

[Press release: Countryside Stewardship opens for applications in 2019](#)

The Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme opened today (18 February) for farmers, foresters and land managers to request 2019 application packs.

These agreements provide a viable, long-term source of income to those who deliver environmental benefits on their land – including habitats for wildlife, pollinator plots and increased biodiversity. Improvements have been introduced this year to make the scheme easier to apply for.

Farmers and land managers who are new to taking on environmental work or with expired or expiring Environmental Stewardship agreements can apply for:

- [Mid Tier](#) – Farmers and land managers can choose from all available multi-year options and capital items to form an agreement which delivers local environmental benefits. Application packs can be downloaded through the online [Rural Payments Service](#), or you can request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting Rural Payments Agency (RPA) by 31 May 2019.
- [Higher Tier](#) – Applicants managing more complex land in environmentally significant sites, commons or woodlands which requires support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission. Check if you are eligible to apply by contacting RPA by 31 March 2019 to receive an application pack.
- [Wildlife Offers](#) – Designed to help guide farmers to the most straightforward options for their farm type, making it easier and simpler to secure a CS agreement. Offers are split into different packages for farm types: arable, lowland grazing, upland, and mixed farming. These applications are the easiest to complete, and can be done online via the [Rural Payments Service](#). Applicants can also request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting RPA by 31 May 2019.
- [Hedgerows and Boundaries](#) – Provides grants for farmers to restore existing farm boundaries and hedgerows on their land. Applications for a Hedgerows and Boundaries Grant can be completed on the [Rural Payments Service](#). Applicants can also request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting RPA by 31 May 2019.

The introduction of the Agriculture Bill in September 2018 signalled a step-change in how farmers will be paid once we leave the EU. Funding for environmental benefits and public goods will be at the front and centre of our future policy, meaning those who get into CS agreements now will be well-placed to benefit from the future scheme.

The new Environmental Land Management (ELM) system is due to be introduced 2024/2025. This will follow three years of piloting the new system nationally.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

We have taken steps to simplify the Countryside Stewardship scheme to make it easier to access. As we start to move future farming policy towards schemes that deliver sustainable food production, entering a Countryside Stewardship agreement can be an important first step and all agreements are guaranteed for their full lifetime.

Improvements to CS in 2019 include a simplified guidance handbook, and applicants can also apply for all of the wildlife offers online this year. CS agreements are flexible – applicants can choose which parts of the land go into an agreement, freeing up other fields or assets for different priorities.

The manuals are available online with guidance on the options available and how to apply. RPA will schedule events and workshops throughout the application window where prospective applicants can ask questions about how they can establish CS options such as beetle banks as part of their agreement. Farmers and land managers can also get help from local [Catchment Sensitive Farming](#) officers if they're based in a High Water Quality Priority area.

[News story: Out-of-this-World! Citizen Science brings Astronomy Data to Dstl](#)

A project designed to test equipment used within the amateur astronomer community to track space debris saw Defence scientists harnessing the talents of a local astronomy society.

Launched at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), Project Argus brought Basingstoke Astronomical Society (BAS) members together with Dstl's Space Programme to test readily-available astronomical equipment's ability to see, catalogue and study space debris.

As the satellite population has grown, so has the risk of collisions involving communication, navigation or remote sensing satellites. Dstl has been working with the RemoveDebris consortium (part funded by the European Commission) to explore space debris disposal technologies using a special demonstrator satellite. The citizen science project observed several satellites including RemoveDebris.

A critical technical challenge of Space Situational Awareness (SSA) is the provision of accurately-timed satellite observations from geographically

distributed sensor sites – without this, precise orbit determination is impossible. Commercially available software was found to be deficient and so the BAS team created their own techniques using a novel mix of hardware and software developed within the group. To enable the efficient processing of large quantities of BAS data, Dstl scientists developed automated image processing tools and in-house orbit estimation software. These developments will be exploited at our new research telescope facility “Holmes”, planned for construction at Portsdown West.

Mike O’Callaghan, Space programme manager from Dstl, said:

It’s been a fantastic example of harnessing the expertise of talented and committed individuals to real effect. We have all enjoyed working with Basingstoke Astronomical Society on Project Argus – they went above and beyond our expectations, I was amazed at how much they achieved following their recent visit to Dstl!

This productive partnership was key to bringing large volumes of data in and led to decisions which have advanced our programme.

Trevor Gaaney, Chair of Basingstoke Astronomical Society, said:

When our Secretary Alan Lorrain invited Dstl to talk to us last February having seen an article in the Salisbury local press, we had no idea this would turn out to be the start of such an involved and enjoyable project. Our members have all been enthusiastic about addressing and solving some really interesting observing problems and working with Dstl staff to enable better knowledge of space debris.

The Argus experiment highlighted key considerations for future UK operational SSA systems, including identifying the capabilities and limitations of commercially available optical equipment to observe satellites. This will feed into advice provided by Dstl into national SSA enhancement programmes across both the military and civilian domains.

[Visit the Basingstoke Astronomical Society website](#)

[Press release: Ancient migration mystery could be solved after eels](#)

fitted with satellite tags

The life-cycle of the eel has been a mystery since at least the 4th century BC when even Aristotle pondered the question of where they came from.

Prehistoric and snakelike in appearance, the European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of threatened species. Where eels spawn is still unknown, unravelling this mystery will be crucial to further understanding of the biology of the species and to protect spawning areas.

Now researchers – led by the Environment Agency together with the University of the Azores, ZSL (Zoological Society of London), Defra, Cefas, the University of Hull and DTU-Aqua – took a big step towards solving the mystery when they located European eel populations on the Azores Islands, close to the last known point on the eel migration route tracked by previous projects.

Three eels large enough to carry satellite tags were captured in a small river on the island of San Miguel following an intensive netting program conducted from October to December 2018.

In December 2018 the eels were fitted with satellite tags and released from a sandy beach into the Atlantic Ocean to begin their epic migration.

The tags are programmed to detach after 8 months so the eels have until around July 2019 to get to the Sargasso Sea before the tags detach, float to the surface and send their data to the researchers via satellite.

Environment Agency project lead and researcher Ros Wright said:

The European Eel is critically endangered so it is important that we solve the mystery surrounding their complete life-cycle to support efforts to protect the spawning area of this mysterious species.

Migrating eels are driven to travel vast distances by an innate desire to spawn. We hope that at least one of these three satellite tagged eels will become a superhero to the species by completing the migration lifecycle giving agencies and conservationists around the world the clues needed to protect this iconic species.

This is the first time we've been able to capture eels in the Azores and also ones that are large enough to carry satellite tracking tags so everything recorded since the eels started their journey will reveal information about eel migration that has never been known before.

There is evidence that the eels migrate around 6000 kilometres from Europe and Mediterranean countries across the Atlantic Ocean to spawn and die

somewhere in the Sargasso Sea, a vast area of the Atlantic off the east coast of the United States and north of the Caribbean. The actual location of the breeding area has never been identified and spawning eels have never been seen.

At a local level the Environment Agency has installed eel and fish passes at man-made structures that can impede the movement of eels along our waterways as well as requiring screens to be added to abstraction intakes to protect eels and other species.

[Press release: Justice Secretary David Gauke sets out long-term for justice](#)

- focus on effective alternatives to custody in the community and more punitive sanctions on certain criminals
- shift resource to probation with new reforms to be unveiled later this year
- harness technology to hit fraudsters where it hurts – in the pocket

In a landmark speech he challenged the “polarising” view that there is only a choice between “soft” and “hard” justice, arguing that the focus should instead be on a system based on evidence of what actually works – “punishments that are punitive, for a purpose”.

In setting out his vision, the Justice Secretary stressed he did not want to reverse tougher sentencing for serious crimes, but urged caution in continuing to increase sentence length as a response to concerns over crime.

Instead, he urged those who shape the system to “take a step back” and ask fundamental questions such as whether our approach to sentencing reduces crime; if prisons currently maximise the chances of rehabilitation; and if we should look at better alternatives to punish and rehabilitate offenders.

He said:

I think now is the time for us as a society, as a country, to start a fresh conversation, a national debate about what justice, including punishment, should look like for our modern times.

Sentencing and community orders

On sentencing, he said that the high rate of reoffending for those on sentences of less than 6 months showed that for them and wider society “prison simply isn’t working”.

There was, he said, “a very strong case to abolish sentences of 6 months or less altogether, with some closely defined exceptions, and put in their place, a robust community order regime”.

Among the problems with short sentences he cited were disruption to the lives of families when women went into custody and – for women and men – the loss of access to benefits and drug or alcohol support services and treatment.

Offenders were less likely to reoffend if they are given a community order, he said, because these orders were “much more effective at tackling the root causes behind criminality”.

He said:

Now, I do not want community orders which are in any sense a ‘soft option’.

I want a regime that can impose greater restrictions on people’s movements and lifestyle and stricter requirements in terms of accessing treatment and support. And critically, these sentences must be enforced.

Mr Gauke stressed the vital role technology has to play in effective community orders, and pointed to the recently-announced rollout of a GPS tagging programme to more effectively monitor offenders’ movements.

He continued:

Other new technology and innovations are opening up the possibility of even more options for the future too.

For example, technology can monitor whether an offender has consumed alcohol, and enables us to be able to better restrict and monitor alcohol consumption where it drives offending behaviour.

We are testing the value of alcohol abstinence monitoring requirements for offenders on licence, building on earlier testing of its value as part of a community order.

Probation

The Justice Secretary pledged to set out more detail on probation later this year, and stated that “if we want to successfully make a shift from prison to community sentences it is critical that we have a probation system that commands the confidence of the courts and the public”.

He said:

In thinking strategically about the future of our justice system I

believe in the end there is a strong case for switching resource away from ineffective prison sentences and into probation. This is more likely to reduce reoffending and, ultimately, reduce pressures on our criminal justice system.

I am determined to strengthen the confidence courts have in probation to ensure we can make this shift away from short custodial sentences towards more punitive and effective sanctions and support in the community.

Economic crime

Mr Gauke said he was looking not only at more effective punishment for those on short sentences, but also those convicted of more serious crimes such as fraud, where the custody rate has increased from 14.5% in 2007 to over 20% now.

He singled out how fraudsters – whose crimes can be “devastating” for victims – could return to their comfortable lifestyles after prison, but that this could be addressed through “a combination of technology and radical thinking”.

He said:

After serving part of their sentence behind bars, we could, for example, continue to restrict an offender’s movement, their activities and their lifestyle beyond prison in a much more intensive way.

And that could also mean a real shift in the standard of living a wealthy criminal can expect after prison.

I want to look at how, once a jail term has been served, we can continue to restrict their expenditure and monitor their earnings, using new technology to enable proper enforcement.

They would be in no uncertainty that, once sentenced, they wouldn’t be able to reap any lifestyle benefits from their crimes and would need to make full reparation to the community as part of the sentence.

Concluding his speech, Mr Gauke said:

Prison will always play a part in serving as punishment for serious crimes and in rehabilitation, and our reforms will deliver that. But we need to think more imaginatively about different and more modern forms of punishment in the community. Punishments that are punitive, for a purpose.

As with our approach to short sentences, ultimately, it's about doing what works to reduce reoffending and make us all safer and less likely to be a future victim of crime.

Guidance

The Ministry of Justice has introduced a wide range of reforms since David Gauke was appointed Justice Secretary in January 2018, including:

- Restoring stability to the prison estate with a £70 million investment in safety, security and decency.
 - This includes £16 million to improve conditions for prisoners and staff and £7 million for new security measures, such as scanners, improved searching techniques, phone-blocking technology and a financial crime unit to target the criminal kingpins operating in prisons.
 - More than 4,300 prison officers have been recruited, staffing levels are at their highest since 2012, and there has been a significant focus on prisoner rehabilitation.
- Launching the Education and Employment strategy last year, which focuses prison regimes on rehabilitation and helps set each prisoner on a path to employment for when they are released.
- Reforming the Parole Board to increase transparency, improve the process for victims and, crucially, introducing a reconsideration mechanism to allow any seriously flawed release decision by the Parole Board to be looked at again without the need for judicial review.
- Unveiling the Victims Strategy, which ensures support for victims is aligned to the changing nature of crime, and boosts services at every stage of the justice system.
- Launching a consultation on no fault divorce, to remove the acrimony created by forcing couples to attribute blame when a marriage ends.
- A draft Domestic Abuse Bill, which represents the most comprehensive package ever to tackle abuse, better support victims, and bring more offenders to justice.
- Launching a new vision for the future of legal aid, including £5 million of funding for technical innovation and £3 million to support litigants in person. This Legal Support Action Plan followed the Post Implementation Review of LASPO reforms, prioritising early intervention and broadening the types of support people can access.

- Moving more court processes online, saving time and money as part of the government's ambitious £1 billion court reform programme, bringing new technology and modern ways of working to the justice system. This includes a new fully accessible online civil money claims service giving the public the ability to make small claims online – with more than 37,000 claims made since its launch in March and user satisfaction at 90% – and a new system for applying for divorce online, which has cut errors in application forms from 40% to less than 1%.
- Investing £15 million in the court estate on more than 170 wide-ranging improvement works across a number of sites before the end of the financial year.
- Introducing the “Upskirting” Bill, protecting victims by making this invasive behaviour a criminal offence punishable by 2 years in prison.
- Publishing a Female Offender Strategy which delivers dedicated support to vulnerable female offenders – diverting them away from short prison sentences wherever possible. This includes £5 million of funding in community services as well as establishing five pilot residential women's centres across England and Wales.
- Introducing 3 new justice bills into law:
 - The Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Bill means mobile network operators can now detect, block and investigate illegal phone use in prisons – joining the government in the fight against criminals who fuel violence behind bars.
 - The Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill doubled the maximum prison sentence from 6 to 12 months for anyone found guilty of assaulting a prison officer
 - The Civil Liability Bill will ensure spurious or exaggerated whiplash claims are no longer an easy payday. Compensation will be capped, and settling claims without medical evidence will be banned – with insurers promising to pass on savings to hard-pressed motorists through lower insurance premiums.

Press release: Whitehall loses one of its best and brightest – Charles Farr

Charles Farr, one of Whitehall's most influential figures in UK national security, has died following a period of illness. He passed away on Friday afternoon.

Throughout his time in government, Charles Farr held a variety of senior posts and played an integral role in protecting the UK and its citizens from acute threats.

In his most recent position as Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, he was responsible for the coordination of inter-departmental security intelligence assessments and was a trusted adviser to senior ministers.

Prior to this, he was Director General of the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism at the Home Office, from 2007-2015, where he delivered cross-government strategies and institutional reforms to combat terrorism and organised crime.

Charles's contributions have been recognised on a number of occasions by the Queen, who approved a Knighthood for him before he died.

Prime Minister, Theresa May, said:

Charles was an outstanding public servant who dedicated his life to national security. As Home Secretary and Prime Minister, I valued his commitment, expertise and advice enormously. He will be greatly missed by his family, friends and all of those who worked with him.

Cabinet Secretary, Sir Mark Sedwill, said:

Charles and I worked together over many years and his rigorous judgement, penetrating analysis and natural authority will truly be missed. He dedicated his entire career to keeping our citizens safe and the country secure, and the nation owes him a huge debt.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this sad time.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington, said:

Charles was committed to making this country a better and safer place, and I feel a great sense of gratitude for the tireless efforts he made throughout his career. Government has lost a true asset and those who worked with him have lost a mentor and a friend.

Notes to editors

A new Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee will be announced in due course. In the interim, his position will be overseen by Sir Simon Gass, a career diplomat and currently Commandant of the Royal College of Defence Studies.