

Land Business Update

Week commencing 6th February 2023

Farming

New round of funding to improve farm profitability and sustainability

The second round of the [Large Research and Development \(R&D\) Partnerships](#) fund will open on the 20th February for farmers, growers, foresters and agri-businesses. The £8 million pot of money will aim to fund projects seeking to develop new agricultural solutions aimed at for example improving productivity, farm resilience and reducing environmental impacts of farming. Collaborative projects are encouraged, and projects worth between £3 to £5 million will be eligible to apply. The competition closes for applications on 19th April.

Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme extended

Farmers and land managers within National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty will have access to the funding for an extra year, as the programme has been extended until March 2025. Projects that can be funded include those that will enhance the natural environment, mitigate climate change impacts by increasing carbon sequestration or reduce flood risk, and increase the resilience of the landscape. Contact your local Strutt & Parker office if you are interested in taking part in the scheme.

Basic Payment Scheme 2023

The BPS application window will open on 14th March. Payments will be cut by 35 to 55% compared with historical rates. A first payment will be made around July and another one towards the end of the year. The RPA has also published their [2023 Key Dates poster](#), summarising key deadlines for BPS, Countryside Stewardship, Environmental Stewardship and the Lump Sum Exit Scheme. Please contact [Andrew Atkinson](#) if you have any questions regarding BPS and how payment cuts will be affecting your farming business this year.

Energy

Electric Vehicle Smart Charging Action Plan

This new plan, published on 17th January, sets out what steps are being taken to make smart charging the preferred method of long duration charging by 2025. The ambition is to use data on energy use better so that consumers can charge electric vehicles when electricity is cheaper or cleaner, power their homes from their vehicle's battery and sell electricity back to the grid for profit. The government estimates that an 'average' driver can save up to £200 a year through smarter charging, and a high mileage driver up to £1,000 a year by delaying the power demand from electric vehicles at peak periods, such as 4pm to 9pm on winter evenings. From July 2022, all new charge points sold for private use must have smart functionality. The government is consulting on these new policies and the technical framework for domestic smart charging.

Environment

Environmental Improvement Plan for England published

Following on from the Environmental Targets for England published just before Christmas, the government has published this Plan, which is the first five-yearly review of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP). The Plan uses the same 10 goals in the 25YEP and it is clear that achieving those goals is already well behind target. Lord Deben, who is the chair of the Climate Change Committee, said (again) that the UK needs to move from producing excellent plans to actually delivering them.

It is also clear how many of the goals rely on changes to land use and land management (this list is not exhaustive):

- Incentivise farmers to adopt nature friendly farming practices across at least 70% of our countryside.
- Publish a baseline map of soil health by 2028 and bring at least 40% of agricultural soils into sustainable management.
- Help farmers transition to Integrated Pest Management with investment and advice.
- Reward farmers for actions to reduce risks and impacts from floods, droughts, and wildfires.



- Reducing ammonia emissions by using incentives and potentially regulating dairy and intensive beef farms.
- Publish a Land Use Framework in 2023, setting out how we will balance multiple demands on our land.
- Rolling out Local Nature Recovery Strategies to identify areas to create and restore habitat.
- Restore 400 miles of river through the first round of Landscape Recovery projects.
- Establish 3,000 hectares of new woodlands along England's rivers.
- Grow a sustainable and long-term UK timber supply by investing in tree planting and skills.
- Deliver the five-year action plan of the 2023 Plant Biosecurity Strategy for GB.

Forestry

England Woodland Creation Offer payment rates revised

Base payments have been increased by 20% to £10,200/ha from £8,500/ha and annual maintenance payments have also increased to £350/ha. Previously, payments covered around 75-80% of costs and it is now break even for many. The EWCO funds capital items and activities to establish new woodland, contributes to infrastructure costs, covers some maintenance costs, and provides funding for other benefits such as public access and flood management. Contact [Hugh Williams](#) for more details.

Launch of the Forest Research Climate Change hub

To help improve the resilience of UK forests and woodlands, climate change mitigation measures must be widely adopted. With this in mind, the [Climate Change Hub](#) aims to be a one-stop-shop for landowners and forest managers, bringing together the latest news and research on adaptive practices and how they can be implemented. Having a woodland management plan is the first step in the adaptation framework. If you have questions about this, please contact [Hugh Williams](#) or [Simon Hart](#).

Property and rural economy

Long-awaited revision of the National Planning Policy Framework open for consultation

The main changes proposed in the [consultation](#) are to housing and renewable energy policies. The revised NPPF is likely to reflect the Government's intention to scrap the 5-year land supply, which would no longer apply if a local authority has an up-to-date local plan in place. This would reduce opportunities to get approval for development proposals where councils are not meeting their 5-year housing land supply targets. Regarding renewable energy, it is proposed to create a new expectation that projects to re-power energy schemes would be approved if their impacts are or can be made acceptable in planning terms. There will also be some tightening of the rules around Biodiversity Net Gain to reduce the risks of developers clearing habitats before submitting applications. Responses to the consultation are due by 2nd March and the Government intends to respond in the spring.

Defra launching a consultation on sustainable drainage

At the moment, Sustainable Draining Systems (SuDS) are only a requirement for developments of 10 dwellings or more, but Defra has confirmed that this requirement is soon to be broadened. SuDS can include wetlands, grassy areas, gardens and ponds and help in reducing flooding risks. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust welcomed the move, not only for its practicality, but also because it will "provide a natural resource for people's mental wellbeing by putting blue and green space in urban areas directly where people live and work". Defra will soon launch a consultation on the best approach to adopt and the new requirements are likely to take effect from next year.

Almost 10% of local bus services cut in 2022 despite the "bus back better" strategy

The number of registered bus services in Great Britain fell by more than 1,000 registered routes in the twelve months to January 2023. The data is likely to reflect cuts in services but it can also be affected by services merging or routes being altered. The cuts vary between regions, with a reduction of over a quarter of bus service registrations in the West Midlands and with an increase of 2% in the East. This is despite England's national bus strategy, published in 2021, and Boris Johnson's "bus back better" strategy. The situation may get worse from April when the bus recovery grant, which supported services affected by the pandemic, ends. Local bus registrations have been falling for over a decade.