

# Land Business Update

Week commencing 24 July 2017

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## Farming and environment

### Michael Gove's major speech on delivering a green Brexit

The Secretary of State chose a wildlife organisation as the setting to deliver his first major speech on farming, food and the environment. Key themes were strengthening environmental protection post-Brexit and continuing to support farming for providing clear environmental benefits and producing healthy food. The speech feels weighty and like a significant change from previous policy but we will know whether the rhetoric translates into action when the 25 year environment plan is published, probably in 2018. The next publications to watch for are the advice on what the 25 year plan should aim to achieve and how it should do it, from the Natural Capital Committee, which will be published in September, and the Clean Growth Plan, which will be published by BEIS in autumn 2017. Please [email](#) for a summary of the speech.

### Take part in the Big Butterfly count and identify reasons for butterfly decline

More than three quarters of the UK's butterflies have declined in the last 40 years, with numbers falling quicker in towns and cities. It only takes 15 minutes so get your ID chart and submit your sightings by 6 August.

## Shooting

### Shoots should double-check rules on minimum wages and reporting to HMRC

Strutt & Parker, Michelmores and Saffery Champness have produced a briefing paper for shoots that use beaters and pickers-up on ensuring they are eligible to work, how much they should be paid to comply with minimum wage requirements, and what and when shoots have to report to HMRC to comply with the Real Time Information rules. [Read the paper here.](#)

### Take part in the Game Shooting Census – the UK's biggest survey for guns and shoots

Over 11,000 guns and 500 shoots have already taken part in this year's survey, so [click here](#) if you would like to join them. The survey is conducted by Guns on Pegs and Strutt & Parker, and this year we are delighted that BASC, the Countryside Alliance and GWCT are supporting it.

## Farming

### Below average European cereals harvest expected due to dry May and June

Despite this, the global outlook is for stable output and prices. The European oilseed harvest is expected to be above the levels of the last two years. N.B. The UK only exports around 10% of the cereals it produces, and most of the exports are to Europe.

### Above average rainfall expected in July to September

Despite higher than average rainfall in June, soils remain drier than average for the time of year in central and southern England, although about average in east, north-east and north-west England. Nationally, groundwater levels are lower than normal at over half of the indicator sites and there is a mixed picture for reservoir levels, with half above normal and half below. Looking forward to July to September, the Met Office says above average rainfall is slightly more probable than below average.

## Business

### **Making Tax Digital: online returns delayed for small firms due to concerns from business groups**

The Government has delayed the implementation of its plan to make all businesses report their tax returns online, which was due to start in April 2018. Now, only firms above the VAT threshold of £85,000 will need to keep digital records from 2019, and then only for VAT purposes, with online reporting for other taxes delayed until 2020 at the earliest. Small businesses can start reporting online as soon as they like but there is no longer a set time by which they must start.

## Energy

### **Government issues new rules on production, storage and use to help transition to smarter grid**

The Government has issued new guidance on how it will support a smart grid, in which energy can be produced, stored and used more efficiently. For example, a 'smart system' would allow the internet to turn washing machines on so they can use the cheapest electricity (i.e. when it is most available); if this is done with millions of washing machines, the savings in terms of electricity used could be significant and it will smooth peak demands. The Government is also running a competition for innovation in battery technology.

## Planning

### **Two recent cases support status of neighbourhood plans**

A Supreme Court judgement has confirmed that a neighbourhood plan can come into effect ahead of an up-to-date local plan (see *DLA Delivery Ltd v Lewes District Council*). Also, it is likely to be much more difficult to challenge a neighbourhood plan for not being in general conformity with a Local Plan (following *Bewley Homes Ltd v Waverley Borough Council*).

## Residential

### **Price growth slows and fewer house sales agreed, according to RICS**

House price inflation dropped further in June, particularly in London and southern England, although surveyors are still reporting price rises in northern England and Northern Ireland. The surveyors report falling levels of enquiries and new instructions to sell homes, a trend that has happened for over a year. Nationally, the number of sales fell for the fourth consecutive month, which is a reflection of lack of stock coming on to the market and a more cautious stance from buyers, due to political uncertainty and Brexit. Looking forward, fewer surveyors are confident that there will be more house sales in a year's time. Separately, Halifax said there was a 'sustained slowdown' in house price growth.