

Landscape

Rural – UK – 14 October 2026

Food & Farming

Farmers' experiences of Sustainable Farming Incentive sought

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is seeking farmers' and land agents' experiences of the latest Sustainable Farming Incentive application process after its £253 million budget was allocated in less than six hours. The [survey](#) is open to those who successfully applied and those who missed out before the window closed. The Committee is particularly interested in how an unsuccessful application could affect the way land is farmed without the anticipated support. Its findings will inform questions to ministers and officials as it examines how the application window was handled. With many businesses having prepared applications and planned around potential agreements, the inquiry provides an opportunity to demonstrate how the process has affected both confidence in the scheme and practical farm planning.

UK's first bird flu outbreak of 2026/27 confirmed

The UK's first premises outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza of the 2026/27 season has been confirmed at Ness on the Isle of Lewis. A 3km Protection Zone and 10km Surveillance Zone have been introduced, while poultry keepers are being urged to strengthen biosecurity and minimise contact between captive and wild birds as the seasonal risk increases. Scotland has also expanded its bluetongue restricted zone nationwide. From 3 October, livestock movements within and between the restricted zones covering Scotland, England and Wales face the same rules, reducing disruption to trade during the autumn sales period. However, animals showing clinical signs must not be moved and vaccination remains an important protection against serious disease. Read the latest Scottish guidance [here](#).

Temporary flexibility to refill farm reservoirs

Autumn appears to be here, with some parts of England experiencing wetter and colder days. Even so, much of the country remains in drought, with September rainfall reaching only 65% of the long-term average. Yorkshire entered official drought status on Friday 9 October, following a period of prolonged dry weather. To help farmers during the continuing drought, the Environment Agency has introduced Regulatory Position Statement 382 (RPS 382). The temporary measure allows eligible licence holders to start refilling existing on-farm reservoirs in October instead of waiting until November. Alongside this, the application process for longer-term abstraction licences has also been streamlined.

The flexibility is not nationwide. Farmers in catchments subject to Section 57 restrictions, or in areas designated as Principal Salmon Rivers, are excluded. The measure also does not apply where licences already permit October or year-round abstraction. RPS 382 does not remove the requirement to hold and comply with a valid abstraction licence. Further guidance is available [here](#). The temporary flexibility reflects the growing importance of on-farm water, as suggested by the findings from [Savills Water Spotlight](#), which highlights how the ability to capture, store and manage water for future use is becoming increasingly important, with grant funding helping drive a significant rise in reservoir projects across the UK.

Policy

What was said at the Labour Party Conference?

Housing was a prominent topic at the Labour Party Conference, with plans announced for a major expansion of council housebuilding and stronger local authority powers over empty and substandard properties. The government also committed to further Right to Buy reform, introducing a Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill before Christmas, and independently regulating property agents. Wider announcements included proposals for a publicly owned Great British Grid, intended to accelerate connections and support investment, and a ten-year ambition to bring UK energy costs in line with neighbouring countries.

The government will reduce the vacancy period for a residential property before a council can intervene from two years to six months. Empty Dwelling Management Orders allow local authorities to take over the management of an empty property and return it to occupation for up to seven years, while ownership remains with the property owner. The application process will also be streamlined by removing requirements to provide evidence relating to matters such as anti-social behaviour or community support. This should make it easier for councils to apply to the Residential Property Tribunal, although the government is still considering further changes to strengthen the regime.

Farming was featured mainly through discussions between ministers, rural MPs and industry representatives. After the latest Sustainable Farming Incentive window closed in less than six hours, Defra secretary Angela Eagle acknowledged the frustration. She said ministers would work with the National Farmers' Union before the next window, including reviewing the first-come, first-served approach. Labour's rural MPs also called for longer-term certainty on farm funding, greater investment in productivity and resilience, stronger British food procurement, and improvements to rural housing, transport, connectivity, and energy infrastructure.

Pledges from the Conservative Party Conference

Abolishing the Environment Agency and Natural England was among the most significant rural policy pledges made at the Conservative Party Conference. Shadow environment secretary Victoria Atkins said their functions would be reviewed, with some transferred into Defra and others removed. The proposal forms part of a wider examination of Defra's 34 arm's-length bodies, intended to reduce bureaucracy and bring decisions under greater ministerial control. More detail is still needed on what this would mean for services, including environmental permitting, water regulation, protected sites and land management advice.

The party also promised to reverse Labour's inheritance tax changes for agricultural and business property. Shadow chancellor Andrew Griffith pledged to repeal the Climate Change Act 2008, reduce net zero subsidies and cut regulation affecting businesses and development. Plans included scrapping the Future Homes Standard and replacing Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy with a single developer levy.

Government changes firearms licensing

The government has introduced new firearms licensing measures designed to strengthen public safety and support police risk assessments across Great Britain. Applicants for firearm and shotgun certificates must now declare any second properties where they may store firearms and provide details of everyone living in their household, helping police identify potential safeguarding concerns. The new requirements also place greater responsibility on certificate holders to report relevant medical diagnoses, treatment, or worsening conditions throughout the five-year licence period. Certificate holders must also disclose treatment received through private or online healthcare providers. The changes build on wider firearms licensing reforms, with revised application forms becoming mandatory from 29 October 2026 following a one-month transition period.

Environment & Natural Capital

£79 million for nature restoration

The government has announced £79 million to help local communities restore nature and adapt to climate change. Of this, £53 million will support the planting of up to 500,000 trees in urban and rural locations between 2027 and 2030, including streets, parks and farmland. A further £26 million will be allocated to local and mayoral authorities to support the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, community-led plans that identify priorities for environmental improvement and climate resilience. The funding is intended to help accelerate projects such as wetland restoration, tree planting and river corridor improvements, while also supporting wider ambitions for nature recovery and the government's commitment to conserve 30% of land for nature by 2030. While the environmental benefits of cooling towns, improving water management and creating wildlife habitats are clear, the wider social and wellbeing benefits should not be understated. Greater access to green spaces can improve physical and mental health, helping to create healthier, more attractive and resilient communities.

Bespoke planning advice for developments with significant harm

Natural England will concentrate its bespoke planning advice on complex developments within, or likely to cause significant harm to, nationally or internationally designated nature sites and protected landscapes. It will also prioritise early engagement on Local Plans, strategic mitigation and nature recovery, while routine or lower-risk proposals will increasingly be handled through standing advice and standard guidance. The change gives Natural England greater flexibility over its wider advisory work and is intended to reduce repeated case-by-case advice where established guidance already exists. Its statutory consultee role remains unchanged.

The new approach should focus specialist expertise on developments presenting the greatest risks or opportunities for nature and help identify environmental issues earlier in the planning process. However, submitting a consultation will not necessarily result in a tailored response where Natural England considers existing guidance sufficient. Local planning authorities and applicants will therefore rely more on published advice when considering routine proposals. The changes will be introduced gradually, supported by updated guidance on when and how Natural England should be engaged.

Property & Development

Scotland: 10 days to investigate damp and mould

Awaab's Law is now in force in Scotland. The law requires landlords to investigate tenants' reports of damp or mould within 10 working days and provide a written summary of the findings within three working days. If the investigation identifies substantial damp or mould, repairs or remedial work must begin within five working days of the investigation ending and be completed within 20 days. If a deadline cannot be met, landlords must explain the delay in writing and state when the work is expected to take place. The Scottish Government has issued [guidance](#) to help social and private landlords achieve compliance. As our Spotlight on [Future-proofing rural homes](#) shows, this is just one part of a raft of new standards to be introduced to the private rented sector across the UK.

England: extending Awaab's Law to private lettings

The government is consulting on how Awaab's Law should apply to the private rented sector. It proposes using the social housing model as a starting point, with modifications to reflect the private rented sector's structure, including enforcement, access, hazard thresholds, and response times. The government considers there is a case for covering all Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards except overcrowding. The consultation also asks how to deal with hazards caused by tenants breaching their contracts and cases where the landlord is a leaseholder.

Under the social housing model, landlords have 10 working days to investigate, three working days to provide a summary of their findings and five working days to complete repairs. The consultation recognises that smaller private landlords may face greater challenges in securing access and contractors within these timescales. It is therefore seeking views on a range of response times, both shorter and longer than those applying in the social housing sector.

The proposals would also extend Awaab's Law to certain licensed accommodation, including temporary accommodation, supported housing and accommodation for care leavers. The [consultation](#) closes on 18 December 2026.

Scotland: update on EPC reform

Scotland's redesigned EPCs will now be introduced on 30 April 2028, 18 months later than planned. The delay applies to domestic and non-domestic buildings and gives more time to complete the new calculation methodologies, EPC register and technical infrastructure, and assessor training. The current system will largely remain in place until then. When the reforms take effect, domestic EPCs will provide separate ratings covering heat retention, energy costs, heating systems and emissions, rather than relying on a single headline measure. Non-domestic certificates will also be redesigned, and a new Property Report will replace the existing recommendations report, providing more detailed information on potential improvements. New-style EPCs will be valid for five years, compared with 10 years under the current system.

The transition will be phased. From 30 April 2028, assessors will issue only new-style EPCs, but a valid existing certificate can generally continue to be used for a sale or letting until 30 April 2029. If the property is sold or let again during that transition year, a new-style EPC and Property Report will be required. Short-term lets will also have until 30 April 2029 to obtain the new documents. Certain large non-domestic buildings can continue displaying an existing EPC until it expires or until 30 April 2033, whichever comes first. One change has not been delayed. From 31 October 2026, EPC lodgement fees will rise from £2.60 to £6 for domestic properties and from £12.10 to £15.50 for other buildings. For rural estates with mixed residential and commercial portfolios, the additional lead-in provides time to review existing certificates, record expiry dates and identify properties likely to require reassessment under the new system.

The Scottish Government has published its analysis of responses to the consultation on a new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard. Many respondents warned that the standard and associated improvements may be unsuitable for some properties, including older stone-built homes, listed buildings and tenements. They cited risks such as poor ventilation causing damp or mould, and called for additional metrics, including heating-system efficiency and technology-neutral measures. Many also considered upgrade costs prohibitive. They also raised concerns about shortages of skilled professionals and limited contractor capacity, especially in rural, remote and island communities.

Business & Economy

New lithium mine in Cornwall

Geothermal Engineering Limited is receiving support to develop a new lithium extraction facility in Cornwall. Backed by almost £10 million of the government's DRIVE35 Automotive Transformation Fund, the £43 million project is expected to create around 50 jobs directly and support a further 80 across the supply chain. Commercial production is due to begin in 2029, with the aim of producing enough lithium each year to supply batteries for more than 180,000 electric vehicles.

The announcement comes alongside plans to reopen the historic Hemerdon tungsten mine in Devon, following a £71 million funding package from the National Wealth Fund. Tungsten is a strategically important mineral used in defence applications. The mine, which contains one of the largest tungsten deposits in the Western world, is forecast to return to full production by March 2027. Together, the two investments reflect a wider government drive to boost domestic production of critical minerals, reduce reliance on imports and strengthen the supply chains supporting the UK's automotive, energy and defence sectors. To discuss minerals further, please contact [Stuart Jeffries](#).

Other Rural News

And finally... Spooky house sells for a premium

The “scariest house on Rightmove” has sold for nearly triple its guide price. The former station master’s house in Bleasby, Nottinghamshire, captured plenty of attention online after photographs from its property listing revealed its collection of horror-film-worthy features, including boarded windows, peeling wallpaper, a forgotten pram and, most memorably, a lone doll standing watch in an upstairs bedroom. Dating back to the 1840s, the property formed part of the original railway station and has been empty for several years. Listed for auction with a guide price of £75,000, the property sold for £200,000, just in time for Halloween. While little renovation will be needed to prepare the house for trick-or-treaters, the listing suggested that, after renovation, the property could be worth up to £600,000 because it occupies a large plot in a desirable area.

If you have queries about any of the articles, please contact us.



Savills Research

We’re a dedicated team with an unrivalled reputation for producing well-informed and accurate analysis, research and commentary across all sectors of the UK property market. To view copies of our previous rural publications, go to www.savills.co.uk/landing-pages/rural-knowledge-portal.aspx



Andrew Teanby

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



Joe Lloyd

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