

Landscape

Rural – UK – 5 August 2026

Food & Farming

Capital grant funding available

The Capital Grants scheme reopened in England at 12.30 pm on 30 July, offering £225 million for practical environmental improvements on farms and across the countryside. The budget is 50% larger than in 2025, but demand has been high: Defra confirmed that 25% had been allocated shortly after 6 pm that day and 50% by 11.30 am the following morning; the 75% threshold was hit within two days of the grant window opening. Farmers and land managers intending to apply should therefore act promptly. However, those who have not yet started may still have time: applications to the first SFI 2026 window slowed after the initial rush, and some funding for that scheme remains available.

Funding for 80 capital items is available, grouped into six categories, including boundaries, trees and orchards, water quality, air quality and natural flood management. Funding caps apply to four groups, with limits of £25,000 for water quality, air quality and flood management items, and £35,000 for boundaries, trees and orchards. Agroforestry items and woodland condition assessments have been removed from this round and will instead be included within Higher Tier offers later in 2026. One [Capital Grants application](#) per Single Business Identifier (SBI) per year can be made. To discuss options for your farm, please contact our [Food and Farming](#) team.

There is also a capital grant funding opportunity live in Wales under the Sustainable Farming Schemes “Optional layer”. It is focused on technology and equipment to improve efficiency, animal health and welfare, resource use, and health and safety on farms. The grant contributes up to 40% of eligible costs. It can be between £500 and £15,000 per Customer Reference Number per financial year. Supported items include boreholes, chemical stores, direct drills, slurry handling equipment and cattle handling equipment. More information is available [here](#).

Open the gates to young people

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF) have launched the *Open Your Gate* campaign to encourage more on-farm experience for children and young people. Eighty farmers in England and Wales will be offered fully funded Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS) training to help deliver one million on-farm experiences by 2031, to improve young people's understanding of food production and farming. Participants will also benefit from one-to-one support, practical resources and guidance on engaging with local schools.

This initiative follows a LEAF-led study which found that 95% of the young people surveyed wanted to understand where their food came from, 91% believed their food choices could help tackle climate change, and more than half wanted information about entering the agri-food sector. Organisers believe farm visits can improve understanding of modern farming, build trust in food production and inspire the next generation to consider careers in agriculture.

The Farmer Welfare Grant

Defra has announced further details of its new Farmer Welfare Grant, a £1.5 million fund available to support mental health and wellbeing across England's farming communities. The grant will be available over three years and is aimed at charities and not-for-profit organisations with experience of working with farmers, rather than individual farm businesses. The fund will prioritise projects aiming to:

- Improve mental health and wellbeing
- Tackle isolation
- Encourage early intervention
- Reduce barriers to support
- Strengthen personal and business resilience

The grant is intended to address specific needs of farmers and hopes to support young farmers, farm families and wider networks, while helping to build stronger, more connected rural communities.

Grants ranging from £1,000 to £200,000 per year will be available for projects running between November 2026 and March 2029, with joint applications from multiple organisations also being considered. The application portal opens on 6 August, with applications closing on 9 September. Defra will host [webinars](#) on 13 and 17 August to explain the eligibility criteria and application process.

Policy

New Prime Minister, new cabinet, new policy

Andy Burnham became Prime Minister on 20 July 2026, replacing Sir Keir Starmer. His cabinet reshuffle included appointing John Healey as Chancellor, and the reshaping of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), where Dame Angela Eagle, a former food security minister, returns as Secretary of State, replacing Emma Reynolds. Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, the MP for Suffolk Coastal, joins as a junior minister for nature and rural affairs, taking over from Mary Creagh. She is one to watch for landowners. She chaired the Labour Rural Research Group and has campaigned closely on the impact of major energy infrastructure on rural communities. Her constituency hosts four nationally significant energy projects including Sizewell C. She has proposed an “energy developers’ levy” - a fund paid for by developers rather than local communities - and tabled amendments to the Planning and Infrastructure Act aimed at making the nature restoration levy deliver benefits locally. Emma Hardy and Stephen Morgan both remain within the ministerial team at Defra, but their briefs have not yet been confirmed.

On her return to the department, Dame Angela Eagle set out her five priorities:

- Tackling the cost of living.
- Fixing the water system to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas.
- Backing our farmers in growing quality British produce.
- Restoring nature so that we have pride in local communities.
- A renewed relationship with the EU to help keep food bills down.

On wider policy, the government's first major announcement is a 20% cut to business rates for pubs, social clubs and live music venues in England from April 2027. It will benefit nearly 32,000 venues and save the typical pub around £1,100 a year, at a cost of roughly £100 million annually. The largest venues are excluded, and hospitality bodies want restaurants and hotels included too, with wider business rates reform expected at the Budget on 28 October. Separately, the Country Land and Business Association has urged the new government to reset its relationship with rural Britain. It argues the rural economy could add £40 billion to national growth, and it is pressing for a reversal of the recent changes to Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief, which it warns can force land sales and deter investment. Our analysis of what Andy Burnham's government could mean for the rural sector is available [here](#).

Wales: new policies announced

The Welsh Government used the Royal Welsh Show (19–22 July 2026) to set out a series of announcements for the rural sector, and funding certainty was the headline. Cabinet Minister for Rural Resilience and Sustainability Llyr Gruffydd confirmed more than £1 billion for the Sustainable Farming Scheme over three years - £340 million a year to March 2030. Of that, £238 million a year goes to the Universal layer and £102 million to the Optional and Collaborative layers, keeping the existing 70:30 split. This is the first multi-year settlement for Welsh farming since Brexit, ending the year-to-year model that made long-term planning so difficult. It adds no new money, but it delivers a Plaid Cymru pledge to set a multi-annual budget within the government's first 100 days.

Three further measures sit alongside the funding. The Welsh Government will begin work on a new national food strategy, a long-term plan intended to join up decisions across the whole food system rather than farm production alone - taking in processing, retail, public procurement, health and the circular economy. Food entrepreneur Simon Wright will chair an expert group to shape it, working with farmers, processors and communities to identify what the current system does well and where it falls short, with a final strategy due in 2027. Secondly, the government opened a consultation on a Rural Proofing and Environmental Sustainability White Paper. Its central proposal is a new statutory duty on rural proofing, which would legally require rural needs to be weighed whenever policies are developed and delivered, rather than considered as an afterthought. Finally, on the question of red tape, the John Davies review into the bureaucratic burden on family farms has already produced results: the Animal Health Improvement Cycle in the Scheme's Universal layer will be simplified and aligned with existing farm assurance schemes from 2027, so farmers already in those schemes are not asked to duplicate the same checks. The government also confirmed new grant windows for woodland creation and organic conversion, with full details on our [funding pages](#).

The Welsh Government has also committed to introducing legislation during the four-year Senedd term to improve housing affordability and restrict no-fault evictions by private landlords. It also plans to establish a Community Right to Buy, allowing local groups to identify and register important community assets. If an owner later decides to sell a registered asset, the community will have the first opportunity to buy it.

New Farmer Collaboration Fund

The new £30 million Farmer Collaboration Fund will support farmer-led groups and networks in England to cut costs, strengthen businesses and improve the environment. It is open to both new and existing groups, with a focus on peer-to-peer learning, local coordination, soil management and landscape-scale environmental improvements. The scheme was first announced at the Oxford Farming Conference, and launch details were confirmed at the Great Yorkshire Show. Guidance will be published during August before an application period running from 1 September to 30 September.

Land Use Framework “does not support factory farming”

Following a legal threat, Defra has clarified that the Land Use Framework “is not intended to support factory farming or the intensification of poultry farming”. The campaign group Communities Against Factory Farming threatened a judicial review on the grounds that parts of the framework referring to “investment in highly productive food growing” and “increasing farm productivity” appear to support the intensification of livestock farming. The strategy also refers to the poultry sector growth plan, which the Farming and Food Partnership Board is going to prepare. This incident highlights the tension between the strong demand drivers for white meat production, the drive to increase the profitability and economic contribution of agriculture and environmental impacts that can be associated with some production systems.

Environment & Natural Capital

Expression of interest for Countryside Stewardship

Defra and the Rural Payments Agency have opened a new expression of interest process for Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier in England. Higher Tier has until now been invitation-only, with applicants chosen where their land fell within priority areas. Since 21 July 2026, that requirement has gone, letting farmers and land managers register interest directly. The process covers agroforestry and woodland improvement and introduces new “single-focus agreements” - a simpler, faster route to funding for one specific action, without applying for a full Higher Tier agreement. These initially cover species-rich grassland and scheduled monument management, with up to 1,200 agreements available in this first phase. Registering interest does not guarantee an agreement, and applicants are told the outcome within 10 weeks; by 31 July, 300 expressions of interest had already been submitted.

The route a farmer takes depends on their land and what they already have in place. Agroforestry needs an approved plan and trees already planted, while woodland improvement needs an approved woodland management plan, along with species management plans for actions such as deer or grey squirrel control. Scheduled monument management is limited to monuments mapped on the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside website ([MAGIC](#)), and species-rich grassland must meet the [CGS22 action](#) habitat requirements. It cannot include upland calcareous or calaminarian grassland. Applications are handled by the relevant body for each topic - Historic England, Natural England or the Forestry Commission - with a separate form for every topic and site, and only one application progressing per business at a time. Common land cannot yet be included, though Defra says it is working to resolve this. To discuss options for your land, please contact our [Food and Farming](#) or [Forestry](#) teams.

Dartmoor ponies given new protections

Defra has said Dartmoor ponies will be excluded from stocking rate calculations, following concerns that reduced grazing requirements could lead to a cull. It will also support the long-term future of the ponies through new protections and financial support, including a pony supplement within the Environmental Land Management schemes to remove any financial incentive to reduce herd numbers. The new pony supplement will also benefit those grazing ponies on other upland areas in England, such as Exmoor and the Cumbrian Fells.

Pony numbers will also be monitored across the moor to help keep the population stable. Dartmoor hill ponies have been part of the landscape for around 4,500 years, but numbers have fallen from about 6,000 25 years ago to fewer than 1,000 today, and the breed is now classed as endangered. Campaigners had warned that new Natural England contracts requiring lower grazing levels on Devon's commons could result in the removal of up to 90% of the remaining ponies.

Property & Development

New BNG arrangement for smaller developments

Changes to England's Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) thresholds and exemptions will take effect on 6 August 2026, following legislation completed by the government. The main change is a new exemption for developments of up to 0.2 hectares, provided they do not affect priority habitat on the site. A temporary exemption will also apply to land that is reinstated within five years, while the exemption for self-build and custom-build housing will be removed. Minor developments above 0.2 hectares will be able to use off-site BNG provision without first having to exhaust all on-site options. The new rules apply only to applications submitted from 6 August; earlier applications will remain subject to the existing requirements, and related section 73 applications are excluded.

Defra frames the package as easing the administrative and compliance burden on the smallest developments, freeing resources for larger schemes where the greatest gains for nature lie. Exempt developments are still expected to include nature-friendly features and remain subject to existing protections and the mitigation hierarchy. Further changes will follow, including exemptions for biodiversity-led development and for works enhancing parks and playing fields, plus revisions to the statutory biodiversity metric. The changes come as the BNG market matures: research this month valued it at around £93 million a year, with 268 habitat banks now in place, up from 118 in June 2025.

Crackdown on baseless legal claims

The government has launched a six-week consultation on extending its judicial review reforms to major housing, transport and energy developments, including solar projects and road building. Judicial review is the process by which the courts examine whether a public body's decision was made lawfully. The problem, the government says, is that some weak claims are used to hold up major projects and can be brought repeatedly even after the courts have rejected them. The reforms would limit how often the same claim can be re-tried.

Business & Economy

Rent controls ruled out for England

Angela Rayner has been reappointed as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and recently spoke about residential rent controls on BBC Breakfast. She said the government won't be looking to introduce rent controls because it has seen what has happened in other areas such as Scotland, where it hasn't necessarily brought rents down. She argued the measures in the Renters' Rights Act to prohibit rental bidding and allow tenants to challenge rent increases at tribunal are having a more favourable impact on the market and are a better way to stabilise the market.

Make taxation less taxing

Policy Exchange, an independent think tank, has published [How to make taxation less taxing](#), a report arguing the UK tax system is holding back economic growth and setting out a phased programme of reform. Of most relevance to rural landowners, the report recommends the eventual abolition of Inheritance Tax, describing it as a tax that distorts investment and asset management as owners make decisions aimed at minimising their liability rather than putting resources to their most productive use. It notes Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief, which are designed to protect farmland and family businesses, together cost the Treasury around £1.8 billion a year and can encourage assets to remain tied up in less efficient forms. As a set of think tank recommendations rather than government policy, the proposals carry no legislative status, but they add to the wider debate on tax reform ahead of future fiscal events.

Plans to end Cantley beet processing

More than a century of sugar beet processing at Cantley could end in February 2027, under British Sugar's proposals to reduce its factory network from four sites to three. The company said the move follows a review aimed at improving efficiency, restoring competitiveness and supporting the long-term future of the UK sugar industry. It said its remaining factories at Bury St Edmunds, Newark and Wissington would have enough capacity to produce the same volume of sugar as the current four-site operation. Cantley will continue operating normally during the forthcoming campaign while consultation takes place, and the proposal relates to ending beet processing rather than confirming closure of the whole site. If processing ends, British Sugar will consider future uses for the site; at other former factory sites such as Bardney, the sugar storage facilities are still used. Growers linked to Cantley will still be invited to grow sugar beet for the 2027/28 campaign and beyond, although the company has not yet explained which factories would receive their beet or how transport arrangements would work.

Other Rural News

National Parks should be given more powers

An independent [report](#) funded by the Peak District, Lake District, Dartmoor and Eryri (Snowdonia) National Parks calls on government to give them more powers and resources so they can coordinate further transformative landscape-scale restoration. It also calls for long-term funding arrangements for farming and land management in national parks to be set out and for the national park authorities to have an enhanced role in the design and delivery of schemes.

Holiday let consultation in Wales

Self-catering properties are classified as domestic and liable for council tax unless they meet certain commercial letting criteria. In Wales, these criteria were tightened on 1 April 2023, resulting in 30% fewer properties qualifying for non-domestic rates. A property must currently have been available to rent for at least 252 days and actually let for at least 182 days during the previous year. Some established self-catering properties have been unable to meet this threshold, so the Welsh Government is [consulting](#) until 23 October on a possible modest reduction in the 182-day requirement from 1 April 2027. It also recognises some self-catering properties are unsuitable for permanent occupation. The consultation therefore proposes five circumstances in which a property could remain eligible for non-domestic rates even if it does not meet the letting threshold:

- Properties which are part of a wider business.
- Large multi-unit properties.
- Properties subject to a relevant planning restriction.
- Properties within the curtilage of the owner's home.
- Properties on the owner's farm.

And finally... Is it too hot for salad?

Britons are bucking the usual summer food and drink trends this year, opting for comfort in the form of cottage pie and a glass of red wine. Despite recent hot weather, Waitrose has reported strong growth in sales of traditional dishes, suggesting many shoppers are choosing hearty food over lighter seasonal options. Cottage pie sales rose by 110% in the last month compared with the same period last year, while demand also increased for chicken, bacon and leek pie (+41%), chicken korma (+67%) and South African red wine (+68%).

The persistent hot weather seems to have created a salad ennui, leading consumers back towards nostalgic dishes. The trend, coined "reverse comfort eating," sees customers favouring familiar, filling meals rather than salads and typical warm-weather meals. Home cooks also appear undeterred by warmer temperatures, with recipe searches rising sharply for classic dishes like toad-in-the-hole, spaghetti bolognese and macaroni cheese.

There are multiple theories for this shift, with food experts suggesting it may reflect a desire for comfort and familiarity amid wider economic, political and global uncertainty. Cost of living pressures may also be encouraging more people to recreate pub-style meals at home instead of eating out, while the shorter shelf life of salad items may also be a deterrent.

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Andrew Teanby
Director
+44 (0) 7835 445 458
ateanby@savills.com



Joe Lloyd
Associate Director
+44 (0) 7790 824 970
joe.lloyd@savills.com

savills