RESEARCH

INSIGHT AND ANALYSIS ON RURAL NEWS

Landscope

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Rural – UK – 29 October 2026

Food & Farming

Scotland: Future Farming Investment Scheme

Updated guidance for Scotland's Future Farming Investment Scheme (FFIS) has revealed farmers and crofters will be able to apply for up to £20,000 of capital funding. Unlike the 2025 scheme, the £20,000 funding ceiling applies irrespective of farm or croft size. Businesses that received funding in 2025 can also apply. Grant rates are 50% as standard, increasing to 60% for eligible Highlands and Islands businesses and 80% for new entrants. Certain environmental investments qualify for 100% funding. The FFIS has a £14.25 million budget to support investment in business efficiency, environmental improvements, emissions reduction and climate adaptation. Funding will be competitive, with eligible applications scored and ranked. Applying earlier will not improve an application's ranking. The application window is expected to be confirmed in November 2026. To prepare, farmers intending to apply can review the eligible investment list and scheme requirements before the window opens. To discuss the scheme, please contact Hamish Logan.

Warning on second-hand bluetongue vaccines

Animal keepers are being warned not to buy, sell or exchange leftover bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) vaccines. The advice follows reports received by Veterinary Medicines Directorate enforcement officers that animal keepers are buying, selling, and exchanging BTV-3 vaccines through social media. Once outside the authorised supply chain, correct storage, handling, and transport cannot be guaranteed, which could compromise the vaccine's quality, safety, and effectiveness. Animal keepers seeking BTV-3 vaccines should first ask their vet whether vaccination is appropriate for their animals. When buying online, they must have a valid veterinary prescription and use a registered retailer authorised to sell prescription-only veterinary medicines.

Bird keepers reminded about biosecurity

The return of migratory wild waterfowl to the UK is increasing the risk of avian influenza. Scotland has confirmed a recent case of highly pathogenic avian influenza, alongside further cases across Europe. Bird keepers are being reminded to strengthen biosecurity measures urgently. Eligible poultry keepers in England can receive a funded £430 Poultry Biosecurity Review, involving a visit from their chosen vet, a written report and recommendations tailored to their farm to reduce the risk of avian influenza and other diseases.

Policy

Rural impacts of the Budget

Chancellor, John Healey made the Budget 2026 announcements on 28 October 2026. The NFU's response is one of frustration and specifically cited as a "massive missed opportunity". The announcements provide some short-term relief for the rural sector through the red diesel duty cut being extended until 1 July 2027, a temporary suspension of fertiliser import tariffs (until 31 December 2027) and kerosene heating oil tariffs (until December 2028) and continued support on fuel costs until 1 July 2027. While the small business rates relief (SBRR) thresholds increase to £18,000 for 100% relief and to £21,000 for tapered relief, from 1 April 2027 National Living Wage and the 18-20 National Minimum Wage will increase by 3.9%.

In addition, further pressures for rural businesses are due to come from higher taxation of property income and a reduction in the business asset disposal relief (BADR). The budget has set out a Fiscal Devolution Roadmap and is certainly one to watch for the rural sector as local and strategic authorities will have greater control over future funding. There was no mention of the APR and BPR reforms.

Scotland: Consultation on Land Reform Act

The Act requires large land holdings to have a Land Management Plan (LMP), reviewed at least every five years. A consultation is now open on community engagement duties and draft guidance for large land holdings. It seeks views on what information new LMPs should include and how landowners should involve communities in preparing them. The consultation also considers new processes for community groups to request to lease land or establish a croft. The consultation proposes that landowners should have the flexibility to combine or split their holdings as they wish when preparing plans. This means different enterprises on an estate could have separate LMPs, so an LMP could cover the same area as a forestry management plan, for example. Landowners with multiple farms or estates can combine them or prepare separate plans. The consultation is open until 26 January 2027, please contact George Hipwell.

Organic Action Plan for England published

Defra has published an Organic Action Plan for England, which it developed in close collaboration with the English Organic Forum. They will jointly oversee its delivery. It sets out an ambition to expand the proportion of agricultural land farmed organically from 3.4% today to 10%

by 2036. The plan's actions will improve access to information, advice, peer networks, markets and supply chains. Public procurement will stimulate demand; Defra will explore opportunities to increase the proportion of food used in the public sector that meets higher environmental standards. The existing ELM schemes will support farmers, such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive's organic conversion and maintenance actions. For arable land, these pay £298 per hectare for up to two years for conversion and then £132 per hectare to maintain the land in organic production. The plan's launch meets a commitment under the Farming Roadmap.

SFI exception window expanded.
Ministers have expanded the technical-issue exception group for the Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026 (SFI26) window 2. It now covers farmers whose applications were affected by a valid technical issue before the application window closed on 22 September 2026 and who reported it by 11:59pm on 29 September. These farmers may amend their submitted applications to include elements the system should have allowed them to apply for under the scheme rules. The RPA will also include a small number of additional "started, not submitted" (SNS) farmers who reported valid issues by the same deadline. Reports submitted after that deadline are ineligible. Following assessment, the RPA will inform farmers whether they qualify for an exception.

SFI26 attracted nearly 19,000 applications across the two application windows. From Window 1, around 6,600 offers have so far been issued from approximately 6,700 applications. 95% of these are now live agreements. Window 2 received about 12,200 applications, and around 2,500 offers have been issued so far, 36% of which are live. Defra has confirmed that in Window 2, 2,859 applications were started but not submitted when the scheme closed.

Environment & Natural Capital

Taskforce to take on floods and droughts
The Flood and Drought Resilience Taskforce has held its first meeting, bringing Floods and Drought Minister Emma Hardy together with more than 50 organisations, including farming representatives, the Environment Agency and the Met Office. The meeting assessed national preparedness for possible winter flooding, reviewed improvements to the response and considered lessons from the ongoing drought to strengthen resilience to both hazards. The group will share expertise on risk and preparedness while supporting a long-term flood and drought resilience strategy to protect communities and the economy.

The Government has declared severe drought in parts of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, East Sussex and West Sussex. The South East and South West have experienced their driest April to September in over a century. Declaring a severe drought ensures steps are taken to safeguard water, including ministers instructing water companies to monitor reservoir and river levels daily and the Environment Agency to increase compliance checks on businesses, such as farms, that abstract water from natural sources. Alongside these steps, Water Minister Emma Hardy has instructed the Environment Agency to prioritise protecting public water supplies in areas affected by severe drought when environmental rules and water supplies are in unavoidable conflict. This may allow water companies to retain more water in depleted reservoirs.

How can farmers build their flood resilience?
New guidance has been released on increasing flood resilience for agricultural buildings. The Rural Flood Resilience Partnership guidance focuses on practical measures, including flood barriers, self-closing airbricks and non-return valves, alongside resilient flooring, raised electrical systems and secure storage of chemicals. It also emphasises protecting machinery, feed, fuel, livestock and harvested crops, where flooding can cause significant operational disruption beyond the immediate event. To help at-risk businesses prepare, the guidance provides a framework for reviewing existing infrastructure and preparing a flood response plan. Around 1.12 million hectares, or 13% of England's agricultural land, is currently within areas at risk from river and coastal flooding.

New national park may be scrapped
Plans for the proposed Glyndŵr National Park in north-east Wales appear likely to be abandoned. In a Senedd statement, Cabinet Secretary for Government Effectiveness and the Constitution Dafydd Trystan Davies MS said he was provisionally minded not to confirm the designation order. All five affected local authorities oppose the proposal, citing concerns about planning and governance, infrastructure, housing, agricultural development and rural businesses. Farming organisations have also objected. Estimates suggest the new National Park Authority would cost more than £11 million to establish. Ministers believe existing programmes, including the Sustainable Farming Scheme, could deliver the environmental aims instead.

Wales has three national parks, covering around 20% of its land. The proposed 230,000-acre designation, spanning Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Powys and Wrexham, would have been the country's first new national park in more than 60 years. The decision is not final: the Welsh Government is currently accepting further representations for four weeks before it reaches its conclusion.

EFRA recommends a National Wildfire Strategy
The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has published A burning issue: managing wildfire risk, recommending a National Wildfire Strategy for England. The Committee recommends the Government:

- Publishes a national strategy and action plan.
- Strengthens firefighting capability and responder support.
- Improves access to water for firefighting.
- Improves wildfire planning and funds resilience.

- Prevents ignitions and strengthens restrictions.
- Provides clearer public warnings.
- Supports land management and reviews burning policy.

At a summit on Wildfires on 23 October, Prime Minister Andy Burnham announced RAF Chinook helicopters and A400M planes will be equipped for firefighting. Civilian fire services across the UK will be able to call upon them to help fight wildfires.

Property & Development

Drive to restore heritage buildings

Seventy-four heritage and faith buildings will receive £41 million through the Places of Worship Renewal Fund and the Heritage at Risk Capital Fund, part of the wider £1.5 billion Arts Everywhere Fund. The new Places of Worship Renewal Fund will provide more than £18 million to 51 historic places of worship, from nationally renowned minsters to churches and synagogues in areas of greatest need. Recipients include St Elwyn's Church in Hayle, Cornwall, Sir Moses Montefiore Memorial Synagogue in Grimsby and Birmingham Cathedral.

Now in its second year, the Heritage at Risk Capital Fund will provide nearly £13 million to 20 recipients. Recipients include the Grade II-listed Margate Museum and Old Town Hall in Kent, where major structural repairs will enable the building to return to community use. A further £10 million over the remainder of this parliament will help preserve three nationally important sites: Dover Castle will have its defensive fortifications restored, while Brodsworth Hall in Doncaster and Osborne House on the Isle of Wight will receive roof repairs. Delivered by Historic England, both funds prioritise areas of England where need is greatest, fundraising is most difficult, and government support can have the greatest impact. For more information on maintaining heritage buildings, see our latest Spotlight.

Wales: delay to council tax shake-up

The Welsh Government wants to postpone the council tax revaluation of homes until 2032, Finance Minister Elin Jones has announced. She said the Welsh Government could not afford the financial support it would need to provide if the planned revaluation went ahead in two years. Council tax bands will therefore remain based on property values from April 2003. The delay requires majority support in the Senedd, so Plaid Cymru will need backing from opposition parties.

Analysis indicated that around a quarter of households could have moved into higher bands, while a similar proportion could have moved down. Transitional support for households facing increases was estimated to cost up to £80 million in the first year. The postponement provides short-term certainty, but revaluation remains government policy, so it should be expected at some point in future.

Evidence sought on barriers to nature recovery

The Office for Environmental Protection is seeking evidence of regulatory and practical barriers to nature recovery in England. It wants examples from landowners, occupiers and practitioners improving land, freshwater and coastal environments. Examples include environmental impact screening for restoring species-rich grassland, planning permission for wildlife ponds on holdings under five hectares, and waste controls on removing and composting roadside grass cuttings. Barriers may stem from legislation, consent processes, scheme rules, guidance or established regulatory practice. Submissions close on 14 December 2026.

Business & Economy

CBAM rates announced

The UK Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism will apply to imported fertiliser from 1 January 2027, alongside products including steel, aluminium and cement. Illustrative figures indicate an initial fertiliser rate of £1.45 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent. Applied to ammonium nitrate's default emissions value, this would add approximately £3.77 per tonne. The final first-quarter rate is due before the end of 2026. Although the initial charge is limited, costs are expected to rise as free carbon allowances are reduced. High-carbon products, including steel, aluminium, and cement, will also be affected. For more information, see our briefing note.

One million tonnes of minerals per day

A new report estimates Great Britain produced more than one million tonnes of minerals and manufactured mineral products per day in 2023. The Mineral Products Association estimated a total of 397 million tonnes were supplied in the year, representing the UK economy's largest material flow. However, weak housebuilding and construction activity are expected to drive a fifth consecutive annual fall in sales in 2026. The MPA forecasts a slow recovery in aggregates, ready-mixed concrete, asphalt and mortar from late 2027, with stronger demand emerging in 2028. Risks remain weighted to the downside, with housing affordability, the Middle East conflict and uncertainty over major infrastructure projects all creating headwinds for the industry.

The longer-term global outlook is more positive. An Oxford Economics report commissioned by the Global Cement and Concrete Association (GCCA), Concrete's Enabling Role in Building a Sustainable and Resilient Future, forecasts global construction activity will grow by more than 70% by 2050. It identifies five key drivers:

- Population growth and urbanisation
- Infrastructure and housing shortages
- Climate adaptation
- Strategic resilience

- High-tech infrastructure

The GCCA estimates that annual concrete demand from utilities, transport and social infrastructure alone will reach 20 billion tonnes by 2050. For more information, please contact our Minerals and Waste team.

Renewables auction on the slowest possible timeline

The UK Government's eighth Contracts for Difference allocation round (AR8) will proceed on its longest timetable. DESNZ had set out five potential timelines for the round, depending on the outcome of pre-qualification and any subsequent appeals. Under the current timetable, the National Energy System Operator is due to publish a notice on 19 November confirming the sealed bid window. The sealed-bid window could run from 3 to 9 December, with results expected in mid-February 2027. A separate notice, also on 19 November, will set out the initial budget for each technology pot. The Government said the timetable is intended to maximise competition and value for consumers while giving applicants sufficient time to prepare bids.

Other Rural News

And finally... Where are you most likely to find treasure?

Historic records suggest the rewards of "treasure hunting" vary widely by region. Norfolk recorded more treasure finds than any other British county between 2014 and 2023, with 2,044 finds accounting for 9% of the national total. It also topped government county tables for new reports in 2022 and 2023. Performance is strong overall in the East of England. Together, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex accounted for 4,390 finds, almost one-fifth of Britain's total, despite covering less than 6% of its land. The Isle of Wight, however, recorded the highest density of treasure finds: its 451 discoveries equate to 118.7 per 100 km^2. That is almost 12 times the British average and more than two and a half times the rate in Staffordshire, the next-highest area. Elsewhere, the record is curiously sparse. Despite evidence of extensive historic activity, with its 1,787 scheduled monuments, Devon has recorded only 4.2 treasure finds per 100 km^2.

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