

[Press release: Countryside Stewardship opens for 2017](#)

From today (10 March 2017) farmers and land managers can apply for the Mid Tier and Higher Tier of Countryside Stewardship. This is a targeted scheme which funds projects to:

- restore habitats
- improve water quality and woodland
- reduce flood risk
- protect landscapes
- provide year-round food and shelter for pollinators, birds and other wildlife

Improvements have been made to the application process this year to make it easier to apply, including simplifying evidence requirements for claims and applications wherever possible. Additional support and advice is also available from Natural England.

Countryside Stewardship grants will be offered to those who propose to make the best environmental improvements within their local area.

The Mid Tier of Countryside Stewardship offers 5-year agreements for environmental improvements in the wider countryside, such as reducing diffuse water pollution or improving the environment for birds, pollinators and farm wildlife.

Higher Tier specifically focuses on environmentally important sites, including commons and woodlands, where the more complex management requires support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission, including tailoring of options.

Application packs can be requested from Natural England by calling 0300 060 3900.

Those thinking of applying for the Higher Tier, including woodland improvement, will need to have submitted an initial application by 5 May 2017. Higher Tier application packs will need to be requested by 13 April so that Natural England can send out the maps and evidence requirements in time for farmers and land managers to develop their application.

Mid Tier applications need to be submitted by 30 September 2017. Mid Tier application packs will need to be requested by 31 July.

Natural England will contact everyone who has a Higher Level Stewardship or Entry Level Stewardship agreement expiring this year to let them know which scheme they will be most suited to and what support is available.

See the main [Countryside Stewardship](#) page for more information, including guidance material.

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Press release: HS2 marks National Apprenticeship Week by launching its search for apprentices

Work can now begin on Britain's new railway after the first phase of the route between the Midlands and London secured Royal Assent last month. High Speed Two (HS2) will create around 25,000 jobs during construction as well as 2,000 apprenticeships. It will also support growth in the wider economy, worth an additional 100,000 jobs.

HS2 apprentices will develop skills in areas such as engineering and project management, while getting paid to play a part in building Europe's largest infrastructure scheme which will create more space on our congested railways for passengers and freight and improve connections between the biggest cities and regions.

The launch of the HS2 Ltd apprenticeship scheme comes as former apprentice and newly appointed CEO, Mark Thurston joins HS2 Ltd. As a former Transport for London apprentice, Mark is understandably a strong advocate of the apprenticeship scheme.

Commenting on HS2 Ltd's apprenticeship scheme, Mark said:

My own career path demonstrates that apprenticeships can lead to a rewarding career, and I'm delighted that HS2 is playing its part in creating a talent pool for the future. Our commitment to creating 2,000 apprenticeships across the project will play a key role in the development of a highly-skilled workforce in the high speed rail industry.

HS2's apprenticeship scheme marks a commitment by the company to bring new people into the business and create meaningful career opportunities that combine work experience with recognised qualifications.

The application process for the first 26 Level 3-4 vacancies opens today, with career opportunities in project planning, project management, project controls and procurement. Twenty of the posts will be based at HS2 Ltd's headquarters in Birmingham, with the remaining 6 positions based in London.

HS2 Ltd is keen to encourage a diverse range of candidates. The vacancies are

open to everyone from school leavers to parents returning to work, or those looking for a new challenge. To qualify, candidates must hold 5 GCSEs, including English and Maths.

All successful candidates will start in post from September 2017.

HS2 is playing a key role in implementing the Transport Infrastructure Skills Strategy, delivering 30,000 apprenticeships in roads and rail by 2020 and gender parity by 2030.

Data farming provides new insights on soil fertility

Scientists from the British Geological Survey and NRM Laboratories have found a novel way of using soil data to assess soil fertility. Maps show that the pattern of more acidic soils – which can reduce soil fertility – increasingly reflect geology and typical rainfall patterns across England and Wales. In recent years, less agricultural lime has been added to farmers' fields to neutralise soil acidity.

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