

15 December 2016

## Countryside Alliance Parliamentary Update

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### Highlights

#### **Most significant improvements to firearms law in 20 years**

The Government has introduced a total of three amendments to firearms law in the Policing and Crime Bill in the House of Lords. These three amendments, which have police support, will see expanding ammunition move back to Section 1 of the 1968 Firearms Act; make provision for the continued validity of firearms licences where there is a delay in renewal; and clarify who may lend and borrow firearms. These amendments are in addition to the original Part 6 of the Bill which introduced the changes recommended by the Law Commission's scoping consultation. Combined, they represent a significant improvement for firearms law and will make life easier for lawful firearms users and the police.

#### **CA gives evidence to EFRA Committee on rural tourism**

Head of the Policy, Sarah Lee, took part in an oral evidence session on 14 December as part of the inquiry into rural tourism in England. Sarah stressed the need to create a "365 day tourism season" and highlighted the role that shooting and other country sports play in achieving this by getting people into the countryside during the 'off-season'. Sarah went on to comment on the reasons why rural businesses often struggle and what can be done to help, including the need to improve mobile and broadband connectivity, create financial incentives through tax breaks, and foster greater collaboration amongst agencies that promote tourism, including more work to promote rural tourism specifically.

#### **CA Chief Executive discusses Brexit with Defra Secretary**

Chief Executive, Tim Bonner, enjoyed a "positive discussion" with Defra Secretary of State, Andrea Leadsom MP, in a meeting on 8 December. The discussion included the implications of Brexit for farming, shooting and the environment. Tim stressed the need to make provision for upland farming in any future UK agricultural policy, in recognition of the vital work that hill farmers play in the management of the uplands, often on low profit margins. Tim also stressed that shooting was heavily reliant on trade with the EU and urged tariff free trade to continue across all markets associated with shooting.

### Government Bills

#### **Policing and Crime Bill**

The Bill has completed Committee Stage in the House of Lords and Third Reading is scheduled for Monday 19 December. In addition to the amendments to firearms law, the Government has also introduced an amendment on police powers to remove disguises from protestors. The amendment will enable a senior police officer to give immediate oral authorisation for a constable to remove face-coverings, where it is impracticable for that authorisation to be given in writing. The authorisation will be subject to the same conditions as now and must be recorded in writing afterwards. More information is available [here](#).

#### **Digital Economy Bill**

The Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Lords on 13 December; our briefing note is available [here](#). We welcomed the inclusion of the Universal Service Obligation in this Bill, and we are now interested in how this is going to be delivered to ensure this helps deliver connectivity to all rural communities.

## Select Committees

### EFRA Select Committee publishes written evidence on forestry

The Inquiry into **forestry in England** is on-going. We submitted [written evidence](#) on the important role that shooting plays in woodland management.

### Environmental Audit Select Committee examines 'rewilding'

The Inquiry into the **future of the natural environment after the EU referendum** is on-going. We have submitted [written evidence](#) highlighting concerns about 'rewilding' which was one of the questions in the terms of reference. One of the key issues is what is meant by 'rewilding'; is it a withdrawal of all management or a change in management and land use to achieve certain objectives?

### Exiting the EU Select Committee

An Inquiry into the **UK's negotiating objectives for leaving the EU** has been launched. We will be submitting written evidence on the rural priorities for Brexit. On 22 November, Head of Policy, Sarah Lee, featured in the *Daily Telegraph* article [Will our countryside still look like this in 50 years?](#) in which she addressed some of the issues raised by Brexit.

## Debates

### BBC governance

On 8 December there was an adjournment debate in the House of Commons on "the governance of the BBC" secured by Charles Walker MP (Con, Broxbourne). We sent out a briefing note ahead of debate focusing on concerns about BBC impartiality and the apparent inability of the corporation to enforce their own editorial standards in relation to rural broadcasting. The briefing note is available [here](#).

### Broadband Universal Service Obligation

On 15 December there was a backbench business debate in the House of Commons on the "broadband Universal Service Obligation". We sent out a briefing note ahead of debate, available [here](#).

## Reports and Consultations

### Ofcom recommends Openreach separate from BT Group

Following a consultation, Ofcom has announced that it is proceeding with a formal notification to require the separation of Openreach from BT. Whilst seeing the potential advantages of BT and Openreach being separated, we have also [expressed caution](#), calling for the Government and the providers of digital infrastructure not to be distracted from the key task of delivering the roll out of broadband and ensuring that rural communities are not left behind.

### Autumn Statement rules out Land Registry privatisation

Government proposals to move the operating functions of the Land Registry to the private sector have been dropped by the Chancellor in his [Autumn Statement](#). The Government has decided that the Land Registry should "*focus on becoming a more digital data-driven registration business, and to do this will remain in the public sector*". We [raised concerns](#) about the proposals during a consultation earlier this year and we welcomed this decision.

### Review of Scottish hunting law concludes

On 21 November, the Scottish Government [published its review](#) of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 which deals with hunting with dogs in Scotland. The review recommends some changes but on the issue of the continuation of the use of dogs to flush to guns; fox control below ground; and to follow up wounded mammals, the review is absolutely clear in its support for the current legislation. A summary of recommendations is available [here](#).

### **Consultation on the Post Office network closes**

The Government is currently seeking views on the accessibility of post offices, the services available, and the role of communities in the future of the network. The consultation closes on 21 December and we will be submitting evidence on the role post offices play in rural communities.

### **Away from Westminster**

#### **Finalists announced for the Countryside Alliance Awards**

Following a record breaking year with over 7,500 nominations, finalists for the 2016 Countryside Alliance Awards have been announced. Businesses in England will go head to head for one of five regional title ([Northern](#), [Eastern](#), [Midlands](#), [South East](#), and [South West](#)) and a shot at national glory. Finalists have also been announced for [Wales](#). MPs with finalists in their constituencies have been notified and we will keep you updated as the judging process continues.

#### **Casting for Recovery mentioned in Parliament**

On 8 December, Casting for Recovery was mentioned during a backbench business debate in the House of Commons on cancer strategy. Jo Churchill MP (Con, Bury St Edmunds) stated: *“Only this week, the Countryside Alliance Foundation took women who have received treatment fly-fishing. They find that the experience of being outside, doing something physical and enjoying nature gives them a huge sense of wellbeing”*. Applications for the six retreats taking place in 2017 are open and more information on these and Casting for Recovery is available [here](#).

#### **Marthon runners announced for London 2017**

We are very grateful to the six plucky fundraisers, including the 63-year-old director of our charity Fishing 4 Schools Charles Jardine, who will run the Virgin Money London Marathon on 23 April 2017 in aid of The Countryside Alliance Foundation projects. More information about the people taking part and how to support them is available [here](#).

#### **Team GB shooting success at Rio secures future funding**

We welcomed the announcement from UK Sport that funding for shooting will increase from £3.95 million to over £7 million. Team GB won two bronze medals in Rio through Ed Ling and Steve Scott and hopefully the extra funding will enable even more medals in Tokyo 2020!

### **And Finally...**

Our thanks to Steven Pidgeon, Head Chef at top sporting hotel The Arundell Arms Hotel in Devon for letting us publish his recipe for [venison and chocolate casserole](#). Delicious, nutritious and with high welfare and low food miles guaranteed, we hope game will grace your table this Christmas.

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