

Headlines

Further boost to rural broadband

Scotland and England have been given £363m to improve rural broadband in order to meet the Government's target of 90% of homes having super-fast broadband by 2015. The Government is also encouraging local authorities and businesses to contribute, so as much progress as possible can be accomplished with the funds, which have come from the TV licence fee.

Requirement to register septic tanks on hold in England but not Wales

The Government is reviewing the requirement to register septic tanks with the Environment Agency in England to see whether there is a simpler solution. Their regulatory position statement can be accessed [here](#). Despite the requirement to register being on hold, the registration scheme remains open on a voluntary basis. The position in Wales remains unchanged with registration required by 1 January 2012.

Farmland reaches record highs

The RICS Rural Land Market Survey has found bare land averaged £6,115/ac during the first six months of the year, an increase of 5% over six months. Their transaction based measure which includes equipped farms, climbed 6% to an average of £7,479/ac in England and Wales.

Agriculture

Controls on CAP payments and advice for claimants

Leaked draft proposals indicate that the European Commission is seeking to tighten controls on CAP payment allocation, by introducing wider scope for suspending or recovering funds from payment agencies, such as the Rural Payment Agency, which fail to perform. Payment agencies may also have to pay interest, at their own cost, to beneficiaries who receive their direct payments late.

Some aspects will potentially have a greater effect on claimants; the EU executive is seeking to conduct its own on the spot farm checks. It is also proposing to develop the "farm advisory system" to provide farmers with access to advice on good agricultural and environmental practices. It is intended such advice would be confidential and entirely separate from enforcement activities so that the relationship is constructive.

Fall in organic farming

Land under organic conversion has fallen by two thirds since 2007; furthermore, the area of fully converted land has reduced by 3% or 22,000ha between 2009 and 2010. Low organic food prices have been blamed, and it is suggested there could be a shortage of organic milk in less than two years.

New Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition on fert and manure

From January 2012, farmers will not be able to spread manure within 10m or fertiliser within 2m of watercourses, and manure within 50m of boreholes, wells and springs.

Supermarket adjudicator given teeth

The House of Common's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee has proposed that the grocery code adjudicator is given new powers to combat the 'climate of fear' that exists in the groceries supply chain.

English Government sets out its position on GMOs

The Government believes that decisions about authorising GMOs must be science-based, that there must be choice for farmers and consumers and that the technology has potential benefits. It is not in favour of the current EU proposal to allow Member States to decide whether to authorise GM cultivation.

New Scottish Beef Scheme

From 1 January 2012, a new Scottish Beef Scheme will be introduced to ensure support payments to the beef sector continue until new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) regulations come into force. The scheme which replaces the Scottish Beef Calf Scheme will target payments towards small farms in hills and other less favoured areas.

Pre-season slurry system checks

The Environment Agency is asking farmers to carry out pre-season checks on their slurry, dirty water and effluent collection systems to reduce the risk of pollution, following an increase in pollution incidents last winter.

Electronic sheep tagging in Scotland

The Scottish Government has been successful in persuading the EU to give Scottish farmers some leeway at cross compliance inspections relating to sheep EID, to account for technology failures and the difficulties associated with gathering sheep from extensive terrain.

Agricultural borrowing in Scotland

As of 31 May 2011, the agricultural industry in Scotland was borrowing £1,612m, a 7% increase on last year. There has been little change in the relative proportions borrowed by owner-occupier farmers (88%), tenant farmers (9%), agricultural contractors (2%) and livestock salesmen (1%).

Environment & Sustainability

Proposals for new SSSI enforcement regime

Historically warning letters and criminal procedures have been the only enforcement tools for SSSI and Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulation breaches. To enable Natural England to respond more proportionately to the circumstances civil sanctions are being made available; a consultation is being conducted on their compliance and enforcement work and specific civil sanction proposals.

Estate Management

Manorial rights cease to be overriding interests from 21 October 2013

This change is significant as it means that holders of manorial titles have to register their interests at the Land Registry for them to be secure – and this can affect sporting and mineral rights.

Planning & Development

Draft National Planning Policy Framework

The Draft National Planning Policy Framework has been published for consultation. In preparing the framework the Government is aiming to streamline national policy into a consolidated set of priorities, these will reflect genuine national objectives and leave local authorities and communities free to produce their own plans which reflect local distinctiveness and priorities. It is a broad framework, within which the Green space designation, and Presumption in favour of sustainable development are of particular interest.

Green space:

- Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or renewed
- They should be close to local population and demonstrably special to a local community
- Local in character, not extensive tracts of land

Presumption in favour of sustainable development:

- The aim is for the planning system to be turned from one focused on barriers to one that prioritises opportunities
- Where plans are not in place or up-to-date, development should be allowed unless it compromises key principles for sustainability in the framework.

The RICS has welcomed the NPPF as a significant step forward in enabling the growth the UK requires.

Welsh appeals system

Proposals to simplify the appeals system in Wales are under consultation. They include a fast track system for household appeals; the ability for the Planning Inspectorate to decide the appeal method; and the ability to reward costs in written representation appeals.

Planning and Archaeology in Scotland

This new [advisory note](#) aims for archaeology to be treated in a way which is proportionate to its relative value without unnecessarily impeding development.

And finally...

Diversification?..... Chinese farmer builds flying saucer

A self taught Chinese farmer has built a second flying saucer and achieved a hover at 2m, his previous attempt last year did not fly, nor did his two home made jet planes. Elsewhere in China an entrepreneur has built a full-size Russian tank at home; he has sold it to a desert park in Inner Mongolia who may want 30 more.

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.

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