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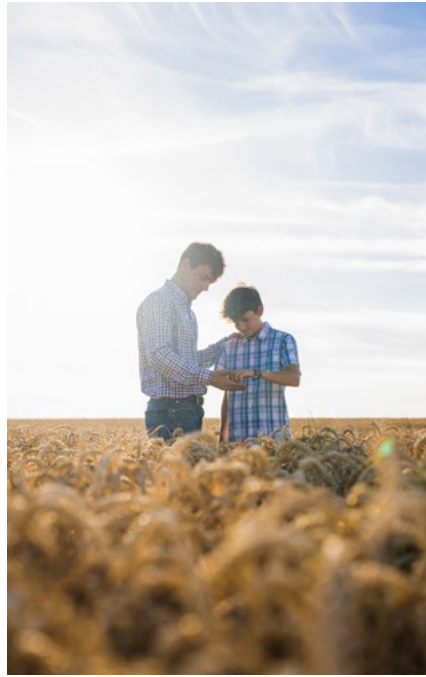


agrilore

Cereals special edition

Summer 2026

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AgriLore Summer 2026

Cereals special edition

Welcome to this Summer edition of AgriLore; particularly if you are reading our special printed edition for Cereals. It is my pleasure to guest edit this edition as I prepare for a few days at Diddly Squat Farm.

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East continues to impact the global economy, driving up fuel, energy and fertiliser costs for the farming community. However, at least we know that the need for secure supplies of domestically produced food is reinforced every time there is an international supply shock, and in spite of land use pressures, Britain can deliver at least some of that.

Cereals is an excellent showcase for British Agriculture, and (I hope) will be even more popular than usual with the next generation of farmers. We are pleased to be sponsoring the Young Farmer's tent again this year, and I am looking forward to seeing the show, and meeting plenty of people with a shared enthusiasm for big farming kit!

On 1 May 2026 Phase 1 of the Renters' Rights Act 2025 (**RRA 2025**) came into force bringing with it the biggest shake up of the private

housing sector in a generation. On page 6 Josie Edwards and Emily Jeffrey discuss the key changes brought by the RRA 2025.

Window 1 for the much-anticipated new SFI will open in June for certain groups, with window 2 following in September. It remains to be seen how the new offering will play out given the introduction of strict payment caps and reduction of core actions.

Artificial Intelligence (**AI**) continues to impact us all. On page 14 Moya Smith and David Thompson consider how farmers and rural businesses may mitigate the risks of using AI in agriculture.

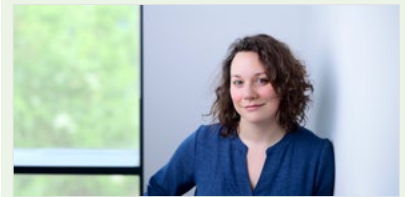
The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 introduced a new framework for discharging environmental obligations via Environmental Delivery Plans and the Nature Restoration Levy. Further detail on both is expected in the Nature Restoration Levy Regulations and from Natural England but in the meantime, Ben Sharples sets out the current changes on page 10.

On the home front we are thrilled to have opened our Cambridge office on 1 April.

We are also pleased to welcome Ed Willis, Legal Director to our Private Property and Landed Estates team and Sarah Pateman, Managing Associate to the Agriculture team.

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We enjoyed the Suffolk Show and Devon County Show last month and we will also be attending the Three Counties Show, Groundswell and the Royal Welsh Show. We hope to see you there.



New Cambridge office:

Meet our team of specialists



Michelmores opens a new Cambridge office

Our new Cambridge office opened on Wednesday 1 April, bringing together specialists in Corporate, Transactional Real Estate and Residential Property, and creating a strong platform for growth across the East of England and London.

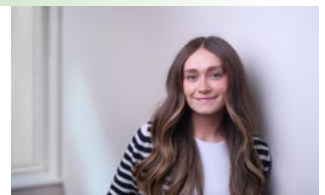
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Residential tenancies:

Round-up of changes under the RRA 2025

On 1 May 2026 many of the substantive provisions in the Renters' Rights Act 2025 (**RRA 2025**) came into force, bringing with it the biggest shake-up of the private rented sector in a long time. This means the rights of both tenants and landlords have shifted and the way in which rural landlords can provide accommodation to employees has changed. This article provides a round-up of 9 key issues.

1. Conversion to APTs

On 1 May 2026 existing fixed term Assured Shorthold Tenancies (**ASTs**) and periodic or statutory periodic ASTs (with a rent day of 1 May 2026) converted to Assured Periodic Tenancies (**APT**s). However, periodic or statutory periodic tenancies with a rent day not on 1 May 2026 convert on the day after the current rent period (which 1 May fell within) expires. This includes current monthly periodic tenancies as well as quarterly, half-yearly and yearly tenancies. This means that some ASTs may not have yet converted to APTs. For example, an AST which had a quarterly rent period running from 1 April, will convert on 2 July 2026.

2. Period of tenancy

Since 1 May 2026 the rent period and the period of the tenancy must be the same. Under the Housing Act 1988 (**HA 1988**), amended by the RRA 2025, the rent periods (and therefore the period of the tenancy) can only be a month, or a period of 28 days or less if desired. If an existing AST converts to an APT and the rent periods are not compliant, the rent period will be converted to monthly.

3. Rent

Landlords are now prohibited from demanding payment of rent before the rent period for which it is due. All rent periods must be the same length, and the rent should be due on the same day during each period. The exception to this is the first rent period which can be a different length, and due on a different day. The first rent period will be the period from the start of the tenancy up until the point at which the second (and regular) rent period will start.

4. Rent review

Since 1 May 2026, the statutory rent review procedure set out in the amended section 13 HA 1988 will be the only mechanism available for increasing rent under assured tenancies. It is not possible to contract out of this.

5. Information sheet and written statements

Landlords of partly or wholly written existing (i.e. those in existence before 1 May 2026) ASTs or assured tenancies should have served the information sheet by 31 May to their tenants.

Landlords of verbal existing ASTs or assured tenancies should have given tenants a written statement of terms by 31 May 2026.

For new assured tenancies granted after 1 May 2026 landlords must provide the contents of the written statement (along with notice of any advance notice grounds) to their tenants prior to signing a tenancy agreement.

6. Section 21 notices

Section 21 notices served before 1 May 2026 remain valid until the earlier of **a)** 6 months beginning with the date of the notice or **b)** 31 July 2026 (the **applicable period**). The tenancy will not become an APT until the section 21 notice is no longer valid. A notice will cease to be valid at the end of the applicable period or until possession proceedings are concluded if proceedings were started by the end of the applicable period (i.e. by 31 July 2026 at the latest). Since a tenancy remains an AST until it converts, it is only once it converts that the changes made by Part 1 Chapter 1 RRA 2025 apply.

7. Possession

Whilst the number of possession grounds has widened under the RRA 2025, there are stricter conditions, notice periods have increased and section 21 notices have been abolished. Landlords wishing to regain possession need to think carefully how to do this under the revised grounds.

To rely on ground 4A (properties rented to students for occupation by new students) landlords **must** have given advance warning before the tenancy is entered into that they seek to rely on this ground. For some other grounds "the advance notice grounds" prior notice is important to avoid a fine of £7,000.

8. Exemptions

A number of tenancies will not be caught by the RRA 2025, since it only affects assured tenancies under the HA 1988. Rural landlords should be aware of some exemptions to

the HA 1988 set out in Schedule 1 which bring some tenancies outside the RRA 2025 such as tenancies of agricultural land exceeding two acres (where let with the dwelling house), agricultural holdings and FBTs, tenancies with high, low or minimal rent and certain fixed term tenancies.

9. Rural workers

Service occupancies will remain a useful mechanism to provide accommodation for rural workers, such as gamekeepers and housekeepers. They sit outside the RRA 2025 because they create a licence, not a tenancy. However, to be a service occupancy there must be a genuine need for the employee to live in a dwelling owned by the employer for the better performance of their duties. Service occupancies will never be suitable for agricultural workers because of the risk of creating an assured agricultural occupancy.

Takeaway

The changes brought by the RRA 2025 have been split into 3 phases. The issues in this article are covered by Phase 1. Phase 2 will introduce to the Private Rented Sector (**PRS**) the PRS Database and Landlord Ombudsman and Phase 3 will apply the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab's Law to the PRS. We will keep alert for the developments of Phases 2 and 3, which are expected to begin later this year and in 2035 or 2037 respectively. For the time being, landlords should focus their efforts on the new assured periodic tenancy regime with its new rules and regulations giving tenants greater rights and more security.

For further information on many of these issues please see our RRA series [here](#):

Part One

Renters' Rights Act 2025: navigating accommodation for rural workers – Michelmores.

Part Two

Renters' Rights Act 2025: which tenancies are not caught?

Part Three

Renters' Rights Act 2025: practicalities for landlords of dealing with new and existing tenancies.

Part Four

Renters' Rights Act 2025: a focus on rent review and subtenancies.

Part Five

Renters' Rights Act 2025: a focus on possession grounds.

Family farms:

Untangling ownership and occupation



When it comes to owning or occupying land for farming, there are often multiple legal structures at play. The legal rules that apply to each structure may not be entirely consistent with one another and may even conflict.

It might also be difficult to distinguish between the responsibilities involved in each role that is held, which could lead to tension within the family and the potential for disputes. The overlap between family relations on one hand and legal duties and responsibilities on the other may lead to emotion and anger, especially where one family member is seeking to rightfully protect their own rights, at the purported expense of others.

For example, one farming family may have the following structures:

- **Limited company:** Farming often operates through a limited company, with members of the family holding varying levels of shareholdings.
- **Partnership:** Often, for tax purposes, it is beneficial for a partnership to be formed. Where land is partnership property, the land is held on trust for the partnership and individual partners are beneficial owners. Sometimes this can cause issues on death because partners cannot make specific gifts of partnership property in their wills - they hold an interest in the capital of the partnership and not an interest in the underlying asset itself.

- **Trust:** A trust may be present where a family member has passed away. The surviving members of the family may find themselves appointed as trustee, with various duties and obligations owed to their fellow trustees and the beneficiaries under the trust.
- **Personal ownership of land:** Land could be jointly owned by family members registered as proprietors at the Land Registry. The position is complicated where there are other structures at play because one owner may owe fiduciary duties (such as under the partnership) to another which may make it difficult to pursue some legal options, like an order for sale of that land at court.

Family fallout

It is not uncommon for disputes to arise when these separate legal entities become intertwined. This is because the family members involved in running each entity and farming the land each entity controls are required to wear different hats - for example, directors of a company owe fiduciary duties to the company, which might conflict with a trustees' duties to beneficiaries of a trust.

If there is no partnership agreement, it can be unclear if land is a partnership asset or held outside it, and therefore which entity owns it. Where it becomes unclear whether assets are personal, partnership property, or company or trust assets, this can lead to deadlock and ultimately a stagnation of production. It can be necessary to seek legal advice to break this

deadlock and prevent a dispute from worsening.

Where one or more family members pass away, someone outside of the family could inherit their share in either the entity or the land (or both). This has the potential to disrupt the running of the family's affairs and can lead to disputes. This might also happen where someone does not put appropriate asset protection measures in place when marrying, and a divorce may affect the ownership and control of assets.

In the event of a dispute, family mediation can be a very effective tool, ensuring everyone continues to communicate concerns with one another and an agreement reached in some sort, whether this by way of a buy out of a particular family member, complete dissolution and winding up of the company and partitioning of land.

Conclusion

Seeking legal advice before issues arise can prevent costly consequences further down the line. To reduce the risk of multi-structure family farms from becoming embroiled in disputes, accurate documentation is crucial: partnership agreements, shareholder agreements, trust deeds and letters of wishes should be written, with clearly defined asset ownership and careful succession planning.

Communication across the family is always key, and together with effective documentation can ultimately protect the future of the family farm.



Environmental Delivery Plans and the Nature Restoration Levy:

What's new?

What's new?

Key facts:

The Nature Restoration Levy (**NRL**) is a levy payable by developers operating within the boundaries of an Environmental Delivery Plan (**EDP**).

EDPs may be voluntary or mandatory. They are intended to streamline developers' route to planning permission, thereby accelerating timescales to build-out.

An EDP constitutes a suite of conservation measures designed by Natural England (**NE**) targeting environmental recovery at scale. The measures will be funded by the NRL (and therefore, by developers), with the first EDPs due to target nutrient pollution in sensitive catchment areas.

Part 3 of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 (**PIA 2025**) introduced the framework for EDPs and the NRL, with secondary legislation anticipated to flesh out the details later this year.

NRL and nutrient pollution

We have previously written about the legislative status quo for developers operating in sensitive catchment areas ([click here](#)) – namely the requirement for developments to be 'nutrient neutral' under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (**Habitats Regulations 2017**) (the **NN Route**).

Under the new regime, where development is caught by an EDP boundary, (assuming that the EDP in question is voluntary) developers will now have a choice. Either, a developer may offset their development via the traditional NN Route, or they may opt to pay the NRL to Natural England.

Should developers opt to pay the NRL, legislative obligations under the NN Route will be disapplied (Schedule 3, Part III, PIA 2025). Developers will therefore have to weigh up the cost and time benefits of each regime once the detail of the secondary legislation is known.

Section 73 PIA 2025 makes it clear that the levy must not make 'development economically unviable.' What this means is difficult to assess as there is no detail at this stage as to the likely amount of the NRL or the basis of charging e.g. a per dwelling cost or some other metric. It remains to be seen how pricing might impact the private nutrient credit market.

What does seem likely is that the costs of the NN Route will adjust to track the NRL charging as the presence of a marketplace competitor has the usual effect. If NE apply a standard rate for the NRL then bespoke solutions from individual landowners under the NN Route may be able to undercut the NRL approach. However, it will be for developers to determine which route to take on a case-by-case basis, and the simplicity of a direct payment may well be attractive.

Of interest to developers will be the temporal and spatial benefits afforded to them under the new regime. Rather than engage in negotiations with landowners under the NN Route, developers can simply pay the levy and move forward in the planning process.

Mitigation, unlike under the NN Route, need not be in place prior to planning permission being obtained. The levy will fund conservation measures to address the negative effects of development during the 10-year lifespan of an EDP.

Furthermore, while conservation measures will be proximate to development (as per the NN Route), there is scope for less proximate measures where a greater contribution to the environmental feature in question can be achieved. These are known as 'network measures' (section 63(3) PIA 2025).

A new statutory test: the Overall Improvement Test

The Secretary of State may make an EDP only where it considers the EDP passes the overall improvement test (Section 65(3)) (**OIT**). To pass the OIT, the suite of conservation measures must materially outweigh the negative effect (defined as the 'maximum amount of development to which an EDP may apply') of development on the conservation status of each identified environmental feature. Environmental features will either be 'protected species', or 'protected features of a protected site' (such as habitat at a European Site or SSSI, for example).

Satisfaction of the OIT is not a one-stop shop. Rather, EDPs are subject to continued assessment and reporting at both the mid and end point of an EDP's lifespan.

Monitoring the effectiveness of conservation measures is therefore required (section 82(1) PIA).

The new regime also makes a nod to the additionality principle. EDPs must include an overview of 'other measures' being taken by NE and public authorities targeting similar environmental goals in that area. This will ensure conservation measures do not fund measures that are already being funded – i.e. avoiding 'double counting'.

How will NE realise conservation measures?

While not set out in the legislation, it is anticipated this will be through land use agreements with landowners and other stakeholders such as environmental NGOs.

Helpfully, public authorities are under a regulatory duty to co-operate with NE under PIA 2025; this might be through the provision of information to NE, imposition of a condition of development, or assistance with the implementation of conservation measures.

What's to come?

Further detail on the inner workings of the NRL will be set out in the Nature Restoration Levy Regulations and we anticipate further guidance from NE on key issues.

Conditional exemption:

From Inheritance Tax



For many rural estates, Inheritance Tax (IHT) has long been mitigated through Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and Business Property Relief (BPR). However, following the recent changes to APR and BPR, conditional exemption is receiving renewed attention as an alternative planning tool.

What is conditional exemption?

Conditional exemption is a relief from IHT (and in some cases Capital Gains Tax) available for assets that are considered part of the nation's heritage. It applies where property is transferred on death or during a lifetime and the statutory conditions are met.

As its name suggests, the relief is conditional: provided the conditions continue to be satisfied, no IHT is payable on the value of the asset. If those conditions cease to be met - most commonly on sale or breach of undertakings - the deferred tax becomes payable.

In practice, it is better understood as a deferral mechanism, although the conditional exemption can apply indefinitely, provided the undertakings continue to be fulfilled.

What assets can qualify?

Eligibility is tightly defined and depends on the asset being of "outstanding" or "pre-eminent" national importance. Broad categories include:

- Land of outstanding scenic, historic or scientific interest.
- Buildings of outstanding historic or architectural interest.
- Amenity land essential for the protection and character of those buildings.
- Works of art or collections of national importance.

HMRC will designate qualifying assets, typically relying on advice from bodies such as Natural England or Historic England.

The "undertakings"

The price of the relief is a binding agreement with HMRC, commonly referred to as the "undertakings." These will usually require the owner to:

- Preserve and maintain the property.
- Keep it in the UK.
- Provide a degree of public access.

Practical considerations

Conditional exemption can be extremely valuable, offering 100% relief from IHT on valuable land or buildings that might otherwise face a significant tax charge. However, the relief comes with real constraints. Its effectiveness depends on a long-term commitment to retain the asset and comply with the undertakings, which can restrict future use. There is always the risk of a deferred IHT charge on disposal or breach.

For these reasons, advisers have historically regarded conditional exemption as a "relief of last resort", to be considered where APR or BPR are unavailable or insufficient.

Conclusion

For rural landowners with heritage assets, conditional exemption can play an important role in succession planning. It allows families to retain property of national importance without an immediate IHT burden, but only at the cost of long-term stewardship commitments.

As the tax landscape evolves, particularly in relation to APR and BPR, careful consideration of conditional exemption - alongside wider estate objectives - will be increasingly important.



Technology:

Legal risks of using AI in agriculture

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform the farming industry, from improving crop yields, mitigating labour shortages and enabling farmers to operate in a more sustainable manner. Understandably, businesses in this industry are looking to expand their use of the technology.

We regularly advise our clients regarding how to deploy AI safely and how to manage the associated legal risks.

In our [AgriLore Summer 2025 Edition](#), we reported on how technology is helping to deliver the farming of the future, and in this article, we have taken a closer look at specific use cases for AI in farming, and the associated legal challenges to be aware of.

Managing farm animal welfare

The innovation:

Early detection of disease is crucial in maintaining the welfare of farm animals and reducing the likelihood of illness spreading through a herd. Machine learning algorithms can be used to monitor continually and analyse the footage obtained from sensors and live video feeds, to more accurately identify subtle changes in animal behaviour, posture and activity levels that might indicate illness or distress. For example, farmers can pre-define scenarios that they want the AI to alert them to, such as whether cows are lying down enough and when food or water is running low. This allows for prompt intervention.

The legal challenges:

- **Confidentiality:** AI tools use content provided by users to train their models, meaning information that is input can later be included in output for another user. This raises particular concerns if a farmer's confidential information is input, as this could result in commercially sensitive information being unintentionally shared. For example, if a farming business has developed a tool or machine that gives an advantage over competitors, it will not want images of that technology being processed and shared with other users of the AI tool.
- **Cyber security:** The processing of increased amounts of data risks cyber criminals targeting the food and agriculture sector. Farmers will need to invest in the infrastructure required to protect against such threats.

Pest and weed control

The innovation:

AI can be used to analyse soil and crop data in order to identify weeds amongst crops with high precision, allowing for targeted application of fertilisers and pesticides through robotics and lasers (instead of blanket applications). This targeted approach reduces costs and environmental impact, and promotes healthier crop growth by preventing over-application, which is harmful to plant and soil health.

The legal challenges:

- **Liability:** Some AI systems are vulnerable to generating “hallucinations” (misleading or wrong results). In the case of pest and weed control, such oversights could result in the AI tool making the wrong decision regarding the administration of pesticides, leading to the unnecessary destruction of good crops. A further risk is that the AI model could recommend the application of a pesticide at a concentration that violates agricultural laws and regulations. In these instances, the farmer will likely want to seek compensation against the AI provider. As reported in our article “[Navigating the legal risks as a business using Artificial Intelligence](#)”, the terms and conditions offered by the providers of AI tools often significantly limit their own liability and place the risk on

users of the platform. Businesses therefore need to consider and negotiate carefully the contractual terms offered by AI service providers.

- **Job losses:** Farmers may find that the use of AI and robotics reduces the need for manual labour, resulting in considerations regarding how to manage their existing workforce.

Automated picking

The innovation:

The innovative business [Dogtooth](#) uses robots equipped with a variety of sensors, including cameras and depth sensors, to allow the robots to see, understand, and interact with soft fruit in real time. This enables the efficient harvesting and grading of picked berries.

The legal challenges:

- **Data privacy issues:** Whilst most of the data captured through the sensors of such robots will not capture humans, the personal data of individuals such as employees working on the farms may be captured (particularly through any video feeds) and processed. Businesses using these farming techniques will therefore need to ensure that they are complying with obligations pursuant to data protection legislation in doing so.

Weather predictions

The rise in unpredictable weather as a consequence of global warming means that farmers are finding it increasingly challenging to manage their land. AI can analyse weather data to provide accurate weather predictions, enabling farmers to schedule seed planting and watering cycles.

The legal challenges:

- **Bias:** AI tools are a product of the data used to train their algorithms. This means that the tool can have biases based on the dataset that is used. For example, recommendations as to watering cycles may be based upon data from a certain geography, which may not be applicable to the particular use case. AI tools may also be trained on data that disproportionately reflects large-scale farming operations, leading to recommendations that are not beneficial to smaller farms (risking increased costs for smaller farmers in doing so).

Key takeaway

The ground-breaking efficiencies that AI can create in this important industry must be carefully balanced with the potential challenges. Well-advised farming businesses will implement measures to mitigate such risks, before deploying this technology.

Grid connection:

Delays and gas-electricity coupling



The UK energy sector is in the midst of a transition from an overwhelming dependence on gas towards increasing electrification, driven by renewable and nuclear generation. Two current issues affecting this transition are grid connection reform and gas-electricity coupling. Failure to address these challenges risks undermining the UK's net zero ambitions.

1. Delayed grid connections

The issue: Renewable energy projects seeking grid connections in 2026 and 2027 are experiencing increasing delays, reflecting persistent pressure across the UK electricity network. Transmission operators have deferred the connection dates for 210 projects, representing approximately 62% of schemes previously categorised as "protected" under recent reform measures. The scale of these deferrals is contributing to ongoing congestion on the network. In response, Ofgem has called for improved transparency and clearer delivery timetables from the National Energy System Operator (NESO). While recent reforms were intended to modernise the grid connection process and prioritise "ready to build" projects, underlying constraints remain, including delays in planning approvals and ongoing supply chain challenges.

The impact: For developers, the consequences are significant. Continued uncertainty around connection dates has the potential to dampen investor appetite at a critical phase of the UK's energy transition. Changes to grid timelines often require reassessment of delivery strategies, with resulting implications for funding structures, investor expectations and contractual commitments. This reinforces the importance of careful risk allocation within project documentation. Longstop dates, delay provisions, termination rights and force majeure clauses are all receiving increased scrutiny. Early engagement with network operators, alongside detailed grid due diligence, will be essential

tools for managing exposure and mitigating risk.

2. Reducing the influence of gas on electricity prices

The issue: The UK wholesale electricity market currently operates on a marginal pricing basis, whereby the most expensive form of generation required to meet demand - typically gas-fired power - sets the market price. As a result, volatility in international gas markets can have a direct and disproportionate effect on electricity prices, even as a growing share of UK electricity is generated from lower-cost renewable and nuclear sources.

On 21 April 2026, the UK Government announced a package of measures aimed at weakening the link between volatile gas prices and electricity costs. The announcement followed renewed pressure on consumer energy bills arising from the conflict in the Middle East.

The impact: The Government proposals centre on two principal policy interventions:

- **Voluntary long-term fixed-price contracts:** The Government has proposed the introduction of Wholesale Contracts for Difference (WCfDs) for existing low-carbon generators that are not currently benefiting from fixed pricing arrangements. These contracts are intended to bring a significant proportion of renewable generation onto more stable pricing structures, helping to provide revenue certainty for generators while insulating consumers from gas-driven price spikes.
- **Increasing the rate of the Electricity Generator Levy (EGL):** EGL is a windfall tax applied to exceptional revenues earned by electricity generators. From 1 July 2026, the rate will increase from 45% to 55%. The levy captures excess profits arising during periods of elevated gas prices, with additional revenues intended to support

consumers facing higher energy costs. The EGL is currently scheduled to apply until 31 March 2028, although an extension remains possible.

While these measures fall short of a fundamental restructuring of the electricity market, they represent a targeted step towards reducing the influence of gas on electricity pricing. Over time, diminishing the proportion of electricity prices driven by gas should enhance price stability and strengthen energy security for UK consumers.

Conclusion

Failure to address delays in grid reform risks slowing the delivery of critical energy infrastructure. At the same time, the historic coupling of gas and electricity pricing continues to create cost pressures that hinder the sector's shift towards electrification. Reforming grid bottlenecks and reducing the exposure of electricity prices to gas volatility are therefore central policy challenges. If successfully addressed, these reforms should help pave the way for a more resilient, sustainable and affordable UK energy system.

Employment Rights Act 2025:

What did April bring?



The Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA 2025) is overhauling employment law in England, Wales and Scotland and its impact upon all employers, including farming and rural businesses, cannot be underestimated. The implementation is being phased across 2026 and 2027, but April 2026 brought some key changes to the employment landscape, and these are set out below.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

The lower earnings threshold for SSP has now been abolished meaning that all employees (even those on zero hours contracts – which may benefit many seasonal farm workers) are eligible for SSP. Furthermore, SSP is now paid from the first day of sickness absence. The rate of SSP will be 80% of an employee's earnings or the current flat rate, whichever is lower.

Whistleblowing and sexual harassment

Sexual harassment has been brought within the list of wrongdoings that can form the subject matter of a whistleblowing disclosure. Workers who "blow the whistle" on sexual harassment can benefit from whistleblowing protections against detriment and unfair dismissal.

Voluntary action plans

Employers with 250+ employees now have the option to produce and publish a voluntary action plan alongside their gender pay gap data. From Spring 2027 the provision of this information will become mandatory and so employers would be well advised to start preparing action plans now. In these documents employers must show the steps they are taking both to reduce their organisation's gender pay gap and support employees experiencing menopause.

Trade union key changes:

1. Collective redundancy awards:

For all dismissals on or after 6 April 2026 the maximum protective award for failing to collectively consult has been doubled to 180 days' pay.

2. A simplified recognition

process: The likely majority support test has been removed, and unions only need show the Central Arbitration Committee that they have 10% membership of the proposed bargaining unit for an application to be accepted.

3. Sweetheart unions:

Employers can no longer block independent unions' voluntary recognition requests by recognising a different, non-independent union.

It is likely that employers will see an increase in independent unions bringing, and succeeding in, recognition claims, potentially increasing unionisation in previously non-unionised workplaces.

Family-related employment rights

In April several changes to family-related employment rights came into force. These include the removal of the requirement to have 26 weeks' service for paternity leave, the entitlement to unpaid parental leave from day one, the removal of the restriction on taking paternity leave after shared parental leave, and the introduction of a new right to Bereaved Partner's Paternity leave.

Fair Work Agency (FWA)

The FWA was established on 7 April 2026. The FWA will ensure legal compliance with pay (including national minimum wage, holiday pay and SSP), the regulation of employment agencies, licensing standards and enforcing unpaid employment tribunal awards.

What should employers do?

As a result of these changes there are some steps that farming and rural business employers should take to protect themselves, remain compliant and prepare to tackle further changes in 2027. Employers should ensure that:

- Policies are up to date such as for SSP and whistleblowing. This is important where seasonal labour or historic arrangements may be in place and now outdated.
- HR systems accurately calculate holiday and the new SSP payments. Systems must also keep organised and accurate records.
- Changes are communicated to employees and where necessary employment contracts are reviewed and updated.
- Internal processes for identifying when collective consultation is triggered are robust.
- HR and management teams are comprehensively trained and aware of the new protections for employees.

Above all, if employers are unsure of what they must do to remain compliant, they should seek legal advice without delay.



Landed Estates and Rural Businesses:

Our offering

Our dedicated Landed Estates team looks after a number of significant landed estates across England and Wales. We work collaboratively and effectively with other professional advisers on the estate to give coordinated and comprehensive advice.

The Landed Estates team

Our Team comprises lawyers and other qualified professionals who have wide ranging interests and expertise in advising rural clients. These include Chartered Surveyors in the Rural Division of the RICS, a Chartered Accountant, and a KC, all of whom understand the issues and demands affecting rural landownership. We appreciate that our clients want to value the relationships they have with their

advisors, and as such we encourage our clients to select a lead partner they feel best fits with their values and objectives. We do not have a landed estates 'person', we are landed estates people.

How we advise

A lead partner is the main point of contact with responsibility for service delivery, cost control, full knowledge of the estate, the client and their strategic objectives and

goals. Working closely with the other professionals the advice takes into account practical aspects or local sensitivities, in a joined-up approach.

Whether our clients are wealth generators or entrepreneurs, landowners or wealth managers, it's an arena where the best advice is as commercial as it is practical, and it is very rarely just legal.

Ask any of our team for further information or if you would like to meet up to discuss how we might help.



Natural Capital:

Overview

Our market leading Natural Capital team are at the forefront of advising on all elements of natural capital. We have built a wealth of knowledge and experience in recent years through our work with Land Managers, Developers, Investors & Funders, and Local & Central Government.

Natural Capital team

Ben Sharples, a dual qualified solicitor and Chartered rural Surveyor and Valuer, leads our team of professional advisers covering areas such as environmental law, regulation, commercial law, corporate law, real estate, planning law and tax.

How we advise

We partner with our clients to help them to navigate their way through BNG, Nutrient Neutrality, landscape recovery and more. We work collaboratively across our legal teams within the firm and with other professionals involved in these often groundbreaking projects. We appreciate that this is a novel and complex area, which carries both risks and opportunities. We are well placed to assist our clients as they innovate and work to support a more sustainable economy.

Ask any of our team for further information or if you would like to meet up to discuss how we might help.

We are proud to have a large team of leading lawyers with experience in the agriculture sector. Your key contacts are:

Agriculture

Natural Capital

Private Wealth

Private Property & Landed Estates

Employment

Transactional Real Estate

Property Litigation

Strategic Land

Agriculture & Landscape Recovery Schemes

Corporate, Investors & Funders

Energy

Family

Agri Tech

Planning & Environmental

Sustainable Economy

Food & Drink

Contentious Planning, Environment & Administrative Law

Disputed Wills & Estates

Commercial

Banking, Restructuring & Insolvency

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