NEWS WITH YOU IN MIND

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SUMMER 2026

Welcome to our summer newsletter

As we head into summer, the rural and agricultural sectors continue to experience significant change. We have once again had the pleasure of working on a wide range of projects, including farm sales, diversification schemes, property renovations, planning applications, party wall matters, valuations, boundary disputes, renewable energy projects, and commercial property instructions, to name just a few.

Alongside this, the farming industry is adapting to a new landscape shaped by evolving support schemes, environmental priorities, and market pressures. The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and the expanding range of farming grants continue to present opportunities, and understanding how best to navigate these options is now more important than ever.

This edition of our newsletter is packed with articles we hope you will find useful. You will find practical tips, market updates, and essential advice from our experts, all aimed at helping you make informed decisions in an industry that is changing.

As always, we produce our printed newsletter twice yearly, but we also provide regular updates throughout the year via the news section of our website. Our articles are circulated to our marketing database (please email marketing@robinsonandhall.co.uk to be added), and we share further insights across our social media platforms. Our ‘Robinson & Hall Experts Talk’ podcast series continues to grow, with over 28 episodes now available to listen to via our website or on our YouTube channel.

If you would like further information on any of the topics covered, or advice on any land or property related matters, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of my colleagues.

Andrew Capel

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Boost farm income with the Sustainable Farming Incentive and grant support

With farming incomes under more pressure than ever with poor commodity prices and ever-increasing input prices, many farmers are looking to the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) to provide support for the industry. Whilst direct support on diesel, inputs, and prices has not been announced, Defra did announce information earlier this year on environmental schemes: Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) 2026 and Capital Grants.

Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026

There will be two windows for applications later this year. The first will open in **June 2026** for those defined as small holdings – 3 to 50 hectares and those without existing Environmental Land Management (ELM) agreements. The second window for applications will open in **September 2026**, which will be open to all farmers who had a SBI number on 1st January 2026.

It is anticipated that the first window will be open for around two months, but this could be reduced if there are a large number of applications.

For those farmers already in a Countryside Stewardship (CS) or SFI scheme, the application window will open in September. However, especially with CS agreements, it is unlikely to be possible to apply for SFI 2026 actions on land which is already in a CS option. Therefore, those claimants may need to wait until 1st January 2027 to apply. The Rural Payments Agency has confirmed that it is aware of this issue and is looking at options to assist those claimants.

Under both application windows, payments will be capped at £100,000 per year and there may only be one agreement per registered business. Similar to the basis for Capital Grant applications last year, applications will be handled on a first come, first served basis, and the application window will close once the budget for the window is met. It is expected that the budget for each window will be released later in the year.

There will be 71 actions offered, most of which are similar to those in the previous SFI offer. The management actions such as CSAM1: Produce a Soil Management Plan will be removed.

Enhanced overwinter stubble is added to the list of actions where the area is capped. For these options, as listed below, the total combined area cannot be more than 25% of the agricultural area. Those actions subject to the 25% cap are:

- CIPM2: Flower-rich grass margins, blocks, or in-field strips
- CAHL1: Pollen and nectar flower mix
- CAHL2: Winter bird food on arable and horticultural land
- CAHL3: Grassy field corners or blocks
- CIGL1: Take improved grassland field corners or blocks out of management
- CIGL2: Winter bird food on improved grassland
- WBD3: In-field grass strips
- AHW7: Enhanced overwinter stubble
- AHW9: Unharvested cereal headland
- AHW11: Cultivated areas for arable plants

Reductions are confirmed on the payment rates for several actions:

- Herbal leys - from £383/ha to £224/ha
- Winter bird food - from £853/ha to £648/ha
- Legume fallow - from £593/ha to £532/ha

There is limited detail available on the actions removed from the scheme offer, but those remaining are focused on food production and environmental targets.

Rotational actions will be capped at the value and area of Year 1, i.e. the area/value of the rotational action cannot increase in later years above the Year 1 figure.

Capital Grant Scheme

Defra has announced there will be a further round of the Capital Grant Scheme, opening around July, with a budget of £225 million.

In the same way as last year's offer, the items will be organised into the following groups:

- Boundaries, trees, and orchards
- Water quality
- Air quality
- Natural flood management
- Assessments
- Improvements

Funding limits will continue to apply to 4 of the 6 groups in the offer:

- £25,000 for the water quality, air quality, and natural flood management groups
- £35,000 for the boundaries, trees, and orchards group.

Options can be chosen from any of the groups, up to any funding limits.

As per last year, we expect there to be strong demand and the budget to be used up quickly.

Getting advice and approval from Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers (CFSO) is proving to be difficult and therefore there may be a benefit in focusing on options where CFSO consent is not required prior to applying.

Overall, with all the pressures on government spending, it is difficult to predict how long payments under these schemes will remain available. Therefore, it is important to have a good plan of what actions can be applied for, prior to an application window opening, so an application can be submitted early before the budget runs out.

For more information, please contact me.

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Navigating the Renters' Rights Act: support, protection, and guidance for landlords

With effect from **1st May 2026**, the Renters' Rights Act 2025 introduced some of the most significant changes to the private rented sector in a generation. It is essential that landlords have a clear understanding of the new legislation, how it will impact their investment properties, and the updated procedures required to ensure compliance is maintained.

Whilst the changes may initially appear challenging, with the right support and guidance from industry specialists, it also presents an opportunity to improve asset performance.

Since the proposed changes were first announced, we have been monitoring developments closely to ensure we are fully prepared.

Periodic tenancies

The move from Assured Shorthold Tenancies (fixed term agreements) to Assured Periodic Tenancies (rolling monthly agreements) has understandably prompted concerns, particularly relating to the potential for increased tenant turnover.

To limit this risk, we carry out a thorough tenant registration process from the outset. This allows us to obtain a clear understanding of each tenant's long-term intentions.

While we have historically issued 12-month fixed-term agreements, our average tenancy length across our managed portfolio exceeds 36 months. This is due to a high proportion of our tenants choosing to renew at the end of the initial term. Therefore, we anticipate that the transition to Assured Periodic Tenancies will have minimum impact on our managed portfolio.

Possession grounds

With revised grounds for possession and the abolishment of Section 21 Notices, landlords are understandably keen to understand the procedure should possession be required.

As part of our managed service, all tenancy-related documentation is recorded to ensure that any necessary paperwork is readily available. When applying for possession, it is essential to demonstrate that compliance has been followed.

We also work closely with local solicitors to ensure not only that we adhere to the latest legal framework but that our clients have access to specialist legal support should possession need to be obtained under specific grounds.

For additional peace of mind, from the start of each tenancy, Robinson & Hall offers an optional Rent and Legal Protection policy to all landlords within our managed service.

Compliance

The Renters' Rights Act introduces total transparency relating to tenancy documentation.

Local authorities have been granted greater enforcement powers including rights to enter businesses to seize documentation and issue fines for non-compliance.

We have undertaken a review of our systems, procedures, and documentation to ensure full alignment with the new legal requirements to protect our clients. We have also issued the required information sheets to all tenants in our portfolio to ensure government guidelines have been followed well in advance of the deadline.

Our priority remains to protect our clients by maintaining compliance during this period of legislative change so they do not need to monitor every development themselves.

Property standards

Increased focus on property conditions and tenant satisfaction will mean maintenance of the property is more important than ever.

Carrying out regular property inspections and providing the client with a comprehensive report with photographs and annotations ensures clients are fully informed of the condition of their investment property. This is also an opportunity to engage with the tenant to address any potential concerns directly and identify maintenance issues to promote a longer-term tenancy. Please also see our article on 'Keeping your rental property well maintained: what landlords should know' written by David Cook, Senior Building Surveyor, on page 21.

Tenant communication

As part of our management service, we act as the direct point of contact for tenants, providing clear guidance to ensure information is received and understood, helping to minimise confusion or potential disputes.

Preparing for the changes

We have taken a proactive approach to the legislation changes by preparing well in advance to ensure all upcoming government guidelines are followed and to support a smooth transition with minimum disruption.

For further information, or to book a free, no-obligation lettings appraisal of your property, please contact me.

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Is now the right time to improve energy efficiency?

As the UK advances towards its net-zero commitments, energy efficiency in both residential and commercial property has been high on the agenda by those conscious of legislation and the climate. A wave of recent government consultations, regulatory updates, and market data released earlier this year shows that landlords, tenants, and developers face a complex but increasingly urgent transition. Strengthened Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES), evolving Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) frameworks, and volatile fuel costs are reshaping how buildings are upgraded, let, and valued.

Tightening to the residential sector

The Government's reform trajectory for privately rented residential homes is now clear. MEES will require an EPC rating of C or above by 1st October 2030 for residential lettings, with new multi-metric EPCs planned from October 2026. These reforms follow extensive consultations that concluded in late 2025 and early 2026, introducing new performance indicators which are to include energy costs, fabric performance, smart technologies, heating system efficiency, and energy demand.

Parallel changes arising from the Decent Homes Standard Reform (2026) extend MEES considerations into both social housing and privately rented homes. A £10,000 spending cap per home will apply. Once reached, landlords may register an exemption through to 2040.

These developments reflect the policy intention to eliminate energy-inefficient homes, reduce fuel poverty, and support national decarbonisation targets.

Commercial property owners are also facing a tightening regulatory climate. While the legal minimum EPC remains band E in 2026, enforcement is now significantly tougher. Local authorities are auditing EPC registers more aggressively, scrutinising exemption claims, and issuing penalties of up to £150,000 per property. Substantial reforms are already moving into view. Government consultations suggest a likely uplift of MEES to EPC band B by 2030, part of a broader strategy to reduce emissions from commercial and public real estate by 87% by 2040, as advised by the UK Climate Change Committee.

At the same time, EPC methodology for commercial buildings is being overhauled. New multi-metric models will replace the familiar A to G rating system, incorporating fabric efficiency, heating, ventilation and air conditioning performance, operational energy use, carbon emissions, and energy costs. This transition is expected to begin rolling out from mid to late 2026.

Energy pricing remains a core driver of the Government's push for higher building efficiency, and recent data helps explain this urgency.

This cost landscape reinforces policy ambitions: the more buildings can reduce energy demand through improved insulation, smart technologies, and low-carbon heating, the less exposed households and businesses will be to global energy price swings.

What does this means for landlords, developers, and occupiers?

EPC REGULATORY TIMELINE

DEADLINE	COMMERCIAL	RESIDENTIAL
2008	EPC required on first date of marketing	EPC required on first date of marketing
April 2018	MEES: Minimum EPC Grade **E** for new leases	MEES: Minimum EPC Grade **E** for new leases
April 2020		MEES implementation: all continuing leases must meet Grade **E** or have a registered valid exemption
April 2023	MEES implementation: all continuing leases must meet Grade **E** or have a registered valid exemption	
Mid 2026	EPC methodology reform	EPC methodology reform
Late 2026	New EPC metrics go live	New EPC metrics go live
TBC	Intermediate step in EPC expected to **C** *(no announcement yet)*	
Oct 2030		Grade **C** minimum or register a valid exemption *(new metrics)*
2030 - 2035	Grade **B** minimum or register a valid exemption *(new metrics)*	

Residential implications

- Landlords must plan multi-stage upgrades now to meet the 2030 MEES deadline and prepare for new EPC frameworks from 2026.
- Funding opportunities such as the Warm Homes Fund (with £5 billion support under consultation) and boiler upgrade scheme grants may ease upfront capital requirements.
- With fuel poverty under continued scrutiny, failure to invest in efficiency will carry heavier reputational and regulatory risks, and ultimately landlords will be under more scrutiny with the potential of fines for non-compliance.
- Poorly performing properties won't be able to be quickly re-let whilst up to £10,000 of property upgrades may be required (per property) before the exemption can be obtained to allow a property to be legally let.

Commercial implications

- Compliance is no longer discretionary: authorities are actively policing MEES, and penalties are escalating.
- Investors and tenants increasingly factor EPC ratings into decisions due to rising energy prices.
- Anticipated future requirements for band B performance will significantly increase retrofit demand across offices, retail, logistics, and industrial sectors.
- Renewables continue to reshape the UK's energy mix, but electricity prices remain high due to grid balancing costs and persistent wholesale pressures.

Electrification of transport and heating is driving up electricity demand, making building-level efficiency measures more economically important than ever.

Typical renewable technologies

The UK's residential and commercial property sectors are undergoing a profound energy efficiency transition. See table on page 9 of typical renewable technologies. MEES reforms, EPC updates, and volatile energy markets are converging, creating both challenges and opportunities.

While compliance timelines are staggered through the decade, the direction is unambiguous: buildings must use less energy, emit less carbon, and protect occupants from the financial shocks of global fuel markets. Stakeholders who act early, adopting a planned, fabric-first and technology-enabled approach, will be best positioned to manage cost, protect asset value, and meet regulatory expectations in a rapidly shifting energy landscape.

We can help you assess and develop plans aimed at enhancing the energy efficiency of your building.

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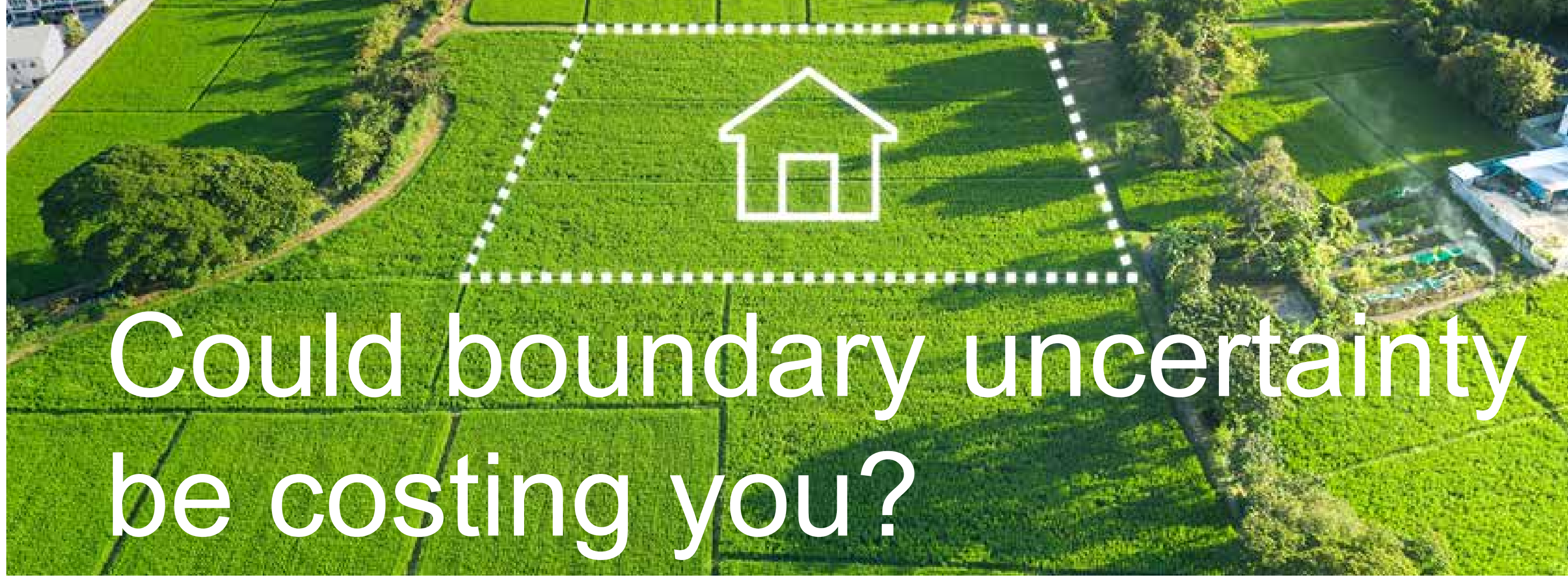
TYPICAL RENEWABLE TECHNOLOGIES

TECHNOLOGY	TYPICAL INSTALLATION COST	ANNUAL SAVINGS	PAYBACK
Solar (hot water) panels	£4,500	£130 - £300 per year	15+ years
Solar PV panels	£1,300 - £1,700 per kWp installed	5 kWp £800 - £1,200 per year depending on tariff and usage	7-8 years
Solar battery storage	£500 - £800 per kWh installed	5 kWh £300 - £1,000 depending on tariff and size of solar system and battery	4-8 years
Smart immersion linked to solar	£600	£150 - £300	1-3 years
Air source heat pump in place of boiler	£8,000 - £15,000	Government grant available of £7,500, comparable to gas in well-insulated homes and cheaper than oil by circa £400 - £800 for a 3-bed house (dependent on volatile oil cost)	8-15 years
Ground source heat pump in place of boiler	£18,000 - £30,000	Government grant available of £7,500, cheaper to run than gas by £200 - £300 for a 3-bed house	12-20 years



Could boundary uncertainty be costing you?

It is fair to say that armed with their title deed, most people assume they know where their boundaries lie. But how confident are you that you fully understand all the information on your title plan and that the information on it is accurate?

Title plans can be misleading

Usually, the red edging on a Land Registry title plan is a good guide of ownership. However, you cannot always assume that the lines drawn on the plans are an accurate representation of the boundaries of the land. Many people are not familiar with the ‘general boundaries rule’ and are surprised as to the levels of inaccuracy a title plan can highlight.

Common issues that arise with title plans:

- When the boundaries have evolved over time, and buildings, fences, and hedges bear little or no resemblance to the red edging on the current title plan.
- When the Land Registry plots boundaries using dotted lines because a physical feature did not exist at the time the title was originally registered.
- Confusion when neighbouring titles have been based upon different editions of Ordnance Survey plans showing conflicting information.
- Misinterpretation of the plans and confusion about how the lines on the map relate to physical features on the ground.

All these issues can arise in both urban and rural environments.

How can we help?

No one likes to be embroiled in a boundary dispute. They can be extremely time consuming, costly, and can lead to an irreversible falling out with the neighbour. We regularly deal with boundary disputes and see how relatively small matters can easily spiral into heated arguments where neither party wishes to back down.

We always advocate good communication between neighbours to try and resolve disputes swiftly and amicably. However, if communication has broken down, we often find that a good starting point is to survey the property and prepare a plan of the features which currently exist on site.

- We can accurately survey the features at the property using GPS technology.
- We can reconcile current and historic title deeds and advise regarding any relevant evidence.
- If matters escalate, we can also prepare an expert report to comply with Part 35 of the Civil Procedure Rules.
- We prepare Land Registry compliant plans which accurately identify all the features that currently exist around the property.

If you would like more information or advice on your property boundaries, please call me.

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Key trends, opportunities and planning influences shaping the development land market

Operating as we do in a broad arc from the Cotswolds in the west through the northern Home Counties across to the east coast, Robinson & Hall is well placed to comment on the residential development land market. The Oxford to Cambridge arc in particular is economically important and is targeted for growth by a raft of government policies.

Helping landowners unlock value through experienced promotion and market insight

Acting for farmers and landowners across the region, we have developed a specialist role in advising our clients through the development maze. As you might imagine, the development world is not short of big egos, and the poorly advised are often the victim of greedy opportunists.

Partnering landowners with the right promoters to achieve the best outcomes

Our role is to pair our clients up with reputable development promoters on terms which can provide a fair reward for both parties while protecting the landowner against the downsides in the market. There are a number of professional promoters with the funds and the experience to make the most of planning opportunities. However, there are many more promoters who are under-funded or who are new to the industry and who are best avoided.
Once we have set up a promotion agreement for our client, we monitor the planning process, acting as the link between the promoter and the landowner. The planning journey is rarely easy, and acting in a cooperative partnership with the promoter is essential when negotiating the various twists and turns which inevitably arise.

In many cases, we eventually secure a planning consent for residential development, and then our real work begins.

What makes an attractive development site sale?

In our region, the market for sites remains strong, but given the current financial climate, sites with unresolved risks can prove difficult to sell. Derisking a development site might include carrying out further surveys or discharging some of the planning conditions. It is also important to recognise

that housebuilders simply want to build houses, and they may have little interest in land for employment uses, local centres, doctors' surgeries, or even retirement accommodation. It is important to package the sale so that these items can attract a value, or at least so that they are not a problem to the housebuilder.

Speed can also be essential in pushing through a deal before the market changes, and we would always ensure that a full data pack is available at the outset. This would include the title to the property, replies to standard enquiries, searches, and all the planning history including surveys and letters of reliance. If there are any particular issues with the site, perhaps relating to access or contamination or archaeology, then this needs to be addressed at the start with a viable solution for bidders. There is no merit in hiding problems.

Strong prices achieved

While the market has not yet recovered to the level it was at a few years ago, in our region we have consistently achieved strong prices in a

difficult market. The demand for housing remains and government policies are encouraging increased housebuilding, but at the same time, the economy is fragile and costs continue to rise. An experienced agent working with an experienced promoter can help to achieve the best in this challenging world.

We are always happy to visit clients, both old and new, and to provide appraisals of land as a first step towards a successful sale for residential development.

Please contact me to discuss further.

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From vision to reality: The plans transforming Bedfordshire and beyond

Milton Keynes Expansion

Officially designated as a settlement in January 1967, the Government plans for Milton Keynes, like Tempsford, to experience huge growth in the next few decades. There are proposals for the city to expand by a third by 2050, with plans for 40,000 new homes and a new rapid transit link to help improve infrastructure and transport.

Universal Studios

Arguably the biggest news for Bedfordshire in decades, this development is set to reshape the area for many years to come. Universal's first branded theme park in the UK is set to open in 2031 on the former brickworks site at Kempston Hardwick. The circa 600-acre site will feature a world-class theme park, 500-room hotel, retail, dining, and entertainment and conference complex. It will also bring with it huge economic benefits for the area and create in the region of 28,000 jobs. As part of the project, there will be a number of transportation upgrades which will help cater for the 8.5 million people expected to visit the park in the first year.

East West Rail

This nationally significant railway project plans to build a new rail link between Oxford and Cambridge, and this will bring a faster and better long-term connectivity across the region. Subject to full approval, the project will benefit an already thriving area between Oxford and Cambridge that contributes around £143 billion to the national economy. Having a Bedford connection will help bolster plans to improve the town centre and enable access to jobs in nearby Cambridge.

Tempsford – Huge Expansion

This quaint village in Bedfordshire might be about to get a whole lot busier with thousands of new homes planned as part of the Government's 'most ambitious housebuilding programme in more than half a century'. Tempsford remains one of the Government's chosen seven new locations and is proposed to create a well-connected new community with homes, jobs, schools, and new transport links (including East West Rail).

A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbett Upgrade Works

A huge infrastructure project costing approximately £1 billion will improve journeys between Milton Keynes and Cambridge. The project is expected to finish in 2027 and will play a big part in supporting the long-term growth in the region.

Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Many councils are reviewing their Local Plans by commencing Call for Sites exercises during this year. The NPPF is also being consulted on and we will update clients on this important document in due course.

This map is for illustration purposes only.

With Bedfordshire and the surrounding counties expected to undergo substantial change over the next few decades, if you own land which might be suitable for development, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

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Planning shake up: appeals procedure revised & Biodiversity Net Gain rules changed

Revised appeals procedure

The key points are:

- Revised guidelines affecting the appeals process took effect on 1st April 2026.
- The new procedure will only affect applications submitted to a local authority on or after 1st April 2026. Applications submitted prior to this date will therefore continue to follow the old procedure.
- The Planning Inspector will only consider the documents submitted at the application stage and considered by the council, and these are limited to the decision notice, the committee minutes, and Planning Officer's report. Additionally, the appeal form and the council's appeal questionnaire will be taken into account.
- The appellants and councils will no longer be able to submit a statement of case, or respond to each other's statements.
- If a planning obligation (commonly known as a Section 106 Agreement) is required to support the appeal, an executed document should be provided at the time of lodging the appeal. The timing of lodging the appeal has therefore become important to ensure the planning obligation is ready in good time before you lose your right to appeal, which is normally six months for most types of appeals.
- The immediate implication is that when submitting a planning application, all the relevant information and surveys should be provided given that there will not be an opportunity to do so at the appeal stage.
- While the new procedure is meant to speed up the appeal process, there are concerns over the loss of opportunity to challenge the Planning Officer's report directly or to provide additional evidence that could otherwise address some of the reasons for refusal.

- The new appeals process will potentially have knock-on effects on the whole planning process given that a lot of councils no longer accept additional information once an application has been registered, leaving applicants with a choice between withdrawing an application and re-submitting it or risking a refusal of permission. Furthermore, some councils only publish objections from the neighbours at the time of issuing the decision notice, so there will be no scope to challenge third-party representations during the application stage and at appeal.
- It is too early to judge how effective the new appeals process will be and whether it would effectively curtail the appellant's rights to challenge decisions by local planning authorities.

Changes to Biodiversity Net Gain requirements

The Government intends to introduce a new area-based exemption to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) contributions before 31st July 2026, which will apply to all developments where the site area (within the red line boundary) is **0.2 hectares or below.**

The Government has explained that this change to the BNG threshold seeks to strike a balance between simplifying the planning process, reducing BNG's impact on development, and improving biodiversity.
It is, however, important to note that the new area-based exemption will not apply where on-site priority habitats are impacted. Developments benefitting from this exemption will continue to be required to satisfy the environmental protection requirements in the Local Plans, national planning policies and guidance, and other wider regulatory requirements.

Local planning authorities will continue to refuse planning permission where significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated.
The new regulations will also :

- remove the self and custom build exemption
- exempt temporary planning permissions granted for a maximum of five years
- amend the biodiversity gain hierarchy for minor development only

Further categories of exemptions are currently being mooted, so keep an eye out for more updates on our website and social media. If you have any queries on BNG or the new appeals process, then please contact me.

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What the Valuation Office Agency's new Duty to Notify means for you

From 1st April 2026, a new legal obligation for business ratepayers in England and Wales introduced under the Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023, known as Duty to Notify, began its phased rollout in England, and it is expected to become fully mandatory by 1st April 2029.

What is Duty to Notify?

Duty to Notify is a legal responsibility on ratepayers to inform the Valuation Office Agency about any relevant changes to their property that could affect its rateable value within 60 days of the change. It is important to note that this applies to any property which is capable of being assessed for rates, even if it is not currently subject to business rates.

The notification process will be expected to be done via an online platform, which is yet to be released.

The events which will require reporting include:

- Physical changes to the property – this will include extensions, demolitions, and structural alterations that impact size or use, for example, converting office space to retail or storage;
- Addition of plant and machinery – the installation of qualifying equipment or anything that may be rateable under business rates rules;
- Occupancy changes – if the property becomes vacant or a new tenant moves in;
- Lease modifications including rent reviews and lease renewals.

The online platform, once released, is expected to integrate with the existing business rates system. Ratepayers will be required to keep accurate property records, submit updates as needed, and periodically confirm their information even if no changes have occurred. The gradual rollout and testing of the new system will happen over several years. Please see image below.

Failure to comply with Duty to Notify could result in penalties and fines, which are expected to be based on a percentage of the property's rateable value.

- False data offences carry a maximum penalty of 3% of the rateable value (RV) and £500. In cases where false information is knowingly or recklessly submitted, criminal sanctions may also apply.
- Failing to comply with a penalty notice within 30 days of service could result in a maximum penalty of the greater of 2% of the RV and £900, plus £60 per day.

If you're looking for expert advice on how to navigate the upcoming rating revaluation, please contact me.

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Company news

New starter

Max Stapleton joins us as Auction Property Manager. Max has a wealth of experience, working for a local law firm and recruitment across a wide range of sectors. These varied environments helped to sharpen his natural sales ability and develop a confident, personable communication style.

As Auction Property Manager, Max is valued for his ability to build rapport quickly and provide clarity throughout.

Events

We are delighted to be sponsoring and attending the following events again this year (see calendar below).

Please come and visit our stand for a chat and refreshments.

Bowling trip!

We held our annual bowling trip in March, which was, as always, very well attended. Congratulations to Robert Franklin, Local Partner and Chartered Building Surveyor, who claimed the top spot.

Podcasts

I have launched many more podcasts since our last newsletter, including a podcast on 'understanding permission in principle', 'maximising your property's potential at auction', and 'thinking of converting your empty barn into commercial use?' to name a few. Please visit our podcast website page to have a listen.

Have you seen our 'Meet Robinson & Hall's Experts' video?

Get to know some of our specialists. Discover their backgrounds and the variety of services we provide. Watch via our YouTube Channel.

Seminars

Our breakfast seminars were a huge success. We discussed SFI and industry updates to ensure you are ahead of the game. If you would like to discuss these matters with our rural team, then please contact 01234 352201.

For marketing queries, please don't hesitate to contact me.

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Why auction could be the answer for you

Market uncertainty and buyer confidence

The economic climate is always changing. While some believe it follows an eight-year cycle, others argue that the past ten years have been different. During this time, the economy has been shaken by a series of major world events, most recently the war in the Middle East. Whenever we see significant fluctuations, it affects people's confidence, which in a downturn can have a seismic impact on property sales, particularly for an individual property where there are few comparable sales to offer reassurance.

Why auction can be the right route

This is where a sale by auction can be the most suitable route to market, especially with a traditional in-room auction. A fixed timeline brings buyers together, and the ability to see others attaching value to the same property is hugely reassuring. Even if the winning bidder ends up being driven beyond the maximum they were hoping to pay, there is the reassurance that they only paid a marginal amount more than the underbidder, their closest rival who too was willing to exchange contracts there and then.

The problem with overpricing and prolonged marketing

This scenario often applies to individual properties that have been marketed by agents for a lengthy period without success. The difficulty for agents at the start is in setting an asking price where there are no comparable sales, and, fearful of asking too little, most ask too much. Buyers then don't engage, and the longer the property remains unsold, the more buyers question what may be wrong, and satisfy themselves they were right not to look at something nobody else wants to buy. Matters are worsened where a sale is agreed and later fails. All sorts of assumptions may then be made, and although the reason may have been quite innocent, the most dire theories may be applied.

Case study: Popes Farm, Sandy

Popes Farm, Sandy

Such was the case with Popes Farm, Sandy, offered in our auction on 22nd April. This was a four-bedroom Victorian farmhouse in need of improvement, together with a collection of buildings that comprised a garage, two barns, and a kennel building, with staff rooms and 17 stalls, plus an approved planning consent for residential redevelopment, all in a plot of two and a half acres, set at the end of a no-through road and fronting onto the A1.

Our first inspection was in September 2024, following six months of marketing by a Bedford corporate estate agent who typically deals with selling modest flats and houses within the town and who had recommended asking £1,300,000. How they had arrived at such a figure was a mystery - probably a combination of over exuberance and inexperience. We valued the property at just over half that sum, which resulted in a short conversation and a swift exit, accompanied by the parting remark that our door is always open. As is often the case, there is always another estate agent knocking on the door claiming they can achieve a better result, usually too afraid to suggest any meaningful reduction. So, the agent was replaced, the price was lowered, and lowered again, and a 'buyer' was eventually found and the sale ultimately fell through. All the time, the costs continued to rise with the property standing empty, and prospective buyers were holding off.

At the end of March, we spoke again with the seller, and this time our advice was heeded. We were instructed to offer the property with a guide price of £500,000. The guide price achieved its aim by attracting interest from multiple buyers, leading to strong competition, with three people bidding against each other. This resulted in a final sale price of £705,000, with contracts exchanged in just four weeks!

Case study: Grange Farm, Cople

Grange Farm, Cople

Our second example is Grange Farm, Cople, a detached period farmhouse with a collection of barns totalling some 12,000 sq. ft., with past planning consent for development, set in just over three acres. It too had significant issues; most of the land was flood plain, a 9,000 sq. ft. barn was clad in asbestos, the traditional barns were dilapidated, and the farmhouse a wreck. It too had been on the market for over a year and had seen two aborted sales, the most recent involving a buyer who negotiated the price down to £650,000 before ultimately pulling out.

Our advice here was to guide at £550,000, which sparked tremendous interest. Each of our open-house viewing sessions were buzzing, with buyers seeing first hand the level of interest and the number of other attendees. With the auction just a week after the last viewing, the bidding was frantic and the eventual sale price was £780,000, being £130,000 more than the previous buyer was paying!

Honest advice and clear guidance

For anyone unsure whether a sale by auction will be suitable, we are always happy to appraise and give advice. We do not charge for appraisals, and if we don't think auction is the best route to market, we will say so.

To discuss further, please contact me.

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Keeping your rental property well maintained: what landlords should know

One of the biggest challenges landlords face is keeping on top of maintenance and repairs. Timely repairs are key to keeping tenants happy and your property in good condition.

Some common repairs that landlords may need to deal with:

Damp and mould

Damp and mould are common problems in rental properties, especially in older buildings. These issues can be caused by poor ventilation, leaks, or water infiltration and can lead to health problems if not treated.

Landlords should determine whether it's caused by a building fabric defect, a leaking service pipe, or by condensation.

Note: Condensation is caused when air containing water vapour is cooled by contact with a cold surface. These damp areas then attract black mould that grows on the surface. Condensation mainly occurs in the colder months, whether it is rainy or dry outside.

The landlord is generally responsible for damp and mould caused by any structural issues, such as penetrating and rising damp. Any significant issues of condensation require particularly careful investigation as they may be symptoms of building fabric issues or may be related to the lifestyle of the occupiers. Whilst it is impossible to remove moisture in the air from a home, it may be helpful to remind tenants to:-

- Dry clothes outside where possible or in a well-ventilated bathroom with the door closed
- Open windows when possible to help ventilation
- Not leave kettles boiling, to cover pans, and turn on extractor fans when cooking
- Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when in use
- Turn on the heating regularly to keep the property at a consistent temperature

Where mould is a significant issue, this can cause health issues such as respiratory and skin problems, so it's important that it is treated seriously and immediately.

The extension of Awaab's Law to the Private Rented Sector, as part of the broader rental reforms under the Renters' Rights Bill, requires that hazards must be inspected within 10 working days, with repairs completed within 5 working days post-inspection. Emergency hazards, such as severe mould, must be investigated and made safe within 24 hours, with alternative accommodation offered if necessary.

Leaky taps and toilets

One of the most common repair requests landlords get is for leaky taps or toilets. A slow-dripping tap may seem like a small issue, but over time it can waste a lot of water and increase utility bills.

Blocked drains

Blocked drains are another common problem, caused by hair, grease, or foreign objects in the pipes. Tenants often report slow draining sinks or bathtubs, and in some cases complete blockages.

Minor blockages can be cleared with a plunger or drain cleaner, but more severe blockages will require a plumber. Tenants should be provided with tips on what not to put down the drains, such as oil or large food particles, to prevent recurring problems
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Boiler and heating system failures

In winter months, having a working heating system is crucial for tenant comfort and for legal compliance. These breakdowns are usually caused by lack of maintenance or old equipment.

Landlords should schedule annual servicing of the boiler and heating systems to prevent sudden failures. Having a trusted heating engineer on standby is also always a good idea.

Roof damage

Missing tiles, leaks, or structural damage can lead to further problems like damp or mould and even more serious building fabric damage, if not addressed quickly.

Regular roof inspections, especially after extreme weather, can catch minor problems before they get out of hand.

Electrical issues

Landlords are legally required to ensure the electrical systems in their rental properties are safe.

It's best to schedule regular electrical inspections and address any issues as soon as they're reported.

Broken appliances (if provided)

It's best to have clear guidelines in the tenancy agreement on what happens when appliances break down. Regular servicing of high-use appliances like boilers, washing machines, and refrigerators can extend their life.

Window and door repairs

Broken windows or malfunctioning doors are not only an inconvenience but can also compromise the security of the property and the comfort of the tenants. Common issues are broken locks and draughty windows or doors that no longer fit their frames.

These are usually simple repairs, such as fixing a lock or replacing window seals, but they should be dealt with promptly. Ensuring windows and doors are in good condition not only makes the tenant more comfortable but also prevents energy loss and potential burglaries.

Pest control

Pests like mice or insects can become a big problem if not addressed quickly.

If tenants report a pest problem, it's best to investigate promptly, and in some cases, professional pest control services will be required. Sealing any cracks or gaps where pests can enter can prevent future infestations. Proactive measures like installing mesh screens over ventilation grates or keeping the property well maintained can also help.

Be proactive

While you can't avoid all repairs, being proactive with property maintenance can reduce the number of repairs you need to do. Regular inspections, scheduled maintenance, and addressing minor issues before they become major problems are key to keeping your rental property in good condition.

If you would like more information or require a survey of your rental property to ensure that it remains in tip-top condition, please contact me.

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