

## Press release: Application return deadline for Countryside Stewardship extended to 31 August

Applicants for the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme have one extra month to complete their application and send it off to Natural England. The deadline has been extended from 31 July to 31 August, allowing extra time for farmers to fill out their forms during the busy summer months.

Over 10,000 farmers and land managers requested an application pack ahead of the 31 May deadline earlier in the spring, and more time has been granted to allow these customers the opportunity to complete their forms and send them off for an agreement offer by 31 August.

Whilst the majority of applicants issued their requests for an application pack in the days up to the 31 May deadline, Natural England is on track to issue all application packs to farmers and land managers by the end of June. This leaves two months to complete the form around other commitments on the farm, which should lead to more farms enter into Countryside Stewardship agreements in 2019.

Entering a Countryside Stewardship agreement can bring multiple benefits to soil health, water quality and create habitats for wildlife on farmland. This can improve the quality of the food that is produced, reduce the risk of pollution from farming, and see the return of cherished species such as the curlew and lapwing to farmland.

The government has outlined an ambition for farming and environmental enhancement to work more closely together when we leave the EU. Entering into a CS agreement is an excellent way for farmers to start changing the way they manage their land ahead of new agricultural policy being implemented outside the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

For the 2018 application window, four new simplified “wildlife offers” have been introduced for upland, lowland, mixed farm and arable, with a shorter form to fill out and a streamlined selection of options depending on farm type. New entrants to CS, or farmers coming off the ELS scheme, are guaranteed an agreement with as few as three options. Applicants who wanted to apply for a wildlife offer, but received the incorrect pack, should contact Natural England about their application.