

Headlines

European Nitrogen Assessment – nitrogen costs double its benefits

The first European Nitrogen Assessment has found that nitrogen pollution costs everyone in Europe between £130-650 a year (or £60-280bn), which is more than double the extra income gained from using nitrogen fertilizers in European agriculture. This is the first time that the multiple threats of nitrogen pollution, including contributions to climate change and biodiversity loss, have been valued in economic terms at a continental scale. One of the lead editors of the report, from the UK's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, said, "Nearly half the world's population depends on synthetic, nitrogen-based fertilizer for food but measures are needed to reduce the impacts of nitrogen pollution. Solutions include more efficient use of fertilizers and manures, and people choosing to eat less meat."

Agriculture

New rules could mean UK gets bluetongue free status

The European Commission is expected to introduce new rules in the summer which allow Member States to vaccinate against bluetongue, even if they are outside the restricted zones. This is good news for the UK as it could move from its current Low Risk Zone status to disease-free status and be able to vaccinate if necessary.

Grocery Adjudicator unlikely until 2013 at the earliest

A Bill to introduce a Grocery Adjudicator is very unlikely until the 2012-2013 session of parliament at the earliest, despite the Grocery Supply Code of Practice which the adjudicator is supposed to enforce being three years old.

National Trust to vaccinate badgers

The National Trust is the first large landowner to try vaccinating badgers, at its Killerton estate near Exeter, rather than culling them. It says that the evidence that culling controls the spread of TB is unclear. Both Wales and England are expected to introduce a cull later this year.

Regional water situation reports from the Environment Agency

Monthly water situation reports are available [here](#).

Renewing, not replacing, time limited abstraction licences

When a time limited abstraction licence is due to expire, it is replaced, upon application, by a new licence issued to the same terms as the old one –not a renewal - with a new licence number. An implication of this is that any agreements associated with the old licence, such as for spray irrigation, expire with the old licence and must be re-applied for.

Environment & Sustainability

European renewable energy almost doubles but UK at bottom of the league

The amount of renewable energy used in Europe (EU27) has almost doubled, from 5% of total gross inland energy consumption in 1999 to 9% in 2009. The leading countries, such as Sweden, Austria and Lithuania, produce over 25% of their energy from renewables, while the UK languishes at 3%, with only Luxembourg producing a lower proportion! And a large part of that 3% comes from Scotland!!

Farm diversification into energy production by anaerobic digestion

AD can be profitable on arable and dairy farms, and can have low environmental impacts, according to [research](#) from the Rural Economy and Land Use programme.

Estate Management

New funding for rivers and waterways

Defra has announced £110m of funding, which will be administered by the Environment Agency, Natural England and civil society associations, over four years. It is for removing non-native invasive weeds and clearing up pollution. Some will be distributed through a Catchment Restoration Fund, from 2012. £18 million will be available in 2011 for farmers to put in buffer strips and fences to protect water courses under the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme.

Coastal Access – consultation period opens for proposals around Weymouth

This [report](#) sets out the route for the coastal access route around Weymouth Bay. Many but not all of the concerns of landowners have been addressed, according to the CLA.

General

Not paying interns may be breaking the law

Interns are generally students or recent graduates receiving practical experience or training and many are not paid. However, recent tribunal decisions suggest that they should be. While most workers in the UK are entitled to be paid at least the National Minimum Wage, there are some exceptions which many employers consider apply to interns, including students on work experience as part of college or university courses. There is also increasing political focus on the area. Solicitors suggest that employers need to fully understand the legal status of work experience students or risk claims.

Local authorities to raise charges across services

Analysis by the Financial Times estimates that councils will raise charges for services, from burials to car parking to recycling, in order to raise around £330m this 2011/2012. Reading Borough Council, for example, will now charge £22.50 for collecting green waste, a previously free service.

Planning & Development

Planning permission and material and non-material amendments

Although 'material amendments' to an existing planning permission are covered in a revised and reissued decision notice, 'non-material amendments', which were introduced in 2010, are not. Therefore anyone wishing to comprehensively review the planning history of a specific property should now fully consider the whole planning file, including letters from the local planning authority, as well as any formal decision notices.

Community Infrastructure Levy – new regulations change some of the rules

CIL was introduced in 2010 and is a charge that local authorities may choose to impose on development to help fund infrastructure. The new regulations allow local authorities to set their own flexible payment deadlines, offer developers the option to pay CIL by instalments and remove the £50,000 minimum threshold for payments in kind. The regulations came into effect on 6 April 2011.

Property Agency

Residential market update

- Over 50% of people currently browsing for homes online are thinking of moving to the country in the next six months – mainly due to quality of life (Digital Property Group)
- Unsold housing stock suffered its biggest increase since May 2007 (Rightmove)
- Mortgage lending dropped 2% in March compared with March 2010, reflecting the 'highly uncertain' outlook for the residential market in the short term. (Council of Mortgage Lenders)
- The proportion of properties sold to people who do not need a mortgage has more than doubled to 40% during the past five years (Council of Mortgage Lenders)

Woodland & Arboriculture

Sale of the Public Forestry Estate: Spelman evidence to EFRA

Caroline Spelman, and her senior team, were questioned by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on the abandoned forestry sale. They got some stiff questioning about the sale actually costing the Government (and taxpayer) more than it would raise – which was answered by saying that there were “wider advantages in there, which, because it was not possible to monetarise precisely, do not appear in the crude impact assessment figure.” The toughest questioning was on how the minister made decisions on proposing the sale of the forest estate and then back tracking. It is clear that Spelman feels like the proposals were misrepresented and her answers suggest that a sale could still happen, depending on the recommendations of the newly formed independent panel.

And finally...

Most creative excuse for applying for beach volleyball tickets at London 2012

Can anyone beat this reason from someone in the firm: “My wife wanted to see what Horse Guards Parade looked like as a beach”!

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this briefing, its information may not be comprehensive and recipients should not act upon it without seeking full professional advice.

If you have queries regarding any of the articles, please contact
jason.beedell@smithsgore.co.uk (01733 866562) or andrew.teanby@smithsgore.co.uk (01733 866565)