



Rewilding or rehashing?

Environment Secretary George Eustice's proposal to pay farmers to rewild land is more of the same with a bit of greenwash to mask the fact that the policy has been formulated to ensure that Brexit is not going to mean that a core Tory constituency will lose a significant part of their unearned income. Common Agricultural Policy subsidies were a direct gift to wealthy landowners and the new grants will be just as iniquitous because all subsidies and grants capitalise into land value which means higher prices for owners and higher rents for tenants. If public money is to be disbursed to achieve the claimed holistic environmental goal, then local communities and local authorities would be in a better position than the landowners to determine exactly what is to be rewilded or restored to wetlands.

The Labour Land Campaign (LLC) has long called for a fundamental shift in what is taxed - off wages and production and onto the unearned incomes landownership yields - by replacing taxes that depress the economy with a Land Value Tax (LVT).

LLC Chair, Peter Reilly, calls on the Environment Secretary to understand how the old Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies benefited rich farmland owners rather than small farms and tenant farmers: "Any farming subsidy should be designed to benefit farming and not be a handout to the wealthiest owners of farm land. LVT is an economic and environmental tool for ensuring all land is used efficiently and sparingly and, if this government is serious about protecting the environment and protecting rural life, a well-designed LVT will achieve just that: farmers will only farm the land they need and will release other land for young new entrants or, if it is unproductive, it can be returned as wildlife habitats or wetlands." Villages and market towns have seen homes become unaffordable for local people because second homes and homes bought for holiday lets (often with subsidised mortgages) have pushed up prices and rents. This has meant fewer customers for local businesses which have been forced to close and that has reduced local jobs. "LVT will stop land speculation which is pushing up house and commercial property prices in towns and cities. It will also bring idle development sites and empty buildings into their proper use, thereby reducing pressure to build on green land in rural areas."

Rural land should be used for food production, homes, businesses and recreation, not as an investment vehicle for wealthy individuals and corporations. Real investment in public services and productive businesses is what generates land value and LVT means that the beneficiaries of rising land values – landowners - will pay their fair share. ENDS

***The Labour Land Campaign is a voluntary organisation working for land reform.
It advocates a fairer distribution of land wealth through a Land Value Tax.***

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