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Mrs Jane Ing  
Chair, Shropshire Local Access Forum  
The Shirehall  
Abbey Forgate  
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SY2 6ND



Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

Your ref: DEW  
CCU Ref: DWO210884

RECEIVED  
- 7 JAN 2011

4 January 2011

Dear Mrs Ing,

**Recent changes to Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) payments for permissive and educational access options**

Thank you for your letter of 16 December to the Secretary of State about the above. I have been asked to reply.

As part of the recent Spending Review we had to look very closely at how best to maximise the funding we receive from the EU for HLS. Spending on HLS will increase by over 80% by 2013/14 compared with 2010/11. However, EU funding is not available for annual access payments. If we use UK taxpayers money to make annual access payments, we would not be able to use either that money or the EU match-funding for other key environmental issues such as biodiversity or water quality. If access revenue payments were not stopped in new agreements, the necessary savings would have to be found from elsewhere, which would have a negative impact on the delivery of other aspects of the programme.

To clarify, annual payments for permissive and educational access are no longer available for new HLS agreements. For permissive access, these payments previously covered the creation/maintenance of footpaths, bridleways, and special surface paths for less mobile users, upgrades to Countryside and Rights of Way Act land, and assisted with public liability insurance costs. For educational access, payments comprised an annual base payment of £500, a payment of £100 per visit, and assistance with public liability insurance costs.

However, capital item payments will still be available to support the provision of access, e.g. benches, step-through/over stiles where appropriate, gates, and hard standing for parking for less mobile users in permissive access, and for toilets and hand washing facilities for farms offering educational visits, plus assistance with undertaking Countryside Educational Visit and Accreditation Scheme training.

There are no changes to payments for existing HLS or classic scheme agreements which will continue until their due expiry date. This means that there will still be large numbers of access paths, and farms offering educational access, available until at least 2020. We will still be encouraging farmers to voluntarily provide permissive and educational access on

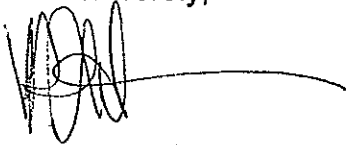


their land where possible, especially where this has already been available through a previous agri-environment scheme agreement so that the benefits of these earlier agreements can continue to be enjoyed by the public.

Natural England advisers will be discussing the changes with farmers who had HLS applications containing access options in the pipeline, and with those whose classic scheme agreements (Countryside Stewardship or Environmentally Sensitive Areas) with access options are due to expire in 2011 and so wish to transfer to HLS.

The changes also mean that our approach to agri-environment access reflects that recently adopted in Wales.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Veronica Jackson  
Defra - Customer Contact Unit