

Land Business Update

Week commencing 20th April 2020

COVID-19

CLA spring webinar series

We are delighted to sponsor the CLA's series of free live online [webinars](#) during the COVID-19 crisis. Each week a different topic will be discussed for around an hour, including a lively Q&A session, with leading specialists. This week's subject is financial management. Ed Mansell Lewis of our land management team will discuss why we should use the time during this lockdown to review our businesses. #TimeToReview

£2m emergency fund to support the heritage sector launched by Historic England

The grants are available for heritage organisations, self-employed contractors, charities and voluntary groups that have been severely affected by the impact of the virus. Grants of up to £25,000 are available to provide short-term emergency financial support to ensure their survival. In addition, grants of up to £50,000 are available for projects and activities that reduce risks to heritage by providing information, resources and skills. The sector can also apply to the government schemes and the National Lottery Heritage Fund's £50m emergency fund. Closing date for applications is 3rd May 2020, with awards made from mid-May.

Public rights of way and COVID-19

There has been a lot of discussion about whether public rights of way should remain open or not. Some are being used by more people than usual and that use can expose some vulnerable people to contact with people carrying the virus. 80% of respondents to a poll by Farmers Weekly said that rights of way should be closed to help prevent the spread of the virus on gates, styles and other points of contact.

Guidance from Natural England is that the risk of passing on the virus from people using public rights of way is considered to be very low as long as people follow social distancing guidance. Where there is a large number of people using a right of way, Natural England says that land managers should consider tying gates open or posting 'polite' notices about alternative routes that do not pass through gardens, farmyards or schools, where it is safe to do so.

France and Germany says EC has the tools needed to manage food and farming markets – so use them now

The French and German agriculture ministers have issued a joint statement saying that say the existing rules on dealing with disturbances to markets (the Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulation) has all the instruments needed to help for the food and farming sectors. They urged the European Commission act quickly and now, for example by using private storage aid for sectors in crisis. Copa-Cogeca, a large farming lobby group in Europe, has said that farmers have lost some market outlets due to the closure of most food service and catering channels. This has also lead to an increase in costs as farmers keep livestock for longer than expected. The EU ornamental sector has also made a case for support, stating that demand for cut flowers, ornamental plants, trees, bulbs and nursery stock has fallen by up to 80% since mid-March. It has been hit at period of the year that is traditionally the busiest for the sector. The sector employs around 760,000 people across Europe.

National Rural Crime Network highlights issues that must not be overlooked

The Network's letter to Defra says that it must continue to monitor poaching and livestock theft, the increase in fly-tipping, family isolation potentially increasing domestic abuse, and ensuring that the increased use of public rights of way is considerate of land managers who could be self-isolating.



Farming

EC extends deadline for submitting direct aid claims by a month to 15th June

Although we expect the UK will do the same our advice remains to submit claims as soon as possible to avoid IT or other issues.

Soils become drier than average in one month

Soils across England were close to saturation at the start of March but by the end of the month they were drier than average for the time of year in all regions. As a comparison, soil moisture deficits were at the long-term average at this time last year.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme now open

CSS has now opened for applications for agreements with a January 2021 start date. There are some good options including nectar flower mix (AB1), flower-rich margins and plots (AB8), winter bird food (AB9) and two-year sown legume fallow (AB15). When deciding whether to apply, we recommend considering whether the ability to lock into a guaranteed revenue stream for the next five years, as BPS is phased out and before ELMS is fully functional, is valuable. Defra has said that anyone entering CSS will not be penalised if they later wish to enter ELMS. The last date for Mid-Tier applications is 31st July and application packs must be ordered by 31st May.

Forestry

New UK plant health measures introduced from 21st April

There are [more stringent import requirements](#) to protect UK plant health against Xylella (a bacterium which causes disease in a wide range of woody plants including several species of broadleaf trees; the changes affect imports of high-risk hosts including Olive, Almond, Nerium, Oleander, Lavender and Rosemary), Emerald ash borer (a woodboring beetle that feeds on the phloem of ash trees), Plane tree wilt (a fungal pathogen that attacks plane trees by entering through wounds and causes canker stain disease and tree death) and Elms Yellows (disease).

Property

The latest information on property markets

Our teams have been very active gathering information on how most major property markets have been affected by the virus. Reports on many different sectors are available on our [website](#) and our [Rural Hub](#).

Read our latest farmland market review – the market is on pause

The ban on non-essential travel as part of the COVID-19 lockdown effectively stops viewings, pressing the 'pause' button on the market. Our Estates & Farm Agency team continues to operate, from home, working on deals that were struck before the UK lockdown was implemented on 23rd March and preparing property to market later this year. Sales of farms and estates with a residential element are on hold for now but the intention is they will launch as soon as restrictions have been lifted. Some vendors selling bare land are choosing to go ahead with marketing now with some success. To date, we have seen very few farmland deals fall through, with most buyers still committed to their purchase. Sale prices remain highly variable. A greater proportion of land is selling in the lower price bands and less in the top ones – for both arable and pasture – however, some top prices are still being paid for the right land in the right places. [Read the full report](#)