

# Land Business Update

Week commencing 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026

## Farming & food

**Weather expected to remain wet in February but may move to average in March and April** 

Land managers are becoming increasingly concerned about the long, wet period. The Financial Times reports that rain has fallen for 32 consecutive days in Reading, where more than 100 global climate scientists recently met, which is the longest continuous period in a record going back 100 years. Changeable wet conditions are expected to continue as frontal zones move in from the Atlantic throughout February. Showers and longer spells of potentially heavy rain are likely, with some drier spells. From February to April, conditions are expected to be around average with only a slightly higher than normal likelihood of it being wet. Groundwater levels are expected to be above normal or higher in all parts of England, except the north-west, by the end of March. River flows across England are expected to be normal or higher for the time of year (and continue at normal levels through to September).

**Hedgerow management rules – useful leaflet from the RPA** 

The [leaflet](#) is a useful reminder on the main rules on cutting hedges:

- No cutting or trimming between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> August (inclusive) to protect bird nests during this time.
- A two metre wide buffer strip should be left, measured from the centre of the hedge, which must not be cultivated, sprayed or fertilised to protect the hedge.
- There are some exemptions from the rules.

A placement student with the GWCT, Isabella Dreist, has also written a [nice article on five reasons to value hedgerows in the farmed landscape](#), which are: nesting and cover for wildlife; shelter and microclimate for wildlife and livestock; food sources for birds and small mammals; supporting wider biodiversity; and they create wildlife corridors that connect habitats across the landscape, allowing wildlife to move between feeding and breeding areas.

## Natural capital & environment

**Influential group says focus on GDP harms nature and will harm organisations that ignore nature loss** 

A [report](#) from the influential Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services or IPBES says that, 'global businesses are undermining the environment even though they rely on nature for key raw materials and critical services such as pollination and water filtration'. The Business and Biodiversity Report also states that levels of natural capital, which means ecosystems and natural resources, have shown declines over the past 50 years for virtually all contributions and that activities by businesses account for much of this reduction and that they don't have enough incentives to protect nature. The report shows that with the right policies, as well as financial and cultural shifts, what is good for nature is also what is best for profitability. It offers tools for choosing more effective measurements and analysis. The report has been approved by representatives of more than 150 member governments of IPBES and its principles are also supported by UN, which said, "Moving beyond gross domestic product is about measuring the things that really matter to people and their communities. GDP tells us the cost of everything, and the value of nothing. Our world is not a gigantic corporation. Financial decisions should be based on more than a snapshot of profit and loss."

**Scotland becomes first UK nation to require swift bricks in new build homes** 

The Scottish Parliament has voted to require the installation of swift bricks in new buildings, as swift numbers in the UK have fallen by 60% since 1995. Sadly, England has delayed a similar measure.

## Rural economy & property

### Local Growth Fund

The £140m fund has been allocated to five regions (Glasgow City, Edinburgh & South East, Tay Cities, Ayrshire and Forth Valley) to fund regional projects which will drive economic growth, including infrastructure investment, business support or skills development. The funding will be allocated through Regional Economic Partnerships (REPs), which are collaborations between local government, the private sector, education and charities. It is one of around 15 funding programmes.

### All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Rural Services sets its priorities

The group of MPs, peers and the Rural Services Network agreed three priorities for the year ahead:

- Fair funding for rural public services, reflecting continuing concerns about disparities and higher demands placed on rural taxpayers.
- Supporting growth in the rural economy, particularly of small and family-run businesses.
- Rural resilience, including energy networks, telecommunications and public transport.

### Planning applications for new homes increases to four year high

Applications were made for 335,000 new homes outside London in 2025, which is 60% higher than in 2024. There were more applications in every region apart from London. It is attributed in part to the government's planning reforms, including allowing development on some lower-quality grey belt land, and changes to processes. Despite this, there are significant concerns about whether the target of building 1.5m new homes in this parliament will be achieved, with the sector facing labour shortages, rising costs and long lead times between planning approval and construction.

Separately, Henry Dimbleby, author of the 2021 National Food Strategy, has warned that Britain's slow planning system is a major barrier to reducing grocery prices, as it prevents the building of essential infrastructure like reservoirs and greenhouses, which could help maintain food production in the face of climate change and supply shocks.

### Making Tax Digital (MTD) is going live in April

Sole traders and landlords should review their obligations now as anyone within the scope of MTD must maintain digital records, use compliant software and submit quarterly updates to HMRC. S&P comment: we recommend that businesses speak to their bookkeepers and tax accountants now to confirm whether the MTD requirements apply to them, complete sign-ups and prepare systems ahead of April. If you require any support around MTD, please contact [Dan Smith](#) our Head of Rural Client Finance.

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