Confor Summary of Land Use Consultation document

Introduction

The UK Government has launched a consultation process on land use in England. The scope of the consultation means there is significant potential for implications for the sector.

The consultation process has produced a consultation document and an analytical annex document. The process is open until 25 April 2025 and has identified 24 questions (summarised below) and the process has committed to include a number of workshops to be held across the country.

To ensure we are well-placed to respond on behalf of the sector, Confor will be engaging members through a survey and other communications forums to solicit opinion and to garner input into the response Confor will provide to the consultation process. We will also be encouraging members to develop their own submission to ensure the voice of the forest and wood use sector is strongly represented.

The material below is a summary of the consultation document and does not reflect any positions of the sector. Confor will also be producing an analysis on the Analytical Annex produced as part of the consultation.

The intent of this process is for government to develop a Land Use Framework. This framework will be a key component of delivering on the government's Devolution White Paper which is intended to shift power away from Whitehall into the hands of local communities.

The consultation document will inform the subsequent development of a Land Use Framework in 2025.

If you have any questions regarding this summary of Confor's process for developing an industry response please contact John Bruce or Jon Garson.

Outcomes

- Section 1 of this consultation starts with evidence to underpin decisions on land use change.
- Section 2 sets out draft principles for decision making.
- Section 3 outlines potential policy levers that could be developed as part of a Land Use Framework such as improving access to data and developing targeted land management incentives.
- Section 4 describes the process of co-creation that will inform the Land Use Framework.

The Framework will include:

1. Principles that Government will apply to policy with land use implications.
2. A description of how policy levers will develop and adapt to support land use change.
3. A release of land use data and analysis to support public and private sector innovation in spatial decision making, and the development of tools to support land managers in practice

The consultation is positioned as the beginning of a conversation "about land use, to minimise trade-offs and optimize the use of land".

The publication of the Land Use Framework is intended to "create a toolkit to support decision making and inform discussion on how we can guarantee our long-term food security, how we can support development and how we can achieve our targets on nature and climate that deliver multiple benefits and support economic growth".

In addition to the consultation document there will also be workshops across the country to bring "farmers, conservation groups and planners to the table".

Farmers and landowners "know the land best and it is right that they lead this transition with clarity about land use change so they can plan their businesses".

The public discussion is intended to "start a public discussion on how land use can deliver our missions for Growth and Clean Energy, boost food security, and meet our statutory climate and nature targets".

Our vision for land use in England (page 8)

The adaptation of this plan will lead to a spatial model that will require a transition from the current 'haphazard' model. This transition will:

- Make space for nature recovery, water, and emissions reduction.
- Support sustainable and resilient food production
- Deliver new infrastructure and housing.
- Fix the foundations for resilient long-term economic growth.
- Co-deliver plans for delivery.
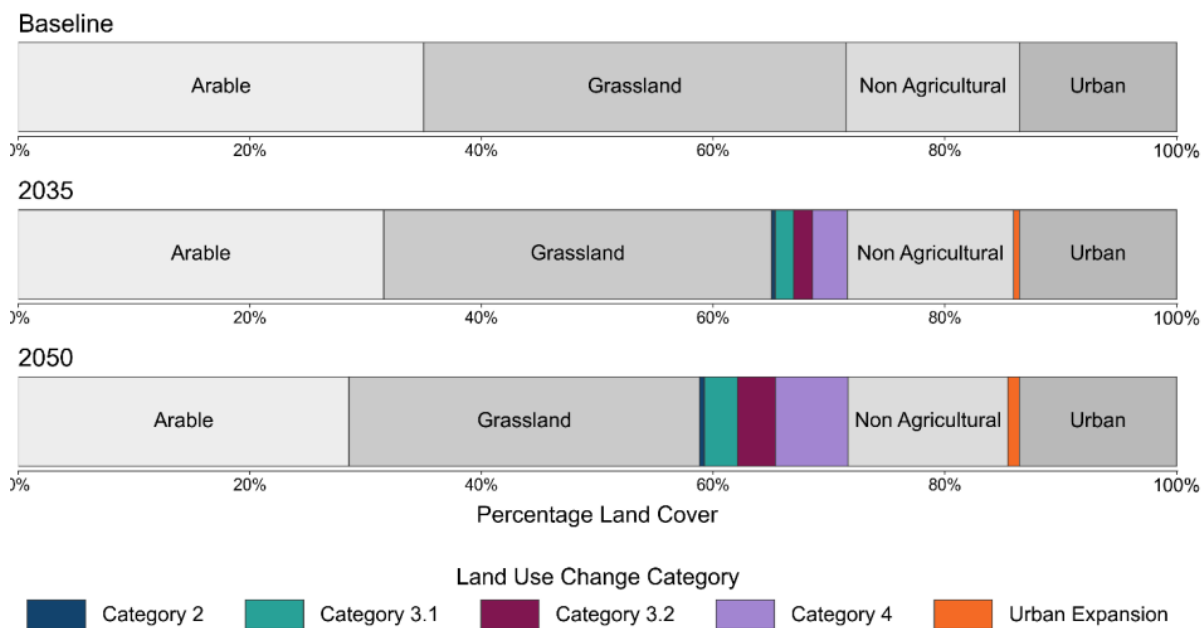
What we mean by land use change (page 14-17)

The consultation document is very clear, there "will need to be a range of different land use changes by 2050".

The consultation document references that the LUF will need a consistent way of categorising changes in land use. Five categories have been identified to define land use management and land use changes in the Analytical Annex (a synopsis and analysis of this aspect of the consultation process and the spatial analysis central to this process will also be shortly provided by Confor).

The approximate percentages of England's total agricultural land area that our analysis shows may need to change in use or management by 2050.	
Category 1 – Land management change Changes in the way the land is farmed, without introducing new habitats or planting trees. It falls outside of the scope of land use change discussed in this document. Examples: Planting cover crops to reduce soil loss, or reducing fertiliser use to prevent water pollution.	**Not in scope**
Category 2 – Small changes maintaining the same agricultural land use Introducing nature within fields, in margins and / or small portions, providing environmental and climate benefits alongside food production. Examples: Arable field margins, riparian features such as river buffer strips.	**1% (50kha)**
Category 3.1 – Changes in agricultural land use, for both food and environmental / climate benefits This is mainly about incorporating more trees alongside food production.	**4% (370kha)**

Category 3.2 – Changes in agricultural land use, mainly for environmental and climate benefits with limited food production. The land is being farmed mainly for other benefits than food. Examples: Creation / restoration of species-rich grassland habitats; responsible management of peat; planting of short rotation coppice.	**5% (430kha)**
Category 4 - Change away from agricultural land, for environmental and climate benefits. Land use becomes non-agricultural. Land is fully dedicated to delivering environmental and climate benefits. Examples: Restoration and maintenance of peat-forming and peat-dependent habitats; creation of woodland; creation / restoration of coastal and lowland heathland habitats.	**9% (760kha)**

Estimated type and extent of land use changes needed to 2035 and 2050

QUESTION 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our assessment of the scale and type of land use change needed, as set out in this consultation and the Analytical Annex?

[Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree / I don't know]

Please explain your response, including your views on the potential scale of change and the type of change needed, including any specific types of change.

Principles: Taking a spatial approach (page 18-19)

The consultation document places significant focus on the role spatial planning will have on the development of the Framework. Underpinning this approach is a set of principles that are intended to "transform how government makes policy and the information we provide to decision makers". The principles are:

1. **Co-design**: Support for participation and leadership at the local and regional scale to develop and align spatial strategies and assess the fairness of changes in land use.
2. **Multifunctional land**: Enable multiple benefits on land, targeted according to opportunity, societal needs (such as the health benefits of co-locating new homes and nature), and environmental pressures (such as reducing pollution).
3. **Playing to the strengths of the land**; Support and spatially target land use change to locations where benefits are greater, and trade-offs are lower. Give priority to land uses that are more scarce or spatially sensitive (for example grid capacity places restrictions on new renewable generation sites or protecting land that is best suited for food production).
4. **Decisions fit for the long-term**: Take a long-term view of changing land suitability, prioritising resilience (including to the impacts of climate change). This could include planning for new homes that are resilient to climate impacts, such as flooding and overheating.
5. **Responsive by design**: Land use policy, including spatial prioritisation and targeting, needs to be responsive to new data, opportunities and pressures.

QUESTION 2: Do you agree or disagree with the land use principles proposed?

[Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree / I don't know]

Please provide any reasons for your response including any changes you believe should be made.

QUESTION 3: Beyond Government departments in England, which other decision makers do you think would benefit from applying these principles?

● *Combined and local authorities (including local planning authorities)*
● *Landowners and land managers (including environmental and heritage groups)*
● *Others (please specify)*

Making the Best Use of Land (page 20-34)

Government are looking to propose "radically improve the access that landowners, land managers and communities have to the resources needed to support long-term and spatial decision making". The consultation focuses on proposing policy changes under four themes; aligned incentives, joined-up decisions, accessible and high-quality data, and skills.

1. Aligning Incentives (page 20)

The consultation recognises that the current suite of incentives regarding land use will require reform if it is going to be able to achieve a transition to more effective land use. While focused on the current suite of agricultural incentives this section opens the door to incentivising "multifunctional land uses".

The consultation recognises that "investors, farmers and other businesses want certainty about how government will act to align incentives and shape emerging markets to support the food, environment, infrastructure, economic and climate outcomes that the nation needs".

Policy levers and incentives

Incentivising changes for long-term food security (page 21-23)

This section recognises that farming systems are under pressure and that change is needed and must be driven by the sector

It focuses on the importance of agriculture and food security and outlines the need for government to design incentives to "support agricultural land use change". Much of the detail around this will be provided by the long-term Farming Roadmap and a Food Strategy.

The Farming Roadmap will include details on governments proposed approach to spatial prioritisation of outcomes and the spatial targeting of financial incentives for land use change.

QUESTION 4: What are the policies, incentives and other changes that are needed to support decision makers in the agricultural sector to deliver this scale of land use change, while considering the importance of food production?

QUESTION 5: How could Government support more land managers to implement multifunctional land uses that deliver a wider range of benefits, such as agroforestry systems with trees within pasture or arable fields?

QUESTION 6: What should the Government consider in identifying suitable locations for spatially targeted incentives?

QUESTION 7: What approach(es) could most effectively support land managers and the agricultural sector to steer land use changes to where they can deliver greater potential benefits and lower trade-offs?

QUESTION 8: In addition to promoting multifunctional land uses and spatially targeting land use change incentives, what more could be done by Government or others to reduce the risk that we displace more food production and environmental impacts abroad?

Please give details for your answer.

Monitoring land use change or production on agricultural land
Accounting for displaced food production impacts in project appraisals
Protecting the best agricultural land from permanent land use changes
Other (please specify)

Increasing private investment into nature-based solutions (page 23)

This section recognises that there will be a need for additional private sector investment if government is able to meet its climate and nature objectives. While recognising the existing mechanisms such as Biodiversity Net Gain, the Woodland Carbon and Peatland Codes the development of the Nature Restoration Fund is an indication of government action on this front.

QUESTION 9: What should Government consider in increasing private investment towards appropriate land use changes?

Making space for nature (page 24)

This focuses on government commitment to 30 by 30 and the Environmental Act biodiversity targets.

QUESTION 10: What changes are needed to accelerate 30by30 delivery, including by enabling Protected Landscapes to contribute more?

Please provide any specific suggestions.

● *Strengthened Protected Landscapes legislation (around governance and regulations or duties on key actors) with a greater focus on nature*
● *Tools: such as greater alignment of existing Defra schemes with the 30by30 criteria*
● *Resources: such as funding or guidance for those managing Protected Landscapes for nature*
● *Other (please specify)*

Bringing nature closer to communities (page 25)

This section focuses on the challenge that will come from governments commitment to building 1.5 million new homes. It recognises that as we look to enhance the living space in urban areas there will be a need to "introduce connected networks of green infrastructure into our villages, towns and cities".

QUESTION 11: What approaches could cost-effectively support nature and food production in urban landscapes and on land managed for recreation?

Empowering local people to bring community spaces back into community ownership (page 26)

Through the English Devolution Bill government will introduce a strong 'right to buy' for community spaces. This is focused on areas which "furthers the social wellbeing and interests of the community".

2. Joined-up decisions on land use changes (pages 26-30)

This section recognises that there is "little formal guidance, information, or structure to support land managers decisions on competing land use demands outside the planning system". It recognises that land use managers and developers need "a more joined up, strategic approach to land use strategy and planning at a local level, linked to regional and national priorities".

Policy levers and enablers

Strategic spatial planning for development and infrastructure (page 26-28)

This section recognises that the government's priority focus on building 1.5 million new homes and the expansion of energy infrastructure will require the optimisation of land use. To achieve this the government has indicated that it will be introducing a "universal system of strategic planning throughout England in the form of Spatial Development Strategies".

These SDSs will involve "combining authorities and partnerships of country councils and unitary authorities by areas where there is no devolved authorities. SDSs will set the overarching spatial strategy for local plans".

QUESTION 12: How can Government ensure that development and infrastructure spatial plans take advantage of potential co-benefits and manage trade-offs?

QUESTION 13: How can local authorities and Government better take account of land use opportunities in transport planning?

Connecting plans and strategies (page 28)

This section recognises that government want there to be "greater local and regional democratic accountability over land use decision making, including spatial strategies for land at local and regional scales". The intent of this process is to move away from the current structure of locally led plans which have led to a sometime "siloed or confusing picture of land use".

QUESTION 14: How can Government support closer coordination across plans and strategies for different sectors and outcomes at the local and regional level?

Planning for climate resilient land use changes (page 29-30)

There will be a need for plans to be in place to adapt to the inevitable changes to climate. This section recognises that through the governments National Adaptation Programme will need to develop an understanding of the climate adaptation plans of owners, managers and developers of land. It also states that government is considering that the Climate Change Adaptation Reporting Power could be used to invite or require more organisations and major landowners to report in this process.

QUESTION 15: Would including additional major landowners and land managers in the Adaptation Reporting Power process (see above) support adaptation knowledge sharing? Please give any reasons or alternative suggestions [Yes / No / I don't know]

QUESTION 16: Below is a list of activities the Government could implement to support landowners, land managers, and communities to understand and prepare for the impacts of climate change. Please select the activities you think should be prioritised and give any reasons for your answer, or specific approaches you would like to see.

● *Providing better information on local climate impacts to inform local decision making and strategies (for example, translating UK Climate Projections29 into what these mean in terms of on-the-ground impacts on farming, buildings, communities and nature)*
● *Providing improved tools and guidance for turning climate information into tangible actions (for example, how to produce an adaptation plan for different sectors)*
● *Developing and sharing clearer objectives and resilience standards (for example, a clear picture and standards of good practice for each sector under a 2°C climate scenario30)*
● *Supporting the right actions in the right places in a changing climate (for example, prioritising incentives for sustainable land uses where they will be most resilient to climate change)*
● *Other (please specify)*

3. Accessible and high-quality data (pages 30-33)

This section recognises that while there is a wealth of data around land use this is neither accessible nor useful.

This section further recognises that a paradigm shift in terms of data sharing is a "key priority".

Policy lever and enablers

Improving land use data (page 31)

This section recognises that the current geospatial data is spread across a wide range of ministries. The stated aim is, through DEFRAs Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment program, to improve "access to high quality, interoperable data by conducting a comprehensive baseline study of England's natural capital assets".

QUESTION 17: What changes to how Government's spatial data is presented or shared could increase its value in decision making and make it more accessible?

- *Updating existing Government tools, apps, portals or websites*
- *Changes to support use through private sector tools, apps or websites*
- *Bringing data from different sectors together into common portals or maps*
- *Increasing consistency across spatial and land datasets*
- *More explanation or support for using existing tools, apps or websites*
- *Greater use of geospatial indicators such as Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) and INSPIRE IDs to allow data to be more easily displayed on a map*
- *Other (please specify)*

QUESTION 18: What improvements could be made to how spatial data is captured, managed, or used to support land use decisions in the following sectors? Please give any reasons for your answer or specific suggestions.

- *Development and planning: such as environmental survey data*
- *Farming: such as supply chain data and carbon or nature baseline measurements*
- *Environment and forestry: such as local and volunteer-collected environmental records*
- *Recreation and access: such as accessible land and route data*
- *Government-published land and agricultural statistics*

Land use data's interaction with other datasets (page 32)

This section states that the government's ability "combine a broad range of datasets and apply the latest advances in spatial data science and analysis is critical to the 10 Year National Energy Plan.

Understanding land's capacity (page 32)

Lands capacity in this section focuses on food production and recognises the work of the Agricultural Land Commission

QUESTION 19: What improvements are needed to the quality, availability and accessibility of ALC data to support effective land use decisions?

Reducing data costs where it benefits the public or economy (pages 32-33)

This section outlines an intent to "move towards a system where data is more widely accessible for the public benefit". This includes making HM Land Registry data free to access.

QUESTION 20: Which sources of spatial data should Government consider making free or easier to access, including via open licensing, to increase their potential benefit?

4. The right skills in the right place (pages 33-34)

Context

This section recognises that "a fair land use transition that underpins long-term economic growth cannot be delivered without a secure, skilled workforce". It further recognises that they have "heard though workshops across England that communities in the regions with significant potential economic opportunities through land use changes often lack access to the skills and resources that would be needed to deliver it".

Policy levers and enablers

Supporting land managers with new skills for changing land uses (pages 33-34)

While this is focused on agriculture it does commits DEFRA to "engage with skills organisations, including Skills England, to ensure a common understanding of the scale and pace of change required".

QUESTION 21: What gaps in land management capacity or skills do you anticipate as part of the land use transition? Please include any suggestions to address these gaps.

- *Development and planning*
- *Farming*
- *Environment and forestry*
- *Recreation and access*
- *Other (please specify)*

Accelerating sharing of best practices and evidence (page 34)

This section expresses concern that while there is value in the Agricultural and Horticulture Development Board there is a perception "that the skills, resources and evidence base are lagging behind the findings of innovative farmers and land managers,"

QUESTION 22: How could the sharing of best practice in innovative land use practices and management be improved?

Sharing lessons from nature restoration and climate adaptation practices (page 34)

This section suggests that a mechanism that would allow government to "test, trial or seek feedback on practical approaches through convening a new group of major public, private and third sector landowners in England".

Co-creation and engagement on a Land Use Framework; next steps (page 35-36)

This section emphasises the fact that consultation and the subsequent Land Use Framework will only be the "start of a conversation about how we use land".

Our plan for policy co-creation (page 35)

This section outlines the plan to run workshops in six different regions in England. The document also commits to "continue the conversation even after the Land Use Framework is published", with a commitment that the Framework could "be reviewed and updated over time".

QUESTION 23: Should a Land Use Framework for England be updated periodically, and if so, how frequently should this occur?

- *Yes, every 5 years*
- *Yes, every 3 years*
- *Yes, another frequency or approach. Please provide details.*
- *No*
- *I don't know*

Making Government effective in policy co-creation (page 36)

"For this process to be meaningful, we know that Government will need to speak with one voice on land use and clarify how its different policy objectives interact spatially. Implementing the principles in this consultation (page 18) would support this, but broader changes to how the Government coordinates land-related policies across departments may also be required. Government will consider how best to co-ordinate and provide:

- A strategic oversight function to ensure the right information and policy is in place to enable delivery against a long-term land use vision.
- A cross-governmental spatial analysis function to produce evidence-based advice on strategic implications across different demands on land.
- Processes to embed land use considerations in strategic Government decisions.
- Open policy-making processes in collaboration with research organisations."

QUESTION 24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed areas above? Please include comments or suggestions with your answer.

[Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree / I don't know

Summary of the consultation questions.

These questions are under the section heading in the consultation document.

What we mean by land use change

QUESTION 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our assessment of the scale and type of land use change needed, as set out in this consultation and the Analytical Annex?

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Principles: Taking a spatial approach

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- Combined and local authorities (including local planning authorities)
- Landowners and land managers (including environmental and heritage groups)
- Others (please specify)

Making the Best Use of Land

1. **Aligned Incentives**

Policy Levers and enablers – Incentivising changes for long term food security

QUESTION 4: What are the policies, incentives and other changes that are needed to support decision makers in the agricultural sector to deliver this scale of land use change, while considering the importance of food production?

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Making space for nature

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Bringing nature closer to communities

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2. Joined-up decisions on land use changes

Policy levers and enablers

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- Supporting the right actions in the right places in a changing climate (for example, prioritising incentives for sustainable land uses where they will be most resilient to climate change)
- Other (please specify)

3. Accessible and high-quality data

Policy levers and enablers

Improving land use data

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4. The right skills in the right place

Policy levers and enablers

Supporting land managers with new skills for changing land uses

QUESTION 21: What gaps in land management capacity or skills do you anticipate as part of the land use transition? Please include any suggestions to address these gaps.

- Development and planning
- Farming
- Environment and forestry
- Recreation and access
- Other (please specify)

Accelerating sharing of best practices and evidence

QUESTION 22: How could the sharing of best practice in innovative land use practices and management be improved?

Co-creation and engagement on a land use Framework: next steps

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Making Government effective in policy co-creation

QUESTION 24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed areas above? Please include comments or suggestions with your answer.

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