2017
SPRING/SUMMER

Meet the Simpsons: the couple whose Kent vineyard is set to thrive

Invest for success: three ways landowners can unlock rural potential

Rise of the machines: hi-tech farming is on the horizon

Land Business

FARMING ESTATE MANAGEMENT SALES

What will the UK's new agricultural policy be?

Should landowners consider investing?

How will Brexit affect land values?

WHAT NOW?

Will we be able to trade freely with Europe?

What trading opportunities will emerge in the UK and abroad?

How will farms cope without EU subsidies?

Should farms diversify into other sectors?

ANSWERING THE ARTICLE 50 QUESTION

STRUTT & PARKER

The big picture

Simpsons Wine Estate in Barham, Kent. In 2012, Strutt & Parker was the first agent to market land specifically for viticulture when it handled the sale of this parcel of English countryside. The purchasers were Charles and Ruth Simpson, who saw their first harvest last autumn.

Land Business

FARMING ESTATE MANAGEMENT SALES

Welcome

So the Article 50 trigger has been pulled, officially firing the pistol to start the Brexit process. At this time, rural business owners will be asking themselves a multitude of questions. How can we prepare for a world without subsidies? What opportunities for global trade could there be? And will the UK really devise an agricultural policy that works for us? We asked experts from Strutt & Parker and across the wider rural industry to give us their views. Read what they said on page 20.

Strutt & Parker's viticulture experts have advised winemakers across southern England for a number of years. So when we were asked to market a parcel of Kent land five years ago, we knew that it was ideal for growing grapevines. We took the bold step of specifically targeting the viticultural world – the first agent to do so – and it paid off. Today, Simpsons Wine Estate is preparing to bottle its first vintage of English sparkling wine from grapes grown on the land – a fine example of the huge potential that this burgeoning industry offers to landowners. See page 10 to find out more.

Also in this issue, we look to the future. We explain why investment is crucial if the landowning sector is to grow between now and 2030 (page 14), and we examine the benefits of the drive towards automated technology on the farm (page 24).

We hope you enjoy reading Land Business. We value your feedback – please visit *struttandparker.com/landbusiness* or complete and return the enclosed form to tell us what you think of this issue.

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The big picture: Thomas Alexander

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IN THE FIELD

NEWS & VIEWS FROM STRUTT & PARKER

Rate hikes hit rural businesses

Many commercial property occupiers in England have seen changes to their business rates for the first time in seven years. While some rates have decreased, many have significantly increased.

Business rates are charged on most non-domestic properties, including pubs, holiday cottages, farm shops, houses open to the public, wedding venues and land used for storage. Thankfully, land and buildings used for agriculture continue to be exempt.

The rates are calculated by multiplying the rateable value (RV) by the uniform business rate (UBR); the UBR is dependent on the RV and the location of the property.

New RVs came into effect on 1 April 2017, and are based on the estimated rental values at 1 April 2015, assessed in England by the Valuation Office Agency. This is causing the most debate, as hypothetical rents are rarely the same as the actual rent at the time and are unlikely to reflect individual circumstances, therefore an appeal could be necessary.

However, businesses could take advantage of a number of reliefs. From April, small business rate relief offers 100% exemption if a business occupies one property with an RV of £12,000 or less. Where a property has an RV of between £12,001 and £15,000, a tapered relief from 100% to 0% is also available.

For businesses in rural locations with a population of less than 3,000, rural rate relief of up to 100% may be available. To be eligible, it must be the only shop or post office in that location and have an RV of less than £8,500, or be the only

public house or petrol station and have an RV of less than £12,500.

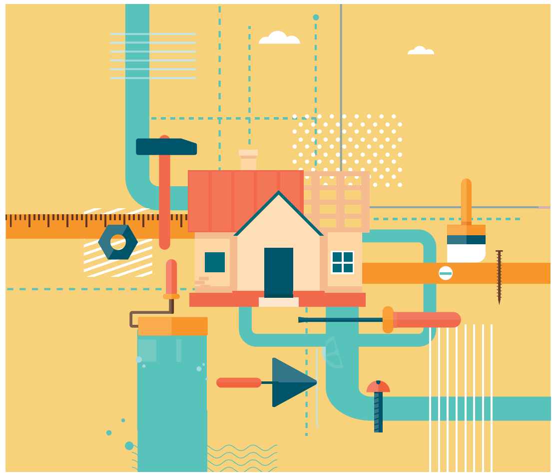
When a property becomes unoccupied, 100% empty buildings relief is available for the first three months, and listed buildings are completely exempt. Also, material change in circumstances relief should be temporarily available if activity in the area – such as road works or flooding – is affecting business performance.

Revaluations have also taken place in Scotland and Wales, where different rates and reliefs apply. What is certain is that if an appeal is appropriate, it is likely to be a lengthy process. Visit *gov.uk/introduction-to-business-rates* for more details.

Nick Bramley and Greig Cockburn, Land Management

Business rates are charged on holiday cottages, such as those at Farndale Cottages in North Yorkshire

Photography: Amy Shore



No quick fix for housing

The government has published a white paper, titled 'Fixing our Broken Housing Market', that sets out its strategy for solving the housing crisis in England.

The paper provides a background on the problems in the housing market and starts a consultation about how the government could reform the planning system and increase housing supply. The aim is to provide a fairer housing market and reduce the affordability gap, with the delivery of more homes being key.

The white paper outlines broadly three categories of proposal: those that the government will implement; those that it proposes to implement, subject to consultation; and those that it is consulting on, with no clearly stated intention yet.

It has been reported that the paper does not deliver the radical change that was expected. However, it is encouraging to note that the consultation does tackle planning issues without reinventing the system. A new 'delivery test' will put pressure on councils and developers. Pre-commencement planning conditions should be reduced, and a proportion of smaller sites should be identified in local plans to diversify allocations. The drafting of a new presumption in favour of sustainable development, to make more efficient use of land, should be welcomed.

There are reasons for optimism about the proposals for the green belt, which at first glance appear to be more restrictive than the existing national policy. Many authorities already recognise the benefit of releasing green-belt land, and the changes indicated in the white paper may ensure that doing this has clear benefits and less opposition in the long run. It is particularly encouraging for well-located, previously developed land in the green belt.

We are actively involved in the consultation process, which closes on 2 May.

John McLarty, Head of Planning

Rural opportunities in rentals market

The seemingly inexorable rise of the private rented sector has reached a landmark, with home ownership at its lowest level for 30 years.

The received wisdom is that the lack of development for both private and social housing has increased prices, decreased affordability and left growing numbers of households unable to access ownership. That is undoubtedly the case, and rural affordability is a particular challenge.

Such a trend will pique the interest of commercial investors, individual investors and estate owners. In 2016, the ULI/PwC *Emerging Trends* report showed that, of the top 10 sectors from which institutional investors expected good performance, the second was home rental, also known as build to rent. Equally, buy-to-let lending remains high.

Estates, then, need to understand the broader landscape. The *Urban Renters* report, Strutt & Parker's analysis of demand in the rental market, highlights that renters seek flexibility, choice and less housing responsibility. These factors will attract the highest rents in rural estate housing, allowing it to effectively compete in this growing marketplace.

Visit *struttandparker.com/housingfutures* to read more about our *Urban Renters* research.

Stephanie McMahon, Head of Research

Sweeping changes on the horizon with HMRC's new digital tax regime

HMRC has announced the 'death of the annual tax return' with the introduction of a brand-new digital taxation system – which will have implications for most businesses operating in the UK.

The government's Making Tax Digital vision is a system whereby tax compliance is integrated into daily business activities, rather than being a separate exercise carried out after the year end. The implementation is to be gradual: unincorporated businesses are set to take on the new reporting requirements first, with companies bringing up the rear in 2020. The requirement to keep digital records and make quarterly reports to HMRC is to begin from April 2018, though this has been deferred until April 2019 for businesses with a turnover below the £85,000 VAT registration threshold.

The change to a quarterly reporting system is likely to increase the overall administrative burden and cost of compliance for businesses, with the time limit likely to be one month after the end of the quarter. These reports will still be supplemented by a year-end declaration so, in practice, the annual tax return will not have changed other than the demise of the form itself.

Currently, individuals have 10 months from the end of the tax year to submit their self-assessment return, so the new system will see a tightening of the year-end timescale. Partnerships and sole traders with accounting year ends before 31 March will have a shorter timescale to submit their figures. Under the old system, a business with a 30 April year end would have 21 months to file their return; this will become just 10 months under the new regime.

Tax payment dates, however, will remain unchanged – although the government is considering changes to both the calculation and timing of income tax payments on account.

Overall, the move to digital tax reporting is likely to have a particularly significant impact on more complex unincorporated farming and property businesses, which unfortunately will be among the first group to fall within the new rules.

Jonathan Smith, Head of Tax

Photography and illustration: iStock

News in brief

£1,157

The average receipts per hectare from contract farming agreements in England in 2016, according to Strutt & Parker's latest English Contract Farming Agreement Survey. See the results at *struttandparker.com/cfa*.

New bid to improve EPC accuracy

In November last year, the government consulted on proposed changes to the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) – the underlying methodology used to assess the energy efficiency of buildings and to produce Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs). The likely impact of the review for rural property owners is mixed: while it should increase the overall accuracy of EPCs, it will improve the EPC rating for some properties, but downgrade others. However, anything that improves EPC accuracy should be welcomed, as this is one of the energy sector's biggest issues to be tackled.
Kieran Crowe, Energy

RETIREES REHOMED

Strutt & Parker has worked with the Addington Fund to provide a new home to a retiring farming client in County Durham. Farming families often lose their home when they have to leave a farm, but the charity's Strategic Rural Housing Scheme can provide them with lifelong accommodation on a rental or shared-equity basis. See *addingtonfund.org.uk* to find out more.
Claire Whitfield, Land Management

> "STEPPING AWAY FROM DATED EU SUGAR POLICIES [MEANS] WE'LL BE FREED FROM THE QUOTA SYSTEM THAT HAS HELD US BACK FOR DECADES"

Paul Kenward, Managing Director of British Sugar, on how Brexit could benefit beet farmers

£1BN FOR RURAL GRANTS

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) has a budget of more than £1 billion for new applications, with grants of up to 40% available to businesses that are creating jobs in rural areas through diversification, food processing and tourism. Find out more at *struttandparker.com/rdpe*.
Sholto Moger, Land Management

Better Broadband on the way?

The government's latest initiative to improve rural broadband services, the Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme, will offer subsidised connections to remote homes and businesses. Premises will be provided with a basic connection – via satellite or wireless – for no more than £400 a year if they are unable to achieve download speeds of 2Mbps and won't benefit from the roll-out of superfast broadband. The scheme is open for applications until the end of 2017. Visit *basicbroadbandchecker.culture.gov.uk*.
Richard White, Land Management

NON-DOMS TAKE TAX HIT

The reach of UK tax to non-domiciled individuals is being extended from April 2017 to include Inheritance Tax (IHT) on UK residential property held in offshore structures – the value of which could be as much as £170 billion, according to HMRC. The changes will not include any interim measures to allow properties to be removed from such structures, and will also apply to non-doms who own shares in offshore companies that hold UK residential properties. The exposure will be based on the value of the company's shares, but referable to the underlying value of the residential property held. On the back of the earlier introduction of Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings (ATED), the net is tightening. For the first time, non-doms will need to consider mechanisms for reducing IHT exposure, such as reliefs and exemptions or reorganising ownership.
Jonathan Smith, Head of Tax

A year of change in Scotland

In the run-up to the 2014 independence referendum, the Scottish government designated 2017 as the nation's Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology. Ironic, then, that three years on so much political energy should be focused on carving out the shape of the future.

With Brexit and the threat of a second independence referendum, one might assume that the Scottish land reform agenda would be on hold. In reality, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 contains enough material to keep policymakers busy until Article 50 has run its course. Five new Land Commissioners are already in place, and wrangling has moved from the merits of proposals such as reintroducing sporting rates to the practical aspect of implementing them across such a diverse rural landscape.

As the year progresses, Dr Bob McIntosh, the newly appointed Tenant Farming Commissioner, will oversee the roll-out of changes to the assignment and succession procedures for secure agricultural tenants; the introduction of a blanket pre-emptive right to buy for secure farm tenants; and the introduction of yet another new form of short-term tenancy, further complicating an already complex area of legislation.

As part of its community engagement agenda, the government is pushing ahead with changes to the planning system, with the ambitious aims of both increasing local accountability and streamlining the development process, funded by increased planning application fees and development levies. And having achieved its climate change target – reducing emissions by 42% by 2020 – six years early, the government is proposing to generate 50% of the nation's energy for heat, transport and electricity from renewable sources by 2030. It remains to be seen how the onshore commercial renewables sector will fare in the face of diminished subsidies, although support for peatland restoration and new woodland creation is expected to continue.

Andrew Aitchison, Land Management

“

LAND REFORM WILL KEEP POLICYMAKERS BUSY UNTIL ARTICLE 50 HAS RUN ITS COURSE

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Photograph: iStock

A RENEWABLE ENERGY BOOST

> THE GLOBAL TRANSITION TO LOW-CARBON ENERGY SOURCES IS GATHERING PACE

ALEXANDER CREED,
HEAD OF ENERGY

It was widely reported in the media that on Christmas Day, more than 40% of the electricity used in the UK was generated from renewable sources.

While this figure was helped by the fact that we use less electricity during a national holiday than we do on a normal working day, it still serves to highlight the change that is happening in the UK's energy supply.

In fact, the change is a global one. The International Energy Agency (IEA) reported that the world's capacity to generate electricity from renewables has now overtaken coal.

In the UK, we saw a significant transition between the start of 2015 and the end of 2016, during which time our fossil-fuel-based electricity generation switched substantially from coal to gas. A new natural gas power plant emits 50-60% less carbon dioxide compared with one that uses coal.

According to energy usage analysis website *mygridgb.co.uk*, during 2016, the share of electricity produced from coal fell from 17% to 10% – and, for the first time in more than 120 years, there were periods where no coal contributed to British electricity.

This change was assisted by the increase in renewables. Between April and September, solar energy supplied 5% of the nation's electricity, and during one particular hour in June 2016, it provided 24% of electricity needs. Data also showed that solar provided more electricity than coal over the summer months.

Wind also contributed a record amount in 2016. It is a little more difficult to measure, as some turbines are part of district networks rather than the National Grid, but again it seems that wind met more of our electricity demand than coal did.

In its report published last October, the IEA reported that renewables, led by wind and solar, represented more than half of the new power capacity installed around the world – a 15% increase over previous years. The report says that during 2015, around half a million solar panels were installed every day, and that in China, two wind turbines were installed every hour.

What is clear from these statistics, and from what is happening in practice, is that the transition to low-carbon energy sources is gathering pace.

Despite the vote for Brexit, the British government has committed to reducing carbon emissions by 2050. In fact, only a few days after the referendum, it confirmed that we would continue on the proposed track to meet its emissions targets – which are actually more stringent than if we had remained within the EU – by 2032.

The next stage of decarbonisation of the electricity supply will be the increased use of energy storage. This will occur on a range of scales, from individual batteries installed in homes to large-scale installations embedded in the electricity networks.

This storage capacity, coupled with smart management, will bring greater control over the timing of the use of electricity. We may see networks of home batteries connected together and centrally controlled as a larger system, or electric cars that are plugged in at home overnight used as storage.

We should also remember that the construction of the next generation of nuclear power stations will contribute to reducing carbon emissions. While the story of new nuclear capacity will still have twists and turns, the government seems committed to its development, in order to secure our base-load requirements.

Other events have preoccupied the government and public agenda since last June, and will continue to do so for the next few years. However, the need to understand where your energy is coming from and how you can manage it in a smart way, ensuring that your rural business can participate in both the generation and management of energy, are going to be important factors in times to come. ■

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BUBBLING UNDER

In 2012, winemakers Charles and Ruth Simpson purchased a slice of Kent countryside through Strutt & Parker. Now, their plans to produce English sparkling wine are coming to fruition

WORDS **CHERRY MASLEN**
PHOTOGRAPHY **ALUN CALLENDER, THOMAS ALEXANDER**

Clockwise from left: Ruth and Charles Simpson; the fruits of the Simpsons' first harvest in 2016; the land in east Kent is ideal for viticulture

Why would the owners of a successful vineyard in the south of France decide to buy land in Kent to expand their acreage? It's 700 miles further north and is unlikely to get anywhere near the 300 days a year of grape-ripening sunshine enjoyed in *le Midi*.

But that is exactly what Charles and Ruth Simpson – the British owners of Domaine Sainte Rose, near Servian in the Languedoc – have done. Having spent 15 years developing their French estate into an award-winning producer of high-quality wines, the next phase of their business has neatly dovetailed with the burgeoning English sparkling wine industry.

Vineyards have existed in the comparatively mild climates of Kent, Sussex and Hampshire for many years, but it is only recently that English sparkling wine has been accepted as a serious contender on the world stage. 'English fizz' was given a further seal of approval at the end of 2015 when Champagne Taittinger bought 171 Kent acres through Strutt & Parker, less than 20 miles from the Simpsons' estate in Barham, on the other side of Canterbury.

Where the conditions are right, east Kent's chalky soil areas are proving highly suitable for viticulture. The soil, essential for cultivating the grapes that produce high-quality sparkling wine, is similar to that in parts of Sussex, and indeed in the Champagne region of France.

Demand for land

Charles and Ruth bought their Kent estate in 2012, three years before Taittinger, but both transactions were arranged through Nigel Porter, Land Management Partner in Strutt & Parker's Canterbury office.

'We've seen an increased demand for land in this area, both from French champagne houses and others interested in viticulture,' he says. 'There's a massive difference in land values, which makes it attractive to French growers; you could pay a million euros a hectare [£350,000 an acre] for planted land in the Champagne region, but here, arable land is worth a fraction of that: around £10,000 an acre, base value.'

But for how much longer? 'We could soon be in a situation where land suitable for vines will be of higher value, even if it's currently arable,' adds Porter.

As soon as he was asked to sell the land at Barham in 2011, Porter thought that it had the potential to become a vineyard. 'When we got the viticulturist's report confirming that it did, we took the bold step of tailoring our marketing specifically at the wine industry through specialist media,' he explains. 'We were the first firm to do that.'

Although this approach drew doubtful comments from other property professionals, it worked. The Simpsons had been considering developing a wine estate in the UK for some time, so were interested as soon as they spotted the land being marketed on *Decanter* online.

'We had lots of reasons to set up a base in the UK,' says Ruth Simpson. 'Domaine Sainte Rose was well established and we could leave our team to run it when we were away. We were very keen to make sparkling wine and knew the conditions could be good in Kent. And we wanted our two children to pursue their secondary education in the UK.'

The farming family who owned the land wanted to release some capital but didn't want to sell a large acreage – an ideal scenario, in fact, for a new vineyard. 'You need fewer acres to make a living out of viticulture than you do for arable farming,' says Porter. →

The Simpsons bought two plots, totalling 87 acres. 'We invested in this land because not only was it chalk soil, but both plots were less than 100 metres above sea level, had south-facing slopes, and shelter from winds to protect young shoots,' says Charles Simpson. 'When you're growing in marginal weather conditions as in the UK, you need to make sure everything else is in your favour – we're very pleased with both sites.'

The couple wanted to secure the land but weren't ready to plant, so Strutt & Parker managed it for them, farming it for two years through a local arable farmer. 'We went from acting for the seller to acting for the purchaser, which worked well for everyone,' says Porter.

Up and running

As a precursor to the English venture, Domaine Sainte Rose's first-ever sparkling wine was produced in the Languedoc in 2012. The first vintage was launched in 2013, and by 2014 the Simpsons were based in the UK. That same year, they bought two large barns close to their land for their new winery, which was installed in 2016 with the help of a Rural Development Programme for England Growth Programme grant.

> “OUR LAND HAS CHALK SOIL, SOUTH-FACING SLOPES AND SHELTER FROM THE WIND”

'We had to jump through a lot of hoops to get the grant, including demonstrating how we would generate jobs in the local community,' says Ruth, 'but it was worth it, as we were given £143,154, which is 37.5% of the cost of the winery.'

The Simpsons planted their first block of vines on English soil in 2014, on the smaller of the two plots, using the same three varieties of grape – chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier – used to make all champagne. The first harvest in 2016 was an encouraging one, with the plentiful juice soon in the winery's brand-new stainless-steel fermentation tanks.

The second, larger plot was partially planted in 2016, with more vines going in this year. A small amount of still chardonnay will be bottled in 2017, with the first English sparkling wine released in 2018. They have already sold half of the sparkling product to the online retailer Naked Wines – impressive, especially for a first vintage. Future plans include a tasting room at the winery, which they hope will be completed in time to sample the 2018 vintage.

A grassroots approach

The Simpsons have approached their English enterprise with the same insistence on authenticity and provenance as their French business. They learned their skills 'on the job' in France, buying a small chateau and vineyard for, as Ruth says, the price of a London flat, and giving up their day jobs to put everything into their new venture. Charles' business background gave him relevant skills including financial management and marketing; Ruth's family makes Scotch whisky, so she understood the risks and the need for long-term investment in an agricultural business.

Above all, they didn't want to simply take over an existing business and do what had already been done. Having read about a loosening of rules in the Languedoc, they used New World winemaking methods, good fruit grown on their own land and minimal intervention to produce quality wines, creating a profitable business that sells up to 400,000 bottles each year.

'We do not buy in external fruit in France and don't aspire to in England,' says Charles. 'We want to be part of the process, from the grape to the glass.'

So how will the Simpsons' English sparkling wine compare with the Domaine Sainte Rose version? 'Our aim is to create an even finer *méthode traditionnelle* than we can in the Languedoc,' says Ruth. 'The challenge in warmer climates is to keep the purity, lightness and finesse you want in a sparkling wine. With the UK's cool climate, our acidities will be higher, something that is essential for ageing this type of product. We believe that our English production will compete with the finest sparkling wines in the world.' ■

WATCH A VIDEO ABOUT SIMPSONS WINE ESTATE AND FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR VITICULTURE EXPERTISE AT **STRUTTANDPARKER.COM/VITICULTURE**

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simpsonswine.com

Clockwise from left: Charles Simpson; Ruth Simpson; the first plots of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier grapes were planted in 2014; Strutt & Parker's Nigel Porter, one of the firm's viticulture experts, advises a number of English wine producers

SPARKLING SUCCESS: THREE OTHER THRIVING WINE ESTATES

NYETIMBER, WEST SUSSEX

Strutt & Parker has been working with Nyetimber, one of the oldest and largest wine estates in the UK, for more than 10 years – assisting with land acquisition for expansion, planning and rating, and providing extensive property advice.

RIDGEVIEW, EAST SUSSEX

Having been involved with two generations of the Roberts family, owners of English sparkling wine producer Ridgeview, Strutt & Parker has assisted them to acquire a neighbouring nursery and upgrade storage, winemaking and bottling facilities.

CHAMPAGNE TAITTINGER, KENT

In 2015, Strutt & Parker acted for Taittinger in the first purchase of land in the UK by a champagne house. Domaine Evremond will establish 70 acres of vines this spring, and Strutt & Parker is advising on plans for a winery, restaurant and visitor centre.

2030 VISION

Strutt & Parker has worked with the CLA to produce *Rural Business 2030: Unlocking Investment, Unlocking Potential* – a new report that explores the possibilities to invest in and grow the landowning sector between now and 2030. It focuses on three key areas of opportunity: natural capital, energy and connectivity. Here, Strutt & Parker experts discuss the prospects that each area presents

WORDS **EMILY SCAIFE** ILLUSTRATION **MARTIN AZAMBUJA**

NATURAL CAPITAL

At present, it can be hard to make a business case for individuals to invest in their natural assets. However, Jason Beedell, Strutt & Parker Research Partner, believes that this is likely to change imminently, as the government looks likely to fail to meet its objectives for the environment – in areas such as wildlife protection, soil management and water quality – without significant investment.

'What we're going to find is that the government is probably not going to pay farmers and land managers as much to produce crops in the future,' he says. 'It will pay them for producing public goods.'

Beedell is more optimistic about natural capital now than he has been for the past 20 years. 'What's quite encouraging is that the government's thinking feels the right way round,' he says, explaining that it has asked the Natural Capital Committee to decide what success would look like in 2030 and then work backwards from that. 'I don't think the government has thought that way in the past. It is potentially a massive market for landowners.'

Several other factors could also contribute to making it a huge opportunity in years to come. Although the government looks likely to remain the primary customer for natural capital, a number of new potential customers are emerging, such as water companies needing to clean and store water, manufacturers who have to meet carbon targets and organisations who have pledged to improve health by connecting people with nature. The market would also grow if planning applications were required to include biodiversity offsetting.

Beedell believes that leaving the EU could also help natural capital fulfil its potential. 'Because we're leaving the Common Agricultural Policy, we've actually got more freedom to introduce these policies,' he says. 'It's really exciting and a lot of the building blocks are already in place.'

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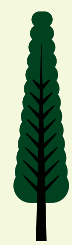

ENERGY

Rural businesses have invested heavily in renewable energy, but changes in policy have led to questions regarding how the sector can be sustained. Despite recent uncertainty, Alexander Creed, Strutt & Parker's Head of Energy, remains convinced that it is vital that business owners confront energy issues head-on.

'The need to understand your energy use, reduce it and manage it in a smarter way – as well as possibly producing some or all of your own energy – is not going away, particularly given the ambitious emissions targets set in the fifth carbon budget,' he says. 'It is something that all businesses must tackle.

'Consumer awareness of the environmental impact of a business is becoming ever more important, so demonstrating that you are doing your bit is essential in order to retain customers.'

However, Creed is keen to emphasise that investing in energy also makes sound business sense. 'When we review the energy use of a business, it is extremely rare that we cannot find cost reductions, or that the cost of taking action exceeds the income generated, so there is an economic case as well.

'For all business owners – and I include rural estates and farms in this – managing your energy will add value, either through a hard return to your bottom line or through softer means by engaging with your customers and encouraging them to do business with you.'

Looking ahead, Nick Watson, Strutt & Parker Land Management Partner, believes that energy storage has the potential to be revolutionary. 'One of the biggest changes we will see in our lifetimes will be the ability to store electricity effectively,' he says. 'Within the next few decades, most of the cars on the road will be electric and most houses will have a solar array, a heat pump and a battery pack, making them largely self-sufficient.'

For this to become a reality, Watson believes that the equipment has to take that next step in terms of efficiency and that the government needs to provide support to help it become mainstream.

'There are some very interesting opportunities for landowners around generating and storing electricity, and reselling it to their own occupiers and the wider local community. Some of the regulatory and planning barriers preventing that at the moment need to come down so that landowners and rural businesses can become energy providers in their own right.' ➔

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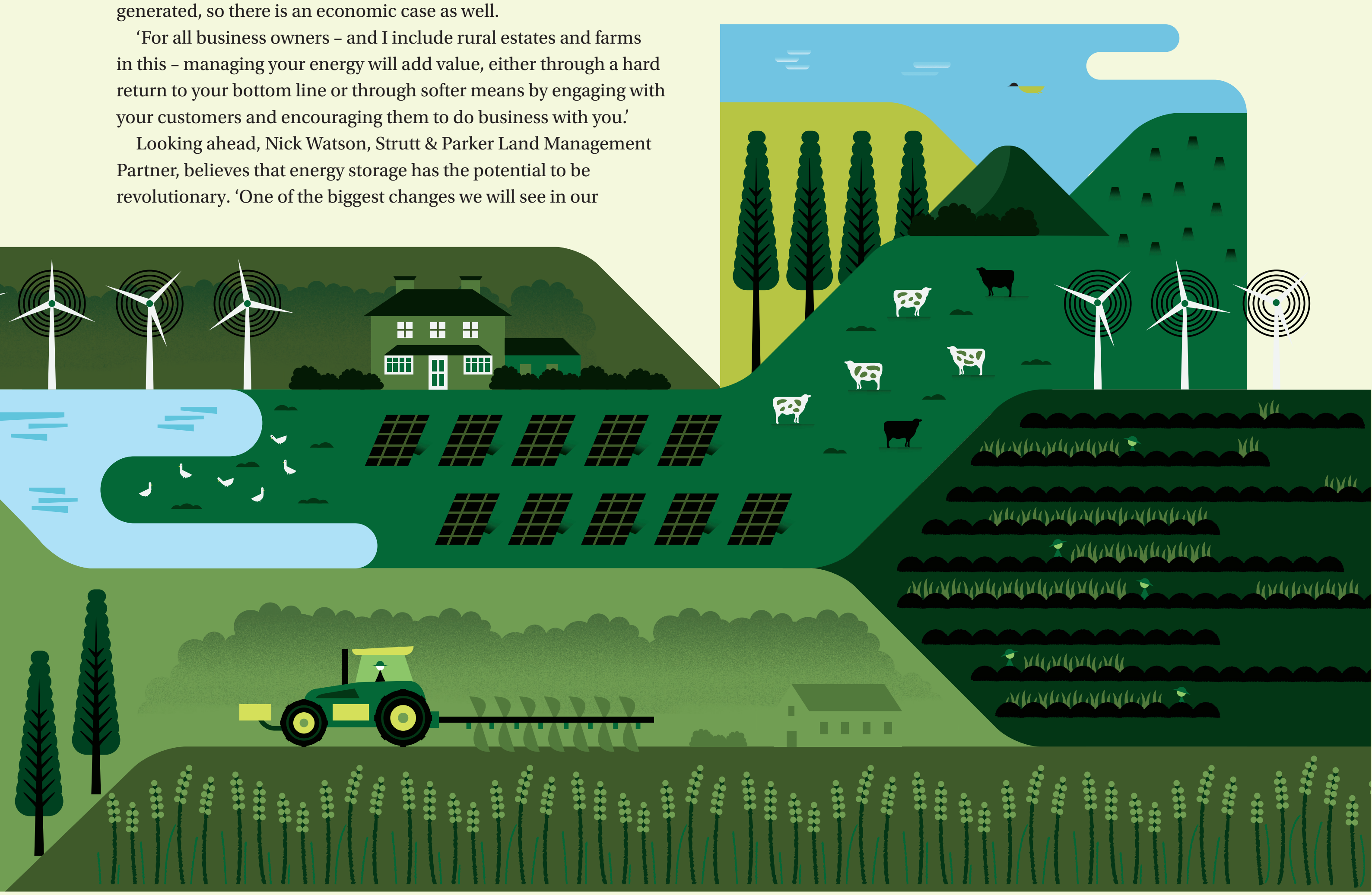

CONNECTIVITY

One of the biggest grievances voiced at the launch of the report at the CLA's Rural Business Conference in December was unpredictable rural broadband. Robert Paul, Head of Strutt & Parker's Telecoms Group, agrees that mobile and broadband coverage remains a challenge in more remote areas after years of underinvestment.

The introduction of the Universal Service Obligation (USO), which promises basic fixed-line broadband services at an affordable price for all UK citizens, has been hailed a breakthrough, but businesses in rural areas will undoubtedly require speeds greater than 10Mbps to help them achieve their full potential.

Paul has another word of warning regarding the obligation: 'The USO is great – however, it only seems to refer to rolling out broadband, not to mobile connectivity. A common misconception is that there is an overlap between the two and that "broadband" includes "mobile connectivity", but they are not the same thing. Businesses and homes cannot operate via broadband alone.

'Both sides of the equation need to be pushed by the government. There need to be clear targets set for absolute universal coverage across all households, regardless of geographic area, and the operators then need to be held to account for delivery.'

This is currently a piece missing from the puzzle. Paul explains that if the government is determined to improve connectivity in rural areas, it needs to actually enforce the targets it has set. The operators blame the delay on planning laws and landowners being difficult, but Paul sees no evidence of this.

'The real issue is that they're not trying – they don't want to invest in infrastructure in rural areas, preferring the more commercial urban networks,' he says. 'Under the new Electronic Communications Code, market value still applies, so the operators' attempts to reduce rents to mere compensation should be fiercely resisted. In fact, rents continue to increase, and we foresee the need for thousands of new sites in order to provide proper 4G and 5G coverage.

'However, there's nothing currently in place to force or incentivise the operators to improve connectivity in rural areas – it won't happen until the government drives it very hard.'

Strutt & Parker is well placed to help improve rural connectivity, says Paul: 'If landowners have "not-spots" on their estate or in their locality, we can help to find operators to fill those gaps. Also, if people want assistance with broadband connectivity issues, we can help them to review the different options available.' ■

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VISIT **STRUTTANDPARKER.COM/RURALBUSINESS2030** TO READ THE FULL REPORT

RURAL INVESTMENT IN NUMBERS

WHAT DO RURAL BUSINESSES PLAN TO INVEST IN?

32% plan to invest in renewable energy

23% want to invest in connectivity

40% intend to invest in the environment

60% seek to invest in property for their own business use

TOP FOUR BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT

49% cite problems with the planning system

47% don't anticipate getting a sufficient return

42% point to regulations

41% mention prohibitive upfront costs

Source: *Rural Business 2030: Unlocking Investment, Unlocking Potential*

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO GOOD USE

“IT’S TIME TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS”

JAMES FIRTH,
PARTNER, PLANNING

Permitted development rights, introduced in April 2014, provide a great opportunity to many farmers and landowners.

Now covered under Class Q of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (GPDO), these rights allow for the change of use of an agricultural building and any land within its curtilage to residential use, alongside any reasonably necessary building operations.

Before work can proceed, however, an application for prior approval from the local planning authority is required. While this considers fewer matters than a full planning application, it can still prove frustrating, and provides the local authority with a degree of control and discretion. Experience of implementation of the new rights, in addition to clarification from government and planning determinations, can provide greater certainty for landowners.

For agricultural to residential conversions, a total of up to 450 sq m of floorspace can be changed in each agricultural unit. Matters covered in applications for prior approval include effects on transport and highways, noise impacts, contamination and flooding risks, and external appearance.

The authority must also consider ‘whether the location of the building makes it otherwise impractical or undesirable for [it] to change to residential use’ – and this final requirement has proved contentious. Within the first six months of the rights coming into force, it was reported that councils rejected half of all applications. Location was frequently cited, with councils using both their own and national policies seeking to restrict new housing in the countryside as justification.

In 2015, the government updated the National Planning Practice Guidance, which has provided support for conversion to residential use and highlighted that the right does not apply a test in relation to sustainability of location. It also recognises that many agricultural buildings will not be in village settlements and may not be able to rely on public transport.

The update also provided guidance on what is meant by ‘impractical or undesirable’ in a change in use. For example, the fact that an agricultural building is located where the local planning authority would not normally grant planning permission for a new dwelling is an insufficient reason for refusing prior approval. There has since been a turnaround in the number of applications being granted, resulting in numerous success stories across the national Strutt & Parker development and planning teams.

If a building is listed, or within a conservation area, an area of outstanding natural beauty or a national park, permitted development rights do not apply. Despite this, government support for the principle of reusing agricultural buildings for residential purposes can be treated as a material consideration – and we have used this to provide positive justification alongside planning applications on behalf of our clients. In several cases, the GPDO has also provided an avenue to achieving more complex planning permission once the principle of a residential use has been granted prior approval.

The government’s response to the Rural Planning Review, published in February, proposes new permitted development rights that allow up to 750 sq m of floorspace to be converted to residential use and up to five new dwellings to be created on each agricultural unit. But there is also greater flexibility for farms that have diversified to include business activities.

From 30 September 2017, new rights will allow for light industrial buildings and workshops to be converted for residential use. As with the agricultural rights, certain restrictions and requirements will apply: there will be a limit of 500 sq m for the area to be converted, and the building must have been in light industrial use on 19 March 2014, or at the point when it was last in use.

This will, however, present an important opportunity to provide homes to meet local needs and support the vibrancy of rural communities – as well as lending further support to landowners seeking to progress schemes through the planning process. ■

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THE NEW FORESTS

Commercial forests are a vital resource, but we're in danger of not planting enough new trees to meet future demand for timber, writes **Fenning Welstead** of John Clegg & Co, the independent forestry arm of Strutt & Parker

ILLUSTRATION **POLLY LINDSAY**

The life of a commercial tree can be measured against the life of the UK's membership of the EU. We joined the EEC in 1973 and voted to leave the EU in 2016 – a period of 43 years, which, as it happens, is an ideal lifespan for growing commercial timber.

A spruce tree planted as we joined the Common Market would be ready for felling today. Throughout that period, we have seen the three-day week, the rise of Thatcherism, the Falklands conflict and countless other world events.

So here we are today, starting the process of leaving the EU, and the tree is ready for harvesting to provide material for a wide range of uses. The best of it will be used for sawn timber for housebuilding. The smaller-dimension timber will go to make pallets and fencing, or be converted into pulp for chipboard. Finally, any sawdust, bark and other leftovers will be burned to create heat and electricity.

Throughout its life, the tree has required little in the way of maintenance and, with the application over time of air, rain and sunshine, it has turned gas, water and heat into something useful. That, in a nutshell, is the purpose of commercial forestry. For our part, we can either lock up the carbon by building with the timber or release the gases and water by burning it and using the heat to keep warm or make electricity. But one of the things we have lost during the lifespan of this tree is consistency and long-term thinking.

In 1988, Chancellor Nigel Lawson removed Schedule D tax relief on forestry expenditure and, with it, ended 70 years of continuity for this vital rural enterprise. Since then, we have only had 'consistency' in the sense that everything has been constantly changing. There have been different support systems put in place almost every five years. Overlay that with political change at Westminster and in the devolved parliaments, and it has become almost impossible to engender the appropriate confidence that is needed to encourage people to plant and think long term.

A growing concern

However, a new awareness is taking hold. The governments in Westminster, Cardiff and Edinburgh fully realise the need for more trees. They appreciate the downstream industries that now flourish on the back of harvesting crops planted 40 years ago. Without replacing those crops, these industries will wither.

The demand for timber is increasing across the globe and the UK should be doing its best to maximise production as part of a holistic long-term land-use policy. Furthermore, planting and growing trees also sequesters carbon, reduces flood risk and provides diverse landscapes, recreational spaces and wildlife habitats.

The recent announcement in England of the £19-million Woodland Carbon Fund is an indication of the support that is now coming forward to promote new planting. In Scotland, the planting target has been increased to 15,000 hectares a year, backed up by hugely positive grants. In Wales, too, there is the political will to see more trees planted.

On the horizon, Brexit is likely to mean a fundamental change in the support system and, at this moment in time, no one can confirm what that will be. Rather than consider it as a negative, we should look on it as a great opportunity to reintroduce consistency of policy and support for rural land uses as vital businesses, among which forestry should be a major player.

A recent economic survey in Scotland confirmed that the forest sector was a £1-billion contributor to the economy. This has really focused minds on the importance of continuing to support and encourage increased planting, thus ensuring that future supplies of the raw material are available. It goes well beyond five-year political cycles and appears to have consolidated cross-party support.

> "THE UK SHOULD BE MAXIMISING TIMBER PRODUCTION AS PART OF A HOLISTIC LONG-TERM LAND-USE POLICY"

A new forest is a tangible asset expressing confidence in the future. While nobody can predict what developments will take place over the next 40 years, it's a reasonable bet that we'll still need raw materials. One made from air, rain and sunshine might be the best investment we make. ■

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VISIT **JOHNCLEGG.CO.UK/FOREST-ASSET-MANAGEMENT/UK-FOREST-MARKET-REPORT** TO READ JOHN CLEGG & CO'S 2016 UK FOREST MARKET REPORT

'WHATEVER HAPPENS, FARMING WILL NEED TO CHANGE'

Now that Article 50 has been triggered, what must rural businesses do to gear up for the brave new world of Brexit? We get the views of experts from across the agricultural sector

ILLUSTRATIONS **IAN DUTNALL**

EXAMINE YOUR BUSINESS, SECURE INCOME AND CUT COSTS – DON'T SIT BACK AND WAIT

Ross Murray, CLA President

It is hard to underestimate how much our farming industry has been shaped by over 40 years of EU membership. Brexit opens up a world of opportunities for the future of the sector and the rural economy, but most of these are not immediate. The risks of getting Brexit wrong are substantial. Above all else, the industry must play its part in supporting the government to get the best possible free-trade agreement for food and farming.

One area where farmers and landowners will benefit is in the shaping of a worthy successor to the CAP. We can build a new policy better suited to UK needs, focused on clearer objectives that support farmers to be more productive and profitable, as well as delivering public goods with better outcomes for the environment.

I have confidence that our industry will be stronger and better off after Brexit, whenever that might be. But of course, no one should sit back and wait. Landowners have to examine their businesses while seeking out diversification to secure income, and, wherever possible, should invest where necessary to increase the product quality of their farming offer and reduce its cost base. It's not an easy challenge, but it's a worthy one.

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TARIFF-FREE ACCESS TO THE EU MARKET IS A PRIORITY

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USE THE NEXT THREE YEARS TO TAKE STOCK OF YOUR BUSINESS

Clare Slipper, Parliamentary Officer, NFU Scotland

For the Scottish farming and food industry, access to the EU market without tariffs or barriers has always been a priority. Next to the rest of the UK, Europe remains the largest destination for Scottish food exports and a market that offers good opportunities for growth.

As Theresa May has ruled out staying in the single market, it is vital that the prime minister achieves her objective of a free-trade agreement with the EU. But these developments also present much bigger questions that will guide discussions with Scottish and UK negotiators over the coming months.

Will future trade arrangements allow Scottish producers the best possible access to EU markets, perhaps in the form of a 'special deal' as has been suggested for other industries? With freedom of movement a sticking point, will we retain access to a competent workforce? Will the negotiations allow the development of an agricultural policy to provide appropriate funding and flexibility in policymaking that recognises Scotland's unique agricultural systems and drives farm profitability?

For our membership, profitability is king. Brexit presents many opportunities for Scottish producers, but it must not be at the expense of the provenance of Scottish produce; nor result in cheap imports driving down standards of production.

Farm businesses must use the next three years of relative certainty – given the UK government's commitments on support – to take stock of their businesses and plan for life after 2020. As we leave the flawed CAP, the new policy framework must facilitate managed change, not chaos. There is a need for new forms of support, but it's equally vital that the pendulum doesn't swing too far and too fast if farms and crofts are to adjust to the new operating environment.

TARGET NON-FARMING BUYERS IN THE LAND MARKET

Michael Fiddes, Head of Estates & Farm Agency, Strutt & Parker

Article 50 is the beginning of a long process, the outcome of which will be uncertain for many years. Uncertainty is not good for any capital market – but the land market has thus far been resilient, with few sales agreed before the referendum subsequently falling through and land prices remaining firm.

That said, we are now seeing the lowest proportion of farmer buyers (about 50% in 2016) since we began research into the land market more than 20 years ago. This is unsurprising: not only are farm profits under pressure, there's also uncertainty about future subsidies.

However, what is very apparent is a continuing demand for land from non-farmers. These include high net worth individuals, who wish to buy land for a myriad of reasons; investors looking for land with long-term strategic development prospects; and individuals and charities who have a conservation bent. We are also seeing some activity from overseas buyers due to the fall in sterling.

There is no doubt that what happens to farming subsidies post-Brexit will have an impact on land values. But with the considerable other benefits of land ownership, there will always be buyers. So with land prices affected by more than farming profitability, the impact of Brexit on the UK's economy and attractiveness as a country in which to invest will be just as important as that of any changes to subsidies. ➔

“

WE’LL BE FREE TO GROW, SELL AND EXPORT MORE OF OUR FOOD

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EXPORTS AND INNOVATION WILL LEAD TO A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

Andrea Leadsom MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform our agricultural policies, and it’s vital that farmers are a key part of this process. There will undoubtedly be support for farming after we leave the EU. We’ll have a system based on simpler, more effective rules than the flawed CAP, and be free to grow, sell and export more of our food.

In 2016, British food and drink exports topped £20 billion for the first time, yet only one in five producers are currently exporting. While the EU will continue to be our most important trading partner – a relationship we are determined to uphold through tariff-free cross-border trade – markets such as the US, China and India offer the greatest potential to grow our exports.

I have heard loud and clear the vital role that seasonal workers play in farm businesses. But we mustn’t forget that a key factor behind the vote to leave the EU was to control immigration. So I want to find out what kind of labour is needed, while exploring the role innovation can play – not just for productivity but also as a means to improve the landscape.

I want farmers to thrive outside of the EU, and I will fight to get the best deal. By working together, I am confident that a stronger industry and a prosperous future awaits British farming.

INVEST, DIVERSIFY AND EMBRACE THIS PERIOD OF CHANGE

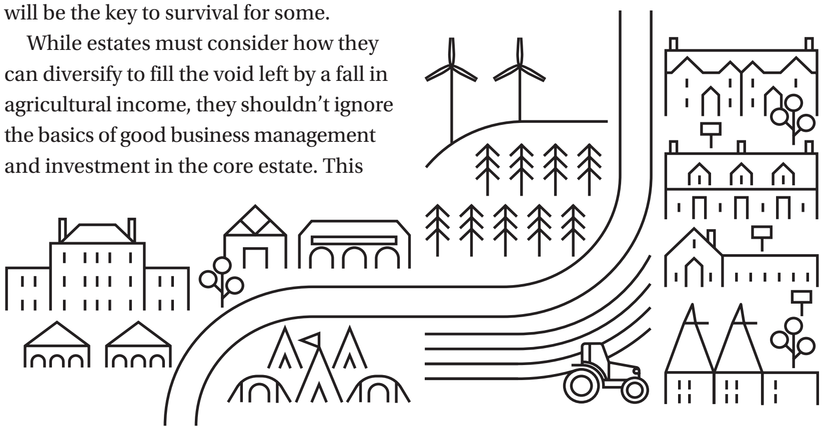
James Farrell, Head of Estate & Land Management, Strutt & Parker

To thrive in the future, we must embrace this period of change. That will mean understanding new areas of opportunity, such as natural capital, which has the potential to create valuable new revenue streams for some.

We are on the cusp of a new agricultural revolution, driven by technological advances in which progressive farmers can invest to become more profitable. But smaller tenant farms, which may be undercapitalised and may not have that opportunity to invest, need to think about what they are going to do. Joint ventures and new collaborative arrangements will be the key to survival for some.

While estates must consider how they can diversify to fill the void left by a fall in agricultural income, they shouldn’t ignore the basics of good business management and investment in the core estate. This could mean investing in residential properties to ensure that they can thrive in a changing private rental market. Rural landlords must adapt and make their rentals competitive with those in urban areas.

Reviewing an estate, understanding its position in the local economy and developing a strategy around that will be vital. The availability of capital has never been better, so there’s a real opportunity to reinvest, too. But while borrowing remains historically cheap, interest rates are rising – and with £1 billion of grant funding available to kick-start new projects (see page 7), the time for action is now.



ENSURE YOUR FARM IS RESILIENT ENOUGH TO COPE WITH A NEW SUPPORT REGIME

Nick Von Westenholz, NFU Director of EU Exit and International Trade

We cannot ignore or underestimate the unprecedented challenges that agriculture will now face. Of UK lamb exports worth £300 million, £290 million came from sales to Europe, and 78% of wheat and barley exports went to the EU. The country relies on the thousands of workers that come from EU countries to pick fruit, flowers and vegetables. So, for farming to deliver for the nation, we need the right conditions. We need the best possible access to trade with Europe, and to a reliable and competent workforce.

The prime minister has ruled out remaining in the single market, instead stating her intention to pursue a free-trade agreement with the EU. But if a quick, comprehensive deal can’t be achieved, it would be vital that there are appropriate phased arrangements to allow Britain’s farmers to adapt and avoid a disruptive cliff-edge.

So, farmers shouldn’t waste any time in having a close look at their businesses and making sure they’re fit for the challenge. In future, there may be a very different support regime, and new trading arrangements with the EU and third countries could lead to structural adjustments in prices for UK produce.

Whatever the final deal, Brexit will mean significant disruption, so farm businesses will need to be resilient to ensure they can thrive in the new environment.

PLAN FOR MORE COMPETITION IN A MARKET-FOCUSED FUTURE

Sir Peter Kendall, Chairman, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board

Triggering Article 50 is not an end to the uncertainty, but the start of it. As we leave the EU, the prime minister's line that 'no deal is better than a bad deal' will hang over farming until the clock strikes midnight.

'No deal' means World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. Although many 'hard' Brexiteers argue that the devaluation of the pound against the euro has already offset any WTO tariffs, with 62% of our agricultural exports going to the EU, tariffs of over 50% on many such products would have a massive impact.

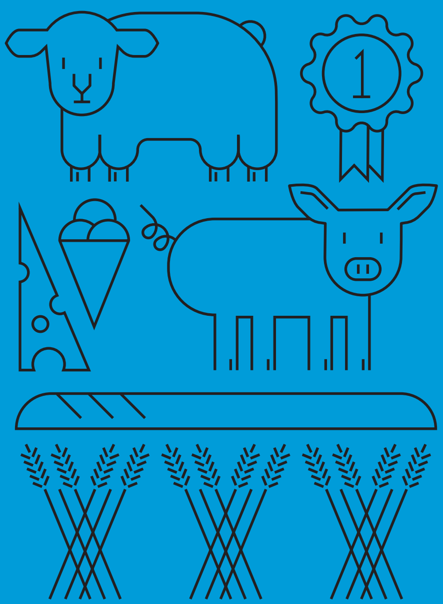
Whatever the outcome of negotiations, farming will have to change. Our current situation is a 'honeymoon period'. The falling pound is a boost to commodity prices and support payments, and has increased farm incomes. The chancellor has committed to maintaining current levels of support until 2020 and access to the single market remains intact.

We should bank these short-term gains and plan for an era of significantly less support and more competition. Understanding our business in intricate detail will be vital, and opportunities will be there for well-run and well-structured businesses.

We must make the most of our domestic market by being suppliers of preference to the UK food and drink industry. We need to deliver what customers want, when they want it, at a price that doesn't have them seeking out bucket-shop prices from around the world.

Globally, there are huge opportunities. British lamb won 'best product' at the Paris show last year, and UK pork exports to China – largely of parts of the carcass not eaten here – increased from £54 million to £85 million.

It will be an uncertain few years, so use the time wisely and plan for an exciting market-focused future. We can do it!



THE FUNDAMENTALS WILL REMAIN THE SAME, SO FOCUS ON GOOD FARM MANAGEMENT

Will Gemmill, Head of Farming, Strutt & Parker

Many of us, including farming ministers, have moaned about the CAP. We now have the chance to create an agricultural and environmental policy that works for us.

We can only speculate about what this policy might be, but it's highly unlikely that farmers will receive similar direct payments to now. Perhaps the key question is whether the government will continue to protect farmers or liberalise the sector, which is perceived by many as inefficient. If there are winds of change, will they be a gentle breeze or a hurricane?

Regardless, the fundamentals of running an efficient business remain the same: detailed understanding of your markets, revenues, costs and profits. Farmers' focus should be on good management. On the ground, aim for excellence in growing the crop, understand the relationship between soils and crops, and monitor, evaluate and learn from the results.

The farming mindset will need to change too: improvement through marginal gains will be key, as will using the best information to find solutions, and ensuring that everyone in the team knows what the objectives are and provides feedback.

> **"BUSINESS SKILLS AND INNOVATION WILL BE KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS"**

YOUNG FARMERS MUST MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD

Ed Ford, Chairman, National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs

Last year, we conducted a post-Brexit survey with young farmers as part of a consultation to ensure that their views are considered in the development of a future British agricultural policy.

There is frustration with the current Basic Payment Scheme, and young farmers are looking for a change of business culture to secure better prospects. Of our respondents, 67% see themselves as trading individually, directly with buyers, which is a good indication of considerations for a future culture and the skillset needed. Although we don't know the results of our trade negotiations yet, it's clear that business skills and innovation will be key to future success.

While most respondents wanted to see subsidies continue, 46% wanted them to remain in place only for a limited time. A preferred system would be one that is not so tied to land ownership, but instead addresses the business needs of established farmers and new entrants alike.

We are ensuring that members' voices are heard by joining Defra and industry roundtable discussions. We are also encouraging our Young Farmers' Clubs to hold their own discussion groups and to raise issues with their local MPs. Young farmers are market-orientated, and are looking for future pragmatic support and collaboration to make Brexit a success. ■

COULD ROBOTS BE THE FUTURE OF FARMING?

This driverless tractor concept developed by CNH Industrial provides a glimpse of the future of automated farming

From drones to automated tractors, advances in technology are changing the way we farm for the better

WORDS **BRENDON HOOPER**

What could a typical arable farm look like in 10 or 20 years' time? Imagine drones buzzing overhead surveying fields, automated machines working the soil and cultivating 'smart'-bred crops, while farmers use 'big data' to improve yields and increase productivity.

The exciting thing is that this vision could soon become commonplace. Right now, arable farming technology is advancing at a tremendous pace, helping farmers to reduce labour costs and improve productivity – which could prove vital if the supply of seasonal labour drops once the UK leaves the EU.

George Badger, Farming Consultant at Strutt & Parker, says we only have to look at the growing number of arable farmers already using precision technology to see the tech revolution taking place. He suggests around two-thirds of the arable farms in East Anglia use satellite-guided precision technology, which enables farmers to drive machinery in straight lines without overlapping during cultivating, drilling or spraying. Precision application means fertiliser, seed and sprays can be deposited exactly where they are needed most, rather than being spread uniformly across the whole field – helping to optimise yields, and reduce costs and environmental impacts.

'But what we're now seeing at the trial stage is driverless, automated machines, with no cabs,' says Badger. 'These are mainly prototypes but, in time, they could become standard equipment. The benefit is that when you take the man out of the machine, the equipment no longer needs to be so big and heavy, so it could work, satellite-guided, 24 hours a day. Moreover, as the machine becomes smaller, the soil suffers less compaction and degradation.'

Automated processes have the potential to radically change the farming industry, and trials focusing on the next big leap – where the farmer won't even need to go into the field – are already under way. For example, engineers at Harper Adams University's National Centre for Precision Farming are using robots to grow and harvest a hectare of cereal crops – all without setting foot into the field. The Hands Free Hectare project team recently assembled their first automated farming robot to drill a spring crop in March.

Project member Kit Franklin, an agricultural engineering lecturer at Harper Adams University, echoes Badger's opinion of field agricultural automation being an opportunity to reverse the trend of ever-increasing machine size, which he says is having a damaging impact on our soils. 'It's the future of farming,' he says. 'Automated swarms of small, light tractors and implements that perform high-resolution, precision farming could reduce compaction and increase the efficiency of input use, while maintaining current work rate and staffing levels.'

Franklin believes such technological advancements are not about putting people out of jobs, but instead evolving roles to make farming more efficient. So rather than a tractor driver needing to be in a tractor, their job will focus on being a fleet manager and agricultural analyst, looking after teams of farming robots that meticulously monitor crop development.

However, according to Franklin, once the technology becomes more readily available, the barriers to its adoption are twofold: legislative, because there is currently no legislation framework applicable to automated field systems; and a public perception of robots 'stealing' jobs. 'I foresee a large resistance from those who may have a negative, media-tainted view of robotics,' he says.

Nevertheless, if the UK is to boost productivity post-Brexit, it's going to need the benefits of automation to make farming more efficient and profitable. 'Of all arable farms, 67% still rely on the EU subsidy for profit on their agricultural activity. So, if this is reduced or cut completely, we will need automated processes to help reduce costs,' Badger states.

Bird's-eye view

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – also known as drones – for monitoring crops, surveying weed populations and investigating drainage conditions, could also become an ordinary sight at farms of the future. 'Increasingly, the farms we see perform better are those that regularly monitor the fields themselves, to enable reactive decision-making and the best timing of applications,' says Badger. 'If you can cover vast areas with a drone, it would certainly increase efficiency. At present, drones aren't widely used, but they could become a standard piece of equipment in the future.'

A smart investment in drones is already paying dividends at the Trumpington Farm Company, one of Strutt & Parker's clients in Cambridgeshire. Trumpington began using drones last year after previously relying on satellite imagery to apply their variable-rate fertiliser, working out the leaf area index (biomass) of their crop from the infrared spectrum. However, says farm manager David Knott, they are now taking the next technological step. 'We've been using a drone to fly a predetermined path across our fields. With its 4K camera, we capture high- →

> A DRONE CAN COVER A FIELD IN THREE MINUTES, WHEREAS A PERSON TAKES AN HOUR

Agricultural automation has many guises, such as Wall-Ye, a robot designed to prune vines in France

resolution imagery, upload it and work out what the biomass of the crop is, and turn this into shapefiles [a common format for storing geographic information system (GIS) vector data] to know exactly where to apply variable rate fertiliser.'

This year, Knott and his team will test a new ability for the drone to differentiate between plant leaves, so that, for example, areas of blackgrass can be treated by an automatic sprayer, which will be 'told' by the drone exactly where to spray.

'It's a lot easier to fly a drone quickly over a field, rather than having an agronomist walk up and down each patch, or having a sprayer operator trying to guess which bits need spraying off,' says Knott. 'A drone can cover 20 hectares in three minutes, whereas a person would take an hour. It's improved accuracy, saved time and cut costs.'

Knott says the only downsides are the difficulties in managing large amounts of data, being unable to fly the drone in bad weather, and its batteries only allowing 20-minute flight times. 'UAV tech is revolutionising farming, but there is still a lot to consider.'

Bigger data

The ability to manage, analyse and share vast amounts of data will also become an essential part of a farmer's skillset, helping to save costs via the digital economy. Apps that are designed for saving time and maximising output price and minimising input price, such as Graindex and Yagro – both of which are being trialled by Strutt & Parker – will become just as indispensable as an expensive drone or automated sprayer.

'I wouldn't be surprised if supply chain logistics become largely automated,' says Jason Beedell, Partner in Research at Strutt & Parker. 'At present, large amounts of fertiliser are bought in advance and stored in barns, because they get a better price. Instead, "pre-ordering" to ship the physical product to a field exactly when it's needed could become more common.'

Sharing data and knowledge, especially through mobile technology, will also be crucial. For example, @AgriChatUK on Twitter shares information throughout the farming community, such as real-time warnings about pests and diseases. 'It's a forum where everyone can get together to improve farming knowledge, with no geographical barriers,' says founder Simon Haley. 'It can also be an antidote to the isolation rural workers sometimes feel – connecting people, sharing knowledge and improving the industry.'

But to achieve much of this, says Badger, a lot more needs to be done to connect rural businesses to faster broadband speeds. 'Poor connectivity is a barrier. In the coming years, we will rely on sharing "big data" from the farmer to the agronomist, so better real-time decisions about the future management of the crop can be made. Sharing knowledge and experience will be key.' ■

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DEVELOPMENTS IN SMART BREEDING

Dr Phil Howell leads the cereal pre-breeding programme at the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB). Speaking in a personal capacity, he thinks that, over the next two decades, climate change is going to dramatically affect how we approach agriculture.

'More extreme weather events mean we will need to develop crop varieties that are tolerant of both waterlogging and heat,' he says. 'We may also require a new resistance to pests and diseases that, at present, we don't think of as a problem.'

Central to this will be 'smart breeding' and the development of F1 hybrids – the selective breeding of a plant by cross-pollinating two different parent plants. 'These will benefit growers in terms of gross margin, due to increased yield and especially increased yield stability,' says Howell.

Although F1 hybrids might counteract some of the pressures from climate change, developments could be slow, warns Howell: 'Much of the public distrusts science, and politicians are too afraid to make unpopular choices.'

Photography: CNH Industrial; Getty

GOING PRIVATE

“SELLING A FARM PRIVATELY MAY APPEAL, BUT THERE IS MUCH TO CONSIDER”

CHARLIE EVANS,
PARTNER, ESTATES & FARM AGENCY

There have been headlines in the farming press about the number of land transactions that have taken place privately in the last 12 months. For many, a private sale is the best way to market a property; for others, the concept of agreeing a sale without exposing the farm to the market seems crazy.

We should clarify what is meant by ‘private sale’. There are varying degrees of privacy, but the most common interpretation is the sale of a property where there is no advertising, publicity or editorial comment. Some private sales are well known about in the market as a brochure is distributed widely, but there is no advertising; whereas the most confidential sales are only known about by the buyer and seller – no other potential buyers are approached.

The decision as to how many potential buyers are contacted lies with the owner, although based on advice from their agent. It depends on sensitivities, such as whether they want to tell staff, friends and sometimes family. It can also be influenced by the objective of the sale, such as the need for a swift transaction or the desire to maximise the sale price.

The nature of owner themselves is important, too. If the farm is held in trust, for example, most trustees want a sale to take place on the open market so they can demonstrate they have fulfilled their duty to the beneficiaries by getting the best price available. An individual owner has more flexibility in their decision making.

The appeal of a private sale for many is the ability to sell without anyone knowing. Often, the perception is that a private sale can be cleaner and quicker than an open-market one, and may involve less upheaval for the seller in terms of viewings – which is understandably attractive. Furthermore, for commercial farms with staff, suppliers and customers, selling privately allows them to continue trading as normal until the deal is concluded, lowering the risk of a sale having a negative impact on the farming business.

The main downside for the owner is that they only have one chance to sell their most valuable asset, and will never know for certain if they got the best possible price – so they’ll need to be comfortable living with this fact. Sometimes, where the sale is to a neighbour for a premium, it’s easy to gain comfort that the best price has been achieved; but for others, there will always be that element of doubt.

Whether to sell privately or not depends on the owner, the circumstances and, in particular, the property and likely target market. The seller will have their own preferences, and their agent can advise them to ensure there will be genuine and strong interest from known buyers if a private sale is preferred.

It’s interesting to see that, in 2016, only about 6% of land was marketed privately, which equates to about 5,000 of the 85,000 acres marketed in England. By definition, there will be some sales that we are not aware of, so a few more sales are likely to have taken place.

Some sellers opt for private marketing as there is a chance of getting a higher price for the land – with a buyer willing to pay a premium to avoid it being marketed publicly, potentially generating competition. There is some support for this in our data, with over half of the privately marketed land selling for more than £12,000 per arable acre, compared with only 12% of open-market sales.

Selling privately will be right for some owners and their property, and it represents a good way to test the market without fully committing to a sale. However, there is much to consider before making the decision to sell either way. ■

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HOW THE LAND LIES

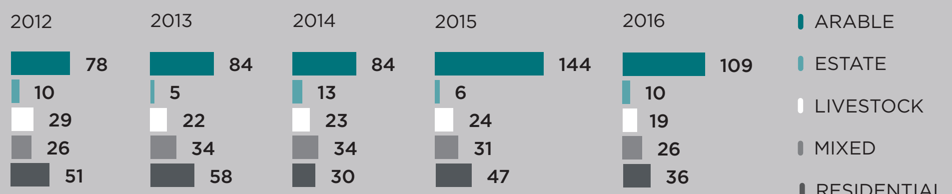
KEY STATISTICS AND RESEARCH FROM STRUTT & PARKER

Farmland

While farmers remain the single biggest group of buyers, they now account for less than half of transactions. This includes a fair proportion who have sold land for development and are reinvesting the proceeds. There are also growing numbers of private and institutional investors looking for more than a 'safe' investment in uncertain times. For farms abutting urban areas, there is a chance of a windfall from development as changes in planning policy look likely to create opportunities. Prices paid vary on a regional and local basis. The average arable values hide greater falls in the pure farming areas and a more stable market in central and southern England, where there is more influence from development proceeds and landowners who are not wholly reliant on farming income.

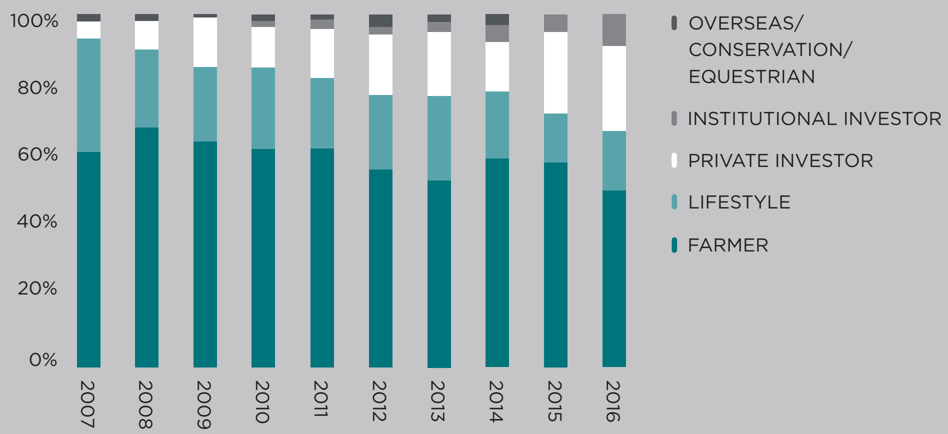
Mark McAndrew,
Estates & Farm Agency

Main types of farms marketed (England)

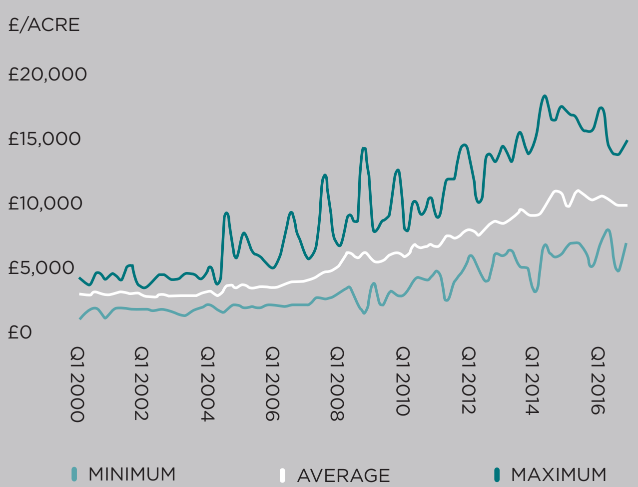


Source for all farmland data: Strutt & Parker Farmland Database

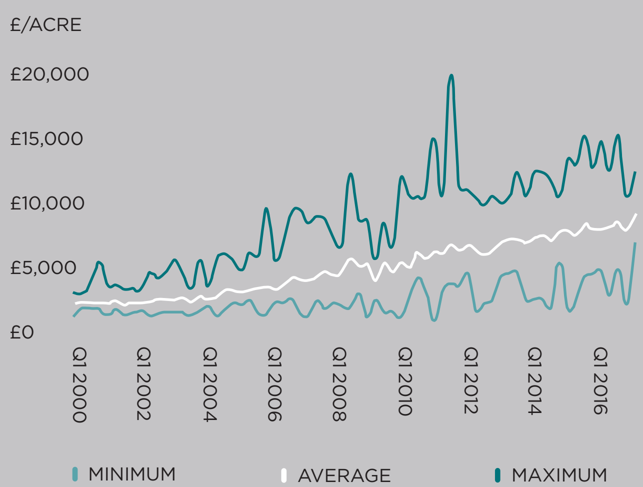
Buyer types (England)



Arable land agreed sale prices (England)



Pasture land agreed sale prices (England)



Residential property

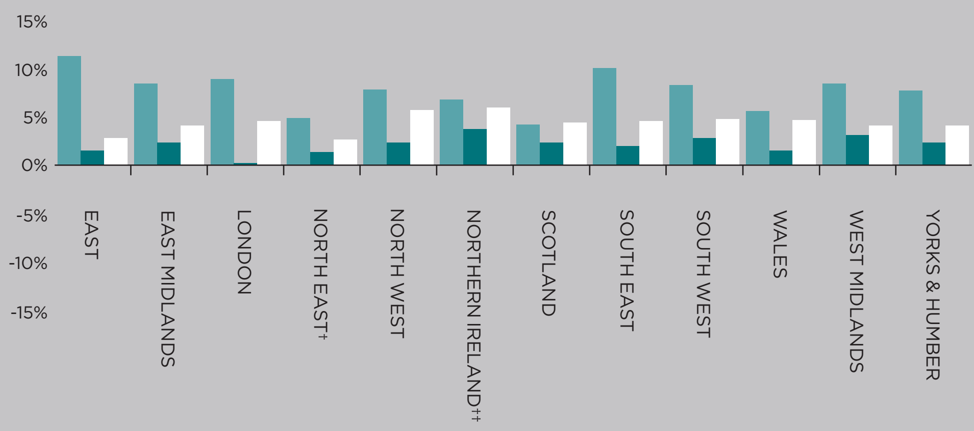
Last year was not a good time for forecasters. Now, with the acknowledgement of Brexit, the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, the triggering of Article 50 and general elections across Europe, what is certain is that the global political and economic volatility from 2016 will continue throughout 2017. The potential for profound change makes it a challenge to forecast housing markets. However, the current weak pound, creeping inflation, questions around how long the Bank of England can hold interest rates, and the extraordinary shortage of housing stock alongside ever-increasing housing demand in the UK will continue to keep house prices stable in London, with a slight upswing in values across the country.
Vanessa Hale, Research

Annual change in average house prices

YEAR TO DECEMBER 2016

NEXT 12 MONTHS (EXPECTED)

NEXT FIVE YEARS (EXPECTED, AVERAGE PER YEAR)



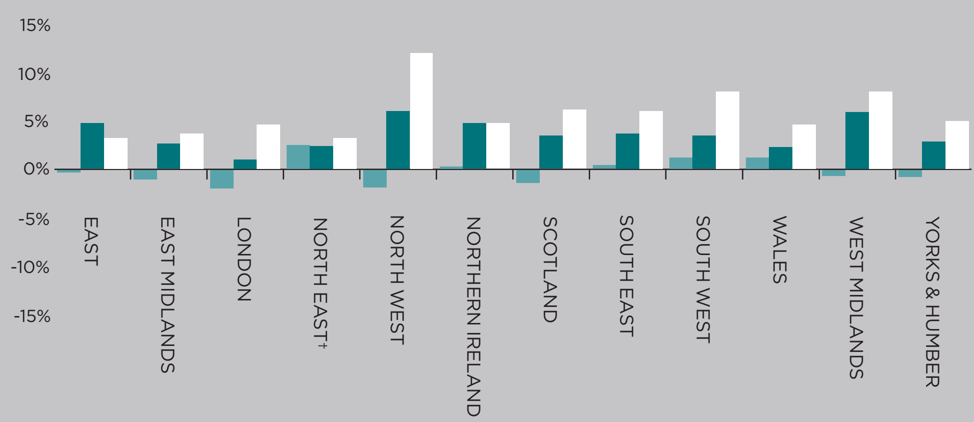
Sources: Land Registry House Price Index (December 2016), RICS (November 2016; not seasonally adjusted)
†RICS forecast data for North East includes Cumbria. ††Northern Ireland data for Q4 2016

Changes in average monthly rents

THREE MONTHS TO DECEMBER 2016

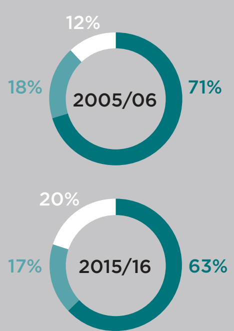
NEXT 12 MONTHS (EXPECTED)

NEXT FIVE YEARS (EXPECTED, AVERAGE PER YEAR)



Source: HomeLet Rental Index (December 2016), RICS (November 2016; not seasonally adjusted)
†RICS forecast data for North East includes Cumbria

Home ownership in England*



OWNER OCCUPIERS

SOCIAL RENTERS

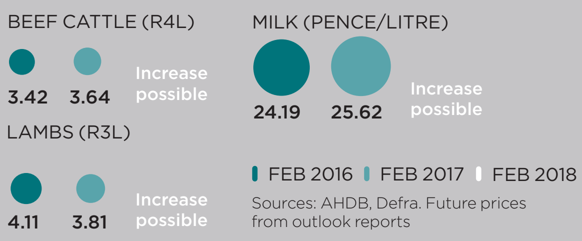
PRIVATE RENTERS

Source: DCLG English Housing Survey 2015/16
*Figures may not total 100% due to rounding

Farming

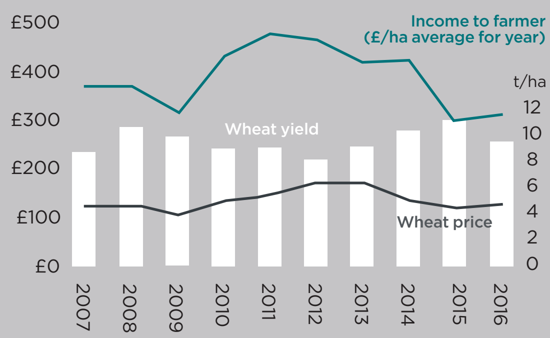
The markets are spectacularly volatile at present: the grain price is up 40% since last year and that of nitrogen fertiliser has increased by 50% in just six months. There is huge uncertainty over what the UK's equivalent of CAP might look like following Brexit and over the outlook for trade arrangements. However, as we outline in our feature on page 20, change brings opportunity. What is for sure is that land is a precious and finite resource, and the world's growing population needs to be fed. Therefore, we need to further improve our soil management, reduce tillage and energy input, and review rotations. We should also be looking to make self-sufficiency a priority, thereby reducing our reliance on both imports and exports.
George Chichester, Farming

Livestock (£/kg dead weight)



Sources: AHDB, Defra. Future prices from outlook reports

Contract farming

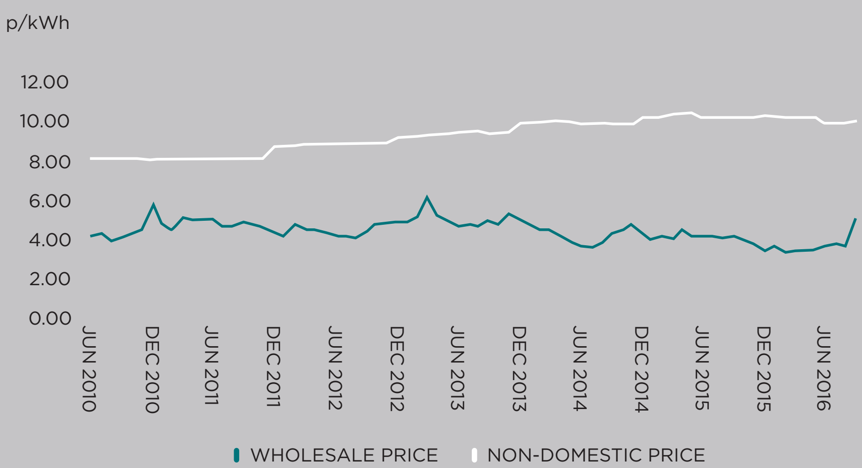


Source: Strutt & Parker

Arable crops (£/tonne)

Source: HGCA. All prices are ex farm. Future prices are indicative bids from agricultural traders

Electricity prices



Source: DBEIS

Energy

We started to see a rise in wholesale electricity prices at the end of 2016, which the graph shows the start of. This has now fed through into the retail market, with a number of retailers announcing price rises for end users. As always, the complete picture is made up of a number of moving parts, and the strategies for buying electricity used by the retailers affects the price at which they sell to end users. Switching suppliers is usually beneficial.
Kieran Crowe, Energy

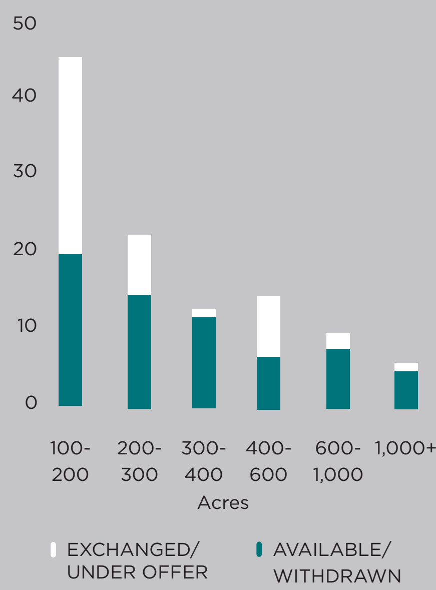
AROUND THE REGIONS

MARKET INSIGHT AND UPDATES FROM OUR LOCAL AGENTS

Scotland

Fossoway Estate, Crook of Devon, Kinross-shire. A 781-acre residential and sporting estate, offered for sale as a whole or in two lots. Offers over £2,250,000. Under offer

Farms brought to market in Scotland in 2016, by size



Prime arable land and mixed arable and livestock farms of more than 300 acres proved the most buoyant sectors of the Scottish farms market in 2016.

There was a demand for larger, more viable farms of all types, with 70% of those over 300 acres sold or under offer, compared with 43% of those under 300 acres. A total of 115 commercial farms (those in excess of 100 acres) amounting to 41,000 acres came to the market, with an average asking price of £1.45 million.

A limited supply of Grade 1 or 2 arable is offered for sale annually in Scotland, so buyers tend to be less price-sensitive and values remain firm. However, with the bulk of supply in the form of secondary arable and pasture, buyers were more selective due to greater pressure on farm profits, and the market for these land types has become more price-sensitive.

Land has traditionally been cheaper in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, which attracts interest from England, Wales and Ireland. Demand for arable has softened in recent years, due to average values rising faster here than in neighbouring countries. But the average pasture value is still sufficiently low, so viable, well-equipped stock farms remain attractive to non-Scottish buyers.

Values remain relatively resilient due to restricted supply, and I expect to see a similar picture in 2017.

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SALES HIGHLIGHT

Stonypath Farm, West Lothian, Peeblesshire
Located 14 miles from Edinburgh, this 1,735-acre hill farm was offered for sale as a whole or in three lots.
Offers over £1,050,000
Sold December 2016

North

So far, 2017 appears to mirror the second half of last year, with a shortage of larger farms and estates throughout the region and buyers becoming increasingly selective.

Residential farms of between 100 and 350 acres remain in demand, although their location will determine both the level of interest from buyers and the prices realised. Open-market supply is likely to remain at a three-year average, although a strong private market has emerged, allowing the most motivated of buyers to explore opportunities away from marketplace competition.

Historically, 'farming' buyers have accounted for 50-60% of sales each year. We anticipate renewed interest from non-farming investors, businesses and overseas buyers this year, owing to global economic uncertainty and the desire to seek refuge in safe assets with long-term capital growth prospects. The invigorated development market will help generate capital for many landowners, and this will translate into rollover buyers looking to reinvest the capital gain. This will further fortify land values in certain areas.

Careful consideration must be given to guide prices – particularly for small or medium-sized blocks of bare land, as buyers may originate from a limited geographical reach. Finally, sellers will need to recognise the value of a sale of a property as a whole, in the instance of marketing in multiple lots.

Will Parry, Harrogate
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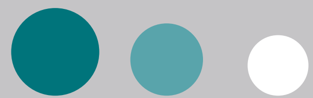
Top, average and bottom prices for land in the North, Q4 2016

ARABLE: £/ACRE (CHANGE FROM Q3)



£9,700 (-12%) | £8,000 (-9%) | £6,700 (+3%)

PASTURE: £/ACRE (CHANGE FROM Q3)

£7,300 (+22%) | £6,100 (+22%) | £4,300 (+8%)

TOP 25%
AVERAGE
BOTTOM 25%

Dry Howe Farm and land at Bannisdale Head, Selside, Kendal. A 1,841-acre residential hill farm, subject to an Agricultural Holdings Act tenancy. Guide price: £850,000. Sold February 2017

SALES HIGHLIGHT

Howden Hill Farm, Darlington, County Durham
Comprising 209 acres, this residential farm includes productive grassland and arable, and a period farmhouse.
Guide price: £1,750,000. Sold far in excess of the guide, October 2016

East Midlands

Land at Morcott, Rutland. A 72-acre block of productive Grade 3 pasture land. Guide price: £1,200,000

Top, average and bottom prices for land in the East Midlands, Q4 2016

ARABLE: £/ACRE (CHANGE FROM Q3)

Top 25%	Average	Bottom 25%
£8,800 (-2%)	£8,400 (-1%)	£7,500 (0%)

PASTURE: £/ACRE (CHANGE FROM Q3)

Top 25%	Average	Bottom 25%
£8,000 (-6%)	£7,300 (-3%)	£6,600 (-3%)

TOP 25%
AVERAGE
BOTTOM 25%

There was a 32% year-on-year decline in land supply in the East Midlands during 2016, with sellers generally using the Brexit uncertainty as a reason to defer a sale.

As a result, we may see more come onto the market in 2017 as landowners look to invest in non-farming opportunities that yield more attractive financial returns than agricultural land.

Demand for land in the region remains localised, with some strong prices being paid for land where there is appetite from local farmers who typically have significant sources of non-farming income. Long-term strategic land also remains in high demand from institutional and private investors. They are typically looking to acquire land with development prospects that may take more than 20 years to come to fruition.

On the back of the devaluation of the pound, land has become more appealing to foreign investors. We have been involved in selling more than 1,200 acres of mostly Grade 1 land to a European family who purchased the farm as a 20-year investment strategy. This has presented an opportunity for local farmers, and is an example of a model of ownership in which land is owned by corporations and farmers operate the contracting and machinery side.

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SALES HIGHLIGHT

Farcet Farms, Yaxley, Cambridgeshire
An outstanding 1,265 acres of Grade 1 land capable of growing root crops, field vegetables and cereals, spread across three farms south of Peterborough.
Guide price: £12,500,000
Sold January 2017

West Midlands

When reviewing the farmland market in the West Midlands, as with most of the country, it is all about location.

Despite being located within the same county, farms of a similar quality and size can achieve a range of different results. This is mainly due to local demand (whether much land has come onto the market in that area) and accessibility for expanding farmers (whether the farm fits into their existing operation).

For those buyers who are not in a hurry to purchase, many make the decision to wait until something more suitable comes onto the market. While this approach is understandable, it will mean those buyers can wait years for the right property.

The sale of New House Farm (pictured below) has attracted a range of national and local interest from farmers, lifestyle buyers and investors alike, demonstrating the continued diversity of buyers within the West Midlands market.

In 2016, the number of acres coming onto the market in the West Midlands was 40% lower than the 10-year average. This fall in supply has been the case for the past two years and may be an indication of the future ahead.

As a result, we predict that prices in the region will remain at current levels: about £9,200/acre for arable and £7,900/acre for pasture on average – dependent largely on location, of course.

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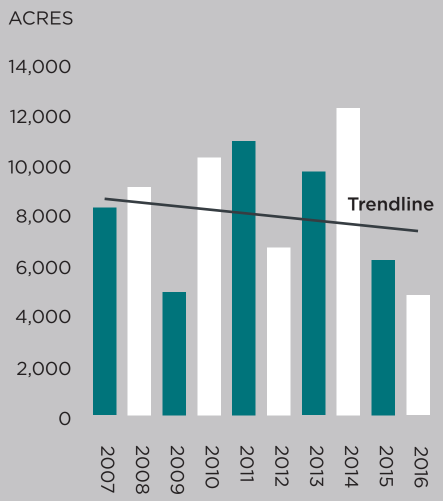
Land entering the market in the West Midlands, 2007-2016



New House Farm, Kempton, Shropshire. An attractive ring-fenced mixed farm. Guide price: £3,450,000. Under offer

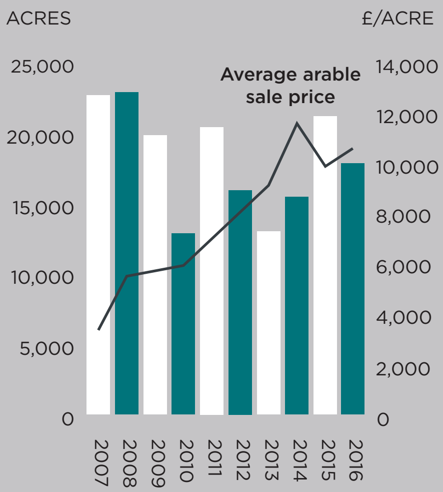
SALES HIGHLIGHT

Walton Hall, near Worthen, Shropshire
A delightful country house with far-reaching views across the Shropshire Hills, farm buildings and 200 acres of grazing and arable land.
Sold in excess of the £2,300,000 guide price, October 2016

East Anglia

Baythorne Park, near Clare, Essex/Suffolk borders. A traditional sporting estate set among 680 acres of picturesque countryside. Launching late April 2017

Amount of farmland marketed and average arable sale price in East Anglia



Until the triggering of Article 50, the farmland market in East Anglia had been holding its breath.

The key question is whether the Brexit uncertainty will cause more or less farmland to be brought to the market.

On the face of it, values in the region remained firmly around £10,000, maintained in part by the falling away of supply as the year progressed (see graph).

In fact, there was a significant change taking place, as, for the first time in 10 years, a substantial amount of the farms and farmland failed to sell. This is the effect of an unseen readjustment in the market during the last 12 months. However, our Eastern team sold or has under offer 83% of the farms and farmland it marketed during 2016, outperforming the market-wide figure of 40%.

There are still sales with more than £10,000/acre being achieved, but values below £7,000/acre are also common. Quality is no longer the key to value, with location and accessibility becoming more important. The market is short of high-quality residential farms and larger blocks of arable land suitable for investors; it is in these two sectors where demand remains untested.

As 2017 progresses, values will continue to come under downward pressure but are unlikely to digress far unless an unexpected event shocks the market.

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SALES HIGHLIGHT

North Boundary Farm, Saxmundham, Suffolk
An arable farm in a rural location, with a period farmhouse, a range of farm buildings, and 180 acres.
Guide price £1,850,000
Sold January 2017

South East

As in other regions, land values were incredibly polarised in the South East in 2016.

For example, in the last quarter of 2016, we contracted on three arable land sales totalling 550 acres; they were of a similar size, grade and quality, but the sale prices ranged from £7,500/acre to £12,000/acre.

Evidently, location continues to be the biggest influence on this widening range in land values. Despite transaction levels in terms of acres sold (both arable and pasture) being down 28% year on year, this shows there is still activity for both buyers and sellers since the political upheaval on both sides of the Atlantic in 2016, and this momentum has appeared to continue into 2017.

With residential and lifestyle farms – which still make up a large section of this region – vendors increasingly have to be more sensible on price, especially where there are compromises. Privately marketed property appears to be increasingly popular with vendors, allowing them to test the market without subjecting themselves fully to what they feel may be an uncertain time.

As we enter the second quarter of 2017, the initial indication is that we are not going to see a rush of land coming to the market. Average prices are predicted to remain stable, with the wide variance to continue.

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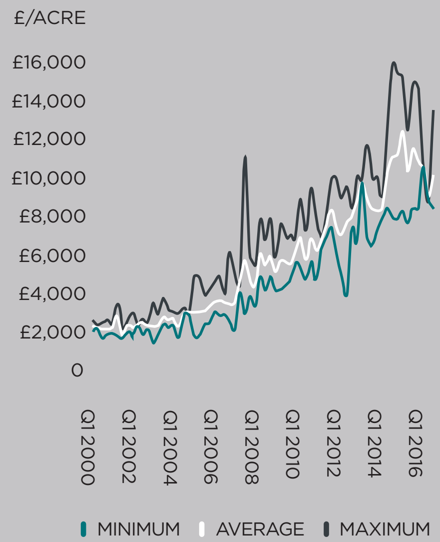
Arable land sale prices in the South East



Fieldside Farm, Quainton, Buckinghamshire. A ring-fenced grassland farm totalling 143 acres. Guide price: £2,850,000. Sold December 2016

All data is from the Strutt & Parker Farmland Database

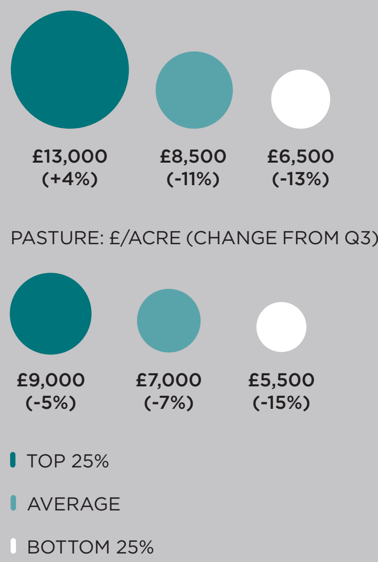
SALES HIGHLIGHT

Curls Farm, East Sussex
Located just outside Lewes, this is an attractive parcel of arable farmland of about 220 acres, with buildings and a fishing lake.
Guide price: £1,650,000
Sold November 2016

South West

Manor Farm, Cattistock, Dorset. A 326-acre grassland farm set amid rolling countryside. Guide price: £2,650,000

Top, average and bottom prices for land in the South West, Q4 2016



The farmland market in the South West has held up reasonably well following the EU referendum, with arable values most commonly ranging between £7,500 and £9,500/acre, although there are examples well above this range.

While most of the country has seen a 15% fall in the amount of land marketed, we have seen an increase in the region of 900 acres (5%) compared with 2015. The majority of farms coming to market are between 100 and 300 acres.

Over the past 12 months, one of the biggest changes we have seen is that there are now usually only one or two buyers for a farm rather than several.

The eventual buyers are often local farmers making the most of cheap borrowing and expanding when a ‘once in a generation’ neighbouring farm comes to the market. They often outbid buyers from outside the area who are not prepared to pay as much.

In addition, there are still investor buyers who see farmland as a safe investment, rollover buyers and lifestyle buyers who are showing increasing demand. Buyers are becoming increasingly selective and often taking far longer to get a farm to the point of exchange, confirming that good preparation is vital to ensure swift completion.

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SALES HIGHLIGHT

Land at Three Maids Hill, Winchester, Hampshire
A block of productive Grade 3 arable land and attractive mixed-amenity woodland on the outskirts of Winchester totalling 185 acres.
Guide price: £1,225,000

Q&A

Thirty-five-year-old Edward Phillips is Director of the 1,200-acre Luton Hoo Estate in Bedfordshire and Vice-Chairman of the CLA's Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire branch

INTERVIEW **DAVE FLANAGAN**
ILLUSTRATION **PETER JAMES FIELD**

"NOWADAYS, THE ESTATE'S FOCUS IS ON SUSTAINABILITY"

You took over the running of your family estate as a 25-year-old with a politics degree and no background in estate management or farming. How did you find the experience?
My father died when I was a small boy, and the estate was run principally by my mother in the intervening period. She was keen to pass it on to someone who was a bit more engaged and happier to sit on a tractor than she was. It was a very steep learning curve for me. However, I wouldn't necessarily change anything about the experience, and feel learning on-the-go was the best way to have done it. I've also been fortunate in that I've had a lot of very qualified people around me, giving me support and guidance.

Estate turnover has increased by around 50% since you took over. What's this thanks to?
It's been about knowing our strengths and understanding our weaknesses. As I've been learning, I've identified opportunities to make small changes and the more I've learned, the deeper I've been able to engage with some of the challenges we've faced. We've got a very strong team here too.

How has the estate's approach to farming changed over the past decade?
These days, it's very much about sustainability. In the past, we were farming very intensively, without necessarily having a long-term vision for the farm. When I came in, we took a step back, changed the rotation and reduced our dependency on chemical and fertiliser applications. We've now got more than 400ha in hand, with around 100ha of contract farming.

Tell us about your diversification strategy.
We've diversified heavily, increasing our commercial space by about 20%, with 18 businesses now based on the estate. In addition, we've done a lot of work in terms of uplifting our residential portfolio – we've now got 50 residential units – and have brought in new enterprises, such as our wedding venue. The estate's also regularly used as a film location.

How much importance do you place on planning?
It's been absolutely vital for us. We're looking forward five years in terms of our budgets, but also have an informal vision of where we want the estate to be in 20 years. Funders can buy into that more easily, and it's helped us tackle projects we've wanted to progress.

What was the thinking behind the installation of a 250kW solar photovoltaic array on the estate? Do you think these projects still make good sense in the face of tariff cuts?
It comes back to our drive for sustainability. Despite changes to tariffs, there's still a phenomenal opportunity there for estates. We have our own ring main, supplying energy to a number of our own properties and tenants. The project equates to the planting of something like 3,000 trees over the course of a year, with 100 tonnes of carbon offsetting. We think that's very important in terms of our corporate and social responsibility plan.

Do you have any concerns over the impact of Brexit, both on your own business and the wider farming and estate community?
There are opportunities and challenges. The industry is resilient by nature, but I worry about it being able to react quickly enough. Organisations such as the CLA are going to be hugely useful in the next couple of years, because we'll need voices and strong connections with civil service officers in Westminster who understand where we're coming from. However, I'm sure we'll survive. As I said to the estate staff after the Brexit vote, we've been farming here for over 120 years, we've seen wars, we've been out of Europe, we've been in Europe, and we're now heading out again. We'll crack on, do our best and hopefully be here in another 120 years wondering what the fuss was about. ■

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Please contact your local office to find out more about our rural services, or visit our website.

struttandparker.com

Estate & Land Management
We manage two million acres across the UK, ensuring that our clients' farms and estates perform in a way that meets their business and personal aspirations.

Farming
Our team of more than 40 experts offers a complete service, advising on business and technical matters to help farmers to make the most of their enterprises.

Estates & Farm Agency
We handle the sale and purchase of some 50,000 acres of farmland, residential and commercial farms, and sporting estates every year.

Energy
We help farms and estates to minimise exposure to energy risks and to generate returns from energy efficiency and energy generation projects.

"BREXIT OPENS UP A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE RURAL ECONOMY... IT'S NOT AN EASY CHALLENGE, BUT IT'S A WORTHY ONE"

Ross Murray,
CLA President