

FARMING AND PROPERTY BULLETIN – MARCH 2017

BPS Update

2017 Payments

The Rural Payments Agency online system is now open for 2017 applications to be submitted. The functions enabling online transfers of land and entitlements are also now available. As a reminder the deadline to submit applications and transfer land and/or entitlements is the **15th May 2017**.

Customer Reference Numbers and passwords remain the same as last year to access the online system. It is worth checking your business details and permission levels carefully before starting your application.

As was the case last year paper RLR maps will not be issued. To view your land you should use the 'land viewer' on the online system. This enables you to view each parcel individually and print sketch maps should you need to.

Paper application forms will be sent out in the middle of March to all applicants who submitted their 2016 claim on paper. Paper forms will not be sent to claimants registered to an agent.

The online system has not changed since last year and the requirements for applicants remain the same. To summarise the claimant must:

- Be an 'Active Farmer' – to qualify they must be carrying out an 'agricultural activity' and complete the Active Farmer Declaration on the application form. This confirms they are not carrying out any of the activities listed on the 'negative list' full details of which are set out in the 2017 guidance.
- Have the land claimed at their disposal on the 15th May 2017.
- Have a minimum area of 5ha eligible land.
- For land to be eligible it must be primarily used for an 'agricultural activity' throughout the year. This can be summarised as producing agricultural products or kept in a state suitable for grazing or cultivation.

The Greening Rules have also not changed since last year. Briefly these are:

Ecological Focus Areas:

- A claimant with over 15ha eligible arable land must ensure at least 5% of their arable area is in EFAs. The different options available have different weightings which need to be considered when calculating EFAs, full details of which are set out in the 2017 guidance.

Crop Diversification:

- A claimant with 10 – 30ha arable land must grow at least two different crops, with crop 1 being no more than 75% of the arable area.
- A claimant with more than 30ha arable land must grow at least three different crops, crop 1 must not cover more than 75% of the arable area and crops 1&2 must not cover more than 95% of the arable area.
- The cropping period for Crop Diversification is the 1st May 2017 – 30th June 2017.

Full guidance and details of exemptions from Greening requirements can be found in the updated guidance for the 2017 scheme which is now available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bps-2017>

2016 Payments

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) have now made a 'BPS Payment Query Form' available. This should be used for all queries which arise following receipt of your Claim Statement which have not been previously flagged to the RPA. These can either be posted to the RPA at Worksop or emailed to ruralpayments@defragsi.gov.uk with the heading 'BPS Payment Query Form'.

Andrea Leadsom announced at the NFU conference that a 75% bridging payment would be made to all claimants who have not been paid their 2016 payment (estimated to be approximately 4,000 claimants) by the end of March.

RPA Chief Executive

The RPA has announced that Mark Grimshaw, their Chief Executive, has decided to stand down. Paul Caldwell has been announced as the interim Chief Executive who was previously the BPS Operational Delivery Director.

Countryside Stewardship

Natural England have not yet issued contracts for applications submitted in 2016 to commence on the 1st January 2017.

Going forward a number of functions for Countryside Stewardship will be available online, via the Rural Payments system also used for the Basic Payment Scheme. Claimants will be able to do the following online:

- Identify Higher and Mid-Tier options for their land.
- Apply for the Hedgerow and Boundaries grant scheme.
- Apply for a Woodland Management Plan.
- Claim for agreed Countryside Stewardship revenue or annual payments.
- Claim for agreed Countryside Stewardship capital works.
- View and download live Countryside Stewardship agreement documents and maps.

The following items will still be paper based:

- All Environmental Stewardship Scheme activities (historical schemes).
- Applications for Mid or Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship schemes.
- Amendments to a Countryside Stewardship scheme.
- Transferring a Countryside Stewardship scheme.
- Applications for Woodland Creation Grants.

Hedgerows & Boundaries Grant

Natural England is now inviting applications for its second round of the Countryside Stewardship Hedgerow and Boundary Grant. Applications can be made for a grant up to the value of £5,000 towards the restoration of farmland boundaries.

The scheme is competitive and there are set payment rates for different options. Natural England have indicated priority will be given to smaller holdings as well as for the restoration of hedges and stone walls. Applicants who have previously taken part in Environmental Stewardship Schemes or the Woodland Grant Scheme will also score more highly.

The scheme cannot apply to parcels already included in a Mid or Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship Scheme, HLS or Uplands ELS (UELS) on the 31st July 2017. Parcels included within an ELS agreement on this date are eligible as long as they meet all other requirements.

The closing date for applications is the 28th April 2017. These can be made on paper or online (which should be available from mid-March). Full guidance and forms can be found at www.gov.uk/government/natural-england-hedges-and-boundaries-for-wildlife-and-people