

# Hugh Townsend



> A flock of sheep grazing on Exmoor  
Michael Russell

## Countryside Stewardship may alleviate Brexit fears

AS we enter 2019 many agents will be looking to 2020 and beyond, with the imminent opening of the application window for Countryside Stewardship (CSS) agreements beginning on January 1, 2020, expected sometime this spring. These more than ever with the confused uncertainty of Brexit are worth having a look at.

There are four main types of CSS agreements: Mid Tier, Wildlife Offers, Higher Tier and Capital Grants. Mid Tier agreements are competitive and replaced the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) agreements that were offered until 2015. There are a large number of options available both for capital works and parcel options.

The Wildlife Offers were introduced in 2018 and are non-competitive. They operate certain options from the Mid Tier, and there are four different types of agreement available, these being the Online Arable, Lowland Grazing, Upland and Mixed Farming. The application process is simpler than the Mid Tier agreement, however there are no capital items available and applicants are limited to the small selection of options that are available within each application.

Higher Tier agreements replaced the HLS (Higher Level Stewardship) agreements that were previously offered until 2015, and offer a wide range of options and capital items over 5 year agreements. The agreements are competitive, and are usually only considered on sites which have a high environmental value.

The final type available is the Capital Grant of which there are multiple options available including (but not limited to) the Hedgerow and Boundaries grant which offers up to £10,000 over a 2 year period for capital works; Woodland Support grants for the creation and management of woodland, and Historic Building Restoration grants which is a pilot scheme that is currently running until the 31st August 2019, but which is only available in the National Parks in Northumberland, Lake District, Yorkshire Dales, Peak District and Dartmoor as long as you applied for an implementation grant by 29th June 2018.

Many people will be aware of the difficulties that have been found with the CSS agreements over the years, however the change of management of CSS from Natural England to the RPA in October of last

year may effect the way this is run, and the RPA are considering making amendments to the way the systems are operated. For instance, applicants should be able to generate their own Mid Tier packs from their RPA online screens in the 2019 application window. The RPA is also looking into improvements to the annual claim forms, the ability to upload documents online including supporting evidence, and evidence requirements. These improvements will be very welcome additions to the CSS process and should hopefully allow the system to run more smoothly in the future.

Despite the poor publicity that the CSS receives, there are still large sums of money available that can be capitalised on. Last year we submitted a Lowland Grazing Wildlife Offer for a client with options GS2 (permanent grassland with very low inputs which would reduce the amount of fertiliser that could be applied to the land), GS17 (lenient grazing supplement which prevents the land from being mown), GS1 (take small areas out of management which requires that areas are blocked off from grazing) and finally option BE3 (management of hedgerows which prevents

hedgerows from being cut more than once every 3 years). These options have only a minor effect on the client's ability to continue to farm his land, and as the Wildlife Offers are not competitive, once the agreement is finalised and offered to our client, he will receive a payment of approximately £150/ha as well as receiving his £227/ha for his BPS application. A total of £377/ha (£152/acre).

There are a number of additional options available for Mid Tier schemes, as well as capital items that can pay for erecting fences, hedgerow maintenance, and establishment of concrete yards. The above is only one example of the amount of money that is available. Schemes have previously been guaranteed for the length of their term as long as they were agreed before we leave the EU. These types of agreement can provide a stable income for five years at a time.

■ **Hugh Townsend, FRICS, FAAV, FCIARs**, is the land agent/surveyor expert of the W/M Farming supplement and he may be contacted on 01392 823935 or [htownsend@townsendcharteredsurveyors.co.uk](mailto:htownsend@townsendcharteredsurveyors.co.uk)