

## Detailed commentary on interest rate forecasts

Our treasury management advisers, Link Asset Services, provided us with the following update to their interest rate forecasts.

### **1. Quarterly Inflation Report and Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting 10.5.18**

- *We have pushed back our first Bank Rate increase from May 2018 to November 2018.*
- *While photographers implore a sitter to watch the birdie, Mark Carney has often repeated the phrase of 'watch the data'!*

As late as mid-February, financial markets were viewing a May Bank Rate increase as a near dead certainty. We would refer clients back to our previous newsflash on 13.2.18 where we explained the forward guidance issued by the MPC after its previous meeting which reinforced the view that Bank Rate was likely to go up faster than markets were expecting. This guidance placed much emphasis on a tight labour market with the following characteristics: -

- remarkably low unemployment which was continuing on a trend of falling
- healthy growth of rising employment and levels of employment out of the population of available workers
- increasing levels of vacancies
- MPC concerns on rising wage inflation in this tight labour market
- low productivity limiting GDP non-inflationary growth to only 1.5% p.a.
- inflation still being slightly above the target of 2% during the new 18-24 month time horizon

Very little has changed since then apart from inflation now being projected to hit the 2% target in two years' time.

BUT..... what has changed the whole outlook and the latest MPC decision to leave Bank Rate unchanged, is the sharp downturn of economic data since mid-February which has resulted in a first estimate, (on 40% of the data), of a mere 0.1% GDP growth in quarter 1. Not only this, but over this quarter, the PMI indicators and actual production figures have come in weaker than expected. Admittedly, some of this was due to adverse weather in the quarter but the ONS commented that its 0.1% statistic was little affected by the weather. Admittedly, the optimists will point to the fact that we had a sharp dip in quarter 1 of 2017, so maybe we should not get too down about what might be just another blip this year. They could also raise concerns around US economic sanctions on Iran and developments in Venezuela leading to a sharp increase in the price of oil which could feed inflationary pressures into the economy; this, in turn, could then put upward pressure on Bank Rate. However, we can only summarise by saying that it is good sense for the MPC to hold fire on their promise on increasing Bank Rate until they see that economic growth recovers during the year and that the quarter 1 downturn proves only to be a temporary dip.

We therefore have to say that while our previous forecast included bringing forward the next increase in Bank Rate from November to May 2018, we have now had to reverse this back again in the light of how the economic data has transpired during quarter 1. The MPC may well now want to see two quarters of a return to reasonably strong growth before tightening

monetary policy so we feel that an increase in Bank Rate as soon as August 2018 is unlikely. We would also point out that the MPC is probably unlikely to change Bank Rate at its February 2019 quarterly review meeting as this would be just ahead of the March deadline for withdrawal from the EU. So the MPC will be trying to juggle the tension between this and needing to take some action to deliver on its promise on increasing Bank Rate, which, therefore, puts the spotlight on the November 2018 meeting. A further factor will be that all central banks now have one eye on the need to normalise monetary policy so they can have tools to use if there was another recession. It is also notable that the MPC announced it will do a review on reversing quantitative easing.

As not much fundamentally has changed apart from recent weak data, we would refer clients back to our previous newsflash for the further comments we made then.

## **2. LINK ASSET SERVICES' FORECASTS**

We are therefore forecasting a first Bank Rate increase in November 2018, to be followed by further increases in September 2019, June 2020 and November 2020.

We can only forecast given the current situation and have to flag up that there is a wide spread of potential outcomes during this three year forecast period and a likelihood of heightened volatility as events actually unfold. Our own forecasts are based on a central assumption that the UK will make progress with concluding a satisfactory outcome over the Brexit negotiations with the EU by March 2019, although the UK finance sector is likely to be an area of particular concern and difficulty.

Forecasts for average investment earnings beyond the three year time horizon will be heavily dependent on economic and political developments.

### **Gilt yields and PWLB rates**

The general situation is for volatility in bond yields to endure as investor fears and confidence ebb and flow between favouring relatively more "risky" assets i.e. equities, or the "safe haven" of government bonds. The overall longer run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to rise, albeit gently, although there are likely to also be periods of sharp volatility from time to time.

We have pointed out consistently that the Fed. Rate is likely to go up more quickly and more strongly than Bank Rate in the UK. While there is normally a high degree of correlation between the bond yields of both countries, we would expect to see an eventual growing decoupling of yields between the two i.e. we would expect US yields to go up faster than UK yields. Over the period since the start of 2017, there has been a strong correlation between increases in treasury, gilt and bund yields for periods longer than 5 years, although the rate of increase in the UK and Germany has been somewhat lower than in the US. We will need to monitor this area and any resulting effect on PWLB rates.

### **The balance of risks to economic growth and Bank Rate increases**

- The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK is probably neutral.
- The balance of risks to increases in Bank Rate and shorter term PWLB rates, are probably also even and are dependent on how strong GDP growth turns out, how slowly inflation pressures subside, and how quickly the Brexit negotiations move forward positively.

Our forecasts are predicated on an assumption that there is no break-up of the Eurozone or EU, (apart from the departure of the UK), within our forecasting time period, despite the major challenges that are looming up, and that there are no major ructions in international relations,

especially between the US and China / North Korea and Iran, which have a major impact on international trade and world GDP growth.

We would, as always, remind clients of the view that we have expressed in our previous interest rate revision newsflashes of just how unpredictable PWLB rates and bond yields are at present. Our revised forecasts are based on the Certainty Rate (minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

Link Asset Services Interest Rate View												
	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19	Mar-20	Jun-20	Sep-20	Dec-20	Mar-21
Bank Rate View	0.50%	0.50%	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%	1.00%	1.00%	1.00%	1.25%	1.25%	1.50%	1.50%
3 Month LIBID	0.60%	0.70%	0.90%	0.90%	0.90%	1.10%	1.20%	1.30%	1.40%	1.50%	1.60%	1.60%
6 Month LIBID	0.70%	0.80%	1.00%	1.00%	1.00%	1.20%	1.20%	1.30%	1.50%	1.60%	1.70%	1.70%
12 Month LIBID	0.80%	0.90%	1.10%	1.10%	1.20%	1.30%	1.40%	1.40%	1.60%	1.70%	1.80%	1.80%
5yr PWLB Rate	1.90%	2.00%	2.00%	2.10%	2.20%	2.20%	2.30%	2.30%	2.40%	2.40%	2.50%	2.50%
10yr PWLB Rate	2.40%	2.40%	2.50%	2.60%	2.60%	2.70%	2.80%	2.80%	2.90%	2.90%	3.00%	3.00%
25yr PWLB Rate	2.70%	2.80%	2.90%	3.00%	3.10%	3.20%	3.30%	3.30%	3.40%	3.40%	3.50%	3.50%
50yr PWLB Rate	2.40%	2.50%	2.60%	2.70%	2.80%	2.90%	3.00%	3.00%	3.10%	3.10%	3.20%	3.20%

BANK RATE	now	previously
Q1 2019	0.75%	1.00%
Q1 2020	1.00%	1.25%
Q1 2021	1.50%	1.50%

Our target borrowing rates and the current PWLB (certainty) borrowing rates are set out below.

PWLB debt	Current borrowing rate as at 11.5.18	Target borrowing rate now (Q2 2018)	Target borrowing rate previous (Q2 2018)
5 year	1.88%	1.90%	2.00%
10 year	2.32%	2.40%	2.50%
25 year	2.71%	2.70%	2.90%
50 year	2.43%	2.40%	2.70%

**Borrowing advice:** although rates have risen from their low points, particularly in periods up to 10 years, longer term rates are still historically low and borrowing should be considered if appropriate to your strategy. We still see value in the 40 years to 50 years range, but note the curve has flattened considerably from 10 years out. Value, however, in the 40-50 years part of the curve may be negated if Bank Rate does not climb to at least 2.5% over the medium term. Accordingly, clients will need to review and assess their risk appetite in terms of any

underlying borrowing requirement they may have, and also project forward their position in respect of cash backed resources.

Any new borrowing should also take into account the continuing cost of carry, the difference between investment earnings and borrowing rates, especially as our forecasts indicate that Bank Rate may rise to only 1.50% by December 2020.

Our suggested budgeted investment earnings rates for investments up to about three months' duration in each financial year for the next seven years are as follows:

Average earnings in each year	Now	Previously
2018/19	0.75%	0.80%
2019/20	1.00%	1.25%
2020/21	1.25%	1.50%
2021/22	1.50%	1.65%
2022/23	1.75%	1.75%
2023/24	2.00%	2.00%
Later years	2.75%	2.75%

As there are so many variables at this time, caution must be exercised in respect of all interest rate forecasts. The general expectation for an eventual trend of gently rising gilt yields and PWLB rates is unchanged. Negative, (or positive), developments could significantly impact safe-haven flows of investor money into UK, US and German bonds and produce shorter term movements away from our central forecasts.

Our interest rate forecast for Bank Rate is in steps of 25 bps whereas PWLB forecasts have been rounded to the nearest 10 bps and are central forecasts within bands of + / - 25 bps.

Naturally, we continue to monitor events and will update our forecasts as and when appropriate.