

UTASS Briefing: 27TH April 2020.

BPS 2020

Coronavirus restrictions, especially social isolating, have made completing BPS applications a rather different challenge this year. Checking maps remotely without the farmer present is never going to be quite as easy but we do feel confident with the claims already submitted. We are nearly there with only a handful left but we could not have done this without the help and trust of all our members. Thank you very much. The RPA have now announced an extension of the deadline to **15th June 2020** but are still requesting submission of claims as soon as possible to enable them to process and pay as many as possible early in the payment window which opens on the 1st December 2020.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP.

The deadline for annual management claims has also been extended to **midnight 15th June 2020**. We have some concerns with the inconsistent way the RPA have sent out annual environmental stewardship claim forms. *“Where RPA have been able to validate email addresses they are sending the ES claim forms via that means. This will include sending out to some customers whom they haven’t contacted via email before or for some time. They therefore recommend that all ES customers keep checking their emails including the junk / spam boxes. Where they are unable to validate an email address they are sending the forms by post.”* We understand that the final batch of claim forms should have been dispatched the weekend beginning 25th April. If you have **not** received one by the end of April please ring the RPA helpline 03000200301 and follow the options to ‘environmental Stewardship/revenue claim form’. You will need to have your agreement number handy as it will need to be entered on the phone keypad. The onus is on the applicant to make sure that an annual claim is submitted: failure to do so can result in no payment. Please note that for Countryside Stewardship agreements the annual claim has to be made on line.

HLS EXTENSIONS/ROLL-OVERS.

All HLS extensions which include land designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) will require a renewed consent from Natural England. This is still the case even though all extension have to be recommended to the RPA by Natural England. The extension agreement cannot go live until this consent has been issued and could ultimately cause an agreement holder to lose their payment. Forms are available on gov.uk or through UTASS and should be emailed to protectedsites@naturalengland.org.uk

FOOTPATHS

We have been advised by Durham County Council that the Covid 19 regulations do not include a legal power to close footpaths that are a Public Right of Way. However, where rights of way pass through farmyards or close to farmhouses and you feel that you or your family are at risk, there is the scope for temporary alternatives to be offered to the public if a safe and obvious route is available. Please note that this does not mean the original route of the footpath can be closed even temporarily. Durham County Council and the NFU have produced posters which are available from UTASS

Please Turn over

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or online at <http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/23001/Roads-and-pathways> We would ask our members to remember that Lockdown for most of the public has been far more restrictive than for farmers who have been able to carry on “essential activity” in the open air more or less the same as usual.

For further advice and assistance please call UTASS 01833 641010.

Richard Betton.