Balfours

PROPERTY PROFESSIONALS

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2026

The Great British Land Circus: A Field Guide

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

In the grand theatre of rural Britain, the cast is diverse and occasionally bewildered!

- Rural diversification: once a polite way of saying “we’ve converted a barn into a holiday cottage” it now includes glamping pods, wedding barns, alpacas, yoga, and—if the brochures are to be believed—transformational wellness retreats involving compost.
- Farming and the environment continue their delicate dance. Farmers are part food producer, part ecologist, and part bureaucrat, navigating stewardship schemes that reward hedgerow pampering while simultaneously filling in forms that require a PhD and a strong cup of tea. The countryside has never looked more managed.
- Land purchase remains the sport of kings and increasingly, investors with a fondness for tax efficiency and long-term thinking. Values ebb and flow like a muddy tide, driven by everything from rollover and commodity prices to carbon credits, with buyers squinting at maps and muttering about “natural capital” as though it might graze itself.
- The residential sales market is its usual excitable self. One minute it’s booming, the next it’s catching its breath. Village houses with beams, views, and questionable broadband still inspire bidding wars, proving romance occasionally trumps reality.
- Planning and development is where optimism meets policy. Here dreams of tasteful barn conversions and modest extensions encounter the solemn gaze of planning committees and bats with impeccable legal representation. Success requires patience, diplomacy, and a working knowledge of obscure guidelines drafted sometime around 1987.

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- Residential lettings, the steady heartbeat of the property world. Tenants seek affordability and decent heating; landlords seek compliance with ever-evolving regulation and perhaps a modest return after costs, taxes, and the occasional "unexpected maintenance." It's a relationship built on compromise—and the odd boiler emergency.
- Property valuations tie it all together, attempting to impose order on a gloriously subjective world. Location, condition, sentiment, and market mood combine to produce figures that are both precise and, somehow, entirely debatable.
- Finally, we cross the border into Welsh property matters, where rolling landscapes meet distinct regulations, language considerations, and a strong sense of identity. Here, policy can be as rugged as the terrain, and understanding the local context is not optional—it's essential.
- So the show goes on: fields evolve, houses change hands, planners deliberate, and somewhere, someone is still trying to justify a shepherd's hut with a hot tub as "agricultural diversification."

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Diversification

Data Centres

Until recently, rural land was not an obvious beneficiary of the digital revolution. However, data centre developers are increasingly considering rural sites that offer space, security and untapped power capacity.

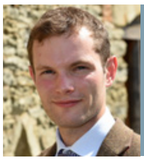
Alongside proximity to major fibre routes, the greatest value lies in sites with guaranteed grid connections or the potential to co-locate with renewable energy such as wind or solar, both of which can command a significant premium.

Planning changes in 2026 have also made it easier to support applications for these sites:

Data centres now hold Critical National Infrastructure status, strengthening the "economic need" case in planning applications.

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local authorities to identify specific sites for data centres.
- Nationally Significant Infrastructure: Large-scale projects can now opt into the NSIP regime, allowing the Secretary of State to fast-track approvals via a Development Consent Order (DCO).

These schemes are not straightforward, but for readers with disused runways, former nursery sites, brownfield land or similar assets, they may be worth exploring.



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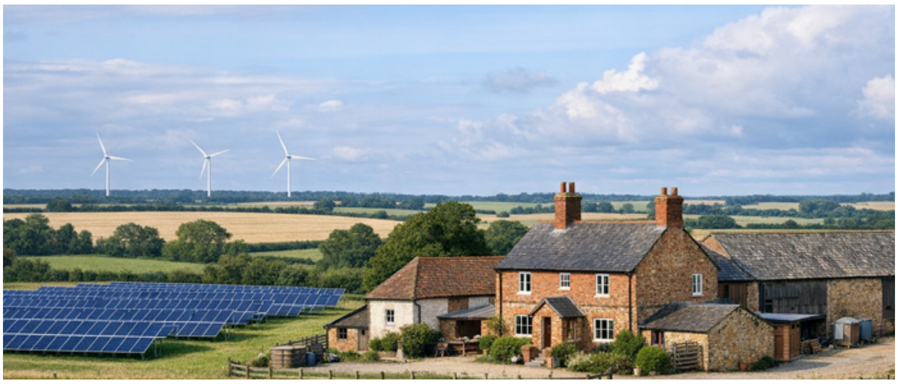
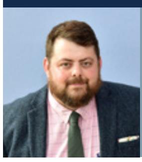


Valuation

Bespoke Valuation Fit for Purpose

At Balfours we undertake valuations of all forms and size of rural property for many purposes. Increased regulatory compliance means that relying on "back of envelope calculations" may, in the end, be a false economy.

Accurate Red Book valuations tailored to reflect the unique attributes a property allow for confident property decisions, providing consistent, RICS-compliant opinions that can be relied on. They reduce risk through transparency and defensibility in lending, investment, and financial reporting allowing lenders to assess security, investors to measure performance, and owners to plan effectively. Regular updates reflect market change, avoiding mispricing and compliance issues. Ultimately, robust Red Book valuations build trust, support regulatory obligations, and strengthen credibility for all involved. Discuss with your professional advisor how we might best help.



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West of Offa's Dyke

Changing government

The 2026 Senedd election marks a major political shift in Wales, with Plaid Cymru emerging as the largest party but without an overall majority, meaning rural and agricultural policy will likely be shaped through negotiation and compromise.

For farming, the key issue is the future of the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), which replaces EU-style direct payments with funding linked to environmental outcomes such as habitat management and soil health. While Plaid Cymru supports refining the scheme with more flexibility and longer-term funding, other parties have pushed for a stronger emphasis on food production and reduced regulatory burden.

This divergence suggests the SFS will continue but could be adjusted to better balance environmental delivery with farm profitability and food security—a central tension for the next Senedd term.

More broadly, the new government faces pressure to provide funding certainty, proportionate regulation and support for rural economies, at a time when farms are dealing with rising costs and policy change.

Overall, the election result points to a period of policy refinement rather than wholesale change, with greater emphasis on collaboration between government and the agricultural sector.

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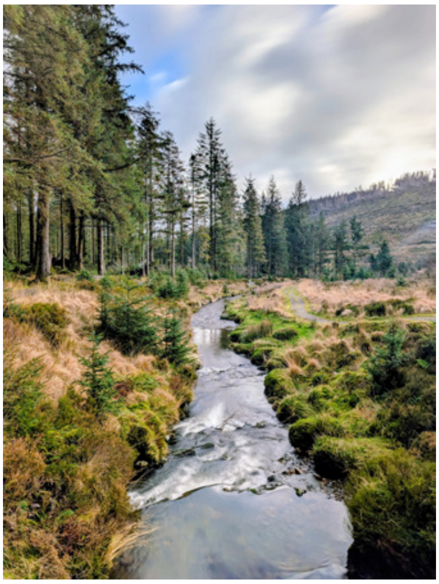

Residential Lettings

Getting it Right

Whilst it is important for a tenant to find a good landlord it is equally important for a landlord to find a good tenant. In the new Renters Rights landscape, and with the current court backlogs, we don't yet know how long it may take to recover possession of a property where a tenant is in breach of the tenancy terms. Under the old legislation we were seeing court orders taking between 6-10 months to be received. In contentious cases significant rent arrears are more than likely.

Rigorous referencing has never been more important. Beyond basic credit checks, landlords should focus on comprehensive affordability assessments and verified rental histories. In a system where possession is harder to regain, choosing a tenant who demonstrates both the financial capacity and a proven track record of maintaining property is essential. Client's must be aware of the law surrounding discrimination when selecting tenants.

Checks should include:

- **Proof of Identity:** A valid passport or driving licence to satisfy Right to Rent checks (a legal requirement in England).
- **Proof of Income:** The last 3–6 months of payslips or an employment contract. For self-employed tenants, request the most recent SA302 tax calculation.
- **Bank Statements:** Usually the last 3 months to verify spending habits and consistent rent payments.
- **Previous Landlord Reference:** Written confirmation of the tenant's history regarding payment and property care. Speak in person, if in doubt.
- **Credit Report:** To check for active CCJs or insolvency history.
- **Guarantor Information:** If the tenant is high-risk, a similar set of documents for a UK-based homeowner. Can they afford to guarantee the rent?

Most of us have experienced some prospective tenants exaggerating on application forms and as such in person viewings with all applicants and asking prudent questions during the viewing is more important than ever.

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Residential Sales Market

If the Price is Right

The residential markets in Shropshire and Herefordshire reflect a steady start, but with a pragmatic approach from sellers, offers are being made.

In Shropshire we have seen modest growth with average prices increasing by 2.2% annually which outperforms the West Midlands average. Buyer activity has now started for 2026, with enquiries rising however properties are taking longer to sell than in recent years. Property prices are readjusting and when these are realistically or even competitively priced, they can still sell quickly.

In surrounding counties, we are seeing prices holding still, but there is still decent demand at the right price.

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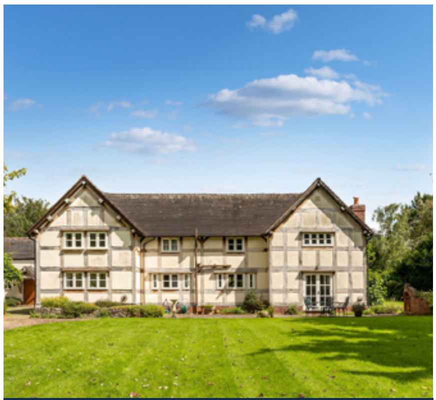

Castle Grange, Ludlow
Sold March 2026

Planning and Development

Shropshire Housing Delivery

Shropshire Council's decision on 24 February 2026 to approve the 1,500 home Tasley Garden Village on the outskirts of Bridgnorth represents a pivotal shift in the county's housing supply position. Planning officers advised councillors that the authority's lack of a demonstrable five year housing land supply weighed heavily in favour of approval, triggering the presumption in favour of sustainable development under national policy.

The scheme should deliver around 300 affordable homes and was permitted on the basis it addressed both housing need and infrastructure deficits in eastern Shropshire. Its consent also strengthens the council's short to medium term housing trajectory following the withdrawal of the draft Shropshire Local Plan in early 2025, which left decision making increasingly reliant on planning balance rather than allocations.

Crucially, this decision is likely to influence other strategic and speculative housing proposals across the county. Developers promoting large or edge of settlement sites are expected to rely on the approval as a precedent, particularly where schemes promise infrastructure delivery and scale. Conversely, the scale of the garden village may temper support for smaller or less sustainable schemes around Bridgnorth itself, as officers seek to avoid cumulative impacts on roads and services—a concern already raised by town and parish councils.

Overall, the consent signals that until a new, sound Local Plan is adopted, strategic sites capable of rapidly boosting supply are likely to receive favourable consideration across Shropshire.

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Farming and the Environment

Unlocking Value for Landowners

In England and Wales, new spatial strategies are transforming how the countryside is managed, turning environmental restoration into a viable business opportunity for landowners.

In England Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are being established to map high-priority areas for habitat creation, Shropshire's LNRS has just been published which for anyone owning land in the county is a must read. For landowners, being situated within these "strategically significant" zones should present an advantage. Projects aligned with an LNRS can receive a 15% uplift in biodiversity units under Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) rules, making land significantly more attractive to developers seeking off-site mitigation. Additionally, these strategies may guide eligibility for public funding through the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Landscape Recovery schemes. The combined Cheshire Authorities, who are ahead of Shropshire in progressing their LNRS, are actively looking for landowners who wish to discuss improvements to priority areas through grant funding.

In Wales, the Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) focuses on building resilient networks through Local Nature Partnerships. Landowners can access support via the Sustainable Farming Scheme, which incentivises maintaining habitat across farm holdings. Collaborative initiatives offer further site-specific opportunities for landscape-scale restoration.

Key Opportunities

- **Diversified Income:** Turning less productive land into revenue through BNG units or carbon sequestration.
- **Funding Priority:** Using LNRS maps to strengthen applications for Countryside Stewardship and other environmental grants.
- **Voluntary Participation:** These strategies are non-prescriptive, allowing landowners to choose actions that suit their long-term business goals.

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Land Purchase

Opportunities Despite Economic Squeeze

Buying neighbouring land is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many farmers. However, current industry challenges and geopolitical uncertainty make short-term profitability and cashflow difficult to predict and so, whilst acquiring neighbouring land is rarely regretted in the long term, buyers must be cognisant of ongoing cashflow volatility before taking on new financial commitments.

Consideration should therefore be given to: -

- **Extending Repayment Terms*** to minimise monthly outgoings, while retaining the flexibility to make capital repayments when cashflow allows.
- **Securing Long-Term Commitments** – which do not include covenants or reviews of the decision to lend to give comfort that the loan cannot be recalled early as long as repayments are met.

As long-standing representatives for the Agricultural Mortgage Corporation (AMC), Balfours LLP can arrange loans with terms up to 30 years on fixed** or variable rates. In many cases, interest-only periods*** can be secured to make land purchase more affordable and for cases that don't fit AMC criteria, we work with other trusted lenders to secure appropriate packages for viable proposals.

To ensure that your lifetime opportunity to buy neighbouring land is comfortably affordable, it is important to structure any borrowing required to best fit your own unique set of circumstances.

To discuss new finance or restructuring existing debt, contact tel: 07538 321201

PLEASE NOTE: -BALFOURS LLP IS A CREDIT BROKER (AUTHORISED & REGULATED BY THE FCA – REF No 442643) AND IS NOT A LENDER

*EXTENDING THE LOAN WILL REDUCE MONTHLY COMMITMENTS BUT WILL INCREASE THE OVERALL COST OF REPAYING THE DEBT

*** IF BORROWING ON INTEREST-ONLY FOR THE TERM OF THE LOAN, THE INITIAL SUM BORROWED REMAINS OUTSTANDING AT THE END OF THE LOAN TERM

Andrew Connah
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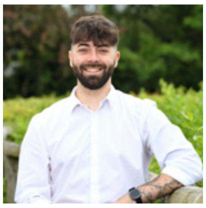
People

Promotions

Nathan Baker – Head of Finance

Nathan completed his accountancy apprenticeship with Balfours and continued his studies to become a fully qualified chartered accountant and is now promoted to Head of Finance.



Liam Heskey – Senior Finance Assistant

Liam joined Balfours in 2020. During his time at Balfours Liam has completed the AAT Level 4 Certificate and is currently over half way through his ACCA Chartered Accounting qualification.

Jayne Kenny - Senior Finance Assistant

Jayne joined Balfours six years ago after retraining from a career in teaching and completing her AAT Level 4 Accounting qualification.

Sarah Corfield – Business Administrator/HR Support

Sarah joined Balfours in 2024 and has been promoted to Business Administrator & HR Support, bringing previous experience in retail management and her degree in teaching.

New Starters

Rebecca Craig - Assistant Administrator

Rebecca has recently relocated to Shrewsbury and brings over 10 years of experience in administration and finance.

Ben Wood – Accounts

Ben seized the opportunity while being furloughed to retrain and successfully gained his AAT qualifications. After 5 years experience as a finance assistance Ben has joined our accounts team at New Windsor House.

Bethany Gough-Becker – Lettings Administrator

Beth is a Real Estate graduate from the University of the West of England and brings experience across both sales and lettings.

Syed Islam - Accounts

Syed brings broad finance experience across automotive, consultancy, health and social care, and tech, and is currently completing his CIMA accountancy qualification.

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