

Important Tips and Guidance for Applications

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Introduction

To make sure your application is accepted when first submitted, it's important that it is completed properly, with all the information needed.

Before you start your submission, please take into account the following tips and common errors.

Please also refer to "[checklist of Requirements](#)" and "[Further requirements for applicants](#) " which expand on the information provided below.

Top tips for submitting an AECS application

- familiarise yourself with individual option and capital item guidance and full scheme guidance. Check that you are using the latest version which is in place when the scheme re-opens for applications in 2019
- designated sites - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Natura sites (SPA or SAC): If you are applying within a designated site, you are strongly advised to speak to [Scottish Natural Heritage](#) before preparing your application. This will help ensure the management you are proposing is appropriate and all issues are being addressed, and will reduce the risk of an application being rejected
- consult with relevant individuals/bodies to obtain documentation / necessary approval ahead of submitting your application e.g Scheduled Monument Consent, where applicable, from Historic Environment Scotland when incorporating management of scheduled monuments within your application
- complete all sections of the online application correctly. For example, if some of the area proposed for management is held under secure tenancy and the rest is owned select both options
- double check that all the required documents accompanying your application meet the specific standards referred to in the scheme guidance and have been uploaded or submitted before the application deadline. Ensure that you use the latest templates ([see the checklist of requirements](#))
- for all management options and capital items which require an individual plan to support your application, (e.g. Grazing Plan, Scrub Control Plan) we strongly advise that you use the relevant plan template.. If you choose to create your own plan, then you **MUST** provide all information requested in the template. Failure to do so may result in the plan being deemed not fit for purpose and the option or item removed from your application.
- ensure maps are created and annotated in accordance with the Mapping, Farm Environment Assessment, Diffuse Pollution Risk Assessment and Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment

guidance (where applicable). You must also meet mapping requirements as set out for each individual management option and capital item and in the Collaborative approach section of the Scoring Criteria guidance, where applicable

- contact your local [RPID Area Office](#) or [Scottish Natural Heritage](#) regional office if you have a query about the scheme. RPID Area Offices can also help if you have any difficulties in uploading supporting documents for your application
- check the Schedule of Work produced at the time the application is due to be submitted to make sure that it contains all the management options and capital items you wish to apply for and that the proposed claim timings are correct
- it is essential that the application is prepared with the full involvement and understanding of the land manager responsible for delivering the work on the ground. The Case Officer's site visit will include a discussion with this person and if they are unaware of what has been included in the application or cannot deliver some options/items the full application will be rejected
- if an application contains many errors and would require significant changes to make the proposals eligible for funding, it will be deemed not fit for purpose and will be rejected. Case officers are not able to make significant changes within the rules of the scheme

Common errors

Below are some of the most common errors made when submitting an AECS application. These can result in your application being rejected, so it's worth taking the time to get it right.

Documents required that relate to the ownership/tenancy of the land

A common issue with applications is a failure to submit documents related to the ownership/tenancy of the land:

- a completed landlord declaration form or copy of lease
- crofting shareholders support/evidence
- a fully completed shared boundary agreement for march fencing or restoring drystone or flagstone dykes

Please check the guidance for occupancy of land for more information.

Occupancy of land

A common error regarding the submission of a lease has been when it is submitted for another purpose and it is then used in support of an AECS application.

To clarify, for this to be acceptable, the applicant is responsible for making sure that the lease submitted already meets the AECS requirements.

The applicant must also make sure that sufficient details are entered in the Proof of secure tenancy section of the online AECS application to alert the case officer of this request – information to be added about the lease's earlier submission to RPID and stating that it is also to be used for AECS.

A common error for Improving Public Access (IPA) applicants was failing to have a contractual licence (a third party agreement) in place.

Documents required to gain points as part of the Scoring Criteria

A common issue which can result in the failure to score points under the relevant Scoring Criteria categories is the absence of the relevant documentation. Examples of this are included below:

National priorities - Biodiversity: enhancing biodiversity in the wider countryside by conserving vulnerable priority species (VPS).

In order to secure the points for enhancing biodiversity you must make sure that:

- the Vulnerable Priority Species form is submitted

- your application includes relevant management/capital options for the species you have provided supporting information for

Please check the guidance for [vulnerable priority species](#) for more information.

Collaborative approach

To be awarded points for collaboration, the person leading on the collaborative project must correctly complete a Collaborative Management Plan (using the template in the [Scoring Criteria webpage](#)) along with a map or maps clearly showing the extent of the collaborative work proposed.

The Plan must be agreed with all parties involved and must clearly demonstrate the contribution each participant applying to AECS will make. (You can apply for funding towards the cost of the plan, as explained in the [Claims and Payments webpage](#)).

A copy of the completed Plan and map(s) must be submitted by each applicant involved in the collaborative project, along with their AECS application.

Including items/options without checking their eligibility

Every option or item has guidance stating when it is eligible. It is a common error to assume that similar options from previous schemes have retained the same eligibility requirements. Always check the latest AECS guidance.

Also, please pay attention to the best practice that is outlined in the supporting guidance for options and items, as this will help ensure that you meet the scheme requirements.

The table below shows common / potential causes of errors relating to options and capital items:

Subject		Comments
Management options general		Ensure the specified supporting maps and tables are submitted as part of the Farm Environment assessment, Diffuse Pollution Risk Assessment and Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment, where applicable
Targeted options		If an option is not on the list for your holding, you cannot apply for it unless you submit an endorsement with your application. Otherwise the whole application may become ineligible. Allow plenty of time to obtain an endorsement from SNH to ensure you have it in time for the submission deadline. Please refer to the 'Endorsement' section of the AECS guidance to check when an 'Endorsement' is available, as these are limited to certain options and designated sites.
Targeting tool		If you are applying for several holdings, remember that an option may be eligible on the Main Location Code but not on the other Location Codes.
Management Options	Management options that require capital items	Ensure the relevant capital items are included. For example, the Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds option requires the Creation of Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds capital item.
	Water margins options	The summary tables must be fully completed, making it clear where the margins are of varying widths, and excluding the margin width required under GAEC.
	Wader grazed grassland options	For Wader grazed grassland applicants you must choose one of the three grazing regimes. In your application, you must provide detail of which grazing regime you have chosen.

	Wader grazed grassland Wader and Wildlife mown grassland	Do not plant hedges around fields entered into these management options. In order to be awarded National priority VPS scoring points, you must not include a 30m margin adjacent to trees, hedges or woodland in your claim area. This buffer must be clearly marked and labelled on your management map.
	Habitat Mosaic Management and Species-Rich Grassland Management	If you are applying for these options on hill and upland rough grazing land, you must request an endorsement from SNH prior to applying. If the endorsement is awarded, you must submit this alongside your application. Allow enough time to ensure you have this prior to the application round closing.
	Wader management on heath mosaics (within the Health management option)	To apply for this option, fields must fall within the target area for the wader grazed grassland option and you must stipulate in your application which waders your plan will benefit. You must follow the grazing regime stated in the option. If the area has previously been managed as moorland under agri-environment, you must continue to claim it as moorland. If the land has not been claimed under agri-environment before, but is a large, heath/mire dominated area, then it should be entered under the Moorland management option - failure to do so will result in the option being removed from the plan, which could jeopardise the whole application. If you are unsure of habitat eligibility, speak to SNH or RPID before applying.
Capital items	Actual costs	Where there is an actual cost capital item, you must provide the quotes and complete the quotations table in line with the scheme guidance. Missing or inadequate quotes for some items, such as water troughs or upland habitat impact assessment, may make your application ineligible. Actual cost fencing must be fully justified and is only available where there is a specific need e.g.. helicopter required to deliver materials in inaccessible sites.
	Fencing	If there is a current stock fence in place and it is not derelict and would last the five years of an AECS agreement then funding for a new stock fence will not be considered acceptable. In certain circumstances, we may allow funding of a new fence to create a wider water margin where the existing fenced margin is too narrow. This does not apply if the margin was created with Rural priorities funding and is being increased in width to meet GAEC 1 requirements. Where a new fence is permitted, it will be a condition of the AECS contract that you remove and dispose of the existing fence appropriately - at your own cost. If you are unsure, request advice from RPID or SNH. Current and proposed grazing practices will also be considered in determining if the stock fence is necessary/beneficial for a particular management option.

	Fence removal	This is only eligible if it is required to deliver benefit to a habitat or is in black grouse or capercaillie core areas. It cannot be used to fund removal of existing fencing so that new fencing can be erected.
	Scare fencing	This item is only available alongside Restoring Drystone or Flagstone Dykes. For all other situations apply for temporary electric fencing.
	Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation	Plan to undertake all scrub control on a site within the first two years of your contract, to prevent continuous seeding of shrub species.
	Hard standings, Livestock Tracks, Livestock Crossings	If applying for these items, there must be a diffuse pollution risk which the items will resolve.
	Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems Hard Standings Livestock Crossing Livestock Tracks Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems Pesticide Handling Facilities Water-use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon	If applying for any of these options, you must submit a Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment
	Sediment Ponds	Where sediment ponds have an integrated sediment trap, they need to be claimed separately as each has a different cost.

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