

Land Business Update

Week commencing 5th October 2020

Farming

Sustainable Farming Incentive may be 'stepping stone' before ELM in England

It looks like the basic level of the new Environmental Land Management (ELM), which is the new environmental scheme that replaces the Common Agricultural Policy in England, will be called the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI). It was previously referred to as Tier 1. This is not 100% clear yet as initial reports called the SFI a temporary scheme to bridge the gap until the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) system is fully working in late 2024; however, George Eustice has said that it will be Tier 1 of ELM. Details are currently scant but it is understood that the SFI could start in 2022 and would be available to all farmers who currently receive BPS payments. It could include catchment sensitive farming, integrated pest management and soil health. Defra is hoping to issue more detail on SFI, and other elements of ELM, in November.

Peers vote to amend Agriculture Bill to maintain food import standards

The House of Lords has passed an amendment to the Bill that would require food imports to the UK to meet domestic standards. Another amendment places a duty on the state to have due regard for animal sentience in policy development. There is no guarantee that the amendments will now be supported by the government, which needs the Bill to get Royal Assent by early November in order to start the agricultural transition period in 2021.

Read the latest S&P Farming Updates for England and Scotland

The latest editions of our quarterly newsletters on farming market and administrative issues that affect farmers' business decisions are now available on our [Rural Hub](#).

Countryside Productivity Small Grants scheme now open in England

The third round of this popular grant scheme is open for applications until 4th November. It offers grants of around 40% for farmers to buy new equipment – from livestock monitoring cameras to precision farming technology – to improve productivity. There is a limit of £12,000 per farm so businesses that bought equipment under previous rounds can apply to this one, up to the £12,000 limit. This will be the final round that is funded under the European Commission but we expect similar grants to be part of future British policy. We have helped many businesses identify equipment that they would benefit from so please contact [Seb Murray](#) for further details.

The Future of Farm Support - are we heading in the right direction?

The CLA and Strutt & Parker are looking to gather the views of landowners and farmers on the design and operation of the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme and other environmental policies, which will feed into the CLA's advocacy work.

Please consider completing our [five-minute survey](#) which closes on 16th October at 6pm. The information will be used in relation to the CLA's Rural Powerhouse Week (23-26 Nov). We will treat all responses you provide as confidential and anonymous in any results that either the CLA or Strutt & Parker publish.

Forestry

£160 million investment for Scottish forestry and agriculture

The Scottish Government has announced £100m of funding for new tree planting, with the aim of hitting the increased target of planting 18,000 hectares a year by 2024 / 25. The increased target will raise demand for trees so £20m has been allocated to increase the supply of young trees, which feels like a positive move. Forestry and Land Scotland has been given £30m to expand the national forests and its land. The final £10m is funding the pilot Sustainable Agriculture Capital Grant Scheme which we covered in the last edition. The pilot scheme will be open for five weeks and offers grants of up to £20,000 to farmers to purchase new equipment that increases their resource use efficiency. For more details, please contact [Mary Munro](#).



British Woodlands Survey highlights need for more and quicker action on responding to environmental change

This survey is funded by the Forestry Commission and led by the always impressive Sylva Foundation, an environmental charity. The results are based on responses from just over 1,000 people, most of whom are woodland owners or agents. It found that if the sector is going to hit the targets set for it in The Forestry and Climate Change Action Plan much more action is needed – by both government agencies and woodland managers. Among four important management activities for adaptation, two were being adopted by the majority of woodland managers (reviewing tree species suitability and implementing continuous cover management), while two other actions (reviewing climate change projections and gaining understanding of soils) were not, which could undermine good decision making. One of the most challenging findings was that most respondents said that they did not intend to expand tree cover in the next five years, most often due to lack of available land but also frustration with the complexity of regulations relating to grant aid. All of the findings make it clear that it will be highly challenging to hit the UK's targets for forestry.

Property

Green Homes Grant Scheme now open in England

This new scheme which offers up to £5,000 per property opened on 30th September and work must be done by 31st March. The aim of the scheme is to enable homeowners and landlords to upgrade their homes and properties with energy-saving features, such as insulation or double glazing, in order to reduce energy usage and improve the energy efficiency of a property. Vouchers cover up to two thirds of the cost of specified home improvements up to a maximum of £5,000 for both primary and secondary measures. A voucher for 100% of the cost up to £10,000 is available for people on low incomes. The £2bn funding is expected to fund improvements in up to 600,000 homes, a large number, but we expect significant demand. The constraining factor appears to be the availability of accredited local suppliers (TrustMark registered or MCS certified businesses). Please contact [Jess Waddington](#), [Laura Gibson-Green](#) or your local building surveying team for advice on the grant and, most importantly, to ensure that any measures you are considering are appropriate and effective for your property. Alternatives are available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Shooting

Pheasants could wipe out adders in Britain within 12 years

This sad warning come from the Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG). Their survey of adders in 2019 found that more than 90% of surveyed sites had populations of 10 or fewer adult adders, and so were vulnerable to local extinction. Pheasants kill reptiles including adders on sight, pecking at adults and swallowing young snakes whole. Although adders are venomous, their bites cannot penetrate the birds' feathers. The warning was issued at the start of the pheasant shooting season, during which around 50m pheasants and partridges will be released into the countryside.

Communications

Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme

Homes and businesses in rural areas of the UK may be eligible for funding towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband when part of a group scheme. Rural premises with broadband speeds of less than 100Mbps can use vouchers worth £1,500 per home and up to £3,500 for each small- to medium-sized business. As the scheme is supplier-led, suppliers have a central role in aggregating demand for the scheme amongst their customers. Our communications team has warned that anyone considering using the scheme should carefully research what, if any, rights the supplier of the broadband equipment will impose under the Digital Economy Act 2017, as they can have significant implications. As is usually the case, buyer beware and please contact [Paul Williams](#) in our communications team if you would like to discuss the scheme.



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