

Land Business Update

Week commencing 5th October 2026

Farming & food

SFI26 Window 2 closes in one day due to demand

As expected, demand for the scheme was very high, with many businesses unable to submit an application at all or one that included the actions they wanted to do. There has been a significant reaction and Defra has said that it is planning to open the 2027 offer “as early as possible”, and will explore alternatives to a first come, first served application process. It has published some initial data on the window’s applications:

- There were just over 12,200 applications, of which 72% had an existing live agreement including one that was expiring soon. 10% did not have an existing live agreement.
- About 2,500 (or 21%) of the Window 2 applicants were businesses with less than 50 hectares, so who could have applied in Window 1. NB Unused funding from window 1 was added to the window 2 budget.
- Defra is allowing two small ‘exception groups’, who contacted the RPA before Window 2 closed, to continue with their applications. They are ‘assisted digital’ farmers, who need the RPA to complete an application on their behalf, and ‘technical issue’ farmers, who were prevented from applying because of a technical issue with the application service.
- The RPA will contact ‘started but not submitted’ Window 2 farmers to confirm whether their applications will be withdrawn, or if they’re in an exception group and can continue with their application.

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Disappointing and variable yields according to the AHDB’s final harvest progress report

The variability of this year’s harvest is considerable, as can be seen in the table below; this is due to a range of factors including soil type and its ability to retain moisture, drilling date, cropping history, variety choice and local weather conditions.

£/ha unless otherwise stated	Harvest 2026 Average	10-year average	Difference	Harvest 2026 range	Quality
Wheat	6.9	7.9	-13%	3.9 - 11.5	Good. Yields better in Scotland and northern England.
Winter barley	6.9	6.9	0%	4.4 - 11.8	Highly variable.
Spring barley	4.8	5.7	-16%	2.2 - 7.4	Variable but yields and quality better in north and Scotland.
Oats	4.6	5.4	-15%	2.0 - 9.3	As for oats.
Winter OSR	4.0	3.3	21%	2.4 - 5.4	Reasonable.

NB The AHDB’s data is based on 60 farms across the UK, so a relatively small sample. Also, the winter OSR 10-year average yield includes both winter and spring crops and so is probably below actual for winter OSR.

Join Defra’s Farming and Countryside Research Panel

Defra is looking for people with experience of the farming sector to join its Farming and Countryside Research Panel. This includes farmers, landowners, land managers, agents and others who work in or with the sector. Joining the panel gives you the opportunity to share your views and experiences directly with Defra and help shape future farming services and schemes, including the SFI and Countryside Stewardship. If you join you may be asked to take part in surveys, interviews and workshops, and you can decide whether to get involved each time you’re invited. Click [here](#) to join the panel or contact the panel manager sophie.werkshagen@defra.gov.uk.

**England's School Food Standards updated**

The [new standards](#), which will apply from September 2027, place a greater emphasis on fruit, vegetables, fibre-rich foods and balanced meals, which is positive. To help with implementation, every school is required to publish their menus and food policies online and also to make a governor accountable for food. The changes have been welcomed by the Soil Association.

Natural capital & environment

UK is not on track to meet the wildlife targets by 2030

The Wildlife Trusts, based on government data, says that the UK is on track to meet just 3 of the 23 Global Biodiversity Framework targets by 2030 it agreed to in 2022, with insufficient or unknown progress on others. Ahead of this month's 17th Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Armenia, which is the wildlife equivalent of the climate change COPs, the Wildlife Trusts has produced an interesting, if sobering, [assessment](#) of progress:

- Many of the policies needed are in development or in place – the challenge is implementation, funding and accountability. This includes accelerating delivery of the policy to protect and manage 30% of land, freshwater and sea for nature by 2030.
- The Trusts says that restoring nature is vital to strengthen food and water security, and reduce climate risks.

Linked to this, more than 130 businesses and financial institutions, including BNP Paribas Asset Management, which is part of our group, have [called on governments](#) to reform the fiscal and financial incentives that currently distort markets and threaten long-term economic and supply chain security. They say that at least US\$2.6tr of public spending each year, which is @ 2.5% of global GDP, unintentionally supports practices that deplete soils, water and ecosystems.

Access to well-managed woodlands reduces antidepressant use

People living in deprived communities are less likely to use medication for depression and anxiety if they have easy access to well-maintained woodlands, according to an interesting study from the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The researchers used NHS prescription records and census data from more than 129,000 people over five years to see whether people living within a 10-minute walk of an improved woodland area were more or less likely to be taking medication for depression or anxiety. The researchers say that relatively inexpensive investments in local greenspaces, like Scottish Forestry's Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) initiative, can make a real difference to people's mental health.

Rural economy & property

Property points from Andy Burnham's speech at the Labour Party conference

The government made a number of announcements that affect property at the Labour Party conference:

- Estate agent regulation and licensing - estate agents will be required to have licences to operate to try to improve standards.
- Energy prices – efforts to break the link between the international price of gas and domestic energy prices will be sped up.
- Empty homes - councils will be able to serve an Empty Dwelling Management Order to take over a home after it is empty for six months, not the current two years, to help meet the need for council houses. New legislation will also make it easier for councils to buy homes from landlords whose homes fall below required standards and who ignore notices to improve them.
- Right to Buy - new-build council homes will be exempt from the Right to Buy for 35 years.
- Your First Home – this new scheme has similarities to the previous Help to Buy scheme. It allows eligible buyers to purchase a new-build property from a developer signed up to the scheme using a 2.5% deposit, backed by a 20% government-backed equity loan with an interest-free period. The idea is to help tackle the challenge of saving up for a deposit. There will be eligibility caps on household income and local house prices. Further details are expected to be announced in the Budget on 28th October.

NB We have not covered announcements by other parties during conference season that could affect property as they are in opposition and cannot be put into effect in the short term.

Scottish Planning Biodiversity Metric consultation for major developments

Policy 3b of the National Planning Framework 4 requires that national or major developments, or those subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), include significant biodiversity enhancements that leave nature in a demonstrably better state. The policy does not, however, specify how to demonstrate the enhancement, and this has led to a range of approaches being used and



inconsistency. The Scottish Government has produced this new Metric, which is adapted from the metric used in England for Biodiversity Net Gain, as a standardised approach that will be applied after a transition period. The consultation is [here](#) and it is open until 30th November.

Winter readiness – keeping your rural business resilient

Autumn is a good time of the year to review the practical arrangements that keep farms and rural properties safe, accessible and operational throughout the winter. Doing this does not need to be an exhaustive inspection programme; it's about identifying foreseeable seasonal pressures and dealing with them promptly. This includes: tree risk management; buildings, drainage and boundaries; services and resilience; lone working; access and lighting; emergency planning; and vulnerable tenants. Please contact [Gulliver Hedley](#), our Health and Safety consultant, if you would like to discuss any of this.

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