

# Environmental Stewardship Update

Farming for a better environment

July 2010 Issue 10

## EU Audit seeks changes to Environmental Stewardship procedures

Defra is likely to make changes to the way farmers are paid for protecting the environment, after an EU audit of England's agri-environment schemes. Although Environmental Stewardship is widely seen as effective and has been designed to make it attractive to farmers, The European Commission has concluded that payments should only be made at certain points during the year, instead of on a rolling basis throughout the year, to comply with EU law. This does not apply to capital payments which can continue to be made as at present. Agreements started before 1 January 2007 may be unaffected, but the Commission has yet to confirm this. The Commission has also asked Defra to establish an annual deadline for applications of 15 May. Discussions between Defra and the European Commission are not yet complete and specific details of the changes are yet to be decided. Defra is making every effort to minimise the potential impacts on agreement holders and to persuade the Commission to adopt a flexible approach.

Natural England has alerted agreement holders by letter of the situation. Key points for farmers and land managers are:

- Take no action now – we will let them know if and how their agreement is affected in due course
- Payment dates may change but the total amount paid over the life of their agreement will not change
- Read more about the proposed changes on the Defra website click [EU audit Defra link](#)

This will take some time to sort out. Defra does not expect to make any changes before 2011 at the earliest. In the meantime, farmers are encouraged to apply for or renew [Environmental Stewardship](#) agreements as before, to secure financial support for their environmentally-friendly farming practices.

### Also in this issue

[Latest facts and figures](#)   [Spotlight on Capital Works](#)

[Uplands ELS](#)   [Natural England at trade shows](#)

[Notice Board](#)

# Latest facts and figures

The table below gives agri-environment scheme uptake statistics at 12 July 2010.

Scheme	Area (ha)	% of UAA	- /+ % in UAA since 1 March 2010 (67.3% coverage)	Number of Agreements	-/+ of Agreements since 1 March 2010	Annual Value
CSS	331,133	3.6%	-0.3	10,409	-177	£80.5 M
ESA	429,248	4.6%	-0.4	6,566	-520	£36.3 M
ELS	5,186,284	55.8%	+2.2	39,701	+1,974	£134.0 M
OELS	391,157	4.2%	+0.1	2,750	+60	£39.1 M
HLS (Combined with ELS/OELS*)	505,549	-		4,694	+691	£90.4 M
HLS (Standalone)	102,556	1.1%	+0.3	677	+111	£17.7M
Total HLS	608,105	-	-	5,128	+802	£108.1 M
UELS	96,192	-	-	1,330	1,330	7.3 M
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>6,440,378</b>	<b>69.3%</b>	<b>+2.0</b>	<b>60,103</b>	<b>+ 1,448</b>	<b>£393.3 M</b>

\* Most land in HLS is already accounted for in ELS or OELS / Numbers in italics not included in overall total / UAA is Utilisable Agricultural Area, by which is meant farmland and associated land such as woodland and scrub / Annual Value: for CSS and ESA, the figures relate to the annual value of live agreements in the current agreement year. For ES, the figures relate to the first year value of the agreements (the value may vary in other years). Small reductions have been made to the area and number of agreements for ELS since the last Update. This is due to corrections which were made to the reporting methodology in order to take account of fluctuations caused by the ELS renewals process.

## Spotlight on adding capital works to existing agreements

In the last issue of ES Update, we reported a reduction in this year's budget for new capital works to be added to existing HLS agreements. We have now fully committed available funds.

Looking ahead now is a good time for farmers to plan for capital works for next year and we invite proposals for new capital works plans - for HLS, ESA and CSS agreements - which will deliver environmental outcomes starting from April 2011. Some key tips, when doing so, are:-

- Capital Works Plans (CWP) for HLS can be for 1,2 or 3 years long, but farmers need to remember that a CWP must not run over their 5-year break point - and undertaking the works need to be timed to avoid the break point.
- New capital works in ESA or CSS agreements can deliver a range of outcomes, but check first with your Natural England adviser that what you want to do is eligible for funding.
- In making amendments to Classic Schemes, we will prioritise those holdings which will transfer to HLS at the end of their agreement.
- Capital works need to be timely and cost effective to ensure best value for money, especially in the current economic climate. Your advisor will work with you to achieve this on your land.

So the advice to farmers and land managers is to get capital proposals rolling in now. The early bird catches the worm!

# Uplands ELS off to an encouraging start

Over 2,000 farmers have now applied for the new Uplands strand of Entry Level Stewardship with the first 1888 agreements going live on 1 July. These agreements cover over 250,000 hectares of the England's uplands – this accounts for over 50% of Natural England's area target for the year. But we want to sign up as many eligible farmers as possible.

Interest in Uplands ELS has grown over recent months. With more than 3,500 farmers requesting information and over 2,500 have attending farm events throughout the country. Over 150 agents and advisers have also attended workshops on the scheme.

The increased appetite for the new scheme reflects:-

- Greater awareness that the Hill Farming Allowance (HFA) has ended
- Improved advice, information and support from Natural England
- Strong support for Uplands ELS from industry organisations, such as the NFU.

## Uplands farmer increases payments with Uplands ELS

Ernie Cornish - of Middle Brown Farm in Huish, Champflower, near Taunton – who has never previously had an AE scheme on his farm, entered Uplands ELS on the first available date of 1 July. He now stands to benefit from £12,000 over the 5 year agreement, following attendance at a Natural England farm event and follow-up visit.

Mr Cornish who has a natural 'mistrust' of paperwork - was initially persuaded by his neighbour to find out about Uplands ELS. He has now secured an Environmental Stewardship payment which is **nearly double the amount** of HFA he received. He said:

*"I had been wondering whether to bother applying for Uplands ELS but now I'm really glad that I did"*

The ES options Mr Cornish has chosen are maintenance of traditional farm buildings and permanent grassland options. They complement his 40 ha beef and sheep unit and sit alongside the standard scheme requirements for upland grassland and completion of a farm environment record map.

## Where to get more info on Uplands ELS

- Access a new, easy to follow, **Step by Step Guide to Uplands ELS** [click here](#). It is an invaluable starting point for upland farmers and land managers thinking of joining Uplands ELS.
- Call **0300 060 0011** for further information and how to apply in your area.
- Visit our stand and talk to our advisers at the NSA **Sheep Event 2010** Tuesday 3 August at Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire. The event attracts over 10,000 farmers and promises to be a key event in the sheep sector's calendar.

## What does Uplands ELS pay?

Uplands ELS supports hill farmers within the Severely Disadvantaged Area with payments of:-

- **£62 per hectare** per year below the Moorland Line
- And **£23 per hectare** per year on parcels of land of 15 hectares or larger, above the Moorland Line.

Over 3,500 farmers have already applied for the scheme and on average have secured £22,500 for their farm business.

**Don't miss out** - apply now to get the funding available for your farm  
Call **0300 060 0011**.

# Keep those ELS renewals coming in

With 12000 agreements expiring this year, we are now busy receiving and processing renewal applications. Thanks to an excellent response to our latest monthly deadline (1 June), we have now renewed a total of 3035 agreements.

We are encouraging farmers whose ELS agreements are due to expire over the next few months, to send in their completed renewal applications before the deadlines below to ensure continuity of payments to their business. Should they miss the deadline, there may be a gap in payments, but we will endeavour to process these applications as soon as possible for the earliest start date.

Agreement Expiry Date	Number of agreements involved	Application Deadline	New Agreement Start Date
30 September 2010	1046	1 August 2010	1 October 2010
31 October 2010	1463	1 September 2010	1 November 2010
30 November 2010	1947	1 October 2010	1 December 2010

As reported in our cover story, farmers will now be aware that an EU audit of Environmental Stewardship may change the way ES operates in future, principally with the timing for applications and payments. Remember, this will **not** affect the amount of money paid over the lifetime of an agreement but it will take time to sort out.

In the meantime our message to customers remains plain and simple - they need to submit their renewal applications in good time to make sure they do not lose out on any payments.

## New single contact number for Environmental Stewardship enquiries

As part of our efforts to streamline the application and query process, farmers and land managers can now call one single number for Environmental Stewardship.

For advice on ELS, OELS and HLS or the older classic schemes (CSS and ESA) they can reach our regional processing centres more quickly by now calling

**0300 060 0011**

# Spotlight on the importance of ES to help protect our history

A recently published English Heritage report has demonstrated that Environmental Stewardship has reduced the number of scheduled monuments at high risk from damage.

The Heritage at Risk Register, published on the 7<sup>th</sup> July, reports that Over 2,000 scheduled monuments – 10% of the national total – have been entered into Environmental Stewardship. Of these some 800 are monuments which were previously ploughed, but which have since been previously taken out of cultivation or their protection enhanced.

The Register has proved to be an invaluable tool for Natural England in helping to target scheduled monuments for Stewardship. Working in partnership with English Heritage, Natural England has been working hard to encourage farmers and land owners into Stewardship schemes. Many scheduled sites are now being protected under Environmental Stewardship through both land management options and capital works. ES has a range of land management options which can be used to both manage and protect a range of archaeological sites – whether under cultivation, threatened by scrub, tree growth, erosion or animal burrowing. In addition, HLS can fund capital repairs to upstanding structures and historic buildings.

Last year, the North East historic team in Natural England agreed to help fund consolidation repairs to Shittleheugh Bastle in Northumberland. The bastle, a scheduled monument in serious danger of deterioration and identified as a 'building at risk' by English Heritage, was given painstaking and sensitive repairs. Loose stones were carefully re-bedded, masonry re-pointed and lost building stone replaced. The bastle is no longer at risk and has been safeguard for future generations to enjoy. In addition, the project has received a prestigious award from the construction industry. In May this year the Constructing Excellence in the North East Awards awarded its 'Heritage Award' to Shittleheugh in recognition of the excellent standards employed in the repairs



**The Shittleheugh Bastle** no longer 'at risk' due to repairs undertaken  
A 'bastle' is a type of defensible farmstead unique to the North East. They were built in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

For more information on the Heritage at Risk register click [Heritage at Risk 2010 | English Heritage](#)

## Notice Board

### £260k Lottery award for Grazing Project apprentices

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded a grant of £260k under its fiercely contested *Skills for the Future* programme, to the Grazing Advice Partnership (GAP). GAP is a partnership of farmers, land managers and conservation organisations committed to promoting the benefits of grazing with the natural environment and cultural heritage in mind.



The award will fund a national pilot - three-year, grazing apprenticeship scheme – the Heritage Grazing Project. The scheme will offer six and twelve month placements for twenty one apprentices with traditional livestock farms and grazing schemes. Placements will be distributed across the UK with a particular emphasis on Upland areas in England where the identified shortage of young skilled grazing managers is most acute.

In addition to directly supporting apprentices the publicity generated by the project will help encourage more young people to develop their practical grazing skills. Ultimately the GAP team hope that the evaluation of the pilot will lead to the creation of a nationally accredited and funded apprenticeship scheme. GAP also runs much-in-demand, LANTRA accredited; livestock checkers courses for volunteers to help farmers with their daily checks. There are a range of free on-line tools for farmers on the GAP website [www.grazingadvicepartnership.org.uk](http://www.grazingadvicepartnership.org.uk)

## Open Farm Sunday

Natural England was delighted to support Open Farm Sunday (OFS) 2010 through sponsorship and by fielding staff at over 50 events.

Our staff helped host famers run a series of wildlife activities for children and families, including colouring competitions, nature walks and river dipping for aquatic life. These proved hugely successful and, along with popular learning activities about farm production, demonstrated the enthusiasm that exists out there for educational visits to farms.

Farmers who have caught the bug for educational access, through OFS participation, are encouraged to sign up for HLS educational access options

[www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/funding/es/hls](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/funding/es/hls)



# HRH The Prince of Wales and top business leaders to support Britain's rural areas

This week sees the launch of **The Princes Countryside Fund** a collaborative, cause related marketing scheme inspired by The Prince of Wales's desire to support Britain's rural areas. It aims to raise money from a wide range of businesses and their consumers to help improve the long-term sustainability of the British countryside and its rural communities.

Robin Tucker, Natural England's Executive Director, National Delivery, is part of the steering group that developed the fund with corporate responsibility charity *Business in the Community* (BITC). "We are delighted that a new source of grant funding will shortly be available to projects seeking to improve the sustainability of British farming and rural communities," said Robin.

Explaining the benefits Robin said "The fund will support the vital role our land managers play in sustaining the landscapes we all enjoy, in a way that complements other schemes, such as our Environmental Stewardship. The fund will also provide financial support to rural communities in times of crisis, easing the often disproportionate impact of natural disasters on rural economies, such as we saw last autumn following the floods in Cumbria."

All the companies that have partnered with BITC to launch this fund, which has a starting pot of £1m, have a special connection to the British countryside through the products they make or sell. They will feature The Prince's Countryside Fund's logo on selected packaging from next month and help communicate the importance of the countryside to consumers. In addition, from the autumn, the fund will have the support of The Post Office where it will be possible for consumers to donate to the fund at their 12,000 branches.

The fund is being launched by leaders of the food industry at St James Palace on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Decisions about which projects to fund will be made by an independent Board of Trustees. More information on The Prince's Countryside Fund will be available at The CLA Game Fair, which opens at Ragley Hall, Alcester, Warwickshire this weekend from Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> July.

For information on how community groups and farmers can apply will be available on the fund website [www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk](http://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk)

## Nature on the map

Is an interactive online map providing detailed local environmental information. It now shows the environmental benefits being delivered by land managers through agri-environmental funding. To see what farmers are doing to look after the land in your local area visit [www.natureonthemap.org.uk](http://www.natureonthemap.org.uk)

## Natural England at trade shows

In spite of the mud, this year's Cereals Event in Royston, Hertfordshire on 9 & 10 June was very successful and attracted 25,300 visitors and industry professionals. Business was brisk at the Natural England stand as we provided information and advice on ES to arable farmers, agents and companies. We talked to farmers wishing to renew their ELS agreement, apply online (which proved popular and resulted in long queue for 'how to' demonstrations) and discuss HLS opportunities.

The stand featured a farm scale model to simply demonstrate the wide range of ELS options important for arable farm businesses in 2010. Natural England also took part in the Campaign for Farmed Environment (CFE) trail, with a 'Farm Wildlife' theme on our stand as added interest for farmers, politicians and industry reporters.



Our partner organisation, Kings Game Cover & Conservation Crops, demonstrated key ES options on their crop plots which attracted over 1,000 interested farmers. Options such as pollen and nectar mixes, grass margins and wild bird seed mixes were on show for farmers and agents to see them working in practice and gain a better understanding of arable conservation.

Looking ahead, you can find us

- Supporting the CFE stand at this year's CLA Game Fair on 23-25 July at Ragley Hall
- At the NSA Sheep Event on 3 August at Three Counties Showground Malvern, with our own stand and advisers.

**ES Update** is our regular bi-monthly newsletter for organisations that represent the interests of farmers, land managers, agents and others who are interested in agri-environment schemes

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