

Shelter for families in war zone

FAMILIES across Lebanon are being forced to flee their homes as the conflict in the Middle East grows.

More than 700,000 people have already left their homes after repeated bombings and evacuation orders. Many towns and cities are now under fire and Lebanon is on the brink of a major humanitarian crisis.

Family homes are being destroyed — people are escaping with almost nothing and taking shelter wherever they can — schools, communal shelters set up by the government, crowded public buildings, or makeshift shelters. Many are already full and some families have no choice but to sleep outside.

At ShelterBox, we've launched an urgent fundraising appeal to help fund our response. We're working with a local organisation and Rotary in Lebanon to support families who have been displaced. Together, we're preparing to support people with essential items that are urgently needed — things like blankets, mattresses, food containers, solar lights, kitchen sets, and hygiene kits.

Our partner is visiting the hardest-hit areas to speak with affected families about what they need most. This will help us shape the right package of support. We've responded in Lebanon before — most recently during the 2024 conflict — and we're drawing on that experience to support again.

If *North Devon Gazette* readers can support us, by sharing our appeal or donating, it would make a real difference to families who have been uprooted from their homes.

Haroon Altaf
Regional director for the
Middle East and North Africa
ShelterBox

Land crunch

THE Land Use Framework is a long-awaited opportunity for real change. It promises serious integration across government departments, which could help ensure we finally make the most of our finite supply of land.

We welcome the review of the agricultural land classification and greater transparency of resources including the Land Registry and National Soil Map. Enhanced safeguards for farmland are also encouraging at a time when demand for land has never been more acute.

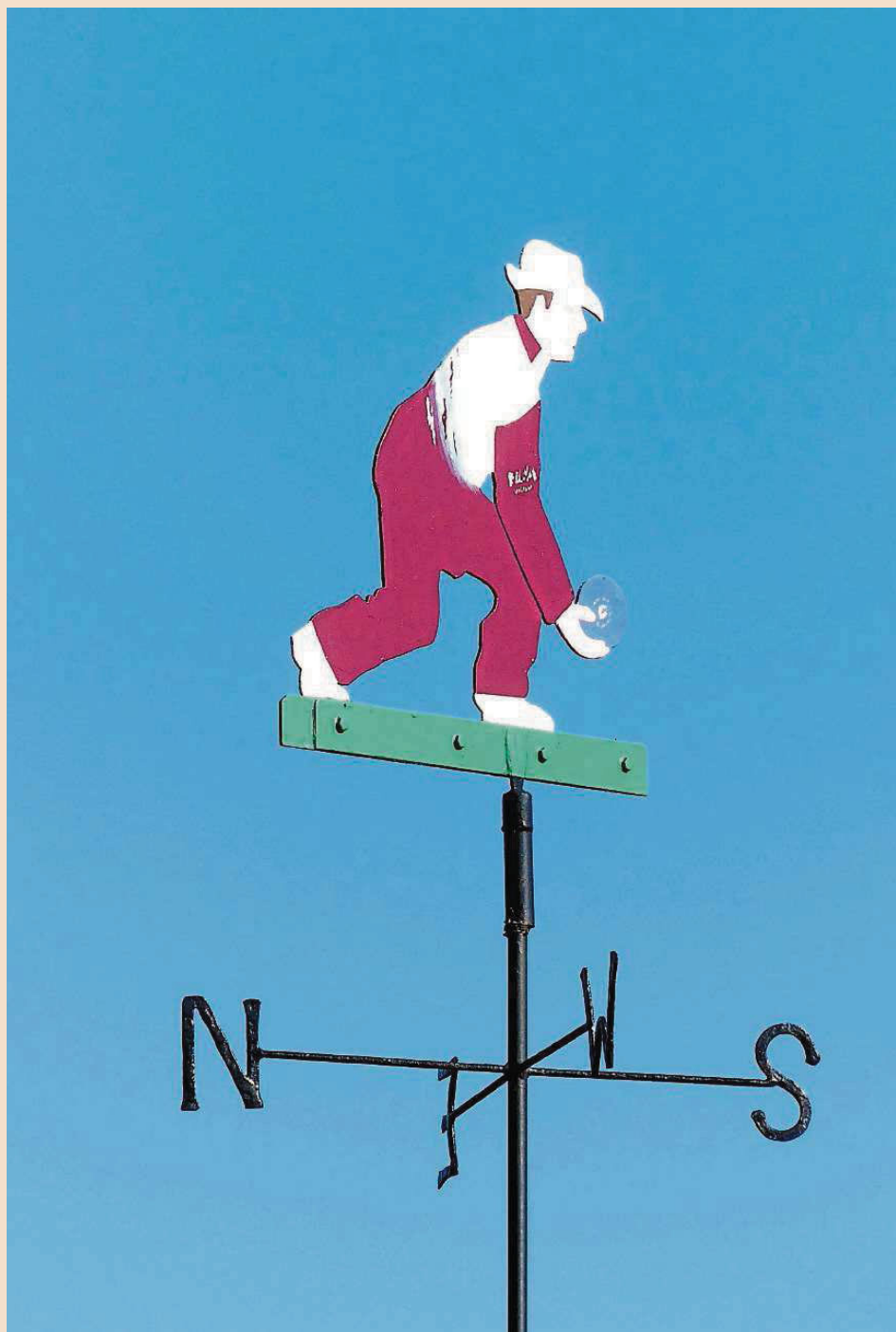
But even the best intentions won't change the fact that every hectare of land is being pulled in multiple directions.

Economic growth should not be prioritised at any cost to the countryside. How trade-offs are managed locally and nationally — and the degree to which the framework is integrated with other spatial strategies — will be key to its success.

The UK is facing a land crunch of unprecedented proportions. We can overcome it, but delivery matters as much as ambition.

Roger Mortlock
CPRE chief executive

Bowled over



The bowling green beckons in Bideford's Victoria Park in this picture taken last week by photographer Graham Hobbs

Green ideas

IT'S often said, particularly in the context of politics, be careful what you wish for!

So where are we after the Greens' success in Manchester? The new MP says she wants to rebuild the NHS and other public services! She can only do that by appealing to the central Labour government, to cough up

the funds! The Royal College of Nursing have said they want to grow the homegrown labour force as should happen but they still recognise the need for migrant staff for the wards and for care work.

If you want to choke off that, vote Reform and don't moan when you can't get staff!

So what about other Green Party policies? They are anti war. Aren't

we all! But what do you do when Putin or Netanyahu involves your country willingly or otherwise in it? Putin does not accept Ukraine's right as a sovereign country to choose EU or NATO!

The far right in Europe and UK are in Putin's pocket! The Greens seek the break-up of a relatively successful and influential UK nation and its replacement by four relatively weak

nations of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England minus the other devolved powers.

It would involve a huge economic hit probably worse than the Brexit engineered by London city financial scammers and spearheaded by Farage, Boris and others. Which reduced British food exports by a reported 40 per cent. Putin and Trump both want to bust the EU and NATO to further their anti-democratic authoritarian neo-fascist plans!

The alternative to this Labour government with all its admitted mis-steps is chaos, social collapse and high interest on government borrowing if you can even persuade the bond traders to loan to the UK at all?

The small powers of a broken-up UK would have no chance! their agenda is the road to nowhere. Sorry, Zac Polanski, Nigel, assorted devolved Nats.

AD Gill
Ashford

Heating costs

£53 MILLION in support for households reliant on heating oil is welcome, but ministers will need to ensure that help arrives quickly for the households that need it most.

Rural poverty often goes unseen, but it is driven by exactly this sort of inequality.

The commitment to take legal action against suppliers who cancelled orders and hiked prices is significant, and the fuel duty freeze until September is vital for rural households, where driving is essential for work, healthcare, and daily life.

The news comes at a time when multiple police forces across the country have warned rural households about oil theft, issuing warnings and urging people to lock their tanks and consider installing security measures. A spate of thefts have recently been reported, with country homes being targeted by oil thieves who are exploiting the surge in energy prices by selling stolen fuel on the black market. Two men were arrested in Nottinghamshire on suspicion of theft of oil.

Further issues remain unaddressed following the Prime Minister's announcement.

The Countryside Alliance is also concerned that support schemes should not overlook other off-grid households. Around 200,000 rural homes rely on LPG, yet these households have not been mentioned in today's announcement.

The Countryside Alliance has been raising these concerns directly with government, highlighting the disproportionate impact of energy price increases on rural communities. The Alliance urges ministers to move swiftly to ensure that support reaches all vulnerable off-grid households and that market abuses by suppliers are fully investigated.

Tim Bonner
Countryside Alliance