

Land Business Update

Week commencing 18th January 2021

Brexit

UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement signed

The agreement means that from 1st January 2021 trade with the EU will continue without tariffs and quotas, which is very positive. The UK government said that it means businesses will be able to continue to 'trade smoothly'. However, most major supermarkets have reported disruptions in imports and exports and a number of major transport firms have halted deliveries to the continent. The disruptions are linked to customs data that is now required as well as complex 'rules of origin' tariffs. The Food and Drink Federation has estimated the added checks and inspections will add about £3 billion of extra costs to British businesses. The full effects of the changes are only likely to be seen once trade reaches typical levels, which is expected in the next few weeks. Agreement was not reached on recognition of Geographical Indications, which are special products from particular areas.

COVID-19

Ban on residential evictions extended until 21st February

The ban on repossessions was due to end on 11th January but has been extended for six weeks. However, courts will continue to prioritise cases of antisocial behaviour, illegal occupation and domestic abuse in the social sector. The government is also planning to pilot test a mediation service for landlords and renters who face potential eviction, to avoid the need for formal hearings. The National Residential Landlords Association called the extension a 'sticking plaster' and called for the government to help tenants pay their debts, as is happening in Scotland and Wales. Charities have also called for more financial support for tenants. Councils are being given extra funding to house rough sleepers during the cold winter months.

Ban on commercial evictions extended until 31st March 2021

The moratorium, which was introduced in March and has been extended twice already, prevents property owners from pursuing tenants for unpaid rent by legal means, or from evicting them. The restriction on landlords using commercial rent arrears recovery to recover unpaid rent has also been extended to the end of March.

Guidance for managing beaches, the countryside and coastal areas

The government has published a [summary of guidance](#), advice and examples produced by external organisations which may be useful for anyone dealing with places used or attractive to the general public.

S&P's business operation during lockdown

We continue to operate as we have been doing since March, with some staff working from home. Site visits remain limited to the essential and we continue to strictly apply the rules on social distancing and personal protective equipment.

Economy

Statutory minimum wage increases from 1st April 2021

The national living wage will increase to £8.91 per hour from £8.72 for workers aged 23 and above (which is a change from the current 25 years and above). The national minimum wage rates will also increase from 1st April:

- £8.36 per hour for 21 to 22 year olds (from £8.20)
- £6.56 per hour for 18 to 20 year olds (from £6.45)
- £4.62 per hour for 16 and 17 year olds (from £4.55)
- £4.30 per hour for apprentices (from £4.15)



Farming

Seasonal Workers Pilot expanded to allow farmers to hire up to 30,000 workers in 2021

This pilot scheme allows farming businesses to recruit a limited number of temporary migrants for specific seasonal roles in the horticultural sector. It is now managed by the Home Office under the T5 (Temporary Worker) Seasonal Worker immigration route. The change increases the number of workers that can be hired from the previous limit of 10,000. It will operate with four scheme operators (Concordia, Pro-Force and two new operators). The farming sector says that it requires around 70,000 seasonal workers so, although welcome, the increase will not meet demand. Farming Today has reported that some farming businesses are changing how they operate as they cannot be sure of recruiting a suitable number of skilled and experienced staff.

Scotland's Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) to reopen on 25th January on a restricted basis

It will be the first time that Scotland's main agri-environment programme has been open to new applications since 2019. Applications will be restricted to funding for designated sites, organic farming, supporting farmland waders, corn buntings and corncrakes, along with actions to improve public access and slurry storage. The application period closes on 30th June.

Consultation on gene editing issued by Defra for England

Gene editing creates organisms possessing genetic changes which could have been introduced by traditional breeding. The consultation also includes a section on genetic modification. It has, predictably, had a very mixed reception. The NFU has said that it allows farmers access to the latest technology for production and reducing environmental impacts. Environmental groups and organic farmers claim it will be bad for animal welfare and efforts to curb greenhouse gases, by driving faster growth rates of animals, 'causing real suffering' and entrenching factory farming.

Forestry

Lower average price per carbon unit in third Woodland Carbon Guarantee auction

The third auction closed in November. There were 46 bids of which 31 were successful and it funded 615ha of new woodland with an average price per carbon unit of £17.31. The schemes were very diverse, with 22 projects being predominately native woodland covering 229ha. Under the scheme, the government agrees to pay successful 'bidders', who are landowners planning to plant trees, a guaranteed index-linked price for the carbon that the trees will store as they grow. The landowners do not have to sell their carbon units to the government – the scheme just guarantees them a minimum price.

Planning

U-turn on house building targets as algorithm is scrapped

The change has been attributed to opposition from Conservative MPs who would have had more houses built in their constituencies. Instead, a larger share of new homes will be built in cities.