



Sowing the planning seeds

After an inquiry into the horticultural sector



BETH WATTS, SENIOR ASSOCIATE, BLOOMFIELDS

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In November 2023, the House of Lords issued a comprehensive report following an inquiry into the UK horticultural industry. While the report is lengthy at 185 pages, it signals the Government's recognition of the sector's economic importance, contributing over £5 billion annually and employing 50,000 individuals. Despite these positive aspects, the report highlights the industry's vulnerability due to factors like Brexit, COVID-19, the Ukraine conflict, rising input costs, labour shortages, and unfavourable trading conditions.

Amid these challenges, Beth Watts, Senior Associate at Bloomfields, is pleased to see the report identify opportunities for positive change. The inquiry acknowledges these difficulties as a catalyst for transformation, emphasising the sector's potential to implement net-zero practices, biodiversity net gain, carbon capture, enhance domestic food security, and adopt technological advancements. It also emphasises the need for a government policy and strategic platform to support the horticultural sector effectively.

Focusing on edible horticulture and planning, the report advocates for a visionary approach extending beyond political cycles. It calls for a long-term seasonal worker scheme, a review of worker numbers, provisions for domestic workers, planning support for accommodation, and advancements in technology and

innovation. Additionally, the report recognises the benefits of "controlled environment horticulture," which is efficient in terms of yield, water, and land use, relying on biopesticides, biofertilisers, and integrated pest management.

The report identifies the importance of dedicated planning attention and support for controlled growing systems and reservoirs, alongside broader grants. It acknowledges the bureaucratic and lengthy nature of

obtaining planning permission, advocating for a more streamlined and consistent system. It is great to see the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) acknowledge these challenges, and the report anticipates improvements which are reflected in the latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) release.

Bloomfields are supporters of strategic changes supporting the horticultural and agricultural sector through the revised planning system, and with our qualified team members we are well placed to assist with planning matters; even if it is within a system that brings obvious challenges.

Contact your local Bloomfields office for further information and please make sure you register for our updates as we keep a keen eye on further planning changes expected in 2024.



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West Kent 01892 831 600 | East Kent 01303 814 444 | Sussex 01435 873 999
info@bloomfieldsltd.co.uk | www.bloomfieldsltd.co.uk

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