

25 October 2017

## **Countryside Alliance Parliamentary Update**

- **Highlights**
- **Select Committees**
- **Consultations and Reviews**
- **Rural Communities**
- **Shooting**
- **Away from Westminster**

### **Highlights**

#### **‘Rural Oscars’ in full swing**

The Countryside Alliance Awards, known as the ‘Rural Oscars’, are now in their 13<sup>th</sup> year and are recognised as the most prestigious rural business awards. The Awards are led by nominations from the public, which are open until Monday 13 November. We are inviting nominations for Local Food & Drink; Village Shop/Post Office; Butcher; Rural Enterprise; and, Pub. Please help us honour the people who go the extra mile for their community by [submitting an online nomination](#) for a business in your constituency.

#### **National Trust members vote to keep trail-hunting**

The Countryside Alliance welcomed the defeat of a resolution to ban [trail-hunting](#) on National Trust land at the Trust’s AGM on Saturday 21 October. The resolution, supported by the League Against Cruel Sports, was defeated by 30,985 votes to 30,686. Our Head of Hunting, Polly Portwin, commented: “Whilst we are happy with the outcome of the vote the resolution was ill-informed, unnecessary and has wasted a huge amount of the Trust’s time and money”. More information can be found [here](#).

#### **CA leads rural debates at the party conferences**

The Countryside Alliance once again attended the autumn party conferences, and hosted fringe events on Brexit and the countryside at the [Labour](#) and [Liberal Democrat](#) conferences. At the [Conservative](#) conference we hosted a breakfast discussion meeting with Defra Secretary of State, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, and another discussion on the future of wildlife law with the writer and philosopher, Professor Sir Roger Scruton. Both events were recorded and can be listened to [here](#).

### **Select Committees**

#### **CA gives evidence to NERC Committee on rural policy**

Our Chief Executive, Tim Bonner, told members of a House of Lords Select Committee on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC), that the [Government needs to do more to engage with rural communities](#) and implement ‘rural proofing’ to ensure that policies are effective in all parts of the country, not just towns and cities. The evidence session can be viewed [here](#).

#### **Brexit and food trade considered by EFRA Committee**

The Countryside Alliance welcomed the EFRA Committee inquiry into food trade with the EU post Brexit. Trade is one of the three central issues facing the food and farming industry as we leave the EU, along with labour and support payments. We have submitted written evidence to the inquiry on the requirements of the rural economy from food and farming, to shooting and the game market.

#### **Welsh Affairs Committee resumes Brexit and agriculture inquiry**

The Countryside Alliance welcomed the relaunch of the Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into agriculture, trade, and the repatriation of powers post Brexit. We submitted written evidence in the last Parliament on the importance of agriculture to the rural economy in Wales and the priorities for rural communities in the Brexit process and new domestic policies.

## Consultations and Reviews

### **Government announce review of airgun regulations**

The Policing Minister, Nick Hurd MP, has committed to review the regulation of airguns, as part of the Government's response to an [Adjournment Debate on the use and control of airguns](#). The Countryside Alliance sent out a [briefing note](#) ahead of the debate and the Minister gave an assurance that the Countryside Alliance, and other shooting organisations, would be consulted as part of the review.

### **CA raises concerns about Home Office proposals on 'offence weapons'**

Proposals to require knives purchased online to be collected in person have been challenged by the Countryside Alliance as being impractical for rural communities. The Countryside Alliance met the Home Office Minister, Sarah Newton MP, to ask for online age verification to be explored before changing the law, and also raised concerns about proposals to ban large calibre rifles without evidence of criminal misuse.

### **CA raises importance of seasonal workers to the rural economy**

The Countryside Alliance [met the Immigration Minister, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP](#), to highlight the importance of seasonal workers from the EU for shooting and the game market. We will be submitting written evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) on the requirements of the rural economy in a new immigration policy, and encouraging MAC to produce an interim report on seasonal workers.

### **A new broadband Universal Service Obligation: consultation on design**

Digital connectivity is a key concern of our membership and we welcomed the Government announcement in November 2015 to introduce a Universal Service Obligation (USO) of 10Mbit/s for broadband speeds. The proposal is being made a reality this year as it was included in the Digital Economy Act. The Countryside Alliance responded to the consultation on the USO acknowledging that the on demand USO will go some way to delivering digital connectivity to communities, but there is still a long way to go in rural areas and in particular those remote, hard to reach areas.

## Rural Communities

### **National Infrastructure Committee call for investment in digital infrastructure**

The [interim National Infrastructure Assessment](#) has highlighted that we are behind countries such as the USA, the Netherlands, and Japan for 4G and broadband speeds. We welcome the Assessment's recognition that "the UK will not be able to fully realise its digital ambitions whilst areas remain excluded" and that "substantial investment" in digital infrastructure is required, including bespoke solutions for rural areas, to ensure we have a world leading digital economy.

### **Increase in fines for fly-tipping**

The Countryside Alliance welcomed the announcement from Environment Minister, Therese Coffey MP, that following a consultation over the summer the [Government plans to almost double the littering fine](#) from £80 to £150 and introduce new fines for owners of vehicles from which litter is thrown.

### **CA raises importance of upland farming and communities with Farming Minister**

The [Countryside Alliance met the Farming Minister, George Eustice MP](#), to raise the importance of farming to the rural economy and communities, particularly in upland areas. The Minister said he was committed to supporting hill farming after Brexit and stated his intention to see a "gradual shift" towards a new system of income support which would not leave upland farmers worse off.

### **Online bullying proposals welcomed**

The Countryside Alliance has been campaigning to end online abuse and we welcomed the DCMS proposals in the [internet safety green paper](#) for social networks and internet providers to remove abusive, humiliating or intimidating content, with an industry-wide levy applied to help raise awareness.

## Shooting

### Defra Secretary praises shooting

Defra Secretary of State, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, has described people who shoot as “some of the people who are most engaged in conservation work”, and described country sports as “essential” for biodiversity. He was speaking at the [Countryside Alliance’s Brexit Breakfast](#) at the Conservative Party Conference where he was in conversation with our Chief Executive, Tim Bonner, on a range of issues including environmental policy, wildlife management, and trade, in the context of leaving the EU.

### Government recognises the value of shooting for curlew conservation

Speaking in a [Westminster Hall Debate on the lowland curlew](#), Environment Minister, Therese Coffey MP, said “areas where predators are managed, such as areas for grouse shooting, have higher rates of breeding success and we have seen a threefold increase in curlew abundance”. The Minister stated that the Government was committed to reversing the decline in bird populations, and recognised the need for predator control as part of this.

## Away from Westminster

### Great British Game Week is back

The Countryside Alliance’s [Game to Eat campaign](#) is delighted to once again co-host, alongside the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, a popular week long celebration of wild game meat from 20-26 November. The recipe leaflet for the current season is available [here](#).

### Casting for Recovery’s final retreat of the year

The [final Casting for Recovery retreat of 2017](#) was held at the Arundell Arms Hotel in Devon during the weekend of 20-22 October, with eleven ladies who have, or have had breast cancer, taking part in the unique medical and fly fishing programme. This was the fifth retreat of the year and more are planned for next year to provide therapy through fly fishing for those recovering from breast cancer.

### Young Kent guns experience game shooting

Over 70 people turned out on 14 October to give ten youngsters a [day to remember at Whitehill shoot](#), near Canterbury, ensuring the future of game shooting is stronger than ever. The ten newcomers to driven shooting, each with their own mentor, experienced a full day’s shooting, facilitated by the fantastic cooperation of the Whitehill shoot.

### Newcomers’ Week welcomes new faces to hunting

The Countryside Alliance annual Newcomers’ Week (21-28 October) is underway and hunts across the country are organising events to welcome people of all ages who want to try a day out with the hounds. If you are interested in finding out about what is going on with your local pack, visit our [Newcomers’ page](#).

## And finally...

### Top tips for Countryside Day at Aintree

Five former racehorses and their riders head to the [Countryside Day at Aintree on Sunday 29 October](#) to prove their versatility in the final of the Racing to Hunting Challenge. More information about the runners and riders can be found [here](#). We wish them all well.

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