Land Business Update

Week commencing 10 July 2017

Farming and environment

Neonicotinoids: large-scale real world study by CEH finds cause for concern on impact on pollinators but funders question the results

Research that covered 2,000 hectares on 33 sites over one year in the UK, Germany and Hungary to establish the "real-world" impacts of the pesticides has found that the seed dressing has some negative effects on honeybees and wild bees. The research was led by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and published in Nature. The study compared the effects of clothianidin (Bayer), thiamethoxam (Syngenta) and untreated oilseed rape. It found that:

- Higher concentrations of neonicotinoid residues found in nests resulted in fewer queens (for bumblebees and solitary bees) (in UK, Germany and Hungary)
- Another type of neonicotinoid (imidacloprid) was present in the wild bee nests, despite it not being used since 2013, which suggests that the chemical is persistent in the environment
- Hives were at risk of dying out over the winter due to exposure to neonicotinoids (for honeybees) (in UK (high hive mortality) and Hungary (-24% colonies), although there were no harmful effects on overwintering honeybees in Germany, possibly due to fewer bee diseases and more flowers to forage on)

Bayer, which produces the chemicals and part-funded the study, said the findings were inconclusive. Syngenta, which also part funded it, said that it showed the importance of the relationship between bee habitats and the health of pollinators, so that if bee habitats and the health of pollinators improved the impact of neonicotinoids can be minimal; it also questioned why some of the analysis carried out showed positive impacts of the chemicals. The response from academics has also been mixed – from saying that it points towards negative impacts on pollinators from the chemicals, to the results being inconclusive, due to the complicated interaction between the chemicals, habitats and different species. A separate study in Canada on corn found that worker bees exposed to neonicotinoids had lower life expectancies and that their colonies were more likely to permanently lose queens. The European Commission is finalising the details of its proposed complete ban on the use of neonicotinoid seed treatments, which will be discussed by Member States on 19th and 20th July.

Farming

Protein from insects has been authorised as a fish food

The insects must comply with the same requirements as any conventionally farmed animal, i.e. they must not be fed with catering waste or livestock manure. The decision has been welcomed by feed manufacturers, who have asked for more research on using food waste as a food for the insects, which would create a more circular economy (i.e. reusing materials and cutting waste).

CAP post-2020: more indications about future policy

At a key event on what stakeholders wanted from the CAP, EU Farm Commissioner Phil Hogan said as well as simplification, there should be a ‘shift from compliance to results orientation’ as well as ‘greater subsidiarity for Member States’. In plain language, this means more concentration on delivering outcomes (for example increasing farm productivity, rather than measuring how many farmers attend training sessions) and greater scope for individual countries to decide how to implement the policies. Hogan said the messages he took from the event are that access to high-quality food is important, that farmers should contribute to environmental protection and sustainability goals, and that more investment is needed in rural areas to improve their viability.

Forestry

British Woodlands Survey 2017 – open now!

Devolution, pests and pathogens, Brexit, emerging markets, climate change and societal attitudes are just some of the momentous factors influencing our trees and woodlands. Have your say about what these and other issues mean to you by taking part in Britain’s only dedicated national survey about woodlands and forestry. The last survey represented around 11% of all privately-owned forest land in Britain with 1,500 people taking part. Take the survey by clicking here.

Planning

Over 425,000 new homes are planned to be built in the greenbelt, up 54% from a year ago

To highlight rural housing issues in Rural Housing Week (3-7 July), the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has published research that shows more than 425,000 houses are now planned to be built in the greenbelt. This is over 50% more houses than were planned a year ago and is despite the Conservative manifesto pledge to "maintain the existing strong protections on designated land like the green belt", where houses can only be built in "exceptional circumstances". The figures come from CPRE analysis of local plans. As well as considering the overall number to be too high, CPRE also says that the proportion of houses that will be affordable, which is around 25%, is too low. It has called for the government to support councils to build more houses themselves and help fund genuinely affordable homes, including on small rural sites.

Rural

Rural Coalition publishes evidence and action plan for living and working countryside in England

The Coalition is twelve national organisations which support a vision for a living and working countryside in England; they include the CLA, NFU, RICS and RTPI. It has identified four policy priorities:

- A meaningful increase in the delivery of affordable housing in villages and small towns
- Proper recognition of rural service delivery challenges and services designed to meet rural needs
- Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient
- Business support and infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs

Telecoms

Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund

This is a £400m government programme to stimulate private firms to invest £1 billion into full fibre connections across the country, which will deliver 'future-proof' broadband of up to 1 Gbps speed. At present, "full fibre" is available to only about one million premises, representing about 2% penetration. That contrasts with Spain, where the figure is 80%. However, rural groups have said that the fund will do little to help very rural places – often called the final 5% – as fibre to the home technology will be impossible to deliver to many of these areas. They have called for alternative technologies to be included, not just fibre. The government department largely responsible for broadband has been renamed the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, so the acronym remains DCMS.