

Grants and Regulations National Email Alert

22 December 2014

Countryside Stewardship Woodlands Preliminary Grant Offer

We are planning to launch a preliminary woodland grant offer in 2015 and from February we will be accepting applications for Countryside Stewardship woodland options for woodland creation, tree health and woodland management plans. Across England, each Forestry Commission Area team will be hosting customer events from late January explaining the preliminary offer in relation to making applications, scoring, agreements and guidance that will be available.

Countryside Stewardship is significantly different to the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) and these events will also introduce the wider suite of options and capital items that will be available later in 2015. For more information on Countryside Stewardship please visit www.gov.uk/cap-reform.

Please look out early in the New Year for details of these events.

Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) "non-fundable items" - changes arising from the new Rural Development Programme

As explained in earlier e-Alerts some current EWGS agreements contain standard cost items that do not meet the new Rural Development Programme rules. These items are:

Standard Cost Code	Activity	Units
A18	Safety inspection	hourly rate
L1	Forest Craftsperson	per day
L2	Forestry Agent	per hour
L3	Tree surgery, 2 men + chipper	per day
L4	Tractor & chipper/flail with 1 man	per day
L5	JCB hire & mini excavator	hour
L6	360 excavator	hour

This has the potential to impact on existing WIG agreements with a 2015/16 claim year or beyond that contain these "non-fundable" items. We will be writing, in week commencing 5th January 2015, to all those customers identified as having these items in their agreements to advise on the options available to customers. These options will include:

- Undertaking appropriate work and claiming by 30 September 2015;



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- Amending contracts to bring forward items into 2015/16 from 2016/17 or beyond allowing appropriate work to be undertaken and claimed by 30 September 2015;
- Removing items from agreements with consideration being given to using a woodland improvement - multi annual agreement under Countryside Stewardship;
- Terminating the agreement – this will be viewed as the last resort.

There will be a comprehensive question and answer section attached to the letter which will explain the issues and options in more detail. This process will be supported by discussions with your Woodland Officer.

We will aim to ensure all affected agreement holders are contacted by their Woodland Officer early in the New Year. However if you think you have an affected agreement then please contact your Woodland Officer. We apologise for the impact this issue will have on your agreement and the delay in initiating these next steps

Woodfuel Woodland Improvement Grant (WWIG)

We have currently received more applications than what we have funding for. We have written to applicants who submitted applications on or after 1st August 2014 explaining that their applications are being processed “at risk” of not being approved. We will be working up until Christmas aiming to identify applications on a “first come first served” basis that can be approved in relation to all the processes being completed and budget being available.

We will notify applicants as soon as we can as to the success of their applications.

EWGS Current Financial Year Claims

At the end of the current 2014/15 claim year (31st March 2015) the financial IT system that currently manages payments is due to be replaced by a new system being brought in to manage payments for Countryside Stewardship. To support this change and minimise potential impacts the earlier you can submit claims for work undertaken the better.

We appreciate the support and patience of our customers in what has been a challenging year as we have moved towards the new Rural Development Programme. We would like take this opportunity to wish all customers a very happy Christmas and peaceful New Year.

