



Rural Research Policy Snapshot

Rural – UK – October 2026

England

Our snapshot provides a brief update on the issues shaping the future of rural estates, agriculture and land management in England. Each topic covers policy commitments and targets, budgets, and other government announcements.

Food and farming	
Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)	The SFI26 offer comprised 71 actions (down from 102), a £100,000 annual cap per agreement and three-year terms for most actions, with a £310 million budget for new agreements. Roughly £560 million is already committed to over 39,000 live agreements of earlier variants of the scheme. For more information on the SFI26 structure, see our briefing note. Window 1 was targeted at small farms (up to 50 hectares) and those without an existing Environmental Land Management revenue agreement. It closed as planned on 28 August 2026 after running its full two months with a £60 million budget. Uptake was strong; 6,650 applications were submitted, with 69% from small farms. Three million of the budget was left over and transferred to Window 2. Window 2 was open to all farmers and had a £253 million budget. It opened and closed less than six hours later on 22 September after demand exhausted the available funding. Around 12,200 applications were submitted, averaging about £20,700 each. The top five actions based on the proportion of agreements they feature in were: • 61% manage grassland with very low nutrient inputs • 35% manage hedgerows • 28% establish herbal leys • 22% provide winter bird food on arable and horticultural land • 21% avoid the use of insecticides on arable and permanent crops To help prevent a gap in support a new “apply early” feature let farmers with SFI23, CS Mid Tier, legacy CS Higher Tier or HLS agreements expiring by 28 February 2027 apply for a successor agreement before their current one ends. More than 8,800 applicants fell into this category, but many others were left disappointed because they couldn’t apply at all. The SFI26 applications will be assessed in submission order, and offers will be made only where eligibility checks are passed and sufficient funding remains. Started but not submitted applications normally cannot be completed. However, farmers who contacted the Rural Payments Agency before closure because they needed assisted digital support or experienced a technical problem may qualify for an exception. If you were successful, you must accept your agreement offer within 30 calendar days. Defra has said it plans to reopen the scheme in 2027 and is exploring alternatives to the first-come, first-served approach.
Countryside Stewardship higher tier	Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) funds complex environmental management on farmland, woodland and land managed for nature, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, priority habitats, commons and scheduled monuments. It offers 99 base actions and 33 supplements, covering woodland and agroforestry, wetlands, peatland, moorland, grassland, waterbody restoration, flood resilience, species recovery, public access and historic features. Agreements last five, 10, 15, or 20 years, depending on the actions selected, and can include support for capital items. At least £50 million is available for new agreements in 2026. Since 21 July 2026, farmers and land managers have been able to submit expressions of interest for agroforestry, woodland improvement, species-rich grassland and scheduled monument management. Species-rich grassland and scheduled monuments are available through simplified single-focus agreements, with up to 1,200 agreements initially available. More than 650 expressions of interest had been submitted by 7 September, mainly for species-rich grassland. Expressions of interest do not guarantee an agreement. Woodland and agroforestry applications require an approved management or agroforestry plan, while more complex multi-action agreements continue through a separate pre-application and advisory process. Expressions of interest cannot currently be submitted for common land, although Defra intends to trial wider access. If an agreement is successfully secured, capital works must normally be completed within three years.
Land Use Framework	England’s Land Use Framework aims to reconcile the nation’s use of land to deliver new homes, restore nature, provide clean energy, and ensure food security. The framework stresses that the UK has enough land to deliver these objectives if it is used more efficiently. It adheres to four central principles: • Multifunctional land use • Right use in the right place • Future-ready decisions • Flexible, adaptive policy

	The framework does not replace the current planning system, nor does it require planners to follow it. Instead, it offers guidance by outlining a national vision for land use, improving coordination, and helping prioritise investments that balance development with environmental concerns. The framework will be updated every five years, and Defra will establish a Land Use Unit to create the first unified map of national spatial priorities. Defra has now moved into delivery. A consolidated publications page brings the framework's supporting analysis, evidence and datasets into one place, and on 23 July 2026 the government published a full list of the actions it has committed to, each carrying a delivery status. Alongside this, the National Soil Map for England and Wales and the wider Land Information System datasets are now openly accessible through a new public portal, along with a new, updated Agricultural Land Classification map for England, both directly relevant when assessing a holding's development, diversification or environmental potential. Scrutiny is also building. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has launched a long-term inquiry into land use and nature that will run across this Parliament, examining how the framework is implemented, the future of protected sites, and progress towards the target of protecting 30% of land by 2030.
Farming Profitability Review (FPR)	The Farming Profitability Review, led by Baroness Minette Batters, was published in December 2025 with 57 recommendations. The government published its formal response on 24 June 2026, accepting 53 of the 57 recommendations and setting out delivery alongside the new Farming Roadmap 2050. The response is structured around seven themes: growing markets and embedding partnerships; fairer supply chains; removing barriers and enabling infrastructure; tax incentives and grant schemes; developing people and skills; research, innovation and technical support; and valuing nature and environmental outcomes. Implementation includes the Farming and Food Partnership Board, which is developing the first Sector Growth Plans for horticulture and poultry, the redesigned SFI26 offer, at least £200 million for the Farming Innovation Programme by 2030 and the Farmer Collaboration Fund. However, the first Sector Growth Plans have not yet been published, and attention remains focused on the funding, milestones, and accountability needed to deliver the Roadmap's ambitions. For more information, see our briefing note.
Farmer Collaboration Fund (FCF)	In January, the government announced a new £30 million FCF, to be delivered over three years. The fund is designed to strengthen farmer networks by supporting peer-to-peer learning, encouraging joint ventures and enabling farmers to share expertise to improve productivity. Positioned outside existing agri-environment schemes, the FCF focuses specifically on business collaboration and reflects recommendations from the Farming Profitability Review, which highlighted the value of collective action in improving farm resilience and performance. Defra invited Round 1 applications from delivery partners by 30 September; it will notify successful applicants in early November. Agreements will run for up to three years and range from £200,000 to £1 million a year, with around 20 grants expected and £5 million available annually; Rounds 2 and 3 are planned for 2027 and 2028. The successful delivery partners must support at least five collaboration groups of four or more separate farm businesses, funding facilitators, peer-to-peer learning, farm walks, workshops and specialist advice. Capital works, farm equipment and help with individual funding applications are excluded, and groups holding Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund agreements must end them before receiving FCF support. Farmers cannot apply to the FCF directly; they will need to approach delivery partners to benefit from the scheme.
Farming and Food Partnership Board (FFPB)	Launched as part of the initial response to the Farming Profitability Review, the FFPB held its inaugural meeting on 25 March 2026, with seven members drawn from farming, food production, retail, and the out-of-home sector. The Board's confirmed mission is to drive improvements in farm profitability, increase productivity, and strengthen the contribution of domestically produced food to national food security. It is intended to take a farm-to-fork approach, with a clear focus on analysing the food supply chain and the role of land management in long-term resilience. The Board has confirmed Sector Growth Plans as its core delivery mechanism. Work on the first plan for horticulture is well advanced, with the Horticulture Expert Growers Group, the UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition, and the Environmental Horticulture Group each leading a distinct component covering intensive edible growers, agroecological and SME growers, and ornamentals respectively. At its second meeting in May, the Board agreed to pause commissioning any further Sector Growth Plans until late 2026; it wants to make clear progress in two sectors rather than limited progress across many. Instead, it is addressing cross-cutting barriers, with planning as the clear priority: at its third meeting on 13 July, members examined where planning constraints most affect growth, including in the poultry sector, alongside grid connection delays and the need to unlock on-farm reservoir development more quickly. The board's terms of reference are still to be confirmed.
Uplands Transformation Programme	At the Oxford Farming Conference, the Secretary of State announced a new Uplands Transformation initiative, initially framed as a series of pilots in Dartmoor and Cumbria. Developed alongside social entrepreneur Dr Hilary Cottam, the programme adopts a place-based approach, working with upland communities to co-design tailored support. Proposals include farmer clusters, mutual funding models and new income streams such as regenerative tourism and nature-based enterprises. The Phase 1 report of the Defra-commissioned Uplands Review, "Towards a Flourishing Uplands", was published on 9 April 2026 and sets out 19 insights for system-level change. The Dartmoor Land Use Management Demonstration Trials are now underway, with the Cumbria pilot also expected to draw directly on the report's findings. The programme will be underpinned by blended funding from public, private, and third-sector sources and is intended to sit alongside, rather than replace, existing mechanisms, including SFI, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL), and the Farmer Collaboration Fund.

RURAL RESEARCH POLICY SNAPSHOT

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL)	The FIPL programme has been extended for three more years, until March 2029, with £30 million confirmed for 2026/27. The programme is now live and accepting applications. Since its launch, FIPL has supported over 11,000 farmers across 44 protected landscapes, funded more than 5,500 projects, and helped establish around 100 farm cluster groups. National Park Authorities and National Landscapes remain the lead delivery bodies for applications; links to all of them are available here. Separately, on 25 May 2026, the government announced a new £30 million (£10 million per annum) Wildlife-Rich Habitat Fund to restore and create habitat across protected landscapes over three years, complementing FIPL's existing offer. It is now live, delivered through the same FIPL officers, with 36 of the 44 protected landscapes taking part in year one. Funding is capital-only and limited to creating new habitat outside Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and SSSIs; ongoing management must come through SFI or Countryside Stewardship.
Farming Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF)	The Farming Equipment and Technology Fund 2026 provided £50 million to farmers and land managers in England to purchase new equipment across three themes: farm productivity (£20 million), slurry management (£10 million) and animal health and welfare (£20 million). Grant funding agreements ranged from £1,000 to £25,000 per theme and began being issued on 22 June 2026, with almost 7,000 in the first tranche; around 3,600 under animal health and welfare, 2,200 under productivity, and 900 under slurry management. Claims must be submitted by 11.59pm on 20 January 2027. Defra has confirmed this was the final standalone round of FETF in its current form. From 2027, the fund's strongest elements will be combined with other grant schemes into a simplified application process.
Animal disease and livestock resilience	Bluetongue serotype 3 is widespread in England, and the whole country is designated a Restricted Zone. As of 23 September 2026, England had recorded 1,513 confirmed cases during the 2026-27 season. Suspected cases must be reported, and vaccination remains the principal protection for susceptible livestock. On 11 September, Defra introduced faster reporting arrangements, allowing private vets to diagnose clear cases from clinical signs for confirmation by the Animal and Plant Health Agency. This removed the delay of waiting for laboratory results. Sheep and cattle farmers can also access government-funded veterinary advice through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway. Farmers must report use of the BTV-3 vaccine within three days.
Farming Innovation Programme (FIP)	To accelerate the development and uptake of practical technologies at farm level, the government allocated £123 million to the FIP for 2026/27. This sits within a wider Industrial Strategy commitment to invest at least £200 million in agricultural innovation by 2030. The programme covers automation, robotics, labour-saving technology, and nature-based solutions, with the 2026 uplift specifically targeting robotics, soil health, and water management, reflecting the growing policy focus on labour shortages and productivity pressures. Details of funding competitions are available here. A Farming Futures round focused on soils and water quality is expected during winter 2026.
Accelerating Development of Practices Fund (ADOPT)	The Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies (ADOPT) Fund supports collaborative, farmer-led trials of new practices and technologies on commercial farms. More than 150 projects are now underway, supported by £30 million of funding for 2026/27. Full ADOPT projects must have eligible costs of between £50,000 and £200,000 and can receive funding for up to 80% of those costs. Applicants can access free support from a hub delivered by ADAS, the UK Agri-Tech Centre and the Soil Association, and a £2,500 Facilitator Support Grant to help develop an application. The fund operates on a rolling basis, with new rounds opening approximately every eight to nine weeks. Full ADOPT Grant Round 10 opened on 8 October, with applicants able to apply for a share of up to £5 million, and closes at 11am on 2 December 2026. Facilitator Support Grant Round 12, offering £2,500 to engage an external project facilitator, closes at 11am on 11 November.
Seasonal Worker Visas	For 2026, Defra has confirmed a total allocation of 42,900 visas, 41,000 for horticulture and 1,900 for poultry, a modest reduction from 2025. From November 2025, horticulture workers can work in the UK for up to six months in any rolling 10-month period, replacing the previous 12-month rolling rule to improve workforce flexibility. The 2027 allocation will remain at 42,900 visas, comprising 41,000 for horticulture and 1,900 for poultry. This is the earliest the annual allocation has been confirmed, although the NFU continues to seek multi-year allocations. In the Farming Roadmap 2050, the government confirmed that the Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme will operate until at least 2030. On 29 January 2026, the government also published its response to the Migration Advisory Committee's review of the Seasonal Worker visa, confirming that the farming sector would normally receive two years' notice before any closure of the route. The government reduced the cooling-off period from six months to four months, but rejected the Committee's proposed three-month period and greater flexibility over when workers could undertake their six-month placement. It is still considering the Employer Pays Principle, which would transfer visa and recruitment costs to the employer or the supply chain.
Food Strategy	In July 2025, the government published its Food Strategy for England, setting out a long-term framework to deliver a more nutritious, sustainable and resilient food system. The strategy aims to improve access to healthy, affordable food, support British farmers, strengthen food security, and reduce environmental impacts across the food system. The Food Strategy Advisory Board met on 12 March 2026 and discussed how the strategy interacts with the Farming Profitability Review, supply chain pressures linked to geopolitical instability, and the need for greater price transparency on key inputs such as fertiliser. The board met again on 6 July. The ban on junk food TV advertising before 9pm and paid online advertising at any time took effect on 5 January 2026. Updated School Food Standards are expected to take effect from September 2027, subject to parliamentary approval. They will increase fruit, vegetables and fibre consumption while reducing sugar, and will cover breakfast for the first time. A coalition of over 30 organisations, including M&S, WWF and the Food Foundation, has also called for a Food Strategy White Paper and new primary legislation through a proposed Good Food Bill.

Taxation	
Inheritance tax	The reformed inheritance tax (IHT) rules for agricultural and business property took effect on 6 April 2026. The first £2.5 million of combined agricultural property relief (APR) and business property relief (BPR) qualifying assets continues to receive 100% relief. Above this threshold, relief is reduced to 50%, creating an effective IHT rate of 20% on the excess. Any unused allowance is transferable between spouses or civil partners, including where the first death occurred before 6 April 2026, meaning couples can pass on up to £5.65 million of qualifying assets tax-free when combined with nil-rate bands. To ease liquidity pressures, the option to pay IHT in 10 equal, interest-free annual instalments now applies to all APR- and BPR-eligible property. The £2.5 million allowance is frozen until April 2031, after which it will rise in line with CPI. The reforms remain politically contested. The reforms remain politically contested. In September 2026, as the 2026 Budget approached, more than 100 parliamentarians called for their reversal.
Taxation of ecosystem services	On 14 May 2026, HM Revenue & Customs published its first dedicated guidance on the taxation of ecosystem-service payments. It covers England's statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and nutrient-neutrality markets, alongside the UK-wide Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code. The guidance explains how existing rules on income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax, VAT, Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) and inheritance tax apply to landowners, developers and purchasers of environmental units and credits. Landowners will normally be treated as receiving income rather than capital receipts. Where the relevant land remains in agricultural use, or the area removed from production is not substantial, receipts may form part of the existing farming trade. Capital treatment is more limited and may apply where payments compensate for loss of use and permanent sterilisation of the land, depending on the particular agreement. Income from ecosystem services delivered on commercially occupied woodland may qualify for the existing woodland income-tax exemption, but there is no equivalent exemption for peatland carbon income. BNG units and most carbon credits supplied by a VAT-registered business are subject to VAT at the standard rate, while statutory BNG credits are outside the scope of VAT. Payments for ecosystem services alone do not normally create a chargeable land interest for SDLT. However, SDLT may apply where an agreement involves acquiring land or another interest in land. The overall tax position will depend on the structure of the agreement, the extent of land-use change and the timing of payments, so specialist advice should be obtained before entering a long-term environmental agreement. For more detail, see our briefing note.
Environment	
Environmental Improvement Plan 2025 (EIP25)	EIP25, published on 1 December 2025, sets out the government's updated strategy for environmental protection and nature recovery through to 2043. It introduced revised interim targets under the Environment Act 2021, supported by increased funding for Landscape Recovery and peatland restoration. EIP25 emphasises more coordinated policymaking, increased private investment, stronger local delivery through Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the role of large landowners in contributing to national environmental objectives. The government has committed £11.8 billion over this Parliament to sustainable farming and food production, alongside £60 million over three years in the Species Recovery Programme. For more details, see our briefing note .
30by30	The 30by30 initiative, a commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, sits alongside the EIP. Defra published its 30by30 Delivery Plan for land in England on 13 July 2026. It confirms that around 7% of England currently meets the full criteria, while a further 3.5% is expected to qualify and around 9% partly meets the criteria. An additional 12.5% is considered ecologically suitable for habitat creation or restoration, supporting the wider finding that around 32% of England is either likely to contribute or has the potential to do so. The plan introduces a three-tier system. Gold land fully meets the requirements for conservation purposes, long-term protection and effective management and formally counts towards the target. Silver land has passed an initial screening threshold but requires stronger management or protection, while Bronze land delivers wider benefits for nature but does not formally count. Landowners can enter the Silver pipeline through a four-question self-assessment, including whether conservation is intended for at least 20 years. The plan is backed by up to £37 million a year for three years for National Parks and National Landscapes, with two assessment officers embedded in protected landscape teams to support landowners through the process. As a direct contribution to delivering 30by30, Defra published the government Estate Nature Plan (GENP) on 26 June 2026. It sets out a coordinated whole-estate approach to nature recovery across more than 577,000 hectares of central government land in England (around 4% of the country's land area), backed by £4.1 million of seed capital for "lighthouse" pilot projects on defence training areas, transport corridors and prison estates. The GENP sits alongside the National Estate for Nature (NEN), a coalition of 26 major public, private and third-sector landowners collectively managing around 10% of England's land, including the Crown Estate, the Duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster, the Church Commissioners, National Trust, RSPB and several large private estates. Members have now been asked to screen their holdings for existing and potential contributions to 30by30 and to update their estate management plans so that newly created or restored habitat enters the 30by30 pipeline.
Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)	Under the Environment Act 2021, LNRS are being created for all 48 strategy areas in England to set priorities for nature recovery and propose actions where they would make the greatest contribution. The LNRS serves as an evidence base that may be a material consideration in planning decisions, so landowners, farmers, and managers should engage with responsible authorities to ensure strategies reflect their needs. Identifying a site in the LNRS can also affect BNG through the 1.15x strategic significance multiplier, meaning more BNG units could be generated, but developments may also require more units. As of 29 September 2026, 45 of 48 strategies have been published. For more information, see our briefing note .

Lowland Peat Water Discovery Grant	Defra's Lowland Peat Water Discovery Grant opened for applications on 8 April and closed on 26 June 2026, offering up to £4.5 million in funding, with individual grants of £50,000 to £300,000, to fund the development of implementation plans for safely raising water tables in lowland peat catchments. Delivered by the Environment Agency, it targeted collaborative, catchment-scale projects involving farmers, land managers, charities, public bodies and commercial enterprises, with extra weighting for groups including a farmer or landowner. Successful applicants will work on their projects until 2028. Completed projects will be well placed to apply to a future Lowland Peat Water Implementation Grant round. On 29 June 2026, following London Climate Action Week, Defra announced a wider £47 million peatland funding package covering three new schemes: 1. Lowland Peat Water Implementation Grant (£36 million, delivered by the Environment Agency); the successor to the Discovery Grant. It will fund the delivery of previously developed implementation plans, including installing infrastructure such as tilting weirs, solar-powered pumps, and real-time monitoring at catchment scale to raise water tables in lowland peat soils. The scheme offers grants of £100,000 to £2 million and will cover up to 100% of eligible costs. Applications are now closed; awards are expected in December 2026, and projects must be completed by 31 March 2030. A second application window is planned for summer 2028. 2. Paludiculture and Wetter Farming Fund (£10 million, delivered by Natural England); funds research into growing and harvesting crops on wetter peat and developing viable markets for them, including wetland plants and bulrush for building materials and insulation. Applications closed on 21 August 2026. 3. Peatland Restoration Sector Capacity Grant (£1.15 million, delivered by Defra; funds training, apprenticeships, equipment and community engagement to grow the workforce and skills needed to deliver peatland restoration at scale. The first application round closed on 23 July 2026. The programme runs to March 2030, with annual rounds offering grants of up to £20,000. The three schemes sit alongside the extended Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme to deliver the Peatland Programme 2026–2030 commitment in EIP25. Around 80% of England's peatlands are currently degraded; drained lowland peat alone accounts for around 88% of England's peatland greenhouse gas emissions.
Voluntary carbon and nature markets consultation	The UK previously consulted on establishing a framework to build trust in voluntary carbon and nature markets, including proposals to endorse the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market's Core Carbon Principles and the Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative's Claims Code of Practice as minimum quality benchmarks. A summary of the responses was published on 26 March 2026, showing broad support for improving integrity, alongside calls for internationally aligned standards, transparent reporting, and proportionate enforcement. The formal government response remains outstanding. On standards development, the British Standards Institution's Nature Investment Standards now cover the Supply of Biodiversity Benefits (Flex 702), the Supply of Nature-based Carbon Benefits (Flex 703), the Supply of Nutrient Benefits (Flex 704), and Community Engagement and Benefits (Flex 705). These are intended to guard against greenwashing and improve consistency and investor confidence across emerging nature markets. Separately, whether to include Woodland Carbon Units in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme remains unresolved. The government confirmed in March 2026 that it will decide "in due course", while ruling out peatland.
Planning	
Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	The government has continued to refine BNG requirements, focusing on reducing regulatory burden for smaller, more constrained sites. Changes that came into force on 6 August 2026 include a new area-based exemption for sites of 0.2 hectares or less, with a carve-out for sites affecting priority habitats, and an exemption for temporary development where land will be reinstated within five years. Minor developments that remain subject to BNG can now proceed directly to off-site delivery, while the previous exemption for self-build and custom-build development has been removed. A consultation on a potential further exemption for residential brownfield development closed on 10 June 2026. Environmental bodies, including CIEEM and Wildlife and Countryside Link, have raised concerns that stacked exemptions could remove a significant proportion of development from BNG obligations. Mandatory BNG for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) will apply from 2 November 2026, with final government guidance published on 27 August 2026. All Development Consent Order (DCO) applications submitted on or after that date must deliver a minimum 10% BNG. The BNG boundary will cover only habitats within the DCO limits that the development negatively impacts, rather than the entire site. Defra is also digitising the statutory biodiversity metric, moving it from a spreadsheet to a digital platform.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The new National Planning Policy Framework was published on 17 August 2026. It is the first comprehensive rewrite since 2012 and replaces the December 2024 framework. The new structure separates policies for preparing development plans from national policies for deciding planning applications, while retaining the presumption in favour of sustainable development, support for brownfield development and the "grey belt" approach to Green Belt land. Major development involving the release of Green Belt land remains subject to "golden rules" covering affordable housing, infrastructure and accessible green space. For the rural sector, planning decisions should give substantial weight to demonstrable benefits for domestic food production, animal welfare or the environment arising from farm modernisation. The framework explicitly supports development that maintains farm viability and domestic food production, including improved livestock accommodation, on-farm reservoirs, greenhouses, polytunnels, farm shops and temporary accommodation for seasonal workers. It also strengthens support for water infrastructure, including for agricultural users, and states that applicants should not be required to demonstrate the need for such development. Development should avoid higher-quality agricultural land where poorer-quality land is available.

Planning and Infrastructure Act	The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 introduced major reforms to accelerate decision-making for nationally significant infrastructure projects. Key measures included removing the first stage of the appeals process for claims deemed without merit, introducing oral hearings for all challenges, and enabling planning inspectors to award costs against parties that submit frivolous or delaying claims. On 24 July 2026, reforms to the Development Consent Order (DCO) regime came into force, including removing statutory requirements for pre-application consultation while maintaining government guidance encouraging proportionate engagement with affected communities, landowners, and other interested parties. The reforms also introduced greater flexibility at the application-acceptance and examination stages, along with new arrangements for entering and surveying land. The Act also introduced wider structural reforms, including provisions for more frequent reviews of National Policy Statements, more targeted consultation for major infrastructure, and powers for the Secretary of State to direct certain projects outside the DCO process. The Act also establishes Spatial Development Strategies, the Nature Restoration Fund and Environmental Delivery Plans; these are covered separately below.
Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs)	The Planning and Infrastructure Act introduced Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) to coordinate strategic conservation measures within defined areas. Where an EDP is in place and satisfies the statutory Overall Improvement Test, developers can meet specified environmental obligations by contributing to the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF), rather than providing bespoke, site-specific mitigation. A consultation on permitted development rights for conservation works delivered through EDPs closed on 5 August 2026. On 19 December 2025, Natural England formally notified the Secretary of State that it would prepare 23 EDPs in England: 16 covering nutrient pollution catchments, including the Broads, Solent, Somerset Levels & Moors, Poole Harbour and the Rivers Avon, Wye, Camel, Eden and Lugg, and seven covering great crested newts. The government has committed to a “test and learn” approach and will not introduce further EDPs beyond nutrient pollution until it has reported the initial lessons to Parliament. The EDP framework became operational in September 2026. Government guidance confirms that each plan will define the developments and environmental impacts it covers, its capacity, the required conservation measures and the applicable levy rate. Draft plans must undergo public consultation before adoption. A consultation on the first EDP, focused on nutrient pollution in Norfolk, is open until 27 October.
Nature Restoration Fund (NRF)	The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 established the Nature Restoration Fund as an alternative route for developers to meet certain environmental obligations affecting protected sites and species. The NRF will provide an alternative to individual site-level mitigation by allowing developers to pay a nature restoration levy where an environmental delivery plan is available. Natural England will use the levy proceeds to fund the conservation measures specified in that plan, which must address the development’s environmental effects and secure an overall improvement for the protected feature concerned. The Nature Restoration Levy Regulations 2026 now set the framework for calculating, paying, using and enforcing the levy.
Property	
Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 reform	Following consultation, the Law Commission concluded that the existing security-of-tenure model under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 should be retained, including the current arrangements for contracting out of renewal rights. The Commission’s second consultation, which closed on 16 September 2026, considered detailed reforms, including simpler contracting-out procedures, the treatment of periodic tenancies, and whether the threshold excluding short-term tenancies should increase from six months to one or two years. Final recommendations are awaited. Separately, and of far broader market impact, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 received Royal Assent on 29 April 2026. Schedule 37 contains a ban on upward-only rent reviews (UORR) in commercial leases in England and Wales. The ban is not yet in force and requires secondary legislation to take effect, and the government has indicated it will not take effect before 2027. The ban will apply to all business tenancies within (or capable of falling within) Part II of the 1954 Act, including contracted-out leases and superior leases where the immediate tenant is not in occupation. It converts UORR mechanisms into two-way reviews, allowing rents to fall as well as rise. Open market, index-linked (CPI/RPI), and turnover reviews are affected where they include an upwards-only element. Stepped or fixed increases are unaffected because the rent is ascertainable at grant. Anti-avoidance provisions catch side letters, landlord-only trigger clauses, and clauses in superior leases requiring sub-leases to contain UORRs; tenants also gain a statutory right to trigger reviews. The ban is generally forward-looking; leases granted before commencement are unaffected, but it has one significant retrospective element. Any renewal arrangement (a put or call option in an existing lease, or a separate agreement for lease) entered into on or after 17 March 2026 will be caught: the renewal lease granted under it cannot contain an upwards-only review, and its initial rent cannot exceed the amount produced by the review formula. Reversionary leases completed before commencement appear to fall outside the ban. The government has committed to consulting on whether caps and collars will be permitted, and MHCLG guidance indicates that reviews to the higher of the two upward/downward reference points (for example, the higher of the open market and index-linked) will remain permissible.

Renters' Rights Act	Phase 1 of the Renters' Rights Act 2025 came into force in England on 1 May 2026. Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) and section 21 'no-fault' evictions have been abolished, and all existing ASTs and assured tenancies automatically converted into monthly Assured Periodic Tenancies (APTs). New assured tenancies must have a written statement of terms. For existing tenancies without a written record, landlords had to provide the prescribed information by 31 May 2026, and they can now recover possession only under a revised section 8, using a specified statutory ground, with extended notice periods. Phase 1 also introduced a ban on rental bidding, a cap of one month's rent in advance, a right for tenants to request a pet, and a ban on discrimination against tenants with children or in receipt of benefits. Landlords may increase rent on APTs only via a section 13 notice, once in any 12-month period, with at least two months' notice. Contractual rent-review clauses are unenforceable for rises, and tenants can refer any proposed increase to the First-tier Tribunal; the Tribunal cannot set a rent higher than the landlord's proposal. The government has said it plans to transfer responsibility for making initial rent determinations to HMRC's Valuation Office, but for now the First-tier Tribunal route applies. The next phase will begin with the regional rollout of the mandatory "Register your rental property" service from 15 December 2026, starting in the West Midlands and reaching London in July 2027 and the South West in August 2027. Landlords must register themselves and each occupied rental property, with an annual fee of £65 per property. More detail is available in this blog. The government also intends to establish a Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman, but it has not yet confirmed a commencement date. The remaining stages of implementation will extend Awaab's Law and the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector. A consultation is now seeking views on how Awaab's Law should apply, using the social housing model as a starting point but adapting it to reflect the structure of the private rented sector. The proposals cover enforcement, access, hazard thresholds and response times, and suggest applying all the Housing Health and Safety Rating System hazards except overcrowding. The consultation also considers hazards caused by tenants breaching their tenancy agreements and circumstances where the landlord is a leaseholder. Under the social housing model, landlords have 10 working days to investigate a hazard, three working days to provide a written summary of their findings and five working days to complete repairs. Recognising that smaller private landlords may face greater difficulties securing access and contractors within these timescales, the consultation seeks views on both shorter and longer response periods. 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.
Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)	From 22 June 2026, councils in England gained powers to fine private landlords up to £7,000 where a property contains a Category 1 hazard that it would have been reasonably practicable to remove. The penalties apply to any of the 21 hazards covered by the updated Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), including damp and mould, excess cold, fire, electrical faults, and structural dangers. According to the latest English Housing Survey, around 9% to 10% of privately rented homes contained a Category 1 hazard in 2024. These new financial penalties sit alongside existing enforcement powers, including requiring repairs, carrying out emergency works and recovering costs from landlords. The changes coincide with the first HHSRS overhaul in 20 years. The revised system, which came into force on 23 June 2026, reduced the number of hazards from 29 to 21 by merging related risks and updating the assessment methodology.
Decent Homes Standard (DHS)	The New Decent Homes Standard (DHS) was published on 28 January and will introduce a single, modern minimum standard for both social and private rented homes in England. It aims to address long-standing issues with unsafe, poor-quality housing by replacing outdated, age-based rules with condition-based requirements. Homes must be free from the most serious safety hazards (the HHSRS covered above is relevant here), be in a reasonable state of repair, provide essential facilities, deliver adequate thermal comfort and energy efficiency, and be free from damp and mould. The framework integrates Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards. The DHS supports wider reforms under the Renters' Rights Act 2025; for example, including a specific damp and mould criterion better aligns with Awaab's Law. The standard will apply to private rented homes from 2035.
Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)	The UK Government confirmed on 21 January 2026 that, for domestic property, the current single A-G EPC rating will be replaced by four headline metrics: fabric performance, heating system, smart readiness, and energy cost. The first three will be banded A-G; energy cost will be displayed in pounds. Properties with fossil-fuel heating, including efficient gas boilers, cannot achieve above Band D on the heating-system metric. The new EPCs will be calculated using the Home Energy Model (HEM), replacing SAP and RdSAP. A consultation on the HEM EPC wrapper ran from January to March 2026; a government response is still awaited. Existing EPCs will remain valid for their usual 10-year term, while the current and new EPC systems will operate in parallel until at least October 2029. For Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards purposes, a property that achieves EPC C under the existing Energy Efficiency Rating before 1 October 2029 will continue to be treated as compliant until that EPC expires or is replaced. The launch of the new EPC has been delayed until the second half of 2027; the government was due to agree a specific launch date and implementation plan by summer 2026, but has not yet published either. The delay does not affect the 2030 Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) deadline for private rented homes in England and Wales. For more details, see our briefing note.

Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES)	The government has confirmed it intends to introduce a single compliance date of 1 October 2030 for all new and existing privately rented homes in England and Wales. Properties will need to meet a standard equivalent to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C or register a valid exemption. Previously, the proposal set staggered deadlines, requiring different groups of tenancies to reach EPC band C at different times. Under the new methodology, landlords must meet a standard set against the fabric performance metric and then either the heating system or smart readiness metric. However, properties rated EPC C or above against the existing Energy Efficiency Rating before 1 October 2029 will remain compliant until that certificate expires or is replaced. To bring properties up to the new standard, landlords will be required to spend up to £10,000 per property on improvements. This is lower than the originally proposed £15,000 cap, but much higher than the existing £3,500. Exemptions will remain available, and a new solid-wall exemption will be introduced, particularly relevant to rural homes where full compliance is not practical or affordable. These include a property-value adjustment for homes worth less than £100,000 and protection where measures would materially damage the property's fabric or value, both particularly relevant to older rural homes. The cost-cap exemption will remain valid for ten years. Other changes to MEES include: - Landlords must meet a standard set against the fabric performance metric and a secondary standard set against either the smart readiness metric or the heating system metric on new EPCs. - Rental properties will be required to have a valid EPC in place from the date of marketing, removing the current 28-day grace period. - Requiring all heritage buildings, short-term lets and HMOs to have an EPC. For a detailed analysis of MEES's impact and advice on developing a portfolio strategy, see our Spotlight: Future-proofing rural homes. The changes above apply to residential MEES only. For non-domestic private rented property (i.e. commercial), the government confirmed on 18 June 2026 a separate, targeted approach for England and Wales: - From 2031, privately rented non-domestic buildings over 1,000m² in England and Wales must reach EPC B, where cost-effective. - Buildings under 1,000m² will remain on the current EPC E minimum, with no set deadline for going further. - The previously consulted EPC C interim milestone for 2027 has been dropped. - The seven-year payback test and existing exemptions remain in place. - The changes will take effect following the passage of secondary legislation. For more details, see our briefing note.
Boiler Upgrade Scheme	The Boiler Upgrade Scheme provides upfront grants towards heat pumps and, in limited circumstances, biomass boilers in homes and small non-domestic buildings in England and Wales. Changes introduced on 28 April 2026 extended the scheme to March 2030, added a £2,500 grant for air-to-air heat pumps in residential properties, relaxed the requirement to provide an Energy Performance Certificate and made Microgeneration Certification Scheme certification mandatory for participating installers. Grants of £7,500 remain available for air-to-water, ground-source and water-source heat pumps, while biomass boilers receive £5,000. Until 31 March 2027, eligible off-gas-grid properties can receive £9,000 towards an air-to-water or ground-source heat pump. The uplift applies where the new system replaces oil, LPG, coal, direct electric heating or another qualifying fossil-fuel system.
Energy and infrastructure	
Energy	The application window for the UK Government's eighth Contracts for Difference (CfD) allocation round closed on 7 August 2026 and the round has moved into the qualification and allocation process. AR8 has five auction pots, including dedicated pots for solar, onshore and remote island wind, offshore wind and floating and other deepwater offshore wind. A fifth pot covers emerging and less-established technologies. Additional delivery years have been provided for several technologies, including solar PV and onshore wind, offering greater flexibility over project delivery. The government is expected to confirm the main auction budget following assessment of applications. Community ownership has also moved from policy ambition towards implementation under Great British Energy's Local Power Plan. On 17 September, Great British Energy launched an initial £30 million for locally owned clean-energy projects through its People's Power programme. Local authorities and community energy groups can progress proposals ranging from solar installations on local buildings to village-owned wind farms and hydropower schemes. The funding is the first instalment of a commitment of up to £1 billion intended to support more than 1,000 local and community-led projects across the UK, with local ownership intended to retain more of the financial benefits of generation within communities. Support for new biomethane projects is also being extended. The Green Gas Support Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2026, made on 23 September and coming into force on 16 October, extend the deadline for eligible plants to commission and begin injecting biomethane into the gas grid from 31 March 2028 to 31 March 2030. The deadline for new initial applications remains 31 March 2028. Projects commissioning after March 2028 will have a correspondingly shorter support period, with payments ending no later than 31 March 2043.

Grid and Infrastructure	Reform of the electricity connections queue is moving into delivering new offers. Under the National Energy System Operator's (NESO) Gate 2 process, projects that meet readiness and strategic-alignment criteria can receive a confirmed connection date and location; other projects receive an indicative Gate 1 offer. Delivery has taken longer than planned. On 2 October, Ofgem extended the deadline for approximately 62 outstanding Phase 1 Gate 2 offers to 31 October 2026. The extension does not alter the remaining offer timetable. For rural renewable-energy and storage projects, the outcome will clarify whether and when they can connect to the grid. The government is also taking forward reforms to the land rights and consents needed to build and maintain electricity networks. In its April 2026 consultation response, it proposed extending certain statutory access rights and increasing the standard term for a necessary wayleave in England and Wales from 15 to 40 years. The Secretary of State would retain discretion to grant a shorter or longer term where appropriate. The wider access proposals include stronger provisions for notice, compensation, and dispute resolution, along with an expectation that network operators seek voluntary agreements first. The changes remain subject to the relevant legislation and guidance; they should not yet be treated as rights already in force. In England, a further proposal would allow certain temporary, low-impact ground investigations and surveys for electricity-network projects to proceed without a planning application, subject to conditions. The consultation closed on 4 September 2026 and the government is analysing responses. If introduced, the right would affect the early survey stage of network development, including investigations on land considered for new infrastructure. Communities hosting new electricity transmission infrastructure may benefit through two separate schemes. DESNZ's Community Funds for Electricity Transmission Infrastructure has indicative funding of £200,000 per kilometre of qualifying overhead line and £530,000 per qualifying substation, switching station or converter station. Ofgem's RIIO-ET3 arrangements allow transmission owners to recover eligible costs incurred when delivering social, economic and environmental benefits to local communities. The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 also provides powers for a separate scheme of financial benefits for households near qualifying new or upgraded above-ground transmission infrastructure, subject to regulations establishing the scheme.
Rural infrastructure and connectivity	The government's Future of Rural England Report, published in July 2026, identifies infrastructure, housing, and connectivity as three of six priorities for rural communities. It highlights poor transport and digital connections, limited affordable housing and unequal access to services as barriers to rural growth. Defra plans to establish a cross-government board to assess how policies affect rural areas, with progress monitored through annual rural-proofing reports and shared measures across departments. Broadband rollout has continued since the report was published. In August, the government announced that more than 60,000 rural homes and businesses across Yorkshire and Lincolnshire could access faster broadband through Project Gigabit. Its September progress update reported that the programme had helped bring gigabit-capable broadband to 1.4 million premises across the UK as of March 2026, with more than £2 billion committed through signed contracts. The government's UK-wide target is 99% gigabit-capable coverage by 2032; it is considering exceptionally difficult or costly premises separately. Mobile coverage has also expanded through the Shared Rural Network. By August 2026, more than 150 government-funded 4G mast upgrades were live across the UK, extending coverage across more than 5,684 square kilometres. The upgrades use existing infrastructure and include coverage improvements in English rural areas such as the Yorkshire Dales, Cumbria and Exmoor.
Carbon	The UK's seventh carbon budget became law in June 2026, setting a limit of 535 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent for 2038–2042, around 87% below 1990 levels. The government's <i>Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan</i> covers the fourth, fifth and sixth budgets, through to 2037. A separate plan setting out how the government will meet the seventh budget has yet to be published. Defra's agricultural statistics, updated in September 2026, show that farming accounts for around 13% of UK greenhouse gas emissions. In 2024, agriculture was responsible for 49% of UK methane emissions and 59% of nitrous oxide emissions. Although estimated agricultural greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 15% since 1990, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) found that emissions from agriculture and land use have not fallen significantly in recent years. In its June 2026 progress report, the CCC found that the UK is on course to meet the fourth carbon budget and has credible policies for the fifth, but identified substantial risks to delivering the sixth. For agriculture and land use, it recognised progress in peatland restoration and increased woodland creation in England, while finding that agricultural emissions-reduction policies still carry delivery risks. The Committee called for stable, long-term funding and policy certainty to support farmers and land managers in adopting lower-emissions practices at scale.
Onshore wind	England's revised National Planning Policy Framework strengthens support for renewable energy, including onshore wind. Published in 2026, it directs local plans to identify suitable areas for renewable energy development, including the repowering and life extension of existing sites. In planning decisions, substantial weight is given to the benefits of renewable energy and, for repowering proposals, the additional benefit of using an established site. Small-scale and community-led projects are also recognised for their contribution to reducing emissions and their wider economic and social benefits. These planning changes form part of the wider Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy, published in July 2025, which contains more than 40 actions to address barriers to deployment across planning and consenting, grid connections, aviation and defence, communities, finance, supply chains and skills. The government's Clean Power 2030 pathway envisages 27 to 29 GW of onshore wind capacity across Great Britain by 2030. Larger projects have also been brought back within the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project regime, while strategic spatial energy planning and electricity-connection reforms are intended to help align future generation with network capacity and system requirements.

	Separately, the government has consulted on a permitted development right for small-scale wind turbines at non-domestic sites in England, including farms and rural businesses. The proposal covers a single turbine with a maximum tip height of 30 metres and a rotor swept area of no more than 200 square metres, subject to conditions and limitations. The consultation closed on 10 June 2026 and a response is awaited. It did not propose extending permitted development rights to the repowering of existing wind farms or to larger community wind projects.
Solar	Following the approval of the 800 MW Springwell Solar Farm in Lincolnshire in April 2026, development consent was granted in July for Peartree Hill in the East Riding of Yorkshire and One Earth in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. In August, the government approved Beacon Fen Energy Park in Lincolnshire, comprising a 400 MW solar farm with battery storage and grid-connection infrastructure. On 8 October, the government granted a development consent order for the Green Hill Solar Farm in Northamptonshire, which will have a generating capacity of up to 500 MW. Further major schemes remain under consideration. The proposed 840 MW Botley West Solar Farm in Oxfordshire is at the decision stage, with the decision deadline extended to 10 November 2026. The Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP), being prepared by NESO for the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments, will set out a long-term spatial approach to electricity generation and storage across Great Britain and will inform subsequent strategic network planning. The SSEP will also interact with Regional Energy Strategic Plans, strengthening the link between the location of generation, future network requirements. In England, this sits alongside the Land Use Framework, published in May 2026, which seeks to manage competing demands on land from food production, nature recovery, climate resilience, clean energy and development. England's revised National Planning Policy Framework also gives substantial weight to the benefits of renewable energy development while still recognising the value of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Defra's new predictive Agricultural Land Classification map distinguishes between Grade 3a and Grade 3b land at a national scale, adding detail to the evidence on agricultural land quality.



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