

Essential Information for Applications

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Introduction

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

Before you start your submission, please take into account the following guidance on essential information to include and common errors.

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

Essential information when 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 for the 2024 round.
- [Designated sites](#) - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and European sites (SPA or SAC): **If you are applying within a designated site, you are strongly recommended to make early contact with [NatureScot](#), at least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your proposals.** This will help ensure the management you are proposing is appropriate for the notified features of the site and that all issues are being addressed, and will reduce the risk of an application being rejected. If you do not allow enough time to discuss your proposals with NatureScot before submitting your application, you are at risk of having options/capital items removed from the application, which could jeopardise the whole application.
- Deer management: if you are considering applying for deer management, you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot at least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your proposals. This will help ensure that deer proposals fit with the scheme requirements.
- Peatland management: 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. This will help ensure that peatland proposals fit with the scheme requirements.
- Consult with relevant individuals/bodies to obtain any necessary documentation or approvals ahead of submitting your application. Check [the further requirements page](#) which has information on consents and licences.
- 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**. For documents where we provide a template, ensure that you use the latest version of the templates ([see also the Checklist of Requirements](#))
- For all management options and capital items which require an individual Management Plan to support your application, (e.g. Grazing Plan, Scrub Control Plan) you must use the relevant plan template and provide all the 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 being removed from your application. In some cases, it may result in the whole application being rejected.
- Ensure maps are created and annotated in accordance with the [Mapping guidance](#) and [Farm Environment Assessment](#) (FEA) guidance (where applicable). You must also meet mapping requirements as set out for each individual management option and capital item.
- Contact your local [RPID Area Office](#) or [NatureScot](#) regional office as early as possible 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 Works for your application before submitting your application, 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 not possible to add options or capital items once the application has been submitted.
- 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 or its associated supporting documents contain multiple errors, or if it 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 or allow significant changes within the rules of the scheme. This is especially important in relation to Moorland Management Plans, where you must ensure that the detail related to flock numbers in the plan aligns to the completed grazing tables and flock records. Additionally, there must be adequate detail on current habitat condition and adequate explanation of how proposed future management is reflecting this and taking account of previous management.**
- **Don't wait until the last few days of the application round to upload your supporting documents and finalise your application, instead upload as you finalise your documents to avoid issues with RP&S which may occur when usage is very high.**

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. Below are some examples:

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

Please check the guidance for [Occupancy of land](#) for more information.

If a lease document has been obtained for another purpose and it is then used in support of an AECS application the applicant must ensure that the lease submitted already meets the AECS requirements.

The applicant must also enter sufficient details in the Proof of Secure Tenancy section of the online AECS application to alert the case officer of this request. Information about the lease's earlier submission to RPID and that the lease is also to be used for the AECS application should be provided.

Documents required to gain points under 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 the required management options or capital items for the species you have provided supporting information for

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

Wader Survey - For applications benefitting VPS waders, additional points can be awarded if recent bird survey data (within last five years) is provided and provides evidence of VPS waders.

The survey for VPS waders has to be carried out by one of the following:

- Non-Government Organisation (NGO) - The survey should be conducted by an environmental NGO where the person doing the survey is experienced in undertaking wader surveys.
- Project Officer - Specialist individuals involved in wader projects. These could be funded by RSPB, Working for Waders, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) etc. The individual must be experienced in conducting wader surveys.
- Ecologist - A member of a recognised body such as The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)

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 (or currently in) AECS will make. 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. **Always check the latest AECS guidance and do not assume it is unchanged since the last round.**

It is also essential to read 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. If you are unsure, request advice from RPID or NatureScot.

Subject		Comments
Management options general		Ensure the specified supporting maps and tables are submitted (as explained on the Farm Environment Assessment webpage), where applicable
Management options general		Your management map(s) must very clearly show which options are being applied for and where. For rotational options, a separate map is useful, to show the location for each year
Targeted options		If an option is not on the list for your holding, you cannot apply for it unless you obtain an endorsement from NatureScot before you apply and then submit this with your application. Allow plenty of time to request the endorsement from NatureScot. We strongly advise you to contact NatureScot at least a month before the application submission deadline. Otherwise, there is a risk that you will

		not receive the endorsement before the deadline and the option may have to be rejected. Please refer to the 'Endorsement' section of the AECS guidance to check when an 'Endorsement' is available. Endorsements are potentially available for any options that would benefit designated sites, but otherwise they are only available for a limited range of options. If you have an endorsement granted for a previous AECS contract and the option and location remains exactly the same, you can upload the previous endorsement to support the new application.
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. Equally, an option could be available on a holding with a sub location code but not on the holding with the main location code
Management Options	Management options that require capital items	Ensure that you include any capital items which are essential to support a particular management option. 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, Wader and Wildlife mown grassland	Complete the Wader Management Plan (PDF, Size: 1.7 MB) to define the grazing regimes in the wader option fields and include photographs of these fields. A link to the plan template is included on the option pages.
	Wader grazed grassland, Wader and Wildlife mown grassland	Do not plant hedges around fields entered into these management options. To be awarded National priority VPS scoring points, you must exclude 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. For further information, please refer to the guidance pages for the individual options. In addition, for Wader Grazed Grassland you MUST complete the grazing calendar in the online application. Take note of restrictions to permitted fencing costs for these options below.
	Habitat Mosaic Management and Species-Rich Grassland Management	If you are applying for these options on hill and upland rough grazing land, you must seek an endorsement from NatureScot prior to applying, using the endorsement request form, supported by survey data proving that the site has the target habitats. If the endorsement is awarded, you must submit this alongside your application. To ensure you receive the endorsement in time, you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot at least a month before the application submission deadline. If you have an endorsement granted for a previous AECS contract and the management area remains exactly the same, you can upload the

		previous endorsement to support the new application. For habitat mosaics, ensure there is a true mosaic and that the site meets the habitat eligibility, clearly set out in the supporting guidance. Sites with more than c25% of heath/bog habitat are not eligible. If the site has a lot of heath/bog, and the aim is to manage for waders, consider the heath management for waders option instead. Where there is a lot of grassland, there must be species rich grassland (not just improved grassland) within the mosaic.
	Wader management on heath mosaics (within the Heath 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. You cannot apply for this option on land previously managed under the Moorland Management option. Also, if the land has not been entered into the agri-environment scheme 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 NatureScot or RPID before applying.
	Moorland Management and associated options	Due to the number of poor quality applications we have received, a revised Moorland Management Plan template (PDF, Size: 213.7 kB) was developed in 2023 which MUST be used for applications. Ensure that the plan is clear about the grazing across the moorland and that the flock details are the same in the next text and grazing tables and backed up by flock records. A new habitat condition assessment must be undertaken for all land to be entered into moorland management and used along with past and present grazing management information to influence proposals for future management with this all set out in the moorland management plan. All Flock records must be supplied at the time of application. (Please note the revised date to be used for flock records) if the application includes Away wintering or Stock Disposal. Ensure any other relevant supporting documentation is submitted alongside your application.
	Predator Control	If you had crow control only in a previous contract, you cannot continue to claim this, as the traps will last more than 5 years. Please note that the hectare based payment for crow and mammal control has had an area limit included from 2023. Predator control should only be applied for where the notified bird features are in unfavourable condition, or at risk of becoming unfavourable. For returning applicants, the new assessment will consider delivery of the

		option in the last contract by checking submitted predator control reports.
	Management of Buffers areas for Fens and Lowland Bogs	This should be a strip of land and whole fields cannot be claimed. An effective buffer between the fen or lowland bog and the productive land must be created by allowing vegetation to grow and then managing effectively by grazing.
	Restoration of Species Rich Grassland	Only permanent grassland that meets the description in the supporting guidance can be entered into this option. Ensure an appropriate grazing regime is proposed, in order to allow the plants to establish.
Capital Items	All capital items	For all applications, only essential capital items will be accepted. For agri-environment type applications this would include: - Capital items that are directly required to deliver the management option, such as the capital item Creation of Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds which is essential for the Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds option - Essential complimentary capital items, such as Creation of Wader Scrapes or Cutting of Rush Pasture - Other capital items that are essential to deliver the outcome of your application Capital items are not eligible when selecting the Organic Maintenance option as this option supports the cost of maintaining an organic management system. The Organic Conversion option is to help farmers with the cost of converting their land to organic systems, capital items such as stock fences are not normally eligible. An exception may be made where the land was previously under a continually cropped arable system which is being converted to an organic system where grass and grazing are being re-introduced. Consequently you must supply a justification for any capital items applied under Organic Conversion, detailing why these should be considered as exceptional by the case officer. Some capital items are available throughout the country. However, some are targeted to particular locations. You can only apply for the targeted capital items if they are listed under your MLC in the Targeting tool webpage. (The capital items webpage shows which items are targeted.) Note that non-targeted capital items are not listed in the Targeting tool webpage. Capital work should all be delivered in year 1 of the contract, unless the webpage for a specific capital items says otherwise. For example, for peatland restoration (ditch blocking) if there is significant work, this can be spread over years 1 and 2, but not beyond. The following capital items are suspended for the 2024 round: <i>Creation of Species-rich grassland</i> <i>Heather Restoration and the associated Follow up Molinia Control</i> <i>Muirburn (but Heather Cutting is available)</i> <i>The following items are restricted:</i>

		Hedge Creation is limited to 1000m per application Pond Creation and Restoration is limited to 2000m² per application and 600m² per individual pond.
	Actual capital costs	Where there is an actual cost capital item, you must provide a robust justification of why standard costs cannot be used and provide the quotes and complete the quotations table in line with the scheme guidance. Items with missing or inadequate quotes for actual capital costs will not progress past the assessment stage and, in exceptional circumstances, may risk rejection of the whole application.
	Fencing	If you have already received funding for fencing in your previous AECS contract, or 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 available. For fences funded in the early rounds of the Rural Priorities Scheme (or comparable previous schemes up to 2014) that are not expected to last another five years, applications can be considered for fencing costs on stretches of fence needing replaced, subject to a site visit by the case officer to confirm the costs are justifiable. We recommend you seek advice before submitting your application. 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, you must remove and dispose of the existing fence appropriately - at your own cost. You cannot apply for fencing costs to facilitate rotational grazing. Stock Fencing costs are not permitted for any wader, corncrake or corn bunting options. However, temporary electric fencing can be applied for under these options where it is justified to deliver management. Temporary electric fencing comes under the Scare and Temporary Electric fencing capital item. For Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds and Forage Brassica Crops for Farmland Bird only Temporary electric fencing can be used to enable management where that management is rotated around the farm over the contract period. The temporary electric fencing can be re-used to enable management on subsequent plots. Fencing for forage brassica crops is only available where the site will be grazed by livestock Stock fencing with these options will only be considered where a robust justification can be demonstrated by the applicant business
	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.
	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.
	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. For Water - see Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon - the Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment is only required where the lagoon will be filled with any water that was collected at a steading
	Sediment Ponds	Where sediment ponds have an integrated sediment trap, they need to be claimed separately as each has a different cost.
Bracken Control		If you adopt the manual treatment capital item, this must be undertaken annually and must involve multiple cuts. Whilst chemical control can be applied for in 2024, the ability to deliver this will be dependent on the decision around approved herbicides. Include mechanised treatment where appropriate.
Muirburn and Heather Cutting		The Muirburn element of the Muirburn and Heather Cutting capital item is suspended for the 2024 round. But if you plan to undertake muirburn at your own expense on a designated site within your AECS application area and during the lifetime of the AECS contract, you MUST submit a Muirburn Plan, so that there is a record of where and when work will take place, to allow the case officer to assess whether work is appropriate to the site. For non-designated sites, you must provide detail within the Moorland management plan of any muirburn you intend to undertake. Heather cutting is not suspended.
Ditch blocking		If you apply for Ditch Blocking for peatland restoration, you will need approval from your planning authority, under the Prior Notification and Prior Approval process . You are also strongly advised to contact NatureScot as least a month before the submission deadline to discuss your peatland proposals. This will help ensure they fit with the scheme requirements.

Recent Changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Updated details for 2024 round

Previous versions

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