications endorsed by a CSFO will gain a higher score.

The maximum capital agreement value will be £10,000. Agreements will last for 1 year.

A list of Mid Tier and capital items options requiring CSFO endorsement is shown on the following table:

Title	Code
Arable reversion to grassland with low fertiliser input	SW7
Management of intensive grassland adjacent to a watercourse	SW8
Yard - underground drainage pipework	RP13
Yard Inspection pit	RP14
Concrete yard renewal	RP15
Water storage tanks underground	RP17
Above ground water storage tanks	RP18
First flush rainwater diverters or downpipe filters	RP19
Relocation of sheep dips & pens	RP20
Relocation of sheep pens only	RP21
Sheep dip drainage aprons & sumps	RP22
Installation of livestock drinking troughs (in draining pens for freshly dipped sheep)	RP23
Livestock and machinery tracks	RP4
Lined bio bed + loading & wash down area	RP24
Lined bio bed with existing wash down area	RP25
Sprayer or applicator load & wash down area	RP27
Roofing for sprayer wash down areas, manure storage, livestock gathering areas, slurry and silage stores	RP28
Self-supporting covers for slurry stores	RP29

Feasibility studies and implementation plans

These will be available year round from early 2016. Feasibility studies can be funded to assess the potential success of a proposed project, for example intertidal habitat creation.

Implementation plans can also be funded. These detail the activities, costs and timings necessary to achieve a project, for example hay meadow restoration.

Further information on these options can be found using the **Countryside Stewardship Grants** tool at www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants.

5.4 Completing the Farm Environment Record (FER)

The applicant is required to complete a FER for all Mid Tier and Higher Tier applications and water quality grant applications.

The FER is not required for standalone capital applications for woodland management, feasibility studies, implementation plans or hedgerows and boundaries capital grants.

The FER need not cover the whole holding but it must cover any parcels which have proposed

options (permanent or rotational) and any proposed capital items and it must also cover any SSSI or Scheduled Monuments, even if options or capital items are not proposed for them.

There is an obligation to retain features mapped in the FER and protect them from damage or removal for the duration of the agreement.

The FER is not required for woodland only applications, feasibility studies or implementation plans.

Further guidance on how to complete the FER is provided with the relevant application packs.

Consulting on the Historic Environment

Some options and items require evidence to prove they will not harm, or may enhance, features of historic interest. This evidence must be obtained from the relevant Local Authority Historic Environment Service, and Historic England Local office if appropriate, and must be factored in to the application before it is submitted.

The consultation will be undertaken by Natural England and is known as an Historic Environment Farm Environment Record (HEFER). There is no cost to the applicant.

It's important to allow time to undertake the consultation and apply its findings before the application deadline. Where it is required the HEFER consultation should cover the whole area of the farm or holding where the application is being considered.

Mid Tier and water quality grant applications: if the applicant is considering any of the options in the following table a HEFER is needed. Applicants must call Natural England on 0300 060 3900 asking them to undertake an HEFER on their behalf, ideally within 10 days from the date of receipt of their Application Pack.

Higher Tier applications: all applications will require a HEFER. The allocated adviser will undertake it on the applicant's behalf.

Woodland Capital applications: a Woodland Management Plan is applied instead, which takes account of historic environment features.

The results of the HEFER will be sent to the applicant within 20 working days. The HEFER consultation provides an applicant with:

- a record of historic features suitable for management derived from the Local Authority Historic Environment Record. If you are not aware of them, you can check some details at www.myshinedata.org.uk.
- tailored advice from Historic England that must be followed whenever they are managing Scheduled Monuments, part of a Registered Park and Garden, or Registered Battlefield.

Applicants should use this information to ensure that historic environment features within the application area are not impacted by the options and capital items being proposed.

The findings from the HEFER must be included with a submitted application. There is an obligation to retain these features and protect them from damage or removal for the duration of the agreement.

Mid Tier applicants should use the tables below to identify the options and capital items that require a HEFER consultation, as they could damage above and below-ground archaeological features.

Option Code	Option Title
AB3	Beetle banks
AB5	Nesting plots for lapwing and stone curlew
AB13	Brassica fodder crop
GS1	Take field corners out of management
GS4	Legume and herb-rich swards
WD3	Woodland edges on arable land
WD7	Management of successional areas and scrub
WD8	Creation of successional areas and scrub

Capital Item Code	Capital Item Title
FG1	Fencing * Subject of an eligibility change to allow/encourage on HE features*.
FG2	Sheep netting
FG3	Permanent electric fencing
FG	Rabbit fencing supplement
FG	Wooden field gate
LV3	Hard bases for livestock drinkers
LV4	Hard bases for livestock feeders
LV7	Livestock troughs
LV8	Pipework associated with livestock troughs
RP1	Resurfacing of gateways (RP1)
RP3	Watercourse crossings (RP3)
RP4	Livestock and machinery hard-core tracks (RP4)
RP6	Installation of piped culverts in ditches (RP6)
RP7	Sediment ponds and traps (RP7)
RP8	Constructed wetlands for the treatment of pollution (RP8)
RP9	Earth banks and soil bunds (RP9)
RP10	Silt filtration dams or seepage barriers (RP10)
RP11	Swales (RP11)
RP13	Yard - underground drainage pipework (RP13)
RP15	Concrete yard renewal (RP15)
RP24	Lined biobed plus pesticide loading and wash-down area (RP24)
RP25	Lined biobed with existing wash-down area (RP25)
RP26	Biofilters (RP26)
RP27	Sprayer or applicator load and wash-down area (RP27)
WN5	Pond management (first 100 sq m)
WN6	Pond management (areas more than 100 sq m)

5.5 Completing the baseline evaluation of higher tier agreements (BEHTA)

All Higher Tier agreements on agricultural land require a baseline survey of the environmental features that are proposed for active management under the agreement, either through multi-year management options or capital items. The BEHTA sets a simple environmental baseline against which progress towards achieving environmental outcomes, via changes in condition or feature extent, can be measured.

The Natural England adviser will complete the BEHTA for all Higher Tier applications where an Expression of Interest has been completed and a Higher Tier application will be progressed by the adviser. The BEHTA will be compiled by the Natural England adviser at no cost to the applicant.

Applicants who wish to submit an application without natural England adviser support will need to produce their own baseline survey at their own expense. This will need to follow the survey method used by Natural England. Such applicants will be provided with the adviser guidance, Environmental Information Maps and a pre-populated Environmental Features Data Sheet which displays parcel level information on environmental features known to be present on the parcels in the application. No other Natural England support will be provided.

5.6 Developing an application

All applicants, except for the adviser supported Higher Tier, need to request an application pack from Natural England.

Applicants that only cover woodland can fill out the **woodland application form** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management).

Applicants will need to secure all necessary consents or permissions and permits as part the development of an application. Guidance is provided in [section 4.1](#) and is provided for each option or capital item in the **Countryside Stewardship Grants** finder tool (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants). This must be read to ensure applicants are able to submit a valid application. Submission of an application without the required information will make the application invalid and it will be rejected.

Applicants must check that multi-year options and capital works won't damage environmental features such as:

- biodiversity;
- water quality;
- landscape; or
- historic environment.

5.7 Submit an application

The address to return completed application forms and supporting information will be provided with the application packs, except for Higher Tier applications which will be submitted through the allocated Natural England or Forestry Commission adviser.

Details of the supporting information required will be included in guidance sent to applicants as part of their application pack. Applicants must allow sufficient time to apply for application forms, complete them and secure any consents or permissions. Applications received after the published application deadline can't be accepted.

Applicants can withdraw a submitted application up to the closing date and resubmit another application if they have time. After the closing date, applicants can request removal of options or items, but they cannot add or amend. If an agreement offer is made, applicants can only accept or reject it.

5.8 After applying

Natural England will acknowledge receipt of the application.

Agreements will be scored, ranked and offered to those whose Countryside Stewardship applications meet the local scheme priorities within the budget available as set out in the Statements of Priorities and which meet scoring criteria.

All applications will be scored against the scheme priorities outlined in section 1 except applications for:

- woodland management plans;
- hedgerows and boundaries capital grant;
- facilitation funding;
- woodland tree health; or
- organic conversion and management.

Feedback will be provided to unsuccessful applicants. All applicants who fail to secure an agreement offer will be notified. That reply will include details of next steps.

Successful applicants will be offered an agreement, with 20 days to accept or decline the offer. Offered agreements cannot be amended. The offer is either accepted or declined.

Unsuccessful applicants will be advised why their application was rejected. Applicants have the right to appeal.

Applicants are able to withdraw their application in writing at any point in the process.

5.9 Scoring for Mid Tier applications

Applications for Mid Tier agreements will be scored using:

- the targeting framework; and
- the options chosen in each land parcel.

Applications for Countryside Stewardship agreements will be scored individually and an application will score more points if it includes options that address the priorities identified in the **statements of priorities** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities). Each score will be ranked to determine which applications will be offered agreements, taking into account the available budget. As a result, the score which successful applications have to meet may vary each year.

All applications must score above an agreed minimum threshold. Any application that does not reach this threshold will be automatically rejected.

Unsuccessful applications can be re-submitted the following year.

Where necessary and before the scheme is launched each year, we may also adjust the scoring weightings to reflect policy objectives, scheme uptake and scheme developments.

The final score for an application takes into account the total cost of the agreement as a measure of value for money. Therefore the score is likely to be lower where options are included that do not address local priorities.

Applications will be scored automatically as information from the paper application form is entered onto the IT system by Natural England. Once the application window has closed and data entry completed, all applications will be ranked based on their final score. Those applications with the highest scores will be offered agreements up to the available budget and subject to the submission of any required evidence or consents not included with the application.

There are two aspects to the scoring for Mid Tier:

- a **basic score** for selecting the appropriate options within the RLR parcel with a targeted feature or issue
- an **additional score** for meeting 'other' criteria that need to be taken into consideration

The weighting between these two aspects of scoring will vary as part of the annual adjustment of scoring although the 'basic score' element will provide the greater proportion of points towards the total score.

Basic Score

The basic score is derived from:

- the CS priorities in each RLR land parcel identified in the statements of priorities
- the appropriate option (s) chosen, and
- the targeting priority given to the feature or issue (high, medium, low).

A standard number of points will be attributed to each priority level e.g. high priority features/ issues will always score most points followed by medium priority and then low priority.

Management options and capital items will be treated differently -

Management options: the area/quantity of option applied for will be multiplied by the score for

the priority feature/issue. For example, where an applicant is proposing 10ha of an option to address a high priority feature/issue the score would be X points x10, if 5ha of a medium priority feature/issue it would be Y points x5.

Capital items: scoring of capital items applies in a similar way. It is based on the quantity of the selected option and the priority level of the features/issues being addressed. To ensure that capital items don't provide disproportionately high scores, the basic calculations are adjusted and coefficients have been applied.

Additional score

Landscape-scale, collaborative approach: Applications confirmed as being part of a wider, coordinated Facilitation Fund group will receive additional points.

CSFO Endorsement: Applications that are confirmed to have acted on CSFO advice will receive additional points over and above the basic score. NB. Some water options are only available with CSFO endorsement and without that endorsement the application will be rejected.

Wild Pollinator & Farm Wildlife package: Where the requirements of the package are met in targeted areas additional points will be allocated.

Final score

A **Value for money** assessment will then be based on the total score divided by first year application cost (£).

5.10 Scoring for Higher Tier applications

Higher Tier applications will be scored by Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

Non-woodland elements will be scored to rank the 'pool' and create the 'pipeline' of agreements for that year. This initial scoring will be based on both:

- the priorities in the Statements of Priorities; and
- the applicant's plans to meet the priorities on their holding.

Natural England advisers will then work with these potential applicants to develop their applications.

For woodland-only applications, there is no need for an Expression of Interest. This means that as long as the application has a valid, Forestry Commission approved, UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) compliant woodland management plan, and an initial submission of the woodland application form and self scoring form is made by 31st July, Forestry Commission advisers will work with applicants on the details of their applications. Once the final application form and self score form has been submitted (deadline: 30th September), scores for the woodland applications will be ranked and agreements offered to the highest scoring applications.

As with Mid-Tier, the area/quantity of option applied for will be multiplied by the score for the priority feature/issue.

The priority value is taken from the CS priorities at the RLR land parcel level. The value attributed is either High, Medium or Low priority.

A value per hectare for each feature/issue has been set, based on the priority value (High, Medium and Low) and location, modified to account for comparative rarity.

The outcomes scored relate to the biodiversity, water quality and historic environment benefits proposed in the Expression of Interest (EoI). Biodiversity includes priority habitats, protected species requiring bespoke management, and sites where the requirements of the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package will be met. Historic Environment features will be scored on a per parcel, not per hectare basis.

There will also be **additional scores** for applications that:

- include SSSIs (related to the area of SSSI);
- include genetic conservation;
- include Educational Access;
- are part of a wider, coordinated Facilitation Fund group

Scoring of the EoI (agri-environment and mixed estate proposals) and all final applications will follow the same format. For applications that come through the EoI route the final scoring will be compared to the EoI to confirm that the offer remains the same.

5.11 Why applications may be rejected

Natural England or the Forestry Commission may reject an application at any stage if it:

- doesn't meet eligibility criteria, including a valid woodland management plan;
- doesn't score highly enough to meet the minimum threshold;
- doesn't score highly enough to be prioritised against the available budget;
- is likely to cause harm to the environment; or
- is incomplete on the date of submission.

5.12 Entering into an agreement

Applications submitted by 30 September will be checked, scored and ranked against the available budget. No options or items can be added to a submitted application. Applicants can request removal of options or items and, if they do so, the application will be scored again.

Successful applicants will be informed and made an agreement offer. Applicants must either accept or decline the offer.

If applicants wish to accept the agreement offer they must return the signed agreement and any required supporting information to Natural England by **15 December 2015**.

If successful applicants don't accept their offer in time, the offer will be withdrawn.

Applicants can re-submit a rejected application in subsequent years, with or without changes, if they wish. However, the scoring criteria applied to that application will be relevant to the priorities for that scheme year.

6. Selecting the best management options and capital items

How to select the right combination of options which best deliver local environmental priorities (and which will increase an application's score).

6.1 Countryside Stewardship: Capital Items and Supplements tool

The **Countryside Stewardship Grants tool** (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants) provides a description of each option and capital item that the scheme offers. This includes the value, eligibility requirements and an outline of what is required to implement it successfully. The tool offers an easy way to filter the full list by a number of search criteria. Alternatively two PDF documents providing the same information for the **options and capital items** are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/countryside-stewardship-manual-and-grants-1-january-2016-agreements>

6.2 Statements of Priorities

Applicants are encouraged to select options and capital items that are closest to the environmental priorities for their area. These are described in Statements of Priorities (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities) that cover the whole of England. Applicants can use them to:

- identify the priority features and issues being targeted in their area; and
- choose which options to include as part of an application.

6.3 Applying with the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package

The Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package (WPFWP) is a bundle of management options designed to benefit wild pollinators, farmland birds and other farm wildlife such as rare arable plants, great crested newts, bats and brown hare.

Applications that contain these management options and meet the minimum 3% area threshold in Mid-Tier and 5% in Higher Tier, will score highly and are more likely to proceed to an agreement offer.

The package options provide the essential resources (especially year-round food, shelter and nesting

places) that wild pollinators, birds and other farm wildlife need to survive and breed successfully. Recent evidence suggests that applying the right combination of options over 3 to 5% of the arable, temporary grass or permanent grass included in an application will deliver meaningful benefits to farm wildlife.

Applications for Countryside Stewardship can now be part-farm (i.e not all fields must be included) so the % calculation for the package should be based only on the area of arable land, temporary grassland and permanent grassland included in the application.

Building a Mid-Tier package

Applicants can choose from options that are suited to arable, mixed or pastoral farm types and that have been grouped together to deliver three important biodiversity resources:

For delivering the pollen and nectar resources within the Mid-tier package, the options available are:

- Nectar flower mix (AB1);
- Flower rich margins and plots (AB8);
- Cultivated areas for arable plants (AB11);
- Two year sown legume fallow (AB15);
- Autumn sown bumblebird mix (AB16);
- Management of hedgerows of high environmental value (one or both sides) (BE3);
- Legume and herb-rich swards (GS4); and
- Multi-species ley (organic) (OP4).

For delivering the shelter and nesting sites resources within the Mid-Tier package, the options available are:

- Skylark plots (AB4);
- Flower rich margins and plots (AB8);
- Cultivated areas for arable plants (AB11);
- Management of hedgerows of high environmental value (one or both sides) (BE3);
- Taking field corners out of management (GS1);
- Permanent grassland with very low inputs (GS2);
- Lenient grazing supplement (GS17);
- Buffering in-field ponds and ditches in improved grassland (WT1); and
- Buffering in-field ponds and ditches on arable land (WT2).

For delivering the winter seed food resources for farmland birds within the Mid-Tier package, the options available are:

- Basic over-winter stubble (AB2);
- Enhanced over-winter stubble (AB6);
- Whole crop cereals (AB7);
- Winter bird food (AB9);
- Brassica fodder crops (AB13);
- Ryegrass seed-set as winter or spring food for birds (GS3);
- Over-winter stubble (organic) (OP1), and
- Wild bird seed mixture (organic) (OP2).

A step by step guide setting out how to build a package WPFWP application in Mid-Tier is shown at the end of this section.

Building a Higher Tier package

Holdings will be targeted by Natural England at the application stage where they:

- have successfully delivered key resources for farm wildlife under previous schemes like Environmental Stewardship, and/or
- are located within areas where priority farmland bird and pollinator species are present.

Options must be delivered on at least 5% of the arable land, temporary grassland and permanent grassland included in the application and target a broader range of farmland species and habitats. A Natural England adviser will advise on the best options to use and work with the applicant to tailor the Higher Tier package to their holding and to meet the priority objectives.

All the options listed above are available in the Higher Tier Package, together with other Countryside Stewardship options that will help to deliver more bespoke management for key Higher Tier farmland bird and pollinator species.

Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package options and their relationship to Basic Payment Scheme (BPS):

Anyone claiming BPS can choose to locate some of the package options on their ecological focus area (EFA) land, so long as both the EFA requirements and Countryside Stewardship scheme prescriptions can be met. This helps EFAs deliver resources for pollinators and farmland birds. The payments for those package options which also appear on the table at 3.14 are reduced to avoid 'double funding'. Options used to meet EFA requirements under BPS receive the same points score under Countryside Stewardship as options not available to use on EFA land.

A Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package will increase an application's score

If the minimum requirements of a package in Mid-Tier or Higher Tier are met then the application

will receive an automatic increase in its score, increasing the likelihood of it being successful. If any of the land parcels entered into the scheme touches a hotspot for farmland birds and/or wild pollinators, the application will receive an additional biodiversity uplift score to recognise this. Information on the location of these hotspots can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities

Delivering options above the maximum quantities for any of the essential resources set for the Mid-Tier package is allowed and does not receive a negative score. The additional option areas will receive their basic scores. However, where an application delivers above the maximum quantities for Mid-Tier and is located within an area where priority farmland bird and pollinator species are present, it is likely to be more suitable for a Higher Tier package agreement. It is important to contact Natural England or an industry adviser who can discuss the likelihood of a Higher Tier agreement being offered, as to be successful, the application would need to include a broader range of options targeted on the priority species found on the holding.

The Mid-Tier Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Packages

The following tables set out how the essential resources required by wild pollinators and farmland birds can be delivered by the CS land management options available within the Mid-Tier package on an arable, pastoral or mixed farm. For illustrative purposes, the minimum and maximum amounts of each resource are given as per 100ha of eligible land. CS options delivering additional resources benefitting farm wildlife that should be considered for each farm type are also provided. Guidance on managing individual CS options is available at www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants, but here are some key points to consider when deciding what options to select:

1. Select one option per essential resource or a combination of options. Selecting a combination of options and spreading them across the farm will generally benefit more wildlife.
2. Selecting both legume and perennial-based mixes will provide nectar and pollen sources for a longer period of time over the summer and autumn. Well-managed hedgerows can provide valuable spring foraging for wild pollinators (and is an essential resource in the pastoral package).
3. Providing both annual and biennial wild bird seed mixes will benefit a broader range of farmland birds. Stubbles will work best if the preceding crop is barley and spring-sown, but you must put larger areas must be put under option to get the same seed delivery. The following steps will help calculate the contribution of the options that deliver stubbles to the winter seed food resource essential requirement (by providing an equivalent value to AB9):

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Option	Option area (ha)	Area divided by:	Contribution to 3% minimum threshold (ha) Equivalent to AB9:
AB2 Basic overwinter stubble OP1 Overwinter stubble AB7 Whole crop cereals	10	5	2
AB6 Enhanced overwinter stubble AB13 Brassica fodder crops	5	2.5	2

A package application can provide both AB9 Winter bird food and stubbles in the same agreement. For example, an agreement based on 300 ha of suitable application land could have

4 ha of AB9 plus 10 ha of AB2 Basic overwinter stubble, providing a total of 6ha of this essential resource and therefore meeting the minimum requirement.

4. Select additional options based on the species and features that are present on the farm. For example, if an applicant wants to benefit yellowhammers and other seed-eating birds on a pastoral farm, consider selecting GS3 and GS17 to provide both winter seed food and summer insect food. If an applicant mainly has winter-sown crops on an arable farm, consider selecting skylark plots over some/all of the area of winter wheat.
5. The maximum figures are for guidance only – an applicant can apply for more than the maximum and will still receive the basic points for that option (but no extra points). Note, there are no maximum values for the buffering of in-field ponds options, WT1 and WT2.

Mid-Tier package for arable farms

Essential resources for wild pollinators and farmland birds:	Select one or more of the following options from each essential resource:	Minimum quantity required per 100 ha of application land	Maximum quantity required per 100 ha of application land
1. Nectar and pollen sources for insect pollinators and insect-rich foraging for birds	AB1 Nectar flower mix AB8 Flower-rich margins and plots AB15 Two-year sown legume fallow AB16 Autumn sown Bumblebird mix AB11 Cultivated areas for arable plants (no more than 25% of the total resource area)	1 ha in total	3 ha in total
2. Winter food for seed-eating birds	AB9 Winter Bird Food (or OP2 Wild bird seed mixture) Can also select up to 7.5 ha per 100 ha of AB6 Enhanced Overwinter Stubble or up to 15 ha per 100 ha of AB2 Basic Overwinter Stubble (or OP1 Overwintered stubble)	2 ha ¹	3 ha ¹
Additional resources:	Select one or more options as appropriate:		
Hedgerows	BE3 Management of hedgerows	500 m	2000 m
In-field breeding habitats for skylarks in winter cereal-dominated landscapes	AB4 Skylark plots	2 per ha of winter wheat	2 per ha of winter wheat
Ponds and ditches	WT2 Buffering in-field ponds and ditches on arable land	as required	as required

¹larger if using stubbles – see point 3 above

Mid-Tier package for pastoral farms

Essential resources for wild pollinators and farmland birds:	Select one or more of the following options from each essential resource:	Minimum quantity required per 100 ha of application land	Maximum quantity required per 100 ha of application land
1. Nectar and pollen sources for insect pollinators and insect-rich foraging for birds	GS4 Legume and herb-rich swards (or OP4 Multi-species ley) GS2 Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDA)	2 ha in total	4 ha in total
2. Winter food for seed-eating birds	GS1 Take field corners out of management (outside SDA)	0.5 ha	2 ha
3. Hedgerows	BE3 Management of hedgerows	500 m	2000 m
Additional resources:	Select one or more options as appropriate:		
Variable grassland sward structure to provide insect-rich foraging for birds	GS17 Lenient grazing supplement	1 ha	4 ha
Winter food for seed-eating birds	GS3 Ryegrass seed-set as winter/spring food for birds	2 ha	3 ha
Ponds and ditches	WT1 Buffering in-field ponds and ditches in improved grassland	as required	as required

Mid-Tier package for mixed farms

Essential resources for wild pollinators and farmland birds:	Select one or more of the following options from each essential resource:	Minimum quantity required per 100 ha of application land	Maximum quantity required per 100 ha of application land
1. Nectar and pollen sources for insect pollinators and insect-rich foraging for birds	AB1 Nectar flower mix AB8 Flower-rich margins and plots AB15 Two-year sown legume fallow AB16 Autumn sown Bumblebird mix AB11 Cultivated areas for arable plants (no more than 25% of the total resource area) GS4 Legume and herb-rich swards (or OP4 Multi-species ley) (2 ha minimum, 3 ha maximum) GS2 Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDA) (2 ha minimum, 3 ha maximum) GS17 Lenient grazing supplement	1 ha in total (2 ha if using GS4 or GS2)	3 ha in total
2. Winter food for seed-eating birds	AB9 Winter Bird Food (or OP2 Wild bird seed mixture) GS3 Ryegrass seed-set as winter/spring food for birds Can also select up to 7.5 ha per 100 ha of AB6 Enhanced Overwinter Stubble or AB13 Brassica fodder crops or up to 15 ha per 100 ha of AB2 Basic Overwinter Stubble (or OP1 Overwintered stubble) or AB7 Whole crop cereals	2 ha ¹	3 ha ¹
Additional resources:	Select one or more options as appropriate:		
Hedgerows	BE3 Management of hedgerows	500 m	2000 m
Ponds and ditches	WT2 Buffering in-field ponds and ditches on arable land	as required	as required

¹ larger if using stubbles – see point 3 above

A step-by-step guide to building a Mid-Tier Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package (WPFWP) application:

Step 1

Work out the area of land that is eligible to deliver the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package and that will be included in the application. The eligible area can only be made up of BPS declared arable land, temporary grassland and permanent grassland. All other land uses are excluded from the calculation.

Step 2

Calculate the area of application land that would need to be managed under options delivering the essential resources in order to meet the minimum 3% requirement (the 3% relates to the ratio of option land to agreement land (ie 3 ha/100 ha). As long as this ratio is maintained, the minimum threshold will be met (for example, if the application area is 50 ha, a minimum of 1.5 ha option area would need to be delivered). In the package for pastoral farms the minimum hedgerow (BE3) requirement i.e. 500m per 100ha of application land should be scaled in the same way e.g. if the application land area is 50ha then the minimum length of BE3 required is 250 metres and if there is 200 ha of application land it will be 1000 metres.

Step 3

Use the tables to pick the package that is most suitable for the farm by identifying the options that are best suited to the farm rotation, soil type and that can be managed well. Look at the individual option requirements on www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants to make sure they can be delivered.

Step 4

Work out how much of each option will need to be done to meet the minimum requirement for each mandatory resource in the relevant package. There are different minimum values for each of the packages so double-check what is required to qualify. Each of the mandatory resources can be met by choosing one option only for each resource, or choosing several options to meet the minimum area requirement for that resource (the latter will generally be better for farm wildlife).

Step 5

Select any additional options listed in the chosen package, where these can be realistically included in the application. These options will enhance the environmental benefits that can be provided through an agreement, and will increase the score of the application. It will also increase the financial value of the agreement, should the application be successful.

The following tables give some working examples on what a Mid-Tier Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package could look like on different farm scenarios when using combinations of the package options.

Step 6

Double-check all of the calculations to make sure the minimum package requirements have been met.

Step 7

The WPFWP is one part of Countryside Stewardship. An application can also include options that are specifically delivering for other environmental priorities such as protecting water courses and historic features, or planting hedges as part of a capital works programme.

Make sure the Statement of Priority for the farm area has been considered to identify what other priorities are relevant. Selecting options that address these priorities will improve the strength of the application.

Example Mid-Tier Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package option combinations for typical farm scenarios

Farm scenario	Area of application land to be considered for CS	Package	Typical options to meet the minimum requirements of essential resources	Annual payment for undertaking these options	Additional options to consider	Comments
Arable farm on heavy land mainly winter cropping, with some high quality hedgerows	250 ha	Arable	1.5 ha AB1 Nectar flower mix 1 ha AB8 Flower-rich margins and plots 5ha AB9 Winter bird food	£4,505.50	BE3 Management of hedgerows of high environmental value AB4 Skylark plots	Spread AB1 and AB9 across the farm, and split AB9 between annual and biennial mixtures
Arable farm on light soil with some spring cropping, good for arable flora and no high quality hedgerows	100 ha	Arable	0.5ha AB1 Nectar flower mix 0.25ha AB8 Flower rich margins and plots 0.25ha AB11 Cultivated area for arable plants 10ha AB2 Basic overwinter stubble	£1,363.25		Consider substituting AB9 Winter bird food and/or AB6 Enhanced Overwinter Stubble for some/all of the AB2
100% grass farm that has some quality hedgerows, semi/unimproved grassland and some ponds	50 ha	Pastoral	0.5ha GS2 Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDA) 0.5ha GS4 Legume and herb-rich swards 0.25ha GS1 Take field corners out of management (outside SDA) 250m BE3 Management of hedgerows of high environmental value (both sides)	£333.25 ¹	GS17 Lenient grazing supplement GS3 Ryegrass seed-set as winter/spring food for birds WT1 Buffering in-field ponds and ditches in improved grassland	Consider GS3 and GS17 in areas with good numbers of seed-eating farmland birds, such as yellowhammers
Mixed farm on heavy soil with high quality hedgerows and some unimproved grassland	200 ha	Mixed	4ha GS2 Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDA) 4ha GS4 Legume and herb-rich swards 4ha AB9 Winter bird food	£4,176	BE3 Management of hedgerows of high environmental value	If there is silage on the farm, consider substituting some GS3 for part AB9

¹ The minimum annual payment under Countryside Stewardship is £1000, so other options will need to be added to the application to meet this threshold.

6.4 Actions to address water quality issues

The following tables can be used with the water quality sections of the **Statements of Priorities** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities) to identify the types of options that can be used to address water quality priorities.

Water quality options and their corresponding pollutant pressure and protected area

Option	Code	Priority Bathing waters	Ground water priority areas -Nitrate	Ground water priority areas - Pesticides	Surface Water -Pesticides	Surface water -Nitrate	Surface water (Phosphate +Sediment)	Flood and Coastal Risk Management and Physical Modification
Nectar Flower mix	AB1						x	
Beetle banks	AB3						x	
Enhanced overwinter stubble	AB6			x	x			
Two year sown legume fallow	AB15			x	x		x	
Management of coastal sand dunes and vegetated shingle	CT1							x
Creation of coastal sand dunes and vegetated shingle on arable land and improved grassland	CT2							x
Management of coastal saltmarsh	CT3							x
Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat on arable land	CT4							x
Creation of inter-tidal and saline habitat by non-intervention	CT5							x
Take field corners out of management	GS1						x	
Creation of wet grassland for breeding waders	GS11		x			x	x	x

Option	Code	Priority Bathing waters	Ground water priority areas -Nitrate	Ground water priority areas - Pesticides	Surface Water -Pesticides	Surface water -Nitrate	Surface water (Phosphate +Sediment)	Flood and Coastal Risk Management and Physical Modification
Creation of wet grassland for wintering waders & wildfowl	GS12		x			x	x	x
Creation of grassland for target features	GS14		x	x		x	x	x
Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDA)	GS2	X				x	x	
Permanent grassland with very low inputs in SDAs	GS5	X				x	x	
Take historic and archaeological features currently on cultivated land out of cultivation	HS2		x			x		
Creation of heathland from arable or improved grassland	LH3		x	x		x	x	
Organic conversion - improved permanent grassland	OR1			x	x			
Organic conversion - unimproved permanent grassland	OR2			x	x			
Organic conversion - rotational land	OR3			x	x			
Organic conversion - horticulture	OR4			x	x			
Administration of group managed agreements supplement	SP10	x			x			
4- 6 m buffer strip on cultivated land	SW1						x	

Option	Code	Priority Bathing waters	Ground water priority areas -Nitrate	Ground water priority areas - Pesticides	Surface Water -Pesticides	Surface water -Nitrate	Surface water (Phosphate +Sediment)	Flood and Coastal Risk Management and Physical Modification
Seasonal livestock removal on grassland in SDAs next to streams, rivers and lakes	SW10	x				x	x	x
Riparian management strip	SW11	x				x	x	x
Making space for water	SW12						x	x
Very low nitrogen inputs to ground waters	SW13		x			x		
Nil fertiliser supplement	SW14		x			x		
4 - 6 m buffer strip on intensive grassland	SW2						x	
In-field grass strips	SW3						x	x
12-24m watercourse buffer strip on cultivated land	SW4						x	x
Enhanced management of maize crops	SW5						x	x
Winter cover crops	SW6		x			x		x
Arable reversion to grassland with low fertiliser input	SW7		x	x	x	x	x	x
Management of intensive grassland adjacent to a watercourse	SW8	x				x	x	x
Seasonal livestock removal on intensive grassland	SW9	x				x	x	x

Option	Code	Priority Bathing waters	Ground water priority areas -Nitrate	Ground water priority areas - Pesticides	Surface Water -Pesticides	Surface water -Nitrate	Surface water (Phosphate +Sediment)	Flood and Coastal Risk Management and Physical Modification
Moorland re-wetting supplement	UP5							x
Upland livestock exclusion supplement	UP6							x
Woodland creation – maintenance payments	WD1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Creation of wood pasture	WD6		x			x		
Creation of successional areas and scrub	WD8		x			x		
Buffering in- field ponds and ditches in improved grassland	WT1						x	
Buffering in- field ponds and ditches in arable land	WT2						x	
Management of ditches of high environmental value	WT3		x			x	x	
Maintenance of ponds of high wildlife value < 100 sq m or less	WT4		x			x	x	
Maintenance of ponds of high wildlife value > 100 sq m	WT5		x			x	x	
Creation of reed bed	WT7		x			x		x
Management of fen	WT8							x
Creation of fen	WT9		x			x	x	x

Capital works and their corresponding pollutant pressure and protected area.

Option	Code	Priority Bathing waters	Ground water priority areas -Nitrate	Ground water priority areas - Pesticides	Surface Water -Pesticides	Surface water -Nitrate	Surface water (Phosphate +Sediment)	Flood and Coastal Risk Management and Physical Modification
Livestock and machinery hardcore tracks	RP4	x					x	
Livestock troughs	LV7	X					x	x
Above ground tanks	RP18	x	x	x	x	x		x
Bio filters	RP26			x	x			
Check dams	RP12	x					x	x
Concrete yard renewal	RP15	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Constructed wetlands for the treatment of pollution	RP8	x					x	x
Cross drains	RP5	X					x	x
Earth banks and soil bunds	RP9	x					x	x
Equipment to disrupt tramlines in arable areas	RP31						x	x
Fencing	FG1	X						
Fencing supplement – difficult sites	FG5	x						x
First flush rainwater diverters or downpipe filters	RP19	x	x	x	x	x		x
Floating covers for slurry stores and lagoons	RP30	x	x			x		
Gateway relocation	RP2	X					x	x
Grip blocking drainage channels	WN1							x
Hard bases for livestock drinkers	LV3	x					x	x

Option	Code	Priority Bathing waters	Ground water priority areas -Nitrate	Ground water priority areas - Pesticides	Surface Water -Pesticides	Surface water -Nitrate	Surface water (Phosphate +Sediment)	Flood and Coastal Risk Management and Physical Modification
Hard bases for livestock feeders	LV4	x					x	x
Installation of livestock drinking troughs (in draining pens for freshly dipped sheep)	RP23			x	x			
Installation of piped culverts in ditches	RP6	x					x	
Lined bio bed plus pesticide loading and wash down area	RP24			x	x			
Lined bio bed with existing wash down area	RP25			x	x			
Major preparatory works for Priority Habitats (creation and restoration) and Priority Species	FM2							x
Pasture pumps and associated pipework	LV5	X					x	x
Permanent electric fencing	FG3	X						
Pipework associated with livestock troughs	LV8	x					x	x
Rainwater goods	RP16	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Ram pumps and associated pipework	LV6	x					x	x
Relocation of sheep dips and pens	RP20			x	x			
Relocation of sheep pens only	RP21			x	x			

Option	Code	Priority Bathing waters	Ground water priority areas -Nitrate	Ground water priority areas - Pesticides	Surface Water -Pesticides	Surface water -Nitrate	Surface water (Phosphate +Sediment)	Flood and Coastal Risk Management and Physical Modification
Restoration of large water bodies	WN7							x
Resurfacing of gateways	RP1						x	
Roofing (sprayer wash down area, manure storage area, livestock gathering area, slurry stores, silage stores)	RP28	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Sediment ponds and traps	RP7	X					x	x
Self- supporting covers for slurry stores	RP29	x	x			x		
Sheep dip drainage aprons and sumps	RP22			x	x			
Sheep netting	FG2	X						
Silt filtration dams or seepage barriers	RP10	x					x	x
Sprayer or applicator load and wash down area	RP27			x	x			
Storage tanks underground	RP17							x
Supply and plant tree	TE4		x			x		
Swales	RP11	X					x	x
Water gates	FG15	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Watercourse crossings	RP3	X					x	
Yard - underground drainage pipework	RP13	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Yard Inspection pit	RP14	x	x	x	x	x	x	

6.5 Actions to address biodiversity issues

The following table can be used with the biodiversity sections of the **Statements of Priorities** (www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities) to identify the types of options that can be used to address biodiversity priorities.

Option	Code	Species	Priority Habitats	Woodland Birds	Arable Plants
Nectar flower mix	AB1	x	x		
Basic overwinter stubble	AB2	x			
Beetle banks	AB3	x	x		
Skylark plots	AB4	x			
Nesting plots for lapwing and stone curlew	AB5	x			
Enhanced overwinter stubble	AB6	x			
Whole crop cereals	AB7	x			
Flower-rich margins and plots	AB8	x			
Winter bird food	AB9	x	x		
Unharvested cereal headland	AB10	x	x		x
Cultivated areas for arable plants	AB11	x	x		x
Supplementary winter feeding for farmland birds	AB12	x			
Brassica fodder crop	AB13	x			
Harvested low input cereal	AB14	x			
Two year sown legume fallow	AB15	x			
Autumn sown bumblebird mix	AB16	x	x		
Management of hedgerows	BE3	x	x		
Earth bank creation	BN3	x			
Earth bank restoration	BN4	x			
Hedgerow laying	BN5	x	x		
Hedgerow coppicing	BN6	x	x		
Hedgerow gapping-up	BN7	x	x		
Hedgerow supplement - casting up	BN8	x	x		
Planting new hedges/m	BN11	x	x		
Take field corners out of management	GS1	x			
Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDAs)	GS2	x			
Ryegrass seed-set as winter food for birds	GS3	x			
Legume and herb-rich swards	GS4	x			
Permanent grassland with very low inputs in SDAs	GS5	x			

Option	Code	Species	Priority Habitats	Woodland Birds	Arable Plants
Lenient grazing supplement	GS17	x			
Maintenance of weatherproof traditional farm buildings	HS1	x			
Take historic and archaeological features out of cultivation	HS2	x	x		
Management of historic and archaeological features on grassland	HS5		x		
Maintenance of weatherproof traditional farm buildings in remote areas	HS8	x			
Wild bird seed mixture	OP2		x		
Organic conversion – unimproved permanent grassland	OR2		x		
Organic land management - unimproved permanent grassland	OT2		x		
Organic land management -enclosed rough grazing	OT6	x			
12-24m watercourse buffer strip on cultivated land	SW4	x			
Management of intensive grassland adjacent to a watercourse	SW8	x	x		
Riparian management strip	SW11	x			
Planting standard hedgerow tree/Unit	TE1	x			
Planting fruit trees/tree	TE3	x			
Coppicing bankside trees/tree	TE10		x		
Enclosed rough grazing	UP1	x	x		
Woodland edges on arable land	WD3	x		x	
Management of successional areas and scrub	WD7	x		x	
Livestock exclusion supplement – scrub and successional areas.	WD9	x		x	
Pond management – first 100 sq m/100 sq m	WN5	x	x		
Pond management (areas more than 100 sq m)/100 sq m	WN6	x	x		
Buffering in-field ponds and ditches in improved grassland	WT1	x	x		
Buffering in-field ponds and ditches on arable land	WT2	x	x		

7. Agreement Management

How agreements are managed once the agreement offer has been accepted and the formal agreement is in place.

7.1 Revenue and capital works

Agreements will start on the following 1 January for multi-year agreements. The agreement offer must not include any financial commitment or any work before that date or the agreement may be terminated.

Invoices and receipts must relate to activities after the agreement start date, and must be dated after that start date. Claims will be rejected and won't be paid if, on inspection, it is discovered that the work was carried out prior to or after the agreement period.

Using own labour for construction work

Successful applicants can use their own labour for the construction of their works. They will need to prepare time sheets signed by the employee and employer showing:

- the hourly rate for the labour or farm employee's labour;
- what work has been undertaken; and
- the date the work was undertaken.

These records must be kept either as paper or electronic records for the duration of the agreement and be produced on request, and kept for a further 7 years after the end of the agreement.

Using own machinery for construction

Machinery and equipment owned by the business can be used to carry out capital works. Hired machinery or equipment, e.g. a cement mixer, can also be used. Any invoices and records of the machinery used must be retained either as paper or electronic records for the duration of the agreement and be produced on request, and kept for a further 7 years after the end of the agreement. Records must include:

- dates and times the machinery was used;
- what it was used for;
- the rate that is being applied to the usage and how this was arrived at; and
- name of the operator.

Using contractors

It is permitted to employ contractors to undertake agricultural work on agreement land, or to undertake work required under the Countryside Stewardship options and capital items.

The agreement holder must notify the contractor about the agreement and its requirements. It's the agreement holder's responsibility to make sure that work carried out by contractors does

not breach the terms of their agreement. The agreement holder will be liable for any payment reductions or penalties that result from any breaches that the contractor commits on the land.

7.2 Payments and claims – How to claim

Multi-year agreements

Agreement holders must submit an annual claim form by 15 May each year.

Capital Works

Agreement holders can submit a capital claim for reimbursement at any time of the year, provided the approved work has been completed in accordance with the agreement and has been paid in full by the agreement holder. The minimum value of any single claim is £500.

Payments will be paid directly into the agreement holder's bank account by the RPA.

The Countryside Stewardship scheme payments in 2015/16 are detailed below:

Scheme	Deadline(s)	Checks	Payment 1	Payment 2
Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier and Higher Tier	Application window open July to September 2015 (Higher Tier October 31st), for agreements starting 1 January 2016. Claim must be received by 15 May 2016.	Single Annual Cross Check summer 2016	Autumn 2016. Capital items paid following receipt of valid claim	Spring 2017
Countryside Stewardship - water capital grants 2015	Application window closes 30 April 2015. Claim once works completed: claims and supporting information eg photos must be received by 29 January 2016.	Check of application form and cross checks carried out before agreement offers made. Aim to get all offers made by end June 2015. Check of paper claim form, cross checks for dual funding, 5% compliance inspections by RPA before claim paid, pre- and post- payment management checks.	Payments from January 2016. All claims paid by 31 March 2016 unless outstanding compliance inspection and or unresolved appeal.	

Scheme	Deadline(s)	Checks	Payment 1	Payment 2
Countryside Stewardship woodland creation capital grants 2015	Application window closes 31 May	As woodland checks above	Capital element to be paid following submission of claim after planting during winter 15/16	Multi-year maintenance payments to be paid in December 2017
Countryside Stewardship woodland management plans and tree health capital grants 2015	All year application window	As woodland checks above	Following receipt of valid claim	
Countryside Stewardship Facilitation funding grants 2015	Application window closes 13 May. First quarter claim due October 2015. (Claim must be supported by proof of expenditure and evidence of payment.)	Eligibility check, local assessment, and national judging and award of funding early to mid June 2015.	Quarterly payments from October 2015 onwards.	Final payment for this FY Spring (April to May) 2016.

8. Scheme requirements and procedures

A Countryside Stewardship agreement comprises the Countryside Stewardship Terms and Conditions (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/657051/cs-terms-conditions-1-january-2016-version.pdf), the Agreement Document (which sets out Agreement Holder-specific details) and the supplementary documents referred to in the Agreement Document.

The Countryside Stewardship Terms and Conditions require Agreement Holders to comply with the mandatory requirements set out in this Manual. These mandatory requirements are set out in the following chapter and also at chapter 3.

8.1 General scheme requirements

‘Agreement Holder’ means the person (whether an individual, a company or other entity) who has entered into the Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement as identified in the Agreement Document.

‘Agreement Land’ is land on which there are multi-year options or capital items, as defined in clause 1 of the Terms and Conditions.

Parcels where rotational options can be located are not considered Agreement Land unless the option is active on that land in a particular year.

General management conditions

The Agreement Holder must follow all the general management conditions as set out below on the Agreement Land throughout the period of the Agreement (unless specifically stated otherwise in another section of this Manual, specifically permitted in the option prescription as part of the Countryside Stewardship Agreement Document, or specifically required for organic management). The Agreement Holder must not:

- allow Agreement Land to be levelled, infilled, or used for the storage or dumping of materials;
- light fires (including burning brash or cuttings) on the Agreement Land; and
- allow field operations or stocking to cause any ground disturbance, wheel rutting, poaching or compaction on Agreement Land.

Protection of historic features

The annotated Farm Environment Record (FER) (see section 5.4 of the CS Manual) includes information supplied by Natural England on the Environmental Information Map. The FER will show the location of the historic features (including archaeological features and traditional farm buildings), where these are known, on the Agreement Land. For each of these features, and for any additional features of which the Agreement Holder is subsequently advised in writing by Natural England, the Agreement Holder must not:

- cause ground disturbance, including poaching by livestock, on known archaeological features or areas of historic interest under grassland;
- sub-soil or de-stone on areas containing known archaeological features, unless these operations have been demonstrably undertaken as a routine in the past five years. Sub-soiling on Scheduled Monuments requires Scheduled Monument Consent from the Secretary of State for the Dept. of Culture Media and Sport, as advised by Historic England;
- deliberately plough more deeply or undertake additional ground works or drainage on those areas already under cultivation that contain known archaeological features;
- allow free-range pigs on archaeological features;
- remove any useable building stone, walling stone or traditional roofing material (excluding materials produced from established quarries) from known archaeological features or areas of historic interest on the Agreement Land; or
- damage, demolish or remove building material from substantially complete ruined traditional farm buildings or from boundaries of parcels containing known archaeological features or areas of historic interest.

For woodland sites, a woodland management plan (see section 3.20) will show the location of archaeological and historic sites. The management of these must be in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard Historic Environment Guidelines.

Hedgerows

In any one calendar year, Agreement Holders must not cut more than 50% of all hedges in or bordering Agreement Land, including land parcels where rotational options are sited during that

year. Parcels where rotational options can be located (and as set out in the Agreement Document) are not considered Agreement Land unless a rotational option is active on that parcel in a particular year.

The only exception is for public safety, when road and trackside hedgerows can be cut annually or more frequently. The relevant hedges will be captured on the FER map (see section 5.4). Detailed guidance on the relevant hedges, and marking them on the FER map, is provided with the application pack.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs)

Where Agreement Land is in an NVZ, Agreement Holders must meet the requirements of both the relevant NVZ Action Programme and Countryside Stewardship. Where the rules overlap, Agreement Holders must meet those that are the most stringent.

8.2 Cross Compliance: requirements

Cross compliance is a set of rules which apply to all Agreement Holders receiving rural payments under:

- the Basic Payment Scheme;
- Countryside Stewardship (CS);
- Entry Level Stewardship (including Organic Entry Level Stewardship and Uplands Entry Level Stewardship);
- Higher Level Stewardship (including Organic Higher Level Stewardship and Uplands Higher Level Stewardship, but not including HLS agreements that started before 1 January 2007); and/or
- Woodland Management Grant and Farm Woodland Payment elements of English Woodland Grant Scheme.

This means that Agreement Holders must:

- maintain their land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) by meeting a range of standards that relate to the protection of soils, habitats and landscape features, and water; and
- meet a range of Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) covering the environment, public and plant health, animal health and welfare, and livestock identification and tracing.

Agreement Holders must comply with cross compliance requirements across their whole Holding for the whole calendar year. For cross compliance purposes, a Holding is all the production units and areas managed by the Agreement Holder situated within the UK. This includes Agreement Land which is:

- used for agricultural activities;
- used for forestry;
- other non-agricultural land (e.g. salt marsh) for which Rural Development payments for the schemes listed above are claimed;
- land declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) (whether BPS aid is claimed or not); and
- common land over which the Agreement Holder exercises or holds rights of common.

Woodland areas (as defined in section 3.1 of the CS Manual):

The table below describes how cross-compliance applies to woodland area.

Type Of Woodland	CS Options	Is it agricultural Land?	Does Cross Compliance Apply?
Woodland under agri-environment option	LH2, WD3, WD4, WD5, WD6	Yes	Yes SMRs and GAECs apply
Woodland under forestry creation/improvement option	WD1, WD2	No	Yes SMRs only apply, not GAECs
Woodland not under RD agreement	N/A	No	No

Full details of cross compliance requirements can be found in 'The Guide to cross compliance in England 2015' - www.gov.uk/government/publications/cross-compliance-guidance-for-2015. These requirements are updated annually and apply to that calendar year, irrespective of when a Countryside Stewardship agreement started.

This is only a summary of the cross compliance requirements, and where there is a discrepancy between the Guide and this section 8.2, the Guide will prevail.

8.3 Evidence: requirements

Inspection and audit requirements applied to the Basic Payment Scheme have been extended by EU law to cover the Rural Development Programme including CS and earlier agri-environment schemes. This has resulted in changes to record keeping and inspection requirements.

All Agreement Holders will be required to provide evidence that they have undertaken all the management requirements of their agreement when submitting claims or at inspections. Detailed information about how to provide this evidence is set out in the scheme Record keeping and inspection requirements document www.gov.uk/government/publications/countryside-stewardship-record-keeping-and-inspection-requirements on GOV.UK.

8.4 Publicity: requirements

All Agreement Holders receiving investment / capital support of more than €50,000 per operation are required to display a plaque or poster. Agreement Holders who receive more than €500,000 to fund a capital item, forest area development or improvement in the viability of forests are required to display a billboard. There are also requirements relating to websites for all levels of funding.

This is a requirement of European Union regulations.

The relevant requirements are set out in Annex III at 2.1 and 2.1 of Regulation (EU) No. 808/2014 which is available here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014Ro808&from=EN>

Also at Annex III of Regulation (EU) No. 2016/669 which is available here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016Ro669&from=EN>

This covers what needs to be said about: the name of the project, the source of the funding, activity supported by the project and use of logos.

Further information about the detailed requirements is available from Natural England Technical Services.

8.5 Claims process

Multi-year agreements

Midnight on 15 May is the deadline for CS claims, including any paperwork to support the claim (such as an organic certificate). [See section 8.6 Reductions and penalties](#)

Capital items within multi-year agreements

Agreement Holders can submit a capital item claim for reimbursement at any time of the year, provided the approved work has been completed in accordance with the agreement and has been paid for in full by the Agreement Holder. The minimum value of any single claim is £500, with the exception of the final claim, which may be less than £500.

Capital-only agreements

For Hedgerows and Boundaries capital grants, Agreement Holders must claim once all the work has been completed: the claim must be a minimum of £1,000.

Capital works must be claimed by the date specified in the agreement document or the claim will be rejected. Late claims will not be accepted under any circumstances.

Payments for all agreements

All payments will be paid directly into the Agreement Holder's nominated bank account by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

The timings of Countryside Stewardship payments in 2015 and 2016 are set out in section 7.2 of this Manual. Timings of payments in future years remain to be confirmed.

8.6 Reductions and penalties

If Natural England becomes aware that an Agreement Holder has breached the terms of their agreement or that they do not meet the relevant eligibility criteria on all or part of their Agreement Land, future grant payments may be reduced or withheld, and sums previously paid to the Agreement Holder may be recovered. In some circumstances, additional penalties may be applied.

This section of the Manual sets out a non-exhaustive list and some examples of where reductions or penalties may be applied, and where payments may be withheld or recovered.

8.6.1. Reductions

Natural England can only pay Agreement Holders for the eligible land that they correctly declare, and that they are managing according to the Scheme rules.

Natural England will reduce the amount an Agreement Holder has been or will be paid for if they:

- have not declared all the agricultural land on the Agreement Holder's holding, and non-agricultural land that is under a Rural Development agreement;

- have claimed payment on land which is not eligible or is not under their management control;
- have not followed the management requirements or prescriptions for the options chosen;
- have over-claimed for capital works;
- have not followed the Scheme rules; or
- have not complied with cross compliance rules where applicable.

In cases of force majeure and exceptional circumstances, Natural England will consider the facts on a case-by-case basis in deciding whether to pay or reduce a claim – see section 8.16 for more information about this.

8.6.2. Penalties

Penalties are applied if:

- a payment claim for a multi-year agreement is submitted late (see late payment claims for multi-year agreements below);
- a late change is made to a payment claim for a multi-year agreement (this includes changes to supporting information or evidence submitted as part of the claim);
- the payment claim for the multi-year agreement does not contain all the agricultural land on the Agreement Holder's holding, and non-agricultural land that is under a Rural Development agreement;
- the agreement area that the Agreement Holder claims payment for is significantly larger than the area on which the Agreement Holder is actually carrying out the agreement options;
- the Agreement Holder has not followed scheme rules;
- the Agreement Holder has not followed the cross compliance rules; or
- the Agreement Holder claims payment on capital items which they have not fully completed or have not completed to the required standard.

This is a non-exhaustive list, and there may be other examples where penalties may be applied. In cases of force majeure and exceptional circumstances, obvious errors and notified errors, Natural England will consider the facts on a case-by-case basis in deciding whether to pay or reduce a claim.

Penalties are applied to the land management elements of the payment in the following order:

- penalties for over-claiming eligible land;
- penalties for agreement breaches (reduction or non-payment of amount claimed);
- penalties for a late submission of a payment claim for a multi-year agreement;
- penalties for not declaring all of the relevant land parcels on the holding;

- penalties for agreement breaches (recovery of support paid earlier); and
- cross compliance penalties.

Penalties for over-claiming on capital items will be applied separately to the capital element of the payment only.

8.6.3. Late payment claims for multi-year agreements

Agreement Holders can make a late claim in writing until midnight on 9 June but they will receive a penalty. For each working day the claim is late, the size of the penalty will be a 1% reduction of the amount to which they would have been entitled had the claim been submitted on time.

Agreement Holders cannot make claims after midnight on 9 June apart from in cases of force majeure (see 8.16).

8.6.4. Changing a payment claim relating to a multi-year agreement after it has been submitted

Claims can be changed until midnight on 31 May without receiving a penalty.

For each working day after this, a 1% penalty will be applied to the land parcel and option which the change relates to.

Claims cannot be changed after 9 June, apart from:

- in cases of force majeure (see section 8.16 for more information);
- where an Agreement Holder withdraws all or part of a claim (see section 8.6.5 for more information); or
- obvious error (see section 8.6.6 for more information).

8.6.5. Withdrawing all or part of a payment claim for a multi-year agreement

Agreement Holders can withdraw all or part of a payment claim at any time unless:

- they have already been told about an error in the payment claim (or the relevant part of the payment claim);
- they have been inspected (or receive advance warning of an inspection); or
- an inspection reveals a breach of the rules; or
- errors have been found by RPA when they cross check information against BPS Applications

8.6.6. Obvious errors

Where a straightforward mistake on a payment claim has been made (and which is obvious from a simple administrative check of the claim), Agreement Holders can ask Natural England to correct it. Natural England may be able to correct it at any time without applying a reduction or a penalty.

However, if an Agreement Holder makes the same mistake more than once, Natural England may not accept it as an obvious error.

8.6.7. Notified errors

Agreement Holders can notify Natural England at any time in writing of errors in their payment claim to avoid certain penalties unless they have:

- already been told of any non-compliances in their payment claim; or
- received advance warning of an inspection.

NE will not apply penalties for not declaring all relevant land parcels, or for over-claiming land in these specific cases.

8.6.8. Not declaring all the relevant land parcels on a holding

If an Agreement Holder does not declare all of their agricultural land parcels plus any non-agricultural parcels that are under a Rural Development agreement, the size of the penalty depends on how big the difference is between:

- the number of hectares declared; and
- the number of hectares declared plus the overall area of parcels not declared.

Difference between land declared and what is actually held (as a % of land declared)	Size of penalty
up to 3% of the area determined	No penalty
more than 3% and up to 20%	1%
more than 20% and up to 50%	2%
more than 50%	3%

8.6.9. Over-claiming land under option

If an Agreement Holder declares land in their payment claim that is not eligible land (as set out in section 3.1) or does not have the relevant option present on it, their claim will be reduced.

Natural England can only pay for the eligible land/options as identified during administrative or on-the-spot checks (called 'the area determined').

Size of over-claim	Size of penalty
Up to 2 hectares or 3%	No penalty
More than 2 hectares or More than 3% but not more than 20% (of the area under option determined)	Twice the difference of the over-claim For example, if the over-claim is 5 hectares, Natural England will reduce the claim by 5 hectares and apply an additional 10 hectare penalty
More than 20% (and up to 50%) of the area under option determined	100% (the whole payment)
More than 50% of the area under option determined	More than 100% (see below)

As well as a reduction, Natural England may apply a penalty. The size of this penalty depends on the size of the over-claim. The over-claim will be the difference between the area determined and the area the Agreement Holder used to claim CS in the payment claim (called 'the area declared').

The only exception is if the difference is less than or equal to 0.1 hectares (providing the difference is not more than 20% of the total area declared for payments in that payment group); in this case, Natural England will pay on the area declared by the Agreement Holder.

Sometimes a penalty can be more than 100% of a payment. The extra penalty is calculated based on the amount of land that has been incorrectly claimed. This penalty calculation will be carried out separately for each payment group for which an over-claim has been made.

Example:

- an Agreement Holder claims payment for 10 hectares of eligible land under option AB1 (Nectar Flower Mix)
- they actually only have 3 hectares of the option AB1
- the difference is therefore 7 hectares

Because 7 hectares is more than 50% of 3 hectares, the Agreement Holder will lose their whole payment (as in the table above) on the 7 hectares of land which they should not have claimed.

The RPA will also deduct an amount equal to the value of the over-claim from future payments. In this example, the amount to be deducted will be the value of 7 hectares. This amount will be taken from future payments from one or more of the following:

- BPS (including greening);
- Young farmer payment; or
- Countryside Stewardship and other Rural Development Schemes.

If there is any money still outstanding after 3 years, the RPA will cancel the balance. This is sometimes known as a '3-year penalty'.

8.6.10. Cross compliance

Any breach by the Agreement Holder (or by others acting under their control, or anyone with access to the holding under the terms of an agreement including contractors, employees or family members) of cross compliance rules anywhere on the Holding (including associated common land) may result in a penalty being applied. In most cases, the penalty would be applied to all BPS, CS and earlier agri-environment scheme area payments claimed by the Agreement Holder.

See 'The Guide to Cross Compliance in England' at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/579836/Cross_Compliance_2017_rules_FINAL.pdf to find out about cross compliance penalties. These are applied after CS penalties.

8.6.11. Breaches of Agreement

If the Agreement Holder breaches the terms of the agreement, reductions may be applied to the payment.

If any breaches are identified as a result of administrative checks or inspections, the Agreement Holder will be notified in writing. Where any such breaches are identified, Natural England will determine the level of reduction to be applied, taking into account the severity of the breach,

its extent and duration, and whether it is an isolated or a repeat occurrence. A reduction may be applied to the current year's claim and also to previous years' claims, unless the Agreement Holder can demonstrate compliance in previous years.

A brief explanation of how breaches are assessed for severity, extent, duration, and reoccurrence is set out below.

Severity

An assessment will be made to determine the relative importance of the consequence of the breach/non-compliance and will take into account the objectives of the agreement or options that were not met. For example, ploughing a priority habitat would be classed as a severe breach.

Extent

This will depend on the particular effect the non-compliance has on the agreement as a whole. It would also reflect how much of the agreement has been breached. So, for example, an agreement covered 10 parcels and a breach of agreement was found to affect 50% or more of this land, then the breach would be considered to be a large extent.

Duration

Consideration will also be given to the length of time the effects of the breach lasts and whether it is possible to remedy the breach by reasonable means.

Re-occurrence

The assessment will depend on a number of factors, for example whether a similar event of non-compliance has been found in previous years (including prior to 2014 – the start of the current Rural Development Programme), and whether the re- occurrence concerns the same or similar measure (for example agri-environment or organic).

Where it is considered that a breach is so serious that it cannot be rectified, this may result in the termination of the agreement. In serious circumstances this may also result in the Agreement Holder being prohibited from entering another agri- environment scheme for up to 2 years.

8.6.12. Refusal or withdrawal of support claimed

In certain scenarios the support claimed will be refused or withdrawn in full. These are when Natural England determines that:

- a serious non-compliance by the applicant / Agreement Holder has occurred.
- the applicant / Agreement Holder has provided false evidence for the purpose of receiving the support.
- the applicant / Agreement Holder has negligently failed to provide the necessary information (for instance, where Natural England has asked for it repeatedly and there is no reasonable justification as to why it has not been provided). Natural England cannot impose this penalty on this ground in the absence of negligence.

The withdrawal of support will be applied for the calendar year of notification plus the following calendar year. In addition support may be refused for other Rural Development schemes. The applicant / Agreement Holder will be notified and will have the right of appeal against such a decision.

8.6.13. Suspension of payments

Where a breach of Agreement is of a minor nature and does not compromise the objectives of an option and it can be rectified within 3 months of the date of notification to the customer of the action they need to take, payments may be withheld until the breach has been rectified. This is only available in certain circumstances.

8.6.14. Capital Payments; Over-declaration of expenditure

If the Agreement Holder submits a claim which exceeds the value of the costs which are eligible to be claimed, a penalty may be applied. Where the excess amount claimed is 10% or less of the value of the eligible costs, the payment will be reduced to the correct amount but no additional penalty will be applied. Where the excess amount claimed is more than 10%, the payment will be reduced to the correct amount and a penalty equal to the difference between the eligible costs and the amount claimed will be applied, up to a maximum of the entire value of the claim.

8.6.15. Interest charges

When Natural England or the RPA act to recover payments already made to the Agreement Holder, interest will be applied. Interest will begin to accrue from 60 days after the date of Natural England's notification of the breach to the Agreement Holder and will continue to accrue until the time of reimbursement of the payments from the Agreement Holder to Natural England or the RPA. This will include any period when the recovery or penalty is being appealed or is otherwise under review.

8.7 Disputes, appeals and complaints

If an applicant for CS, or an Agreement Holder, is unhappy with a decision taken by Natural England or the Forestry Commission in respect of an application or an Agreement, the applicant or Agreement Holder can appeal.

Appeals process – disagreeing with a decision or proposed action by Natural England or the Forestry Commission

To appeal against a decision that has already been taken, applicants or Agreement Holders should write to the Technical Services Team at Natural England (contact details are at section 5.2), advising of their wish to appeal and providing details of the reasons. The permitted reasons are limited:

- that the decision was based on an error of fact;
- that the decision was wrong in law;
- that the delivery body made a procedural error.

A Natural England adviser will ensure the case is properly investigated according to the four stage appeals process outlined below. If the applicant or Agreement Holder remains unsatisfied following the outcome of each appeal stage, they should write to Natural England requesting the appeal is advanced to the next stage in the process.

First Stage Appeal:

An administrative review of the decision will check whether information is correct, the guidance has been followed and no calculation errors have been made. First stage appeals will be dealt with within 20 working days of receipt.

Second Stage Appeal:

A Team Leader from Technical Services or an Area Team will then examine the case and look in detail at the Natural England decision and how scheme rules have been applied.

Third Stage Appeal:

Natural England will appoint a Senior Manager who has had no previous contact with the case to make an objective review of the Natural England decision and how scheme rules have been applied.

Final Stage Appeal:

A hearing is convened in front of an Independent Agricultural Appeals Panel, a panel of 3 independent agricultural professionals selected from the Public Appointments Register, and the Applicant / Agreement Holder has the opportunity to appear before the Panel. The Panel's recommendation is passed to the appropriate Defra Minister, who will make a final decision.

Complaints about service

If an applicant for CS, or an Agreement Holder, is unhappy about the way a member of staff has dealt with them, or with the level of service they have received, they should use the appropriate organisation's complaints procedure:

For Natural England: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england/about/complaints-procedure

For the Forestry Commission: www.forestry.gov.uk/complaints

For the Rural Payments Agency: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/rural-payments-agency/about/complaints-procedure

8.8 Site visits

Site visits are carried out in order to monitor Agreement Holders' compliance with the rules governing their agreements (and cross compliance on the whole Holding), and the success of CS overall. Agreement Holders must allow any UK or EU public authority (or their authorised representatives or auditors) to access their land or premises for this purpose and must assist and co-operate with any person carrying out a site visit. Any refusal to do so or obstruction is a breach of the Countryside Stewardship terms and conditions, and may also be a criminal offence. Further information on scheme inspection and monitoring is included in the scheme evidence requirements document, which will be made available shortly on GOV.UK.

8.9 Terminating agreements early

Natural England reserves the right to terminate the agreement on written notice to the Agreement Holder if:

- the Agreement Holder has breached the terms of the agreement;
- there is a change in circumstances affecting the Agreement Holder's eligibility to receive CS payments; or
- the Agreement Holder has failed to repay any sum which has become recoverable by the RPA in relation to a breach.

In addition to the right to terminate as detailed above, Natural England may terminate the agreement and any future payments on giving the Agreement Holder six months' written notice at any time.

The Agreement Holder may terminate the agreement at any time by giving written notice to Natural England. In these situations the Agreement Holder may be required to repay all or part of the payments received and their obligations under the agreement shall not cease until such repayment has been made.

8.10 Break Clause

For agreements lasting 10 years or more, it may be possible for either the Agreement Holder or Natural England to terminate the agreement after 5, 10 or 15 years (the "Break Point Dates"). The break clause is not available for capital grant agreements.

A break clause only permits closure of the agreement; amendment or re-negotiation of the Agreement is not available.

Where an Agreement contains the 10 year Woodland creation – maintenance payments (WD1) option, no break clause is available at the five year point as the funded management must be in place for the full ten years.

Either Natural England or the Agreement Holder can terminate the Agreement by giving written notice to the other party at least one month prior to the "Break Point Date".

If this right is exercised, grant payments already paid to the Agreement Holder will not have to be repaid, unless the Agreement Holder is in breach of scheme requirements or rules.

8.11 Transfers of land under agreement

Selling or transferring land to another party

Natural England will consider requests to transfer an agreement (in whole or part) to another party as a result of:

- a change in business structure;
- death;
- inheritance; or
- sale, lease or other similar transfer of land.

If the transfer request is approved, any options associated with the transferred land parcels will be included in a stand-alone CS Agreement. The agreement cannot be re-negotiated at the point of transfer or merged with another agri environment agreement, it will also expire at the end of the original agreement term.

Please Note: Capital Grant agreements are not transferable. If all or part of the land under a Capital Grant agreement is transferred to another party, the Capital Grant agreement will be

terminated on those parcels and the Agreement Holder may be required to repay all or part of the grant payments received.

The new owner/occupier (Transferee) should notify Natural England by requesting and submitting a Transfer Request Form to their nearest Natural England (Technical Services) office as early as possible in advance of any transfer of all or any part of the Agreement Land and no later than 90 calendar days after the transfer has taken place. If there are capital items associated with the transferred land parcels please contact Natural England.

In order for us to process the transfer as quickly and efficiently as possible, the Agreement Holder (Transferor) (the party transferring the land) should also contact us as early as possible about the transfer.

The Agreement Holder should tell the new owner/occupier about their agreement before they transfer any Agreement Land. If the new owner or occupier is willing to continue with the agreement, they must complete and return the relevant part of the Transfer Request Form to confirm their intention to continue with it within 90 calendar days of the date of transfer. In this case, the Agreement Holder may not be required to repay any multi-year grant payments for the period when the Agreement Land was in their ownership or occupation due to the transfer (though other recoveries may still apply, for instance in relation to breaches of agreement). The Agreement Holder may be required to repay all or part of any grants received for capital items. The other exception is where organic options are involved and in these cases the Agreement Holder will be required to repay all organic multi-year grant payments if the new owner or occupier does not maintain the organic registration on the land – see section 2.7.

If the new owner/occupier chooses not to continue with the Agreement on the transferred land, or if Natural England does not receive the new owner/occupier's confirmation of their intention to continue with the agreement within 90 calendar days of the date of transfer, the agreement will be terminated for that land. In this situation the Agreement Holder will not be required to repay any multi-year grant payments for the period when the Agreement Land was in their ownership due to the transfer (though other recoveries may still apply, for instance in relation to breaches of agreement). The Agreement Holder may be required to repay all or part of any grants received for capital items. The other exception is where organic options are involved and in these cases the Agreement Holder will be required to repay all organic multi-year grant payments if the new owner or occupier does not maintain the organic registration on the land – see section 2.7.

If only part of the Agreement Land is transferred, the original Agreement Holder will be expected to continue with the existing options on the land they have retained in their Agreement. The amended Agreement will run for the remaining term of the original Agreement.

Important to note: A transfer cannot be completed by Natural England until the Rural Payments Agency have also been informed of and completed the transfer of land parcels from one party to another. This needs to be done using the RLE1 form or online in the Rural Payments service.

Changes to customer details or businesses

If there is a change to customer details or business structure that results in a new SBI being provided by the Rural Payments Agency it will be treated as a transfer.

Acquiring additional land covered by another scheme or agreement

Where an Agreement Holder acquires land on which there are already commitments under another scheme, such as Environmental Stewardship (ES), Countryside Stewardship (CS) or the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS), there will be a range of options available for how the acquired land is managed in future. A Natural England adviser can discuss the individual circumstances with the Agreement Holder and propose the best solution available. Agreement Holders in this position should contact Natural England.

However, where the acquired land is already under an agreement (ES, EWGS or CS) and does not remain at the same or a higher level of management, the original Agreement Holder may be liable for any repayment of grants made under that agreement.

When will agreement transfers take effect?

Please contact your Natural England office for confirmation of when your transfer will take effect, the impact on any outstanding payments and the process, in addition to the completion of the Transfer Request Form, that needs to be followed.

Natural England recommends that each party involved in a transfer takes independent legal advice to ensure that their respective obligations or liabilities are built into the relevant transfer documentation (for instance the contract of sale or the lease agreement). However Natural England cannot reimburse any costs incurred in the transfer process.

If a transfer is progressing and has not been fully processed at the time of the annual claim submission the owner/occupier will need to countersign the claim form for the land they will be taking on. Please contact your local Natural England office for the counter signatory annex to the claim form.

8.12 Amendments to the Agreement

Changes requested by the Agreement Holder

The Agreement Holder should be able to carry out the options and management under their Agreement without difficulty. However, for both Mid and Higher Tier, should an exceptional situation arise where an Agreement Holder needs to change the choice or location of management options, Natural England will consider requests to amend the Agreement. Repayment of all or part of previous payments may be required. Natural England will also consider requests by the Agreement Holder to amend the Agreement to enhance delivery of the environmental benefits.

Continuity of management is important during the lifetime of the agreement if the environmental benefits sought are to be achieved. Natural England will therefore only agree to changes that are absolutely necessary.

No amendments or rescheduling of approved Capital Items is permitted.

The Agreement Holder must contact their local Natural England office (see details at Chapter 9) in writing to request any option amendments and Natural England must agree to them before the Agreement Holder makes any changes to their location or management. All amendments come into effect from 1 January of the next calendar year. The amendment will not be valid until the Agreement Holder has received a letter from Natural England agreeing to the amendment and advising them

of the date from which it will take effect. If the request is successful, Natural England will provide the Agreement Holder with confirmation within three months of receipt of a written request. The Agreement Holder must continue to manage their agreement under the existing prescriptions until the date the amendment takes effect, as set out in the formal confirmation of the amendment. The Agreement Holder may also need to contact the RPA to notify them of changes to their Holding.

Variation of agreements by Natural England

Very rarely, it may be necessary for Natural England to vary the agreement in line with changes to European law and in other exceptional circumstances. In applying for the scheme, the Agreement Holder accepts that such changes may be made at any time. Natural England will make such changes available on its website in a List of Changes document. Where the changes are significant in affecting the land management required, or affect financial aspects of the agreement, Natural England will give the Agreement Holder notice of this in writing.

If adjustments are required to meet changes in EU Regulations, relevant mandatory standards, requirements or obligations and the Agreement Holder is not prepared to accept these changes, the commitment will expire and reimbursement will not be required.

8.13 Metal Detecting: requirements

Metal detecting is not allowed on Scheduled Monuments, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and known archaeological sites on Agreement Land. These are identified on the Farm Environment Record (FER), Historic Environment FER Map and Record (HEFER), and Baseline Evaluation of Higher Tier Agreements (BEHTA). Natural England will advise Agreement Holders in writing of any new sites that are discovered that will also be covered by these terms.

On all other land, Agreement Holders must ensure that metal detecting does not conflict with the requirements of their Agreement, in particular where proposed metal detecting may affect their ability to meet option prescriptions. For example, options supporting ground nesting birds, priority habitats, or rare arable plants are incompatible with ground disturbance and such activities may cause a breach of agreement and result in penalties (see section 8.8).

Any metal detecting that Agreement Holders allow on Agreement Land should be undertaken in accordance with best practice laid down in the current [Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting](#) in England and Wales, and all finds must be reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

8.14 Archaeological fieldwork: requirements

If archaeological fieldwork (such as survey, test pitting or excavation) is proposed on agreement land that would cause, or may cause, ground disturbance or damage to any known archaeological sites or other environmental assets, Agreement Holders will need to seek approval from Natural England (see section 8.17). Any proposed fieldwork must have the written support of the local authority Historic Environment Service.

In addition:

- any archaeological fieldwork involving ground disturbance on Scheduled Monuments requires Scheduled Monument Consent from the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture Media and Sport, as advised by Historic England, before fieldwork can commence;

- on Scheduled Monuments, any geophysical survey requires written consent from Historic England before fieldwork can commence; and
- any archaeological fieldwork (including the use of ground-penetrating radar or remote sensing) on SSSIs requires written consent from Natural England before fieldwork can commence.

8.15 Farm Environment Record (FER) /Historic Environment Farm Environment Record (HEFER)/ Baseline Evaluation of Higher Tier Agreements (BEHTA)

As set out at sections 5.4 and 8.1, it is a mandatory requirement to retain all the features identified in the FER and the HEFER and to protect them from damage or removal for the duration of the Agreement.

It is a mandatory requirement to retain all features identified in a BEHTA (as described in section 5.5) and protect them from damage: the NE adviser will explain these requirements when progressing Higher Tier applications.

Removal or damage to a BEHTA feature represents an agreement breach (see section 8.8), except where this is permitted under the Agreement, for example where arable land (BEHTA feature code A01) is under management to re-create species rich grassland.

8.16 Force majeure

If the Agreement Holder is prevented from complying with their obligations under the Agreement due to force majeure or exceptional circumstances, Natural England must be notified in writing, within 15 working days from the date on which the Agreement Holder (or any person authorised to act on the Agreement Holder's behalf) is in a position to do so. They'll need to give evidence to show:

- what has happened
- how the event meant they couldn't meet the scheme rules

Force majeure or exceptional circumstances may include, but is not limited to:

- the death or long-term professional incapacity of the Agreement Holder;
- a severe natural disaster gravely affecting the Holding;
- the accidental destruction of livestock buildings on the Holding;
- an epizootic or a plant disease affecting part or all of the Agreement Holder's crops, trees or livestock; or
- expropriation of all or a large part of the Holding (provided that the expropriation could not have been anticipated at the time the application for funding was made).

Natural England will consider the facts on a case-by-case basis in deciding whether or not the Agreement Holder is relieved of all or part of their obligations under the Agreement and whether all or part of the grant should be withheld or repaid.

If the agreement holder is aware of the issue when entering into their agreement then it is unlikely to fall under the force majeure or exceptional circumstances provisions.

8.17 Minor and temporary adjustments to Agreement management: requirements

Where the Agreement Holder considers that, due to factors beyond their control in a particular year, they will be temporarily prevented from carrying out some of the management conditions required under their Agreement, they may apply to Natural England for a minor and temporary adjustment to the management conditions applying for that year.

For example, where bad weather such as snow is preventing normal grazing and stock require supplementary feeding, but the Agreement does not allow this; or where there is a serious weed infestation which is likely to prevent delivery of the management required and the only way to deal with it is by the application of herbicides, but the Agreement does not allow this.

To request a minor and temporary adjustment to the management requirements set out in the agreement a Minor and Temporary Adjustment Form must be completed. This form should be downloaded (from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/minor-and-temporary-adjustment-mta-form-countryside-stewardship>), completed and submitted by the Agreement Holder and sent to their local Natural England Technical Services office. Simple, straightforward cases will be dealt with within 20 working days of receipt. More complicated cases involving additional contact/liaison with customers to clarify details will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

During periods of extreme weather where access to forage is severely restricted and the welfare of livestock might otherwise be compromised, Natural England may be able to provide conditional consent over the telephone or by email. However this must be followed by a formal written request and permission.

If the Agreement Holder proceeds without written or conditional permission, they may be penalised for a breach of agreement.

Natural England will consider the request in the light of:

- Alternative management – for example in the case of supplementary feeding when there is deep snow on the ground, is there alternative grazing available, or can the livestock be moved?
- The specifics of the minor and temporary adjustment requested – what adjustment is necessary, where and for what period of time it will apply;
- The impact of the proposed activity on the income foregone payment relevant to the required management;
- The net environmental impact of the proposed activity;
- Evidence from third parties; and
- The administrative cost of making a reduction to the payment (if required).

Additional management costs that might arise from a minor and temporary adjustment will not be recompensed.

Where a minor and temporary adjustment results in a reduced cost or increased output (with respect to the income foregone calculation), the payment rate relating to the area of the minor and temporary adjustment will be adjusted by a similar amount.

Please note that Natural England cannot approve a minor and temporary adjustment to an agreement if this is likely to, or will, result in a breach of legislation, general scheme requirements, eligibility conditions, or the cross compliance rules.

If Natural England agrees to the suggested minor and temporary adjustment, they will send the Agreement Holder a letter or email giving permission. The Agreement Holder should keep this approval with their agreement documentation.

8.18 Grazing management: requirements

If the agreement contains one or more options which limit grazing activity (listed in section 3.4), the Agreement Holder must meet the following requirements:

- Avoid over-grazing and under-grazing across the whole grazed area of the Holding. Stock must be distributed across the grazed area of the Holding to ensure this is the case, and for:
- **Mid Tier:** Do not stock more than 2.5 Livestock Units (LU) / ha on non-Severely Disadvantaged Area (SDA) land and 2.0 LU / ha on SDA land on average over the year across all agricultural land on the farm or production unit where the agreement is located; or
- **Higher Tier:** Do not stock at more than the rates specified in the Agreement Document on average over the year across all agricultural land on the farm or production unit where the agreement is located.

Under-grazing is defined as occurring where annual growth is not being fully utilised, or where scrub or coarse vegetation is becoming evident, and this is detrimental to the environmental interests of the site.

Over-grazing means grazing land supporting so many livestock that the growth, quality or diversity of vegetation is adversely affected, and this is detrimental to the environmental interests of the site.

The following table should be used to calculate livestock units on average over the year across all agricultural land on the farm or production unit where the agreement is located.

Animal numbers converted into Livestock Units (LUs) as follows	LUs
Cattle over 2 years	1.0
Cattle over 6 months to 2 years	0.6
Lowland ewe and lamb; ram	0.12
Hill ewe and lamb; hogg; teg	0.08
Ram and teg over 6 months	0.15
Horse	1.0
Pony / Donkey	0.8
Goat	0.12

Please note, if the Agreement Holder to which this requirement applies acquires additional agricultural land, they must notify Natural England by letter or email within 90 calendar days of the acquisition. This is because Natural England is required to carry out administrative checks to ensure this has not affected calculation of the stocking density requirement. This notification is in addition to any requirements to ensure that the land has been registered on the RPA's land management system (previously known as the Rural Land Register).

8.19 Maintenance of capital items

Capital items funded under CS are required to be maintained by the Agreement Holder on the Agreement Land, in the condition and to the specification for which they were grant-aided, for a set period of time.

For capital works which form part of a multi-year agreement, this obligation will last for the whole time that the parcel of land in which the capital item is located is under agreement.

For capital items forming part of a stand-alone capital agreement, the obligation will last for five years beginning on agreement start date.

For woodland creation and woodland infrastructure capital items, the obligation is five years from the agreement start date. However for woodland creation that is also in receipt of a ten-year maintenance payment, the obligation lasts for the ten year period.

Payments may be recovered if these requirements are not fulfilled, or if Agreement Land, within which the capital item is located, leaves the scheme before the expiry of any linked maintenance obligations.

8.20 How Natural England will use and share Agreement Holder's information

The data controller is Natural England, 4th Floor, Foss House, Kings Pool, 1-2 Peasholme Green, York, YO1 7PX.

Agreement Holder information will be stored and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. This Act gives individuals the right to know what data Natural England hold, how Natural England use it, with whom Natural England share it, and how Natural England ensures that it is accurate.

Natural England will use the data for administering and analysing applications, agreements and claims under Countryside Stewardship. Natural England will circulate and discuss it, in confidence, with those persons or organisations that help us to assess and monitor applications, agreements and claims. Some information will be shared with other grant distribution bodies and government departments, to enable them to detect fraudulent applications, agreements and claims and to co-ordinate the processing of complementary applications, agreements and claims. To do this, Natural England may have to discuss applications, agreements and claims with third parties or disclose information about funding decisions.

Natural England are required to make certain information about Countryside Stewardship applications, agreements and claims publicly available to meet requirements set out in the European Regulations governing payment of these grants. Natural England will do this by publishing information proactively or on request.

Details disclosed may include, but are not limited to:

- name;
- the name and address of the farm or business;
- postal town/parish;
- the first part of the postcode;
- the payments received for each measure; and
- details of the environmental features and management options they contain.

Natural England is also subject to transparency obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004. Participation in Countryside Stewardship involves expenditure of public money and is therefore a matter of public interest. Natural England will respect personal privacy while complying with access to information requests to the extent necessary to enable Natural England to comply with its statutory obligations under this legislation. Information disclosed under these obligations includes:

- grid references;
- the total area under agreement;
- the location of land parcels; and
- details of inspections by Defra or its agents

Natural England, or their appointed agents, may use the name, address and other details on an application form to make contact in connection with customer research aimed at improving the services that Natural England provides to customers.

8.21 State aid rules

Countryside Stewardship Payments under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 are made in accordance with the Rural Development Regulations and State Aid Notification SA41676.



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



The European
Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development:
Europe investing in
rural areas



Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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