CERES GROUP

RESPONSE TO THE LANDUSE FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION

2025

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UK LAND USE FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION

The government is consulting on their vision for land use in England and how to deliver it. This consultation will inform the development of a Land Use Framework which intends to minimise trade-offs and optimise land use. The feedback from this consultation is intended to set out a direction for England's land use and recognise the challenges that land managers will need Defra to address so that they can deliver the shared vision of a fair land use transition.

Our response aimed to contribute to this vital national conversation about the increasingly complex and challenging issue of land use. We provide here a high-level summary of our response to the consultation.

PRINCIPLES OF THE LAND USE FRAMEWORK

We support the principle of a strategic Land Use Framework to guide and assess the feasibility and impact of new plans and policies. This consultation is welcomed as it stimulates a vital national conversation about the complex issue of land use. Our land is a finite resource with significant demands.

However, we neither agree nor disagree with the assessment of the scale and type of land use change needed. While we recognise that land use must change to address societal and environmental challenges, we are concerned about some assumptions in the assessments. Categories 2 and 3.1 (outlined in the figure at the end of this report) require clear policies and schemes based on sound science and evidence. Categories 3.2 and 4 suggest that some land can only be used for environmental purposes or food production. We believe that multifunctionality is essential, as both objectives can be achieved on most land areas and are often mutually beneficial. Therefore, any framework must be flexible and not prescriptive.

There is also an assumption that productivity will continue to increase to ensure national food security. This cannot be taken for granted, as productivity has stalled in recent years. Sufficient funding for research and knowledge exchange, along with policy frameworks that provide businesses with certainty for long-term investments, is necessary to achieve further productivity improvements.

Moreover, increases in housing cannot be considered in isolation. More housing requires additional infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, transport, and recreational spaces, to be sustainable.

In addition, we highlight considerations regarding:

- **Economic and Environmental Resilience**: We stress that long-term resilience must be both economic and environmental. Profitable businesses are essential to support environmental projects.
- **Ongoing Monitoring**: There must be continuous monitoring and reporting of land use changes to ensure policies remain effective.
- **Flexibility in Policies**: Policies must be adaptable to new circumstances to remain relevant and effective.
- **Local Expertise**: National or regional policies must be ground-truthed at a local level by consulting with farmers, landowners, and their advisers who have extensive knowledge and expertise.

- **Private Investment**: It is crucial that farmers and landowners have the flexibility to make the best decisions for their businesses to encourage private investment.

Therefore, we emphasise the need for flexibility and adaptability in policies to reflect the dynamic situation on the ground.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Collaboration Across Departments**: All government departments and decision-makers at all levels must be joined up in their thinking and consult with key stakeholders to achieve positive changes. Data-driven planning, financial incentives and advisory support (based on scientific and economic evidence) would most effectively support the agricultural sector. This also includes joined up thinking with regards to consumer choices about food production and sustainability.
- **Support for Agricultural Sector**: A comprehensive plan of action is needed to support agricultural decision-makers. This includes: fiscal policies that are transparent, fair and consistent to encourage long-term investment and planning; environmental schemes based on certainty, clarity and consistency, backed by scientific and economic analysis; a framework for agricultural tenancies that ensure tenant farmers have the security required to access schemes and make the required investments; and investment in agricultural research and knowledge exchange initiatives, such as demonstrations and case studies, that are focused on productivity improvement.
- **Multifunctional Land Uses**: Government should support multifunctional land uses that deliver a wider range of benefits. This includes providing clear and consistent policies, financial incentives, and support for knowledge exchange initiatives. Policies and governance coordination should ensure that domestic land-use change does not reduce food security, targets are set for both food production and the environment in tandem, and trade policy protects farms and consumers.
- **Spatial Data and Planning**: To support nature and food production in urban landscapes, development and infrastructure spatial plans should take advantage of co-benefits through Regional Spatial Plans. These Plans should have the same weight as a Local Development Plan to ensure that development and infrastructure is coordinated in the most sustainable locations. These Plans will also integrate land use opportunities in transport planning, and support closer coordination across sectors, with additional planning powers for Mayors and inclusion of major landowners in the Adaptation Reporting Power process to enhance adaptation knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the government should combine spatial

data and economic assessments to balance food production, environmental sustainability and rural economic growth, with local engagement with farmers and landowners being essential for effective land use planning.

- **Capacity building and upskilling**: Significant investment is required to: support development and planning, for example investing in suitably qualified ecologists to support the application of existing schemes and regulations; to support benchmarking activities in farming to help identify areas where efficiency gains can be made to deliver both economic and environmental outcomes (and thus productivity); and to provide suitable training in understanding, measuring and implementing different management strategies in relation to biodiversity and carbon.

We strongly urge broader changes to how the government coordinates land-related policies across departments. It is crucial to ensure collaborative engagement with relevant stakeholders and to focus on long-term planning and security. The success of these initiatives will depend on the Government's commitment to implementing these strategies effectively and transparently.

Figure 4: The approximate percentages of England's total agricultural land area that our analysis shows may need to change in use or management by 2050[12].

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)

Source: Page 15 - Defra Land Use Consultation