

Land Business Update

Week commencing 12 March 2018

Farming

Health and Harmony: consultation on the future for food, farming and the environment

DEFRA has published its long-awaited consultation paper on the future for food, farming and the environment outlining its vision for what it deems a “green Brexit”. There are no big surprises in the document given much of the content had been heavily trailed by DEFRA Secretary of State Michael Gove during recent speeches. The key points are:

- Direct Payments in England will be completely phased out, either gradually or in steps, by the end of an ‘agricultural transition’ period, which is of unspecified length.
- A new environmental land management system (NELMS) will be the cornerstone of the new policy, from 2022. It is likely to include wildlife diversity and landscape protection but it is not clear what other public goods it might cover.
- Although there will be some Government support, there is a strong message that land managers will be expected to help themselves, through training, benchmarking and risk management, so the industry is more self-reliant in the long-term.

Our detailed summary of the proposals will be published shortly; it includes six actions that farmers can take now to prepare. Please contact [Will Gemmill](#) if you would like to discuss the potential impact on your business.

Brexit: Gove asked what happens to farming trade if there is no deal

The House of Lords European Union Committee has asked Michael Gove a series of questions on what would happen to slaughterhouses, pesticides, plant seed rights and food law if there is no deal and no agreement on mutual recognition. Its questions are good ones!

- Is the Government working to get UK food and farming certifications recognised by the EU?
- What happens if they are not recognised?
- Does the Government agree with the EC that the UK would become a 3rd country?

Labour publishes its animal welfare plan

One of the key [proposals](#) is introducing an Animal Welfare Commissioner to ensure that all policy affecting animals is based on the latest scientific evidence on animal sentience and best practice; they would also ensure that welfare standards are not reduced due to Brexit. The plan also proposes:

- Banning practices considered cruel and inhumane, such as badger culling; Labour instead proposes science-based policy, more research on vaccination and stronger rules on the movement of cattle.
- A ban on the export of live animals for slaughter or fattening, with some exemptions for breeding livestock.
- Mandatory labelling of meat, both domestic and imported.
- Ending routine preventative use of antibiotics for livestock.
- Design post-Brexit farm subsidies to move away from intensive factory farming and bad environmental practices.
- Further curbs on hunting with dogs, including more policing of drag hunts and tougher sentencing.
- Mandatory CCTV in abattoirs. Less than ten days later, the Government introduced new legislation to parliament to make CCTV cameras mandatory in slaughterhouses from May 2018, with businesses given six months to comply with the new rules.
- A right to keep pets in rent homes.

The plan has been widely welcomed by animal charities.

Joint letter from food sector calls for free and frictionless trade

A [joint-industry letter](#) signed by 36 organisations has set out what a successful Brexit means to the food sector. The letter calls on the Government to maintain free and frictionless trade with the EU, including maintaining the benefits of existing EU preferential trade arrangements, at least until they can be replaced; ensure access to an adequate supply of permanent and seasonal labour; and to ensure businesses operate under an efficient and proportionate regulatory system, centred on scientific evaluation, which incentivises innovation and competitiveness.



Macron promises radical transformation of French farming

Saying that over 40% of the current farmers would be retired soon, he called on the next generation to invest in new buildings, invest in technology to cut the use of pesticides, grow more organically and to invest in diversification projects. Some of the funding will be through state-backed credit investment in animal welfare, food security and the organic sector. He restated his opposition to imports of hormone-produced beef and to banning glyphosate – 'Give me the report that tells me that glyphosate is a good thing'. He also said that he would control foreign investment in farmland which is, he said, a strategic national asset.

Neonicotinoids: EFSA report confirms risks to bees

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published an updated risk assessment, based on a review of hundreds of studies, that confirms that most uses of the pesticides represent a risk to wild bees and honeybees, so supporting the EC's (and UK's) intention to widen the ban on their use outdoors. Chemical companies have criticised the EFSA's assessment, saying that it is contrary to assessments made by environmental agencies in the US and Canada.

Planning

Prime Minister announces reforms to National Planning Policy – focussed on housing

The Prime Minister said that young people without family wealth are "right to be angry" at not being able to buy a home, so many of the key measures announced relate to housing:

- A new presumption in favour of sustainable development, including a focus on areas where there has been substantial under delivery of housing.
- Planning authorities must fully examine 'all other reasonable options' for meeting their identified needs before releasing Green Belt land.
- A new standard method for calculating housing need that applies nationwide.
- 10% of homes on major sites should be available for affordable home ownership.
- Minimum density standards to be used in towns, city centres and transport hubs in areas where there is a shortage of land.
- Councils to consider revoking planning permission after two years if building has not started.
- A focus on smaller sites; at least 20% of sites allocated in local plans are to be half a hectare or less.

The Government also published documents on Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy in England, the Housing Delivery Test and Draft Guidance for Viability. The consultation on the revised NPPF runs until 10 May 2018, with the revised framework published this summer. Please contact [Mike Robinson](#) if you would like to discuss.

Energy

Scotland: new Climate Change Plan published

The [Plan](#) aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 66% in the next 15 years, in order to meet Scotland's statutory and international climate obligations. It includes policies for cutting emissions from farming, as well as energy, transport, heating and the building sectors. The actions for land use include more peatland restoration; more woodland planting; a move to low carbon farming practices (which will use carbon audits), including better use of fertiliser, precision farming and use of renewable energy, so that farming emissions are cut by 9% by 2032.

Forestry

Woodland Improvement Grant open for applications until 13 April

This funding can only be applied for if you have a woodland management plan approved by the Forestry Commission or have already submitted a plan for approval. For further details or to make an application, please contact [Mike Tustin](#).

Property

Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings (ATED) reminder

ATED is an annual tax payable mainly by companies that own UK residential property valued at more than £500,000. ATED returns and tax payments need to be made by 30 April 2018. Please contact [Jonathan Smith](#) if you would like to discuss.