

Land Business Update

Week commencing 27th May 2024

Farming

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) expanded offer published

Defra announced what new actions (which is the new name for options) will be available to English land managers from July onwards. More than 50 simplified actions from Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier will be merged into SFI which, with 20 new options, expands the SFI to 102 actions. The duration of some of the Mid Tier actions has been reduced to three years from five to fit better with tenancies. The 25% of farm area limit on some actions has been extended to also include in-field grass strips, unharvested cereal headlands, bumblebird mix and cultivated areas for arable plants. Please contact your local farming team if you would like to discuss the new options and making an application.

Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship details expected in July

More details will be published this summer in advance of the winter application period for agreements starting in January 2025. Defra says it will make the scheme simpler and reduce the burden of seeking advice and endorsement. From 2025 onwards, applications can be made at any time during the year.

New hedgerow regulations come into effect in England

As previously reported on, the regulations largely replicate how hedgerows were protected under cross-compliance. The main requirements are:

- No cutting period – from 1st March to 31st August to protect nesting birds.
- Buffering hedges – with a two-metre buffer strip on each side of the hedge, with no cultivation, pesticides or fertilisers.

All land managers are required to comply with the regulations, which will be enforced by the RPA. In addition, the SFI offers payments for hedgerow management which aligns with these regulations:

- Assess the condition of your hedges and plan to improve them (£5 / 100 metres of each side of a hedge, code CHRW1).
- Manage the hedges by cutting them once every two or three years and rotating the trimming (£13 / 100 metres of each side of a hedge, code CHRW2).

Key outcomes from the PM's 2024 Food and Farming Summit

A food security index was published to coincide with the Summit. It states that food security in the UK is 'broadly stable' – the overall production to supply ratio has not changed significantly since the 2000s - but that there is a need to boost UK production of fruit and vegetables. It also highlights that there is a 'longer-term risk from climate change' (see article below). Concern over the UK's reliance on imported fruit and vegetables prompted the government to roll out a new 'blueprint' to boost domestic production.

S&P comment: It is time that the government acts on the fresh fruit and vegetable sectors. Of the many challenges they face, the changing balance of risk and reward needs particular focus. However, although the blueprint has said that current domestic production needs to increase, it has not indicated by how much or how to improve relationships between producers and the supply chain. The metrics proposed do not utilise internationally agreed definitions and indices of food security. Further, it does not measure food security for consumers, about a quarter of whom are food insecure as food prices are 25% higher than a few years ago. Our summary of the Summit is [here](#).

New polling for the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU) found major concern about climate change and support for net zero policies. Overall, 72% of farmers questioned were worried about climate change, slightly higher than the general public at 70%. It also found that 72% of farmers supported reaching the UK Government's target to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.



UK lacks the resilience to deal with climate change - food security concerns

The chair of the Climate Change Committee's adaptation committee, Baroness Brown, has said that the UK does not have a plan which shows what a well-adapted UK looks like and that the UK is "not ready at all." Giving evidence to a parliamentary committee, she underscored the importance of addressing food security concerns, encompassing both the quality of food and the vulnerability of agricultural production to climate impacts, both in the UK and from where we import food from. She also said that reporting on climate risks in the supply chains of large food companies was deficient, so watch out for this increasing in the future.

Separately but linked, orange juice prices have more than doubled to over \$6,500 / tonne as producers struggle with higher temperatures, lower rainfall and a citrus disease, most notably in Brazil, which produces a third of the world's oranges. Also, the shortlist for the [Earth Photo](#) 2024 has been published; it highlights the effects of climate change. And also, volunteers have carried on the work of Jean Combes, who died last year, who recorded when four tree species - oak, ash, horse chestnut and lime - came into leaf near Ashted in Surrey. Her 76-year dataset has been used by scientists in climate change modelling as it demonstrated the long-term trend in Britain for spring to start much earlier than it used to.

Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme introduction delayed

The Welsh Government has said that it is still committed to the scheme but will consult more (despite having 'had a seven-year conversation' already) before a transition period will start in 2026. The delay has been criticised by Wildlife Trusts Wales as prolonging uncertainty when farmers need to be rewarded for switching to sustainable farming methods which will benefit their businesses in the future. The change was prompted by farmer protests about some elements of the scheme, particularly the requirement for at least 10% of land to be under tree cover. Wildlife Trusts Wales said that most Welsh farms already have 6% tree cover and so do not have far to go to meet the proposals to reach 10% under the new scheme. Basic Payments will be paid as at present in 2025.

Forestry

Make an England Woodland Creation Offer application by 30th June

This is the closing date to secure an agreement by the next planting season. Please contact our forestry team if you need any assistance.

Oak Processionary Moth

Now is the time of year when the moth's caterpillars emerge, so the risk of irritation from their hairs is greatest. In England, there are movement restrictions on oak trees with a girth of 8cm or more (or 2.5cm diameter) within the updated OPM management zones. Please contact Hugh Williams if you would like to discuss OPM or other tree pests. NB There is separate guidance for Scotland and Wales.

Property and rural economy

Changes to Permitted Development Rights in England and Wales

A number of changes to existing rights will apply from 21st May 2024:

Class Q (agricultural buildings to residential use)

- Can now include former agricultural buildings which are no longer part of an established agricultural unit.
- Creation of up to ten dwellings (previously five) with a maximum cumulative floor space of 1,000m² (previously 865m²).
- Reduction in the maximum floor space for any one property to 150m² (previously 465m²).
- Allowing a single-storey rear extension of up to 4m to be added to a building as part of the change of use (subject to conditions, but this should open-up new opportunities for smaller buildings to be converted).
- Transitional arrangements allow the previous Class Q guidelines to be used if preferred until 20th May 2025.
- NOT changed - Class Q will not be extended to Protected Landscapes (which are Conservation Areas, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks) or to cover equestrian buildings.

Class R (agricultural buildings to commercial use)

- Commercial uses include general industrial, storage, distribution, hotel and commercial use, sport and recreational uses.
- The maximum floor space has been increased to 1,000m² (previously 500m²).
- There are no transitional arrangements for the Class R changes.

Other permitted development rights changes



- Class MA permits the change of use of commercial, business and service buildings to dwellings.
- The commercial building being converted no longer needs to have been vacant for three months before applying and the limit on the floor space to be converted has been removed (previously 1,500m²).

Agricultural development

- The size limit for new agricultural buildings has been increased to 1,500 m² (previously 1,000 m²) for farms over 5ha, and to 1,250m² for farms under 5 ha.

These changes are positive for anyone looking to convert buildings. The rules remain complex, especially in order to maximise developable area. Please contact [Alice Robinson](#) or [Richard Clews](#) if you would like further information or to discuss your opportunities, or read [our blog](#).

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