

Improved Countryside Stewardship scheme opens for 2021 agreements

The application window for the [Countryside Stewardship \(CS\)](#) scheme has opened today (11 February), providing the chance for more farmers and land managers to get ready for the future and be paid for environmental work.

Through the scheme, farmers can apply for funding to improve their local environment – from restoring wildlife habitats and creating woodlands to managing flood risk.

Applying this year is the best way to prepare for the government's future Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme, which will reward farmers for producing 'public goods', such as better air and water quality or improved access to the countryside.

The Government will be rolling out a national pilot in 2021 to test how ELM works on the ground, with the scheme expected to be fully operational by the end of 2024. CS provides a stepping stone to this future, paying for environmental enhancements now as area-based payments are phased out.

Those signed up to CS who secure a place in the ELM pilot from 2021, or wish to enter the scheme when it is fully rolled out from 2024, will be able to leave their agreements at agreed exit points, without penalty.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

Paying farmers for protecting the environment and enhancing animal welfare is front and centre of our future farming policy and entering a Countryside Stewardship Scheme is a good stepping stone to that future policy.

There is nothing to be gained by holding back. We are guaranteeing that anyone who joins our new scheme in the future will be able to leave their CS agreement early in order to do so.

The [Rural Payments Agency \(RPA\)](#) is continually improving CS to make it easier for farmers to apply for and quicker to be paid.

For the 2019 claim year, final payments started to arrive with customers four months earlier than in previous years after the RPA made the change for agreement holders to receive one full revenue payment, rather than a 75% payment followed by a 25% payment.

Rural Payments Agency Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said:

We are continuously making Countryside Stewardship easier to apply

for and simpler to administer, with full CS payments arriving in bank accounts much earlier this year than in previous years.

The application window this year is a great opportunity to get into a scheme that is improving all the time, and which rewards farmers and land managers for their vital work to protect our countryside and enhance the environment for generations to come.

I'd encourage farmers and their agents to complete their applications and claims promptly and ensure they are submitted by the deadline.

Farmers and land managers who are new to taking on environmental work or with expired or expiring Environmental Stewardship agreements can apply for:

- [Mid Tier](#) – Farmers and land managers can choose from all available multi-year options and capital items to form an agreement which delivers local environmental benefits. Application packs can be downloaded online through [Rural Payments Service](#), or you can request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting Rural Payments Agency (RPA) by 31 May 2020.
- [Higher Tier](#) – Applicants managing more complex land in environmentally significant sites, commons or woodlands which requires support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission. Application packs can be downloaded online through [Rural Payments Service](#), or you can request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting Rural Payments Agency (RPA) by 31 March 2020.
- [Wildlife Offers](#) – Designed to help guide farmers to the most straightforward options for their farm type, making it easier and simpler to secure a CS agreement. Offers are split into different packages for farm types: arable, lowland grazing, upland, and mixed farming. These applications are the easiest to complete, and can be done online via the [Rural Payments Service](#). Applicants can also request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting RPA by 31 May 2020.
- [Hedgerows and Boundaries](#) – Provides grants for farmers to restore existing farm boundaries and hedgerows on their land. Applications for a Hedgerows and Boundaries Grant can be completed on the [Rural Payments Service](#). Applicants can also request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting RPA by 31 March 2020.
- [Woodland support](#) – Farmers and land managers can apply for woodland creation, management plan and tree health grants all year round. Woodland creation provides funding to supply, plant, weed and protect young trees. The management plan grant is a capital grant to produce a woodland management plan. The tree health grant is for restocking or improving woodland after tree health problems. Applicants can speak to their local [Forestry Commission Woodland Officer](#) to discuss these further.

Those new to CS can find out more by attending farm advice events, with a schedule of local events due to be available on GOV.UK.

The Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) partnership can support applications for Mid Tier capital grants to improve water and air quality in a high priority area. Some capital items require written support from a CSF Officer as part of the evidence requirement. Check the capital grant requirements to find out when this applies. If your holding is in a High Water Quality Priority Area, contact your local [CSF Officer](#) for advice by 31 May.

All CS agreements confirmed by the end of 2020 will be funded for their full lifetime. To apply and find out more visit [GOV.UK](#).