



Rural Research Policy Snapshot

Rural – UK – July 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 Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026 (SFI26) scheme has been simplified to 71 actions, down from 102, with lower-uptake and less impactful options removed. Almost all actions now run for three years, and supplemental actions must be applied for alongside a supporting base action. A total budget of £240 million has been confirmed for new SFI26 agreements, alongside around £560 million already committed to over 39,000 live agreements. Window 1 opened on 30 June 2026, with up to £60 million available, limited to small farms (up to 50 hectares) and those without an existing Environmental Land Management (ELM) revenue agreement. Applicants need only meet one criterion. Window 2 opens in September 2026 for all eligible farms, with the remaining budget. A minimum threshold of three hectares of agricultural land applies, reflecting the recommendation from Baroness Batters’ Farming Profitability Review. The definition of “without an existing ELM revenue agreement” for Window 1 is more restrictive than previously implied, covering legacy schemes and excluding Landscape Recovery, even though it sits within the ELM family. Farms holding revenue agreements under previous SFI versions, Countryside Stewardship (CS) Mid Tier, old or new CS Higher Tier, or Higher Level Stewardship are ineligible for Window 1. Area limits apply to actions that take land out of production, including a 25% cap on specific options and restrictions on expanding rotational actions beyond year-one commitments. A £100,000 annual cap applies per agreement, with one agreement per farm business, a direct response to SFI24, where 25% of funding went to just 4% of farms. The management payment has not been continued. Defra has committed to providing regular updates on remaining funds in response to concerns following the early closure of the SFI24 offer. As of 9 July 2026, Defra has confirmed that over 50% of the £60 million Window 1 budget has been allocated. A further update is expected once 75% has been allocated. Alongside SFI26, at least £50 million is available for new CS Higher Tier agreements, and annual ELM spending is set to rise from £1.8 billion in 2025–26 to more than £2 billion by 2028–29. For more information on SFI26, see our briefing note.
Land Use Framework	England’s long-delayed, first-ever Land Use Framework has been published. It 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, its purpose is to offer guidance by outlining a national vision for land use, improving coordination, and helping to prioritise investments that balance development with environmental concerns. The framework will be updated every five years, with a Defra Land Use Unit being established to create the first unified map of national spatial priorities. To support its aim of promoting multifunctional land use, the framework was published alongside a consultation on permitted development rights (PDR) for onshore wind turbines in England (see the Energy section). Defra also announced possible tighter controls on the release of pheasants and partridges into the wild. While the government acknowledges the economic and cultural role of well-managed shoots, it notes that recreational gamebird shooting can affect the environment and animal welfare and may limit land-use benefits. As a result, broader measures, such as licensing for gamebird shooting and release, are being considered, extending beyond the current rules for protected sites.
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.

	The response confirms progress already made against Baroness Batters' recommendations. The Farming and Food Partnership Board has been established and has commissioned the first Sector Growth Plans, covering horticulture and poultry. The SFI26 offer has been redesigned to promote fairer distribution, including the three-hectare minimum threshold recommended by the review to give effect to its "Active farmer principle" and a £100,000 annual cap per business introduced by Defra in response to SFI24, where 25% of funding went to just 4% of farms. The Farming Innovation Programme is now backed by at least £200 million by 2030, and the £50 million Farming Equipment and Technology Fund closed in May. Further commitments span planning reform, simpler regulation, modernised grant delivery, a new farmer collaboration fund and skills strategy, and expanded frameworks for private finance in nature markets. The review and response have directly informed the Farming Roadmap 2050, the government's first long-term plan for English agriculture, published on the same day. The Secretary of State's oral statement to the Commons on 24 June and a subsequent Lords statement on 1 July presented the two documents as a single package intended to provide farm businesses with long-term planning certainty. For more information, see our briefing note.
Farmer Collaboration Fund (FCF)	In January, the Government announced a new £30 million Farmer Collaboration Fund (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. In-person and online workshops with farmers and land managers were held between mid-March and mid-April to help shape the scheme's final design. Since then, Defra has moved into the delivery partner procurement phase, holding a webinar on 19 May for organisations interested in running collaboration groups and closing the delivery partner application window on 1 June. Up to £2.5 million will be available in 2026/27, with individual project grants ranging from £100,000 to £1,000,000. Defra expects to fund up to 10 projects initially, with additional projects starting in subsequent years. The fund is not yet open to farmers directly.
Farming and Food Partnership Board (FFPB)	Launched as part of the initial response to the Farming Profitability Review, the Farming and Food Partnership Board (FFPB) held its inaugural meeting on 25 March 2026, with seven members drawn from farming, food production, retail, and the out-of-home sector. Chaired by Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds, with Farming Minister Dame Angela Eagle as Deputy Chair, 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. Sector Growth Plans have been confirmed as the Board's core delivery mechanism. Work on the first plan for horticulture has begun, with the Horticulture Expert Growers Group, the UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition, and the Environmental Horticulture Group invited to lead its development. A poultry sector growth plan is expected to follow this summer. The Board has also agreed to establish task-and-finish sub-groups to support its wider work programme, providing an opportunity for broader stakeholder engagement. Terms of reference for the board 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, setting 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 across, rather than replace, existing mechanisms including SFI, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) and the Farmer Collaboration Fund. Separately, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ran a call for evidence which closed on 26 June 2026. It examined how the government should support upland farms and landscapes, covering ELM and FIPL effectiveness, the impact of the transition away from direct payments, and competing demands on upland land.
Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL)	The FIPL programme has been extended for a further three years until March 2029, with £30 million of funding 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, funding more than 5,500 projects and helping to 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.
Combinable crops consultation	A Defra consultation focused on fairness in the combinable crops supply chain ran until 4 February. Described as an opportunity for farmers to "reset the balance of power", it sought views on issues such as clarity of standards, sampling and testing procedures, supply volumes, data sharing, and dispute resolution. The consultation was intended to inform proposals for clearer contracting arrangements and fairer treatment of producers within the supply chain. Defra is currently analysing submissions and has confirmed the sector is next in line for formal supply chain regulation. Regulatory powers available under the Agriculture Act 2020 may be used if voluntary improvements prove insufficient. Early indications suggest relatively low engagement during the consultation period, although key

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	pressure points have been clearly reinforced, particularly around pricing transparency, contract clarity, data sharing and dispute resolution.
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). Applications closed at midday on 12 May 2026, with grants available ranging from £1,000 to £25,000 per theme. Applications are now being assessed and scored, with grant funding agreements to be issued to successful applicants in due course. Defra has confirmed this was the final standalone round of FETF in its current form. From 2027, the strongest elements of the fund will be brought together with other grant schemes into a simplified application process.
Farming Innovation Programme	The Farming Innovation Programme received a £70 million funding package at the NFU Conference in February 2026, aimed at accelerating the development and uptake of practical technologies at farm level. A further £53 million was confirmed on 24 June 2026, alongside the Farming Roadmap 2050 and the Government's response to the Farming Profitability Review, taking total FIP investment for 2026/27 to £123 million. 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 targeted specifically at robotics, soil health and water management, reflecting growing policy focus on addressing labour shortages and productivity pressures. Eight competitive funding rounds are open or scheduled across 2026, delivered in partnership with Innovate UK. These include the ADOPT Full Grant (£50,000–£200,000, Rounds 8–10 running to November); Feasibility Studies Round 5 (£200,000–£500,000, opens 15 July); Farming Futures on Automation and Robotics (opens 3 August); and Small R&D Round 5 (£1–£3 million, opens 1 September). A new £5 million Farming Innovation Investor Partnerships competition closed on 17 June, combining government grants with private investment to bring near-market innovations to farms. The first round of the Investor Partnerships secured around £40 million in private co-investment across 12 projects. The programme's expanded scope reinforces Defra's view that innovation is a key component of farm business resilience and longer-term competitiveness.
Accelerating Development of Practices Fund (ADOPT)	The ADOPT fund supports collaborative, farmer-led on-farm trials, with £30 million committed for 2026/27 and over 150 projects already underway. From Round 8, the maximum eligible project cost has been doubled from £100,000 to £200,000 in response to farmer feedback, enabling more ambitious trials involving multiple farms and greater technical input. The minimum project cost remains £50,000, with funding covering up to 80% of eligible costs. A free Support Hub delivered by ADAS, UK Agri-Tech Centre and the Soil Association assists applicants at every stage, alongside a Facilitator Support Grant of £2,500 to help develop applications. The fund operates on a rolling basis, with new rounds opening approximately every eight to nine weeks. Round 8 is open until 29 July 2026, with further rounds confirmed through to at least November 2026.
Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)	The REPF ended on 31 March 2026. The Pride in Place Programme and the new Local Growth Fund are viewed as its successors. The growth fund is due to be targeted at specific mayoral city regions in the North and Midlands with the highest productivity catch-up and potential to benefit from being part of a larger cluster of activity.
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 spend up to six months in any rolling 10-month period, replacing the previous 12-month rolling rule to improve workforce flexibility. 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 (MAC) review of the Seasonal Worker visa, accepting most of the Committee's recommendations. Headline commitments include publishing visa quotas three years in advance to give growers longer planning horizons; piloting a nine-month visa for horticulture roles (up from six); tighter compliance requirements, including the Employer Pays Principle; and unannounced sponsor spot checks. Despite these commitments, allocations for 2027 to 2030 have still not been published. The NFU continues to press for early visibility to give growers sufficient planning certainty and has called on the Government to confirm annual visa allocations by the summer of each year. The Government's response to the Farming Profitability Review, published alongside the Farming Roadmap on 24 June 2026, folded the Shropshire review's outstanding labour recommendations into the wider Roadmap package rather than issuing a standalone response. The Roadmap frames the scheme extension, MAC response and continued investment in automation and skills as a coherent labour package for the sector.
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 seeks to improve access to healthy, affordable food while supporting British farmers, strengthening food security and reducing environmental impacts across the food system. The Food Strategy Advisory Board met on 12 March 2026, with discussion covering the interaction between the strategy and 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 ban on junk food TV advertising before 9 pm and paid online advertising at any time came into force on 5 January 2026. A consultation on updating the School Food Standards, the first in over a decade, closed on 12 June 2026, with the outcome expected later this year. 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 came into force 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. According to the Government's own estimates, the number of estates claiming APR expected to pay more IHT in 2026–27 has halved from 375 to 185 compared with the original Budget 2025 proposal, with around 85% of APR-claiming estates forecast to pay no more tax. To ease liquidity pressures, the option to pay IHT in 10 equal annual interest-free instalments has been extended 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.
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 a record £11.8 billion over this Parliament to sustainable farming and food production, alongside £60 million over three years in the Species Recovery Programme. The OEP's January 2026 progress report, its fourth statutory report, covering April 2024 to March 2025, assessed government progress against 43 environmental targets and commitments and found the majority off track: 21 largely off track, 16 partially on track and only 5 largely on track. Of the 13 legally binding targets set under the Environment Act 2021, specifically, only 3 were assessed as largely on track, with the biodiversity target particularly at risk. The Government committed in January 2026 to respond to the OEP's recommendations "in the summer"; that response has not been published by early July 2026. Defra has, however, already responded to a separate OEP output, its December 2025 review of the implementation of protected sites laws, on 2 March 2026. The response committed to strengthening planning, monitoring and resource allocation. Still, it declined to introduce new statutory targets, which the OEP publicly described as "disappointing" and unlikely to "deliver the urgent action needed." On delivery, Defra and Natural England confirmed in May 2026 that action has been undertaken on 77,638 hectares of habitat creation or restoration since January 2023. For further details, please refer to our briefing note.
30by30	The 30by30 initiative, a commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, sits alongside the EIP. On 18 March 2026, Defra published a spatial assessment showing that 32% of England meets, or has the potential to meet, the 30by30 criteria, though much of this land is not yet in the required condition. A 30by30 Delivery Plan setting out the pathway to 2030 will be published later this year. Whilst the ambition is clear, progress on the ground remains slow. The latest Wildlife and Countryside Link report found just 6% of UK land is effectively protected and managed for nature. England's figure has dropped slightly from 2.93% in 2024 to 2.83%, with similarly low numbers in Wales (2.14%), Northern Ireland (4%) and Scotland (12.63%). As a direct contribution to the delivery of 30by30, Defra published the Government Estate Nature Plan (GENP) on 26 June 2026, described as the first of its kind globally. 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 GEMP 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.
Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)	Under the Environment Act 2021, LNRS are being created for all 48 strategy areas in England and are intended to set priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where they would make the greatest contribution. The LNRS serves as an evidence base that may be a material consideration in planning decisions, making it important that landowners, farmers and managers engage with responsible authorities to ensure strategies reflect their needs. Identifying a site in the LNRS can also affect Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through the 1.15x strategic significance multiplier, meaning more BNG units could be generated, but developments may also require more units. The OEP reviewed LNRS in June 2025, making seven recommendations, including the need to clarify how strategies contribute to national targets, establish long-term governance and resourcing, and update the NPPF. The Government accepted these in its October 2025 response. As of 9 July 2026, 41 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 now progress plans through to 2028 and feed into the wider peatland funding package announced immediately after.

	On 29 June 2026, following London Climate Action Week, Defra announced a wider £47 million peatland funding package covering three new schemes: - 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 the installation of infrastructure such as tilting weirs, solar-powered pumps, and real-time monitoring at catchment scale to raise water tables in lowland peat soils. Applications are open until 18 September. - 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 are open until 21 August. - 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. Applications are open until 23 July. The three schemes sit alongside the extended Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme and are framed as delivery of 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, with proposals including endorsing 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. The consultation closed on 10 July 2025, and a summary of the 200 responses was published on 26 March 2026, showing broad support for improving integrity, alongside calls for internationally aligned standards, transparent reporting, and proportionate enforcement. A formal government response is still expected in summer 2026 and has not been published as of early July. At London Climate Action Week (22–28 June 2026), Energy Minister Katie White confirmed that the government's headline contribution would be the Coalition to Grow Carbon Markets, an international integrity-focused initiative, with the consultation response itself pushed to later in 2026. On standards development, BSI published new Nature Investment Standards on 24 March 2026 for the Supply of Biodiversity Benefits (Flex 702) and the Supply of Nutrient Benefits (Flex 704), with standards for nature-based carbon (Flex 703) and community engagement (Flex 705) still in development. These are intended to guard against greenwashing and improve consistency and investor confidence across emerging nature markets. Separately, the question of whether to include Woodland Carbon Units in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme remains unresolved. The Government confirmed in March 2026 that a decision will come "in due course", while peatland has been ruled out.
Planning	
Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	The Government has continued to refine BNG requirements, with a focus on reducing regulatory burden for smaller and more constrained sites. On 15 April 2026, Defra confirmed a package of changes including a new area-based exemption for sites of 0.2 hectares or below (with a carve-out where priority habitats are affected), alongside new exemptions for biodiversity-focused development, temporary planning permissions of up to five years, and development enhancing parks, playing fields and public gardens. A consultation on a potential further exemption for residential brownfield development ran from 15 April to 10 June 2026 and is now being analysed. 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) has been confirmed from 2 November 2026, with biodiversity gain statements laid in Parliament and full guidance published on 2 June 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 are negatively impacted by the development, rather than the entire site. Defra is also working to digitise the statutory biodiversity metric, moving it from a spreadsheet to a digital platform.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The draft revised NPPF, consulted on until March 2026, is the biggest overhaul of national planning policy since 2012 and is aimed squarely at unlocking housing delivery. It reintroduces a permanent presumption in favour of sustainable development, treats suitable brownfield and urban sites as acceptable in principle, and strongly pushes for higher-density schemes, particularly around railway stations, in defined Green Belt locations, and through upward extensions, infill, and redevelopment of low-density plots. Housing schemes meeting national energy efficiency standards would qualify for a streamlined planning route. Earlier drafts added a set of environmental and social requirements: mandatory swift bricks in new homes, explicit protections for chalk streams, and stronger weight for children's play space and community facilities in decision-making. The most recent consultation material also leans towards on-site delivery of affordable housing, with only limited flexibility for cash contributions on certain medium-sized sites. The draft is not yet policy. The final framework is expected in summer 2026; until then, decisions will continue to be made under the current NPPF.
Planning and Infrastructure Act	The Planning and Infrastructure Act, which received Royal Assent in December 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. The Act also simplified the Development Consent Order (DCO) regime by removing the statutory requirement for pre-application consultation, while maintaining expectations for proportionate engagement and environmental compliance.

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	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. Strategic planning is reinforced through new Spatial Development Strategies and closer integration of LNRS with planning. In addition, the Act establishes the Nature Restoration Fund and statutory Environmental Delivery Plans, offering developers clearer routes to meeting environmental obligations through strategic, levy-funded conservation measures. Together, these changes are intended to support faster delivery of infrastructure and housing while enabling more coordinated approaches to nature recovery.
Nature Restoration Fund (NRF)	With the Planning and Infrastructure Act now in force, the government has confirmed the creation of the NRF. The NRF will provide an alternative to individual site-level mitigation by allowing developers to make a single contribution towards strategic environmental improvements. Natural England will use these pooled funds to deliver large-scale conservation actions, such as river restoration, wetland creation and improvements to protected habitats and species.
Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs)	The Planning and Infrastructure Act introduced EDPs as a mechanism to set out strategic conservation measures in defined areas. Where an EDP is in place and meets the statutory Overall Improvement Test, developers can meet certain environmental obligations by contributing to the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) rather than undertaking bespoke, site-specific mitigation. The first EDPs are expected to launch in 2026, initially focusing on nutrient-neutrality catchments. While EDPs are generally intended to be voluntary, the Act allows mandatory plans in exceptional circumstances with the Secretary of State's approval. Further detail has emerged on delivery and governance. All EDPs must undergo a 28-working-day public consultation before adoption. The legislative framework has now been fleshed out. On 16 June 2026, the Government made the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 regulations, which brought into force Natural England's updated statutory advisory role for public authorities (section 57 of the Act) from 17 June 2026. The Environmental Delivery Plans (Appropriate Prioritisation) Regulations 2026 (SI 2026/655) were made the same day, taking effect on 9 July 2026, and require Natural England to apply the mitigation hierarchy when preparing draft EDPs, avoidance measures over mitigation, and mitigation over compensation. The draft Nature Restoration Levy Regulations 2026 have also been published, setting out how the levy itself will operate. On delivery, Natural England formally notified the Secretary of State on 19 December 2025 that it will prepare 23 EDPs in England: 16 for nutrient pollution catchments (including the Broads, Solent, Somerset Levels & Moors, Poole Harbour and the Rivers Avon, Wye, Camel, Eden and Lugg) and 7 for great crested newts. The Government has committed to a "test and learn" approach, with no further EDPs made beyond nutrient pollution until it has made a statement to Parliament setting out the initial learnings. Separately, on 10 June 2026, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government opened a consultation on new permitted development rights for conservation works delivered through EDPs, including small-scale structures for protected species and new pond creation by Natural England or its delivery partners, which would remove the need for individual planning applications for these interventions. The NRF and EDP framework underpin the government's ambition to unlock 1.5 million homes and 150 major infrastructure decisions this Parliament. While the reforms are intended to accelerate development and enable nature recovery at scale, scrutiny continues, with concerns raised about how EDPs interact with BNG and whether centralised, levy-based approaches could affect private investment in nature markets.
Property	
Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 reform	Following consultation, the Law Commission concluded that the existing model of security of tenure under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 should be retained, including the current arrangements for contracting out of renewal rights. This preserves the established framework governing business tenancies and avoids fundamental reform of the commercial leasing system. The Commission did, however, recommend a targeted change: raising the threshold for excluding short-term tenancies from the Act from six months to two years, which would reduce the number of short occupational arrangements qualifying for statutory renewal rights. A further consultation will be conducted on this potential change. At present, no amendments to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 are in force, and the statutory regime continues to operate unchanged. 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 (UORRs) in commercial leases in England and Wales, the most significant change to commercial leasing since the 1954 Act itself. The ban is not yet in force and requires secondary legislation to take effect, with the Government indicating 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 all caught where they contain an upwards-only element; stepped or fixed increases are unaffected because the rent is ascertainable at grant. Agricultural and mining leases, residential tenancies and genuine licences to occupy sit outside the ban. 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). Landlords must serve a written statement of terms before a tenancy begins, and possession can now only be recovered under a revised section 8, using a specified statutory ground, with extended notice periods. Rent increases on APTs are permitted only via a section 13 notice, once in any 12-month period and 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 now set a rent higher than the landlord's proposal. 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. Two further phases are still to come. Phase 2, from late 2026, will introduce the mandatory Private Rented Sector Database and establish a PRS Landlord Ombudsman, with mandatory membership expected from 2028. Phase 3, currently indicated for 2035 or 2037, will extend the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab's Law to the private rented sector. For more details, see our briefing note.
Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)	Councils in England gained new powers on 22 June 2026 to fine private landlords up to £7,000 for failing to address serious hazards in let properties, under the Renters' Rights Act. The fines cover 21 categories of serious hazard, with damp and mould, cold, fire risk, faulty electrics and structural defects leading the list, all of which are disproportionately common in older, traditionally built rural housing stock. The government estimates that around 10% of privately rented homes are likely to have one of these issues to the extent that it qualifies as "serious". The penalty sits alongside existing powers to force repairs, undertake emergency works and recover costs, and coincides with the first update to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) in 20 years, which recalibrates how hazards are assessed and is likely to bring more properties into scope.
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. Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards are integrated into the framework. The DHS supports wider reforms under the Renters' Rights Act 2025, for example, the inclusion of a specific damp and mould criterion reflects closer alignment with Awaab's Law. The standard will apply to the private rented sector 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, replacing SAP and RdSAP. A consultation on the HEM EPC wrapper ran from January to March 2026; a government response is expected later this year. Existing EPCs remain valid for 10 years and the current system will run alongside the new one until at least October 2029. On 9 March 2026, the Government confirmed that the launch has been delayed from October 2026 to the second half of 2027, following industry feedback that the original timeline was not achievable given the scale of assessor retraining and software testing required. A revised launch date is expected during the summer of 2026. 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 that by 2030, all privately rented domestic properties must achieve an EPC rating of at least band C. Previously, the proposal was a staggered set of deadlines requiring different groups of tenancies to reach EPC band C at different times. The single universal deadline for all rented property streamlines this. EPC "C" will be measured against the new methodology (see above). However, if a property is rated EPC C under the current rating system, the C rating will remain valid until the EPC's expiry date (even if this date is after 2030) if it does not meet the C rating under the new methodology. To bring properties up to the new standard, landlords will be required to invest up to £10,000 per property in improvements. This is lower than the originally proposed £15,000 cap, but much higher than the existing £3,500. Exemptions will continue to be available, and a new solid-wall exemption will be introduced, particularly relevant to rural homes. 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. 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.
Energy and infrastructure	
Energy	The UK Government is scheduled to commence Allocation Round 8 of the Contracts for Difference (CfD) auction in July 2026, in line with the transition to annual auctions. This follows legislative amendments on 20 March to improve the efficiency of the CfD scheme. Key modifications include: - The permanent exclusion of surrendered CfD capacity from subsequent rounds. - Extension of commissioning windows for floating offshore wind projects from 18 to 24 months. - Implementation of hybrid metering arrangements that permit generators to share balancing mechanism units while maintaining separate output records. - Establishment of the “Other Deepwater Offshore Wind” technology category to facilitate the development of innovative non-floating deep-water foundation designs. The UK Government announced an Energy Independence Bill as a centrepiece of its 2026 legislative agenda. This wide-ranging bill aims to scale up domestic clean energy by expanding nuclear and renewable generation and reforming energy markets to reduce reliance on volatile fossil fuels. Rural landowners and developers can expect stronger government support for onshore renewables. The Government released the final report of its review of Ofgem (Britain’s energy regulator), outlining reforms to modernise its remit and powers. Key measures include giving Ofgem stronger enforcement tools to tackle poor service and price gouging, clarified statutory duties that explicitly balance consumer protection, economic growth, and net-zero delivery, and elevating Ofgem’s role in whole-system planning of energy networks.
Grid and Infrastructure	The NESO (National Energy System Operator) anticipates surplus electricity on the GB system for summer 2026 and has introduced an updated Demand Flexibility Service. This service rewards consumers and businesses for increasing electricity use during periods of excess supply, supporting system resilience and efficiency. The UK Government and Ofgem announced progress on electricity connections reform to tackle the backlog of projects waiting for grid access. In an April 2026 open letter, they revealed a new staged process that has already filtered out over 220 GW of stalled or long-term projects from the connection queue – creating a more realistic pipeline for clean power deployment. The programme is introducing new governance and data transparency measures to ensure that distribution and transmission companies process active projects more quickly, enabling many renewable schemes to receive earlier connection offers. UK Government proposals to give ministers greater control over the approval of nationally significant infrastructure, introduce a “critical national importance” category, and restrict judicial review timelines. This is a material shift in the consenting regime, directly targeting one of the biggest barriers to delivery.
Carbon	The UK government has published a revised Carbon Budget Delivery Plan. This is the third version of the plan, following two earlier iterations prepared by the previous government that were successfully challenged in court. The plan confirms that the government has all the necessary climate policies in place to meet the UK’s fourth and fifth carbon budgets for the period 2023-2032. It also establishes that the government has enough additional policies in the pipeline to ensure that 100% of the emissions cuts required for the sixth carbon budget are achieved; previous drafts covered only 97%. The plan reduces expectations across several sectors, including peatland restoration and biofuel crop planting. Uptake of low-carbon practices by farmers and afforestation has also been less than projected. The adjustment of goals for major emissions-reduction policies raised questions about how the new plan will align with the UK’s sixth carbon budget. The baseline emissions, which serve as a reference point for future reductions, are lower in 2025 compared to the 2023 delivery plan. Some policies are now considered implemented and reflected in the baseline. Additionally, three new categories for emissions reductions have been introduced: societal changes, initial-stage policies, and marine removals. In accordance with Part 1, section 14 of the Climate Change Act 2008, the Government will next publish updated cross-economy decarbonisation policies and proposals in connection with the setting of the seventh carbon budget (CB7, 2038-2042).
Onshore wind	The Government is cautiously lifting the lid on onshore wind after a de facto moratorium since 2015. Following the Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy in July 2025, DESNZ ran a consultation on a new permitted development right (PDR) for small-scale, non-domestic onshore wind turbines, targeted at farms, businesses, and public-sector premises rather than households. The proposal would allow a single turbine with a tip height of up to 30 metres (200 m² swept area) to be installed within the curtilage of a non-domestic site without a full planning application, subject to siting conditions, buffer distances, certification standards, and prior approval for certain impacts. Existing domestic PDRs (currently capped at 11.1m for standalone turbines) are not proposed to change, and no new PDR is proposed for repowering or community energy projects at this stage. The consultation closed on 10 June 2026, and a response is awaited. By 2030, approximately 200 wind farm sites are scheduled for operational termination, presenting an opportunity to add 2 gigawatts of power through repowering without the need for new sites.

Solar

157 solar farm projects (total 4.9 GW) won 15-year CfD contracts in last year's Allocation Round 7 at £65/MWh. This clearing price was lower than the previous round and represented a 13% discount to the auction ceiling price. It indicates that projects require less public support to be viable investments.

The 800 MW Springwell Solar farm in Lincolnshire has been approved, making it the UK's largest power-producing solar farm. This project, along with 24 other nationally significant clean energy projects have been approved since July 2024, contributing towards the government's target of 150 decisions on major projects this parliament.

The Land Use Framework confirmed that policy will continue to safeguard our best and most versatile farmland from permanent land use change. A new Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) map for England has been published, replacing the pre-1988 Provisional ALC map by incorporating more recent classification methodologies and, for the first time, distinguishing between Grades 3a and 3b land nationally. Comprehensive sampling has not been undertaken, so the methodology is "predictive". Defra has said it will complete a technical review of the ALC system by 2028, so that new data and methodologies can be incorporated to classify agricultural land better.



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