

22 October 2026

Dear

**ATISN 27563: Request for Information – Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)
Collaborative Layer Allocations & Stakeholder Exchanges (2024–2026)**

Information requested

Thank you for your request which I received on 24 September 2026. You asked for recorded information from 2024 to 2026 regarding:

- The projected or actual annual monetary value (£) and percentage of the SFS budget allocated to the Collaborative Layer for landscape-scale actions.
- All recorded evidence, submissions, internal briefings, and stakeholder exchanges concerning this allocation, including a summary log of dates, internal departments, and external organizations involved.

Our response

I can confirm that we hold information relating to your request. From my preliminary assessment, I find that that your request is likely to be very time consuming to deal with.

In the first instance, I am of the view that the information you want me to search for is environmental information and as such I have considered your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs). ‘Environmental information’ is defined in the Regulations as (inter alia) ‘information on measures (including administrative measures), such as policies, legislation, plans, programmes, environmental agreements, and activities affecting or likely to affect the state of the elements of the environment, such as air and atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscape and natural sites, and also factors such as substances, energy, noise, radiation or waste likely to affect the state of the elements of the environment above’. The sustainable farming scheme clearly falls within this.

I have concluded that your request is both voluminous and complex and will be very time consuming to deal. Under the EIRs, there is no appropriate costs limit above which public authorities are not required to deal with requests for information. However, Reg 12(4)(b), manifestly unreasonable request, can apply if the cost or burden of dealing with a request is too great. This position was confirmed in the Upper Tribunal case of *Craven v The Information Commissioner and the Department of Energy and Climate Change* [2012] UKUT442 (AAC).

“Taking the position under the EIR first, it must be right that a public authority is entitled to refuse a single extremely burdensome request under regulation 12(4)(b) as “manifestly unreasonable”, purely on the basis that the cost of compliance would be too great (assuming, of course, it is also satisfied that the public interest test

favours maintaining the exception). The absence of any provision in the EIR equivalent to section 12 of FOIA makes such a conclusion inescapable."

In order to understand the scope of this request, officials undertook preliminary work to identify where information may lie and what would be necessary to extract and collate that information. As your request asks for all recorded evidence across a three year period, it is necessary to search our electronic records system to see what information we hold that mentions the SFS Collaborative Layer, so that we can collate and review these records, and ascertain if they are captured by the request.

Our searches identified in excess of 5,000 documents that reference the SFS Collaborative Layer. In a sampling exercise, we have established that it takes between 3 and 5 minutes per document to extract the document from our electronic records system, and to read and review the contents of the document to determine if it is captured by the request. This is a manual process and cannot be automated. On the basis of the fastest estimate of 3 minutes per document, and with excess of 5,000 documents to review, I estimate the time taken to complete the searches for this request would be in excess of 250 hours. This is a conservative estimate and does not include time taken to extract and prepare any such documents found to be in scope.

Public Interest Test

Reg 12(4)(b) is subject to the public interest test. I have given consideration to the public interest in disclosing the information. The Welsh Government recognises the general public interest in openness and transparency and that releasing the information would help the public gain a better understanding of the scheme and policy area.

Nevertheless, the time required to process this request is clearly excessive and would require processing by the teams associated with this policy area, who would need to review and evaluate the documents identified above. This would take those officials away from their areas of delivery, and would be of detriment to the scheme itself.

The question is whether there is an over-riding public interest in seeing the volume of information you have requested that would countervail the burden on the authority, and the associated impact on delivery, imposed by undertaking this level of discovery. I do not believe such countervailing considerations apply.

The Welsh Government therefore considers the balance of the public interest lies in favour of refusing your request. This is because it is believed your request would place a substantial and unreasonable burden on Welsh Government resources which are already stretched and on balance, it is considered the public interest would be better served by not deploying our resources at the expense of undertaking core work. As part of these considerations we have applied the statutory presumption in favour of disclosure under Reg12(2) of the Regulations but our view is that the significant burden that this request would impose outweighs the public interest in releasing this information.

Your request is therefore refused under Reg 12(4)(b) – manifestly unreasonable, of the EIRs, for the reasons outlined above.

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely