

# Land Business Update

Week commencing 17 November 2025

## Farming & food

## Global food systems pushing the planet beyond safe environmental boundaries - "the science is undeniable"



The latest report from the EAT-Lancet Commission, which is a collaboration of health, agriculture and environmental scientists, reaffirmed its 'Planetary Health Diet', which recommends a shift toward largely plant-based diets with moderate amounts of animalsource foods. The report found that diets in many parts of the world, including Europe, contain an excess of meat, dairy and animal fats, and are short on fruit, vegetables and legumes. It found that even if fossil fuel use were eliminated, emissions from food alone could still push global temperatures beyond the 1.5°C limit set in the Paris Agreement. The Commission said that its 'Planetary Health Diet' would support both human health and environmental sustainability; the diet includes a portion of up to 200g of red meat a week and up to 400g of poultry meat. The Commission emphasised that change should not undermine farmers' incomes but instead reward climate-smart and resource-efficient output.

## Heightened risk of a drought in spring 2026



The Environment Agency has warned that land managers need to prepare for a drought in the spring as the current Met Office long-term forecast for the UK shows a 30% likelihood of drier conditions from November to January, which will lead to drought conditions in spring. The areas affected by drought will be determined by the amount of rain over winter. If it is 100% or more of the long-term average (LTA), most of England will be okay but some areas in the east will be more vulnerable due to low groundwater levels. If it is 80% of the LTA, drought conditions would stretch across the country from Wessex to Yorkshire, so similar to 2025. If it is 60% of the LTA, all of England would be in drought at the start of spring.

The EA says that land managers should assess how much water they have access to, and ensure they have enough water where they know their crops are susceptible to dry weather, which can involve working together to share water. Some land managers might choose to change their cropping to grow more drought tolerant crops or adjust areas based on limited water availability. They can also increase water retention of soils and build improving water resilience into their business plans. This could include rainwater harvesting, high flow abstraction, recycling water and using water from Internal Drainage Boards.

## **Natural capital & environment**

## Key issues from COP30 - the health cost of climate inaction – almost 500,000 deaths a year linked to extreme heat



The 2025 Lancet Countdown report, published in October and see article above on its 'Planetary Health Diet', provides the starkest evidence to date of climate change's impact on human health. 12 out of 20 indicators are now at their worst levels on record. While the findings show that inaction is already costing lives, the report highlights how cutting emissions (like phasing out coal) brings immediate health gains through cleaner air and better living conditions. This research is expected to strengthen the Belém Health Action Plan and strongly influence COP30 discussions on embedding health in climate policy. Key facts are:

- Heat-related mortality is up 63.2% since the 1990s, with 546,000 deaths/year linked to extreme heat.
- Productivity losses from heat reached 640 billion work hours in 2024 (a 98% increase compared with the 1990s annual
- 123.7 million more people faced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2023 due to climate-driven droughts and heat.
- Governments spent \$956bn on fossil fuel subsidies in 2023 and 15 countries spent more on fossil subsidies than on their health systems, reflecting the opportunity cost of fossil fuel dependence.
- Coal's decline saved 160,000 lives per year (2010–2022) by reducing air pollution.



#### Consider climate change adaptation in all building works, says Climate Change Committee



The Committee's scientists have said that work to existing buildings and infrastructure should aim for them to be able to withstand temperatures of at least 2°C higher than normal by 2050. Any new buildings should be prepared for 4°C above preindustrial levels. The Committee made the recommendations in response to a request from the government on guidelines it could use to prepare for flooding and similar impacts. It also said again that making the changes would cost less than the cost of not acting.

# Commons committee says nature is not a blocker to housing growth



A report from the House of Commons environmental audit committee has challenged ministers for using the "lazy narrative" that nature blocks or is an inconvenience to delivering housing. Instead they say nature is necessary for building resilient towns and neighbourhoods and that skills shortages in construction, planning and ecology would be what made it impossible for the government to deliver on its housebuilding ambitions. The MPs said that local planning authorities were already severely underresourced in ecological skills and at the scale needed to deliver the country's legally defined target to halt the decline of nature by 2030 and reverse it by 2042. Separately many MPs and organisations have been pushing for changes to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which they say will undermine protections for wildlife and rare habitats.

## New guidance on how to protect trees from mammal damage







The Forestry Commission, with Edinburgh Napier University, has issued the <u>guidance</u> to help land managers identify 23 mammal species that may be damaging trees and how to protect woodlands effectively (hopefully). Associated with this, the UK Squirrel Accord is asking land managers to survey grey squirrel bark stripping in their woods. Responses to their survey can be submitted until the end of December. Also, Forest Research is calling for woodland owners and managers to join a GB-wide network to monitor the eight-toothed spruce bark beetle (Ips typographus). Volunteers are needed to install pheromone traps and collect samples. Training is provided.

## Rural economy & property

#### Phased introduction of Renters' Rights Act to start on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026



The Government has confirmed that the Act will be implemented in three phases, following this timetable:

#### Phase One (from 1st May 2026)

- All Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) will convert to periodic agreements with no fixed end date. Where an existing tenancy is in place, landlords will need to provide the tenant with a copy of the government's 'Information Sheet' before 31st May 2026. For tenancies created on or after 1st May, a new tenancy agreement will be required.
- Section 21 'no fault' evictions will be abolished. Landlords will need to meet specific legal grounds for regaining possession.
- Rents can only be increased once a year and are capped at market levels.
- Landlords cannot unreasonably withhold consent to a request to rent with a pet. It will also be illegal to discriminate against renters who have children or receive benefits.

## Phase Two (from late 2026)

- Roll out of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Database, which all landlords must sign up to. The annual fee is yet to be
- Establishment of the PRS Landlord Ombudsman, which will provide a redress service for landlords and tenants. The service will be mandatory for landlords, but membership may not become obligatory until 2028.

#### Phase Three (various future dates)

- Introduction of Decent Homes Standards to ensure that all PRS properties meet a minimum standard of housing quality. Details of the standard are yet to be confirmed, but it is proposed that this will come into force between 2035 and 2037.
- Awaab's law to be extended to the PRS, which will set timeframes for landlords to respond to complaints about hazards, such as mould and damp.

For advice on any of the points above and how it might impact rural lettings, please contact Sarah Roberts.



#### UK rooftop solar installations hit record high



Over 200,000 installations have been carried out in 2025, with systems being installed all over the UK. 35% of them have been on new build homes. There has also been significant growth in battery storage, which is often installed alongside solar panels to store excess electricity: battery installations have increased by 122% compared with the first nine months of 2024, with 59,000 batteries in total now installed.

#### Air-to-air heat pumps for cooling added to the Boiler Upgrade Scheme





The scheme has been amended to offer a £2,500 discount off the cost of installing an air-to-air heat pump, which can provide heating as well as cooling. This is the first time air-conditioning units have been eligible for this funding and the grant covers over half the typical cost of around £4,500. Heat batteries, which store heat overnight for use during the day, have also ben added Existing grants towards the cost of installing an air source or ground source heat pump continue (at £7,500). To discuss heating and cooling systems, please contact Alexander MacFarlane in our building consultancy team.

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