

Common Agricultural Policy Reform and New Agricultural and Equestrian Buildings



This advice note is issued by the Cotswolds Conservation Board. It explains why the new agricultural support mechanism is producing an increase in planning applications for agricultural and equestrian buildings. The Board reminds local planning authorities of the need to carefully consider the impact that such buildings may have on the landscape.

The Impact of Recent Change

The Common Agricultural Policy financial support mechanism for landowners has changed significantly.

In January 2005 the support farmers receive changed from a production based subsidy to a Single Payment Scheme. Landowners who opt into the scheme will receive annual payments per hectare of land, provided certain environmental standards are met. The most basic standard is that agricultural land is maintained in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC).

The Government has published guidance for the minimum standards of GAEC. Failure to meet these standards can result in landowners losing support payments. The Rural Development Service (RDS) will monitor the condition of land under the scheme and carry out spot checks on individual holdings.

Helping to conserve the AONB

The Cotswolds Conservation Board welcomes, in principle, the objectives of the Single Payment Scheme. In some cases it helps us to conserve the Cotswolds. For example, the important unimproved grassland sites within the AONB will be protected from scrub encroachment by the standards and existing drystone walls and hedges will not be able to be removed without consent from the RDS.

An important objective of the GAEC standard is the maintenance of good soil quality. In particular, the effects of over grazing land in winter, resulting in damage to the soil structure by “poaching”; (localised soil compaction caused by animals, especially cattle and horses), is being discouraged.

Some landowners are responding to the challenge of GAEC by seeking to erect new buildings for over-wintering animals. In many cases within the AONB prior notification or planning permission will be required for such buildings.

Guidance set out in the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan

Two key factors that should be taken into account by planners when considering the issue, are outlined in the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan. The Plan has been adopted by all local authorities in the AONB and sets out their policies for managing the area. The Plan recognises that the fundamental basis of successful landscape management is a viable farming industry. However, it also underlines the fact that poorly designed and sited new agricultural and equestrian buildings can be a source of harm to the AONB.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board would therefore expect individual planning authorities to scrutinise such applications carefully and only consider them acceptable where there is a proven need. Much of the Cotswolds is free draining land, and poaching can be a very localised problem. It is important to bear in mind the fact that some winter grazing, particularly by cattle, is an important management technique used to maintain the quality of permanent pasture, including unimproved grassland. Whilst the Board cannot advise on individual cases, further more detailed general advice on this issue can be obtained from the sources listed below.

If the need is proven, then the Board would expect the local planning authority to secure compliance with its own Local Plan Policy with respect to the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. This would include issues of scale, siting, design and materials reflecting local character.

Background/further information

DEFRA Cross compliance handbook:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/capreform/pubs/pdf/Cross-compliance-3011.pdf>

DEFRA Cross compliance handbook for soil management.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/capreform/pubs/pdf/Soil-hb.pdf>

DEFRA Cross compliance helpline

"<http://www.crosscompliance.org.uk/>"

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

info@fwag.org.uk

Rural Payments Agency

www.rpa.gov.uk

DEFRA helpline

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