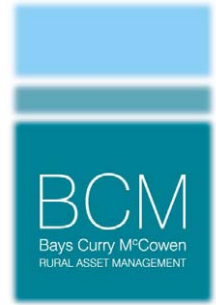


PRESS RELEASE



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Rural Development Plan Approved

The EU Commission has approved the Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE) for 2007-13. The legal texts that confirm the decision will be published early in the New Year, meaning that the £3.9 billion funds for that period can now be formally released. Of course good news though this is, it must not be forgotten that this is one year late in coming!

However, in order to get approval of the RDPE, DEFRA had to make several changes to the Environmental Stewardship (ES) rules:-

- Points from any of the Entry Level Scheme management plan options will no longer count towards the 30 points per hectare target
- The new NVZ rules will form part of the new ES agreements
- A review clause will be inserted into any agreements that run beyond 2015

These changes only apply to schemes entered into since the start of the new Rural Development programme on 1st January 2007. Agreements running before this date are unaffected.

Tom Tyrwhitt-Drake of BCM Bays Curry McCowen comments "These changes are unwelcome insofar as DEFRA are effectively seeking to undo agreements that have already been made. In the majority of cases this will apply to ELS agreements entered into this year. Claimants will be faced with a choice of either taking action to obtain more points to replace those gained from management plan options or withdrawing from the scheme. A major concern from our perspective is that Natural England, who administer these schemes, would appear to have been heavily stretched in their workloads to date. This decision, which will mean revisiting a large number of schemes, coupled with recent announcements on low staff morale in Natural England and possible further budgetary cuts, may result in significant administrative difficulties."

Partners: Iain Curry Andrew Bays Henry McCowen Ros Foreman Alastair Wilson James Fraser



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