

Land Business Update

Week commencing 21st September 2020

Farming

Prepare now for Scotland's Sustainable Agriculture Capital Grant Scheme

This £10m pilot scheme from the Scottish Government offers grants of up to £20,000 for farmers and crofters to purchase equipment which will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect the natural environment or support sustainable land use. It is a competitive scheme, with each item of equipment given a set number of 'green points' based on the impact they will have. Farmers who have completed a carbon audit, nutrient management plan or veterinary health plan may be eligible for additional points. The list of eligible items includes a range of livestock handling systems, EID devices, precision-farming equipment, low emission slurry application systems, slurry store covers and very flexible tractor tyres. The grants are based on standard costs so farmers don't have to get quotes for the equipment. The grant will open in September for five weeks so our advice is to prepare now. For more details about the Grant, carbon audits, health or nutrient plans please contact [Mary Munro](#), our head of farming in Scotland.

NFU calls for Trade Bill to give parliament the ability to ratify or veto new trade deals

The NFU has also called for the House of Lords to adopt an amendment to the Agriculture Bill that would require the recently formed Trade and Agriculture Commission to provide advice to parliament on the impacts of trade deals on UK farming. So far, the government has opposed the vast majority of amendments to the Agriculture Bill and is expected to continue to do so in order to pass the Bill this autumn. The Trade and Agriculture Commission appears almost entirely powerless – it has an advisory role and was only established for six months, which the NFU has come close to admitting when Minette Batters said that if the latest moves were rejected it would be 'game over'.

Eustice accused of 'lack of openness' on agricultural trade in Northern Ireland

The House of Lords EU Environment Sub-Committee has said that George Eustice, representing the government, did not answer its questions on the implications on trade of the government's bills on trade, agriculture and the UK internal market. The Committee is concerned about how trade between northern and southern Ireland, as well as the rest of the UK, will be affected, including by checks along the Irish border.

Environment and energy

£1.6bn Scottish Government funding to transition heating to net zero

The money is expected to support up to 5,000 jobs and is part of the Government's commitment to cut emissions by 2045. There was also a further announcement of £150m to increase woodland creation by 50% by 2024 and a further £150m for flood risk management.

Try an electric vehicle for free - it was #WorldEVDAY on 9th September

A new £9.3 million scheme launched by Highways England will allow businesses to try electric vehicles for free for up to two months before they buy, to encourage them to switch from diesel van fleets.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/supercharging-the-future-of-driving-this-worlddevday>



English river water quality falls even lower

Only 14% of England's rivers are rated as 'good condition' according to the Environment Agency's latest assessment; in 2016, 17% were classed as good. In Scotland, 66% are deemed healthy and the European average is 40%. The EA has said 'it is not good enough' and in a classic understatement Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said it was 'not comfortable reading'. The government's own target is 100% in good condition by 2027. The Angling Trust said the results were "shameful" and campaigner Fergal Sharkey has launched a legal challenge against the government, which he accused of failing to stop water companies discharging raw sewage into rivers and allowing water companies and farmers to extract too much water from them. Wildlife and Countryside Link, a coalition of conservation groups, said: "Chemicals, sewage, manure, and plastic are polluting our rivers, invasive weeds are choking them, and climate change and over-abstraction are drying them out."

Strutt & Parker is part of a business that has been carbon neutral since 2017

We are part of the BNP Paribas group which has become carbon neutral through three commitments. We aim to reduce the CO2 emissions from our operations and since 2016 we have cut our emissions by 21% to 1.28 t of carbon dioxide per employee. Our energy consumption has also been cut, by 37% to 2.4 kWh per employee, and we use low carbon electricity. The remaining residual emissions from our activities are offset through tree planting, water supply and peat bog restoration projects in Kenya, Malawi and Indonesia respectively. Please contact [Jason Beedell](#) if you would like more details.

Communications

Government claims major leap in rural 5G roll-out

Rural mobile phone coverage should improve next year as radio waves previously used for TV signals have been made available for mobile use. This is the final wave in a three-year project that aimed to clear the spectrum for future auctions in all areas, not just rural.

Property and rural business

High Court issues nuanced ruling on business interruption insurance policies in COVID-19 pay-out case

The High Court has ruled that pay-outs were triggered under certain 'non-damage' clauses and that the policies should restore businesses to their pre-COVID-19 positions. However, whether an insurance policy must pay out will depend on the wording of a policy – the judgement considered 21 wordings and reached different conclusions for each. For example, for Zurich and Ecclesiastical Insurance it ruled in favour of the insurers, not the policy holders. It is not known whether all, or some, of the insurers will appeal against the ruling.

Moratorium on evictions of commercial tenants extended until 1st January 2020

The government has also extended the ban on landlords using commercial rent arrears recovery services to enforce rent collection for the same period. The extension has been criticised by the British Property Federation which says that many tenants which are well-financed have been exploiting the rules to avoid paying rent. It has called for an exit strategy to clearly outline to both property owners and tenants how the transition back to normal market conditions will happen.