

# Top tips for Countryside Stewardship applications

**HUGH TOWNSEND**



The July 31 deadline for submitting applications is fast approaching, and Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier packs and Wildlife Offer packs are arriving by email and post.

A few tips which applicants should watch out for:

## July 6 deadline for Hedgerow RLE1s

Most applicants will need to consider whether or not they wish to include a hedgerow option in their application for this year.

If they intend to include options for management, laying or coppicing hedgerows they need to check their hedgerow data on the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) online system and confirm that the information represents what is taking place on the ground.

If corrections need to be made these must be done using an RLE1 form and sketch map submitted to the RPA by the July 6 for all applications this year.

## Which scheme to choose?

Should you apply under a Mid Tier application or a Wildlife Offer? The Wildlife Offers are non-competitive and include some of the most popular options from the Mid Tier agreement. There is also no requirement under the Wildlife Offer to meet the priorities in your area as there is in the Mid Tier agreement.

If therefore you are not organic and create a package of equal or better options under a Wildlife Offer instead of a Mid Tier agreement this would be the most attractive

option as you are guaranteed an agreement if you submit a valid application.

## Do not overlook the HEFER

The HEFER documentation, which is sent out to all Mid Tier applicants separately from their packs, can easily be overlooked and must be considered carefully. The HEFER, which is a Historic Environment Farm Environment Record, provides detail about your holding.

Applicants with Scheduled Monuments on land registered to their SBI must ensure they are included in the application or it will be rejected. It is also important to ensure that the box within the application form is ticked con-

**‘Each individual option needs to be considered carefully and the details checked’**

firmed you have read and considered the HEFER before making your application.

## Do not forget the supplementary evidence

Another often overlooked element of the claim is the supplementary evidence that is required for each individual option, these can be found on the options information page on the Countryside Stewardship website (<https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants>), or at the back of the application form where each option has a tick-box to confirm the inclusion of the supplementary evidence. These include soil sampling, photographs and additional documentation. This can



Hedge laying in the traditional way on the Blackdown Hills. Hedgerow RLE1 applicants will need to check their hedgerow data on the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) online system, says Hugh Townsend

PICTURE: RICHARD AUSTIN

easily be overlooked it can hold up or even cause an application to be rejected early if they are not supplied on time.

## Remember some options can have reduced payments if already used for EFA

In completing the Mid Tier or Wildlife Offer application it is important for applicants to consider their previous Basic Payment Scheme applications and how these may impact upon the CSS application. Do not forget there will be a reduced payment for options under the Mid Tier scheme if already used as EFA for Basic Payment. This is to prevent double funding.

## BPS ineligible features may be eligible under CSS

Not all ineligible features

under the Basic Payment Scheme are ineligible under the Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier application and Wildlife Offers, eg, water. Each individual option needs to be considered carefully and the details checked as to what areas of land are eligible and which are not.

## Land to be registered with RPA by July 31, 2018

It is also important to remember that all parcels which applicants wish to include in their application for either a Mid Tier or Wildlife Offer must be registered with the RPA and a completed RLE1 form and an accompanying map submitted to the RPA prior to the submission of the Wildlife Offer or Mid Tier ap-

plication for England.

## Watch out for simple errors and omissions

Finally a major issue found by Natural England last year was that application forms were not completed correctly. It is therefore recommended that applicants seek professional advice when completing these forms or at the very minimum have them double checked by a competent person before submission to avoid an application being held up or rejected for simple and avoidable reasons.

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