How to apply

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Introduction

The 2024 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) application round will open for applications in early 2024. A summary is below but it is important that you read the detail for each element you wish to apply for as there are important changes

Element of AECS	Application Window
Stand–alone Water-use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon	15 February 2024 – 19 April 2024
Slurry Stores	15 February 2024 – 19 April 2024
Stand - alone Organic conversion and maintenance	01 February 2024 - 31 July 2024
Agri-environment	01 February 2024 – 10 June 2024

Note: If you are applying for Organic conversion and maintenance as part of a single application with Agri-environment management it must be submitted by the 10 June 2024 deadline. Similarly, if you are applying for water-use efficiency irrigation lagoon capital items alongside other AECS management options your application must be submitted in the main Agri-Environment application window 1 February to 10 June 2024.

Water-use Efficiency – Irrigation Lagoon

This item can stand alone or be part of a wider application. Stand alone irrigation applications will be assessed on their own merits and against other stand alone irrigation lagoon applications if budget pressures constrain our ability to approve applications.

Slurry Storage

The AECS Slurry Storage option remains nationally available, except in areas designated as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones. Businesses that currently house livestock on slurry-based system with less than 6 months storage capacity will be eligible to apply.

Organic Conversion/Maintenance

The area caps were removed in 2023 for conversion and maintenance. While there is no upper limit for land in organic conversion or maintenance you must be able to demonstrate that the land is used for agricultural purposes.

Improving Public Access (IPA)

IPA will not be opening for new applications in 2024.

Agri-environment

To maximise the benefits of the scheme while mindful of budgetary pressures, the amount that can be applied for under the following two options have been restricted.

- Pond creation and restoration is restricted to 2000m2 per application and 600m2 per pond
- Creation of Hedgerows is restricted to 1000m per application. (The limit has been raised from the 500m limit set in the 2023 round)

The capital items below that were not available for the 2023 application round are available for the 2024 round

- Restoring Drystone or Flagstone Dykes
- The Heather Cutting cutting element of the Muirburn and Heather Cutting capital item
- Primary Treatment of Bracken – Mechanised or Chemical*
- Follow up Treatment of Bracken - Mechanised or Chemical*

* Chemical control of Bracken is no longer funded through AECS following the decision by the manufacturers of Asulam not to pursue authorisation for the chemical in the UK.

For clarity, the items/options below remain suspended for the 2024 round.

- Creation of Species Rich Grassland
- Heather Restoration
- Heather Restoration – Follow - up Molinia control
- The Muirburn element of the Muirburn and Heather Cutting capital item

All supporting documentation should be submitted by the relevant application deadlines as outlined above. Consider early on what supporting documents you will need. Some will require input from other individuals or organisations and it is important that you allow enough time to get these inputs **before** the closing date. Failure to submit the required documents by the closing date may result in your application being deemed ineligible.

If you intend to reapply in 2024 on the same land as in your expiring/expired AECS contract you **must** consider the current requirements of the land and not assume that the existing management can simply carry on unchanged. You must submit new information including up-to-date management plans using the latest plan templates provided.

If you intend to apply for management to benefit a designated site (SSSI or European site) you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot before preparing your application.

If you are considering applying for deer management, you **must** contact a NatureScot Wildlife Management Officer before applying. We advise you do this as soon as the application window opens. The deadline for NatureScot pre-application advice on deer is **30 April 2024.**

If you are considering applying for peatland management, you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot at least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your proposals.

If you require a NatureScot endorsement to allow you to apply for an option outwith its target area you **must** submit the endorsement request form to NatureScot as early as possible and at least one month before the closing date. If it is approved you must upload the endorsement as part of your application.

Role of the case officer

When you submit your application for the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme it will be assigned to a case officer. They will manage the application process from the formal submission to the point at which it has been assessed and presented to the relevant individual or group who will determine whether it should be approved, either in whole or in part.

Please refer to the ' Your application will then be assessed ' step of the application process below.

# Application process

1. Consult website

You should first check the relevant sections of the AECS website to get a better understanding of the rules of the scheme, and to check that you will be eligible to apply and meet the entry criteria for the 2024 application round. Please read the Eligibility guidance.

Links to all the individual pages of the full scheme guidance, together with rules and management requirements for each management option and capital item, can be found below:

- [Agri-Environment Climate Scheme full guidance](#)
- [Management options homepage](#)
- [Capital items homepage](#)
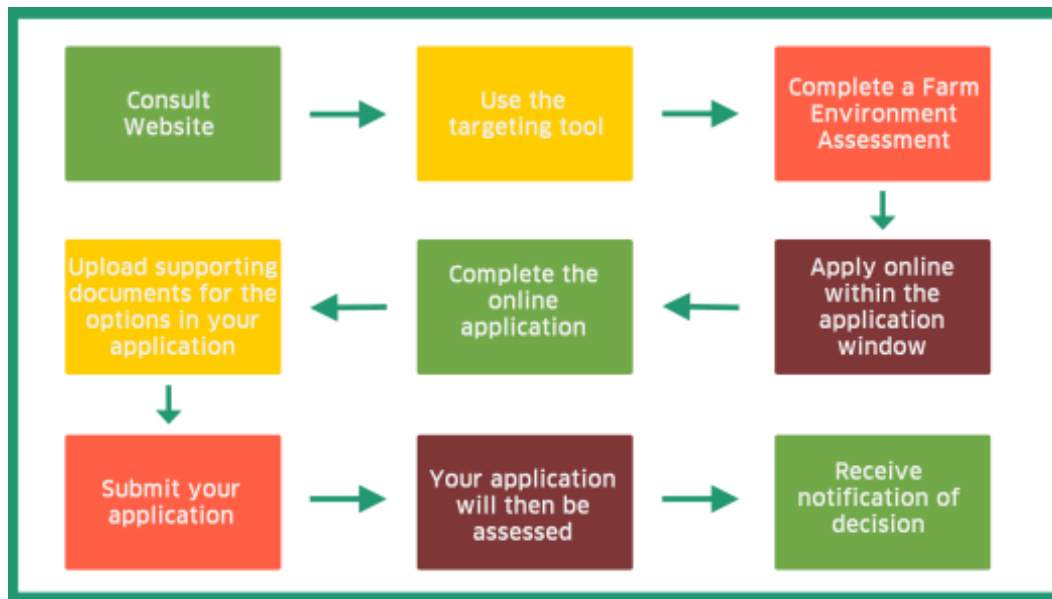
2. Use the targeting tool

Enter your holding number into the targeting tool (MS Excel, Size: 12.2 MB) to check which options or capital items are available on your land. If you have several holdings, you will need to enter each of these separately. In exceptional cases you can apply for other options or capital items if you have obtained an Endorsement from NatureScot.

If you find your location code is not recognised when you enter it on the targeting tool, please contact your local RPID office to discuss this matter further.

3. Complete a Farm Environment Assessment where necessary

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

- Coastal embankment breaching, lowering or removal.
- River embankment breaching, lowering or removal.
- Restoring (protecting) river banks.
- Stand-alone slurry stores.
- Organics.
- Upland habitat impact assessment for deer management (as stand-alone capital item).
- Improving Public Access (not available for 2024 round).
- Water - use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon

The Farm Environment Assessment is a tool to help you to take stock of the important environmental features on your holding and plan what to include in your application.

You can find out more about Farm Environment Assessment on the guidance page . The webpage also explains the requirement to carry out a Diffuse Pollution Assessment and a Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment if applicable.

4. Apply online within the application window

Your application for support under this scheme must be submitted online by registering and logging in to Rural Payments and Services.

You can register for this service here if you have not registered already.

Please refer to Eligibility page for information on how many applications can be submitted per business per year.

5. Complete the online application

Once you have logged in to Rural Payments and Services, you will be able to submit an application online.

You can do this by clicking 'Applications' from your customer home page and selecting 'Agri-Environment Climate Scheme' from the drop down list to start a new application.

You will be asked a series of questions about your application. You will also need to enter the management options that you wish to undertake as well as any capital items.

The relevant Land Parcel Identifiers (LPID) will need to be used (unless not yet allocated by RPID) and you will need to supply the areas (hectares) to be managed under the relevant options and capital items.

The application system will prompt you when errors arise during the completion of the application. For example, you will be prompted when information requested at a particular section has not been provided to allow you to progress to the next stage of the application process.

The Online application guidance is provided below.

Online application guidance (PDF, Size: 4.1 MB)

doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpaymentsandservices.org/media/resources/AECS-2022---Online-Application-Guidance.pdf (Guidance)

6. Upload supporting documents for the options in your application

Along with the information you complete online you will also need to supply additional documents - see checklist of requirements .

Any supporting documents should be uploaded directly into the application system. If you have problems doing this or are not sure which documents you need to submit, contact your local Rural Payments and Inspections Division area office or NatureScot.

Supporting documents must be submitted by the relevant application deadline for the application type you are applying for, as set out in the Introduction above.

7. Submit your application

Once you have completed your application successfully, the system will display a summary of the options or items you have applied for.

A more detailed Schedule of Works will also be available setting out the proposed claim profile of any annual management option payments and payment details for any capital items applicable to your application.

If you are satisfied that the summary and Schedule of Works are accurate and correct, you should then confirm you have read the declarations and undertakings. View a copy of the declarations and undertakings.

You will then be directed to click **'Submit application'**. An acknowledgment of your application will appear on screen along with your application reference number. This reference number can be used to track the progress of your application.

You **cannot** amend an application after it has been submitted. However, an application can be withdrawn and an amended application submitted before the closing date.

8. Your application will then be assessed

There are two levels of entry to the AECS scheme and applications falling into each level will be assessed and scored as follows:

- Level one – this is for lower value applications up to an agreed monetary value for the round. This agreed value is dependent on the amount and value of the applications received. Applications at this level will undergo an initial assessment by a case officer including a discussion with you. The discussion may take place during an on-farm visit, depending on the options you have applied

for. Your application is then considered by the Rural Payments and Inspections Division or NatureScot for approval or rejection. In certain circumstances, The National Project Assessment Committee (NPAC), referred to at Level two entry below, may be called upon by the regional offices to provide an opinion on level one cases which require a decision on a point of principle or value for money issue before the final decision is reached.

- Level two – this is for higher value applications above an agreed monetary value for the round. This agreed value is dependent on the amount and value of the applications received. Applications for this level will undergo an initial assessment as per level one. After assessment the case will be considered for approval or rejection by an expert panel constituted on a national basis titled, the National Project Assessment Committee (NPAC).

The Application Assessment and Eligibility pages have more detailed information

Scoring criteria

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

Please see the scoring criteria for agri-environments applications in section 2 of the scoring page .

The organic maintenance or organic conversion element of applications will be scored separately. (See section 3 of the scoring page).

The Slurry Storage and standalone Water-use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon applications will be scored separately. (See sections 4 and 5 respectively of the scoring page)

9. Notification of decision

Once your application has been assessed, you will be notified as to whether it has been approved or rejected. If your application is approved you will then be sent a contract. In some cases, only part of your application may be approved.

If your application is unsuccessful you will be provided with the reasons why your application has been rejected. If you are not satisfied with the decision reached you may seek a formal review.

You should read the contract offer letter and all the contract documentation and ensure it is acceptable before formally accepting the contract terms.

You must follow the instructions included both in the contract offer letter and within the contract itself to confirm that you wish to accept the terms of the contract offer.

View a copy of the standard contract terms and conditions (PDF, Size: 271.0 kB) .

However, please note that there may be additional conditions included in the contract which are specific to your application.

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

An agent, acting as an accountable person, can only accept on behalf of a business if they have the mandated authority to do so.

If you are an agent accepting a contract on an applicants business' behalf, the case officer will contact the relevant RPID area office to request confirmation that you have the authority to sign the contract. Any mandate in place will apply to the office that an agent works from. It does not apply to the agent as an individual.

You may only start work when you have accepted the contract offer and have received a confirmation letter letting you know that you can begin.

You are under no obligation to accept the contract offer. If you decide not to proceed, please tell us and we will cancel the contract offer. The case officer will formally acknowledge your rejection.

Recent changes

Section	Change

Introduction	Opening and closing dates for 2024 application round. Options/capital items restricted in 2024, not available in 2023 but available in 2024 / suspended for the 2024 application round , including Improving Public Access. Added information covering Water-use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon, slurry storage, applying for Deer management, Peatland management and the submission of an endorsement request form to NatureScot.
Application Process	Point 2 -Link to updated Targeting tool. Revised text - In exceptional cases you can apply for other options or capital items if you have obtained an Endorsement from NatureScot. Point 3 - FEA not required for Water-use Efficiency – Irrigation Lagoon where this is the only option applied for. Point 7 - A copy of the declarations and undertakings provided. Point 8 added text stating where Scoring Criteria information for Agri Environment, Organics, Slurry Storage and Irrigation Lagoons can be found on Scoring Criteria page. Point 9 - A copy of the standard contract terms and conditions provided If your application is unsuccessful you will be provided with the reasons why your application has been rejected and you may seek a formal review. September 2024: Point 8 - added sentence to Level one relating to NPAC.
Whole page	Minor edits since page was published for 2023 round

Previous versions

Previous versions of this page

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