

Land Business Update

Week commencing 13th January 2020

Queen's speech and proposed bills

Aims of the reintroduced Agriculture Bill will remain the same as before

The speech confirmed that the government still intends to phase out Direct Payments over a seven-year agricultural transition period to 2028 in England. The intention remains to introduce an Environmental Land Management System, underpinned by the principle of 'public money for public good'. NB Agricultural policy is devolved, so Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will make their own proposals.

Villiers commits to no imports of chlorinated chicken and hormone-treated beef – probably!

Speaking after the Oxford Farming Conference to Countryfile, the Secretary of State for Environment appeared to make greater commitments to not allow any food to be imported that is currently illegal under EU law, which she said would be transposed into UK law. She said she had the prime ministers commitment on this. However, the devil may be in the detail. It is not 100% clear whether her statements apply to the transition period or to after it and, if so, for how long. Also, she was only asked about chlorinated chicken and hormone-treated beef, so it is not clear whether the commitment will apply to other products.

Government reconfirms intention to abolish section 21 evictions for residential tenancies

The Renters' Reform Bill, which applies to England only, is largely a 'rollover' of the proposals that were included in the consultation that closed in October 2019. Its main proposals are to end 'no fault' evictions by removing Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988. This will be coupled with strengthened grounds for possession for landlords and improved court processes. A new proposal is that tenants can have a 'lifetime deposit', which moves with them from property to property, which the government says will avoid them having to save for a new deposit every time they move house. There will also be changes to the rogue landlord and agent database.

Farming and food

Charity Veganuary claims that 3.6 million fewer animals were eaten in the first half of 2019

The data comes from research carried out for the charity by Kantar, which interviewed people who chose to eat less meat. Data from other research confirms that sales of red meat fell more by value than any other category in supermarkets in 2019 - beef sales fell by 4% and pork by 6%. Sales of meat-free alternatives rose by 18%, and poultry and fish sales also rose, by 1.4% and 1.2% respectively. There appear to be three main reasons for the change: wanting to be healthier (mentioned by 55% of people who gave up some animal products for the first time in January 2019), followed by concern for animal welfare (49%) and protecting the environment (30%). The NFU has said that everyone should choose what they want to eat but should look behind the label, whether that be a meat product or a plant-based one, at how the food is produced. Separately, the AHDB has produced a pack of information to use on [having positive conversations about meat and dairy](#).

Economy

Preparation for negotiations on the free trade agreement between the UK and the EU starts

Boris Johnson met Ursula von der Layen, the EC President, in their first meeting since both were elected. The UK's position is that it wants:

- A broad free trade agreement covering goods and services and co-operation in other areas, complete by the end of 2020. The EU says that an agreement on all areas would not be possible within this time frame.
- The agreement would exclude alignment with EU rules, free movement of people, European Court of Justice jurisdiction.
- To maintain control of UK fishing water.



The EC President said that it would not enter into an agreement that undercut the EU with a looser British state aid system (i.e., that allows greater intervention in failing industries or different public procurement rules), or that the 'playing field' is not level in terms of the environment, labour and taxation regulation. She said that the EU wanted an agreement that involved 'no tariffs, no quotas and no dumping'.

Economy: wages to rise in April 2020 as government accept Low Pay Commission proposals

The new rates recommended by Low Pay Commission are set out below. They are still subject to parliamentary approval, which is expected to be given.

- NLW – workers aged 25 and over – £8.72, up 6.2% from £8.21.
- NMW – 21 to 24 year olds – £8.20, up 6.5% from £7.70.
- NMW – 18 to 20 year olds – £6.45, up 4.9% from £6.15.
- NMW – 16 and 17 year olds – £4.55, up 4.6% from £4.35.
- NMW – apprentices – £4.15, up 6.4% from £3.90.

NB This is separate to the voluntary 'real living wage' campaign, which increased its UK hourly rate by 30p to £9.30 on 11 November 2019.

Property

All new buildings in Scotland to be more energy efficient from 2024 onwards

The Scottish Government has announced that it will amend the energy standards in building regulations to ensure that all new homes and non-domestic buildings use renewable or low carbon heating from 2024. It is also spending £30m on renewable heat projects. Separately, Citizens Advice Scotland has estimated that the cost of bringing the energy performance of homes in Scotland up to at least EPC C in the 20 years to 2040 is in the region of £11bn, which is £3bn more than the Scottish Government's estimate. It says that the Scottish Government should pay just under half of this cost, which would require it to double its current spending of £119m pa on Energy Efficient Scotland. Doubling the spending would increase it to 0.3% of Scottish public sector expenditure in 2018/19. Citizens Advice Scotland says that as well as the environmental benefits, there are significant social and economic benefits of upgrading energy efficiency, including preventing ill health and premature death, and reduced energy bills.

Additional £1.9m available for communities to produce neighbourhood plans

Since being introduced in 2011, over 2,600 different communities have made neighbourhood planning proposals – although this still represents a small proportion of communities. This money is available for communities to get advice on producing a plan, organising independent examinations of draft plans and hosting local referendums. In addition, the government has allocated £6m of 'capacity awards' to fund the environmental assessments required for new garden towns and villages to be developed. Please contact John McLarty, whose team is working with a number of proposed garden villages, if you would like to discuss the above.

New five year telecoms plan aims lift UK's broadband ranking

Ofcom has announced a series of measures designed to encourage BT and other telecoms companies to invest in full fibre networks; currently only 3m or 10% of homes in Britain can connect to full fibre lines. The aim is that 15m households will be connected by 2025. Part of the 'deal' with BT is that it can raise the charge it makes on basic 40 Mbps broadband packages from £1.50 a month to £1.85; the additional revenue to BT will be used to fund the upgrade to the network. It will, however, increase the cost of broadband for many consumers and may also lead to BT cutting the dividend paid to shareholders. If agreed, the proposals will come into effect from April 2021. NB The proposals are in addition to, but linked to, the government's commitment of £5bn to connect the most rural 20% of the population to fibre.