

**Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

**THE LAND TRUST'S RESPONSE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY ON THE FUTURE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AFTER THE EU REFERENDUM**

**Introduction to the Land Trust**

The Land Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry on the future of the natural environment after the EU referendum.

In the first instance, to put our response into context, the Land Trust is the national land management charity that provides cost effective, long term management solutions for green open spaces.

Our vision is to improve the quality of people's lives by creating and maintaining high quality green spaces that deliver environmental, social and economic benefits.

We manage our land, to enhance its services, from supporting vital biodiversity, restoring and creating habitats, improving water quality and flood risk management, by engaging with local communities and involving them in decisions and providing them with opportunities to shape their green spaces.

As such, we and all of the communities surrounding our 60+ green spaces have a vested interest in ensuring that Government policies on agriculture continue to protect and enhance the environment and that this becomes a key objective in any new schemes.

Our business model enables us to provide high quality and sustainable, well maintained green spaces that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits and we see that agricultural and environmental policies are an integral part of wider sustainable land management.

Therefore, we feel that we are in a strong position to be able to put forward our views in response to this inquiry.

**Key messages**

Below are the key messages that we make in our response:

- Ensure public funding is used for public good
- Encourage landowners to manage their land sustainably
- Ensure biodiversity is supported and enhanced in both rural and urban landscapes
- Maximize opportunities to engage people with nature, bringing about social benefit and improved health and wellbeing of people
- Have a country more resilient to the effects of climate change

**Inquiry Questions**

Please find our responses to the inquiry questions on the following pages.

## **1. What are the implications for UK biodiversity of leaving the EU, in particular the Common Agricultural Policy?**

Agricultural support has impacted on the natural environment for the last 50 to 70 years and beyond. Significantly during this time and as a result of numerous factors, we have seen major declines in invertebrates, birds, wild flowers, mammals and reptiles within the countryside. This would suggest that the policies and payments implemented to protect and enhance the countryside for these species have not been wholly successful.

Therefore, although the state of nature in the UK has declined considerably during this time, without financial support, it could be in an even worse state.

We believe that if the right type of financial support is available, and is clearly targeted and specific, biodiversity can improve.

As such, the implications for biodiversity of leaving the EU has the potential to be beneficial but this will be singularly dependent on the replacement payments, schemes and structures that are put in to place in the future.

### **1.1 To what extent do initiatives to support biodiversity in the UK depend on CAP-related payments?**

The management of the UK's highest quality sites for nature are significantly dependent on CAP related payments. The majority of SSSI's, for example, have minimal ability to generate direct financial returns from their management; therefore if we wish to see them persist in their most biodiverse state then they will require continued external funding.

CAP related payments have also incentivised some landowners to help the recovery of threatened farmland birds, such as Tree Sparrow, Skylark and Corn Bunting and these and a number of other farmland dependent species would have undoubtedly gone into an irreversible decline had the incentive payments through CAP or any other scheme been in place.

Pollinating insects are also now severely under threat. There is considerable research into how modern intensive farming practices, using fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides may have contributed towards this.<sup>1</sup> Whereas support for sustainable land management practices can have much greater positive impacts.

Although, the funding schemes have not been as good as they could be; the biodiversity loss without them would have been significantly more dramatic if no other scheme was in place.

### **1.2 What risks and opportunities could developing our own agri-environment policy and funding present?**

#### Risks

Unfortunately, given the budgetary pressures that already exist in Government; there is a risk

<sup>1</sup> [www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/beesandneonics.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/beesandneonics.pdf)

that the wider implications on the economy and society as a whole of not supporting and improving our land will not be considered fully. There is a risk of further cuts to biodiversity related budgets if others, such as health and education budgets are also under pressure. This will be a short term saving but will leave us with long term problems, additional costs and liabilities.

An example of this is that at a local government level, parks and open spaces budgets are a mere fraction of what they once were. This demonstrates that the wider benefits to health, education and the economy that come from good land management are not seriously considered.

However, Brexit offers a fantastic opportunity to completely reconsider the multiple benefits that society, agriculture and environmental sectors wish to see from the countryside and Government now has the opportunity to make that come about.

#### Opportunities

There are opportunities to target the unique character of the UK landscape and help restore some key landscape features and species.

For example, there is a likely future challenge of restoring the distinctive landscape of hedgerows with standard trees. We have already lost English Elms and are also running the risk of losing Ash and even Oaks in the same context. As such, by improving and supporting sustainable land management practices by having future policies focus on long term strategies would be an opportunity not to be missed.

Further to this, food is an important issue, but securing the quality of biodiversity, soils, water, landscapes and cultural history is vital if food is to continue to be produced in a functioning ecosystem.

Furthermore, tourism is worth billions of pounds per year and supports many farm businesses through farm diversification.

A rich and functioning countryside will add to this value and show leadership at an international level.

Consideration should be taken seriously on what the reasons are for having financial support for land management.

We strongly believe that public funding should be used for public good, rather than to support one specific industry and this is also shared by Dieter Helm in his recent report.<sup>2</sup>

Helm states that Government has already committed to leaving the natural environment in a better state for the next generation through a 25 year plan. Therefore by using the funding wisely to focus on improving the land we have, to benefit both biodiversity and people, this can be achieved.

The Land Trust also believes that BREXIT provides real opportunity to reset farming policy and not just replace CAP with a British CAP – this will not improve the land. Helm also shares this view - there is no good general case for subsidising farmers for simply owning land but to

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<sup>2</sup> [www.dieterhelm.co.uk/natural-capital/environment/agricultural-policy-after-brexit/](http://www.dieterhelm.co.uk/natural-capital/environment/agricultural-policy-after-brexit/)

encourage farmers and other landowners improve the land and ensure it is sustainably managed.<sup>3</sup> In turn, this will help society and the economy.

The Land Trust has 2,000 hectares of land, which is mostly former brownfield land in urban areas. However, it has demonstrated through its sustainable land management practices, how people and wildlife have benefitted from CAP related payments.

As such, the Land Trust sees a significant opportunity in having funding schemes to encourage and support sustainable land management in both urban and rural areas, to support biodiversity across the country and connect people with nature.

Green spaces in urban and peri-urban areas will become even more important in contributing to supporting biodiversity as well as alleviate pollution and help adapt to a changing climate. And it is only through sustainable land management that this will be achieved. But there needs to be the Government will and incentives to ensure landowners do this.

## **2. How should future support for UK agriculture be structured in order to ensure there are incentives for environmentally-friendly land management?**

Standard payments for owning / controlling the land are not delivering public benefit and we need to move away from just providing subsidies to farmers and landowners on the basis of the land they control. It should be focused on what the land is used for – an incentivised payment based on results.

If a payment is to be applied universally, it should go further in its requirements to enhance the environment by building meaningful biodiversity corridors and connections and used for sustainable land management, covering both urban and rural land. If it does not serve this function then it will reduce the funding for more specific biodiversity delivery instead of working with these measures to enhance the whole.

Flexibility, local decision making and delivery are key to ensuring meaningful change on the ground. All of the examples of successful restoration and species recovery are local and driven by local enthusiasm and knowledge, supported by flexible and realistic funding.

### **2.1 What are the positives/negatives of current schemes (e.g. Countryside Stewardship) that should be retained/avoided?**

#### Negatives

##### 1. Short-termism

- The current scheme is caught up in a short term budget issue. Schemes are put forward and short term capital works programs follow. This does not help bring land into a scheme or replacing an existing scheme.
- The lengths of the schemes are currently too short with not enough security over payments and too short to deliver real benefits.
- To deliver real change and biodiversity gain will almost always require landowners to make significant changes to production and business plans and In order to do this; they

<sup>3</sup> [www.dieterhelm.co.uk/natural-capital/environment/agricultural-policy-after-brexite/](http://www.dieterhelm.co.uk/natural-capital/environment/agricultural-policy-after-brexite/)

need the certainty of payments and the guaranteed timing of payments.

2. Bureaucratic

- The current schemes are very bureaucratic, focused on ensuring they are auditable with somewhat meaningless prescriptions, with the application process being complex. For example, the Soil Protection Reviews are particularly difficult.

3. Unclear focus/Inflexible

- The focus should be on the outcome, how you get there needs to be as flexible as possible.
- Payments for some of the more costly elements of the scheme (such as re-building dry stone walls) are not sufficient to allow completion of sets of actions, fall too short of the costs required and are unlikely to be chosen as options by landowners.

4. Administration

- The links between Natural England and the Forestry Commission are not functioning. This has led to a conflict between biodiversity and forestry objectives.
- There is confusion amongst landowners and managers as to the role and responsibilities of both Natural England and The Forestry Commission.

### Positives

The requirement of landowners to produce farm management plans has however brought conservationists and landowners (where they're not one and the same) together and has helped some landowners understand the benefits of schemes they are entering.

The Land Trust manages its land in a sustainable way to benefit people and biodiversity and has received CAP related payments (BPS, HLS, ELES, EWGS) to help achieve these positive outcomes<sup>4</sup>.

Below are examples of where the Land Trust has received CAP funding to help manage and improve its land to benefit people and biodiversity:

Beam Parklands and Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park support key pollinators whilst at the same time educate people about nature.

Canvey Wick Nature Reserve and SSSI site provides protection for the rare Carder Bee.

Elba Park now has educational areas and improved access to enable more people to connect with nature, whilst its woodland plantation is being improved for wildlife.

Langdon Lake and Meadows is managed well to support neighbouring farmers to graze their livestock, whilst also providing open space for local people to enjoy, exercise and keep fit.

Monkton Community Woodland now has improved access and a car park, enabling more people to spend time in nature, whilst also being a hub for health programmes, supporting people with their weight management and mental health.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/news/101000-grant-helps-maintain-vital-woodlands-across-uk/>

This shows that the Land Trust has used the funding in a sustainable way, to improve the land, to support biodiversity, but for it to be used by people to improve their health and wellbeing.

Our recent study<sup>5</sup> states that

- 9 out of 10 people feel that our green spaces play a positive part in their happiness and wellbeing
- More than a third use our green spaces to engage with wildlife and nature
- 9 out of 10 people feel that our green spaces help wildlife and the environment
- 9 out of 10 feel that our green spaces encourage them or others to keep fit and healthy.

Avoid

Entry into a random, non-targeted set of incentives, just to bring in additional money.

**3. How should future UK agri-environment support be administered, and what outcomes should it focus on?**

The key successes of the previous schemes have mostly been determined by area based knowledge. The skills and dedication of Natural England advisors to lead and guide landowners into appropriate elements of schemes to benefit species and habitats on a landscape scale has been of huge significance.

This has often led to locally or regionally significant improvements in biodiversity and may have helped some species come back from the brink of extinction in the UK.

Future schemes should build on this success, but without the guidance of a large team of advisors, it is likely to flounder. Outcomes should continue to focus on regionally significant landscapes and habitats, delivering outputs that bring groups of landowners working together.

It should work locally, simply and as flexibly as possible. It is important to have binding contracts, avoid constant changes and invest time explaining changes to areas and payment.

They should also be based on 10 year or longer contracts, so that positive and significant changes have time to be embedded.

**4. What are the prospects and challenges for future environmental stewardship schemes in the devolved administrations?**

1. Geographical challenges

Different areas of countryside will have different priority species and habitats. These change due to latitude, elevation, rainfall amongst a host of other factors. It is notable that different devolved areas of the United Kingdom vary in these significant factors which may enable some tailoring of the scheme to the landscape. However landscape and wildlife does not stop at administrative borders

Solution: A common element to the scheme would help to manage change over wider areas.

<sup>5</sup> <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

## 2. International challenges

One of the greatest challenges is saving some species that cross international boundaries, such as the Turtle Dove, which goes well beyond the UK shores.

Solution: There is a real opportunity for cross sector collaboration, with Governments and other organisations, such as the Land Trust, RSPB, Butterfly Conservation and Buglife to work together, building on previous successful projects to make real differences to support biodiversity.

## 3. Funding definition challenges

What is not clear is who this funding is aimed at. There needs to be clarity in what the funding will be used for.

Currently, landowners receive funding to support their agricultural businesses whilst there is also some funding for projects, such as the Nature Improvement Areas.

The agricultural industry is constantly under pressure from the food industry, being forced to produce more from less. This has significant negative impacts on land, and as such biodiversity suffers and the quality of the land degrades, leading to reduced ecosystem services, resulting in greater costs in the long term, for the wider economy, such as on public health and flooding.

But pumping funding into this sector to just support them to produce more is unsustainable and not based on achieving positive environmental benefits. It is simply supporting an industry.

Whereas, if funding was clearly aimed at helping to support landowners to improve and enhance their land, through sustainable land management practices, the land would not only help biodiversity, it would also work better and be more productive, and benefit society more.

Alternatively, a future scheme could include a strand of the funding specifically for targeted largescale landscapes. If a large proportion of the funding was used for such projects that would have a greater conservation impact, landowners would be in a position to make a real difference on a large landscape scale.

Government should also consider additional investment in urban green spaces, to encourage biodiversity in these spaces as well as rural areas, such as the High Line in New York, which not only supports wildlife in a significantly built up area, it is supporting the economy through tourism.<sup>6</sup>

### **4.1 How much divergence in policy between the nations of the United Kingdom is likely?**

Due to the devolved administrations, divergence between the nations needs to be considered. Particularly, because there are such wide differences in land types and

<sup>6</sup> [http://ecosystemsknowledge.net/events/building-prosperous-cities/blog/Ian\\_Dickie](http://ecosystemsknowledge.net/events/building-prosperous-cities/blog/Ian_Dickie)

management. However, the focus still needs to be on sustainable land management practices and ensuring that landowners are taking responsibility for ensuring the land is being looked after and pollution is minimised.

#### **4.2 How can divergence be managed?**

There needs to be some form of non-competitiveness, cross border policies to ensure all nations are benefitting and importantly, the land is benefitting. As this ultimately benefits biodiversity and people.

### **5. What are the future risks and opportunities to innovative land practices, such as managed rewilding?**

First of all, it is important to clarify what is meant by 'rewilding'. We think that this term is not explicit and may be misleading. We would recommend that Government thinks about re-naturalising habitats on a landscape scale, both rural and urban, looking at how we can restore and conserve the UK's countryside and green urban areas for future generations.

As outlined above, biodiversity has been significantly diminished as a result of existing practices, industrialisation and development.

There are endless opportunities for innovative land practices, such as managed rewilding. For example, there is evidence that the secretive and nocturnal beaver is increasing tourism locally in Devon and Argyll. Other significant animal reintroductions may have similar or greater impacts, economically and socially as well as environmentally, however there is a potential that they may also have negative effects on tourism, particularly with wilder animals.

A scheme to reintroduce or at least prevent control of the pine martin could save many thousands of pounds spent on grey squirrel control, and the evidence from Ireland suggests that although many may not see the pine martin, the return of the red squirrel would be welcomed by many. To run through every possible reintroduction here would be a significant body of work, but they need not be limited to large mammals or birds, but all species groups should be considered. As long as there the focus on one or two species does not then have a detrimental knock on effect onto others.

However it is to be hoped that future administrations will consider science and evidence led policy. As such, if the evidence suggests that a rewilding initiative would have significant public benefit, then a scheme which enables farmers and other land owners concerns to be addressed would have some advantages.

#### **5.1 What role can rewilding play in conservation and restoration of habitats and wildlife?**

Rewilding or re-naturalising (as we suggest above), can have a substantial role, not only in conservation and restoration of habitats and wildlife, but to support the national economy and society through the ecosystem services that nature provides.

This would not only significantly support key pollinators, which in turn support our economy through their vital contribution to food production, but it can contribute to improving air



quality, water quality and flood risk management, all of which have major cost implications on other aspects of society and the economy.

For example, rewetting wetland areas can also provide flood protection in nearby communities as well as providing improved habitats for biodiversity.

Furthermore, rewilding will also have positive impacts on public health and wellbeing and the economy. For example, evidence suggests that being in nature and green spaces can improve mood, help decrease blood pressure and help prevent and reduce many chronic diseases. (NHF Forest). Extremely important when mental ill health in England costs the economy around £105 billion per annum and physical inactivity costs the economy around £8.3 billion (Dept of Health).<sup>7</sup> Without a healthy environment with land that is functioning well, there will be no society and the economy will collapse. Government needs to realise that our land is the backbone of our society and economy and without it, nothing will exist.

According to Defra, those who live within 500m of accessible green space are 24% more likely to meet recommended levels of physical exercise whilst the national Ecosystem Assessment suggests that health benefits of living near green space are worth up to £300 per person per year. As such, the role of rewilding plays a significant role in economic and social as well as environmental terms.

However, if funding is limited, rather than just focusing on rewilding, the Government should also encourage more landowners to farm in the way that some conservation organisations do and have demonstrated that this can still turn a profit, whilst conserving and improving habitats.

## **5.2 What evidence is there to support the incentivising of such schemes in any new land management policies?**

There are considerable examples of how restoring areas of land, have significant benefits not only on the environment, but the wider economy and society as well.

One of our own sites – the Award winning Beam Parklands, in Dagenham was an area of derelict land. With funding and a multi partner project, this land was able to be rewetted, regenerated and is now a functioning flood storage area. It demonstrates the sustainable use of wetland habitats to protect nearby communities from flooding. However the wider outcomes from this have been magnanimous. This green space now provides habitats for biodiversity, it provides access to nature by all groups in the community and supports the local economy, and improves their health and wellbeing. Although this is not rural, it demonstrates how sustainable funding and land management can provide multiple benefits to many different parts of society<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/space/beam-parklands>

For £51,000 per year natural capital maintenance, flood risk reduction benefits have been valued at £591,000, whilst the park brings £770,000 worth of community benefits as well as significant biodiversity benefits.<sup>9</sup>

There is strong evidence that rewilding can be a success in restoring diminished wildlife populations. The well-known Wildland project at Knepp Castle is ample testament to this.<sup>10</sup>

The Avalon Marshes project has been a multi-agency success story of creating wetlands on an epic landscape scale and in terms of restoring wetland biodiversity, but a significant grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund has made this possible. It has been remarkable in its achievements to biodiversity, for example, there are now more Bitterns breeding in the marshes than there were in the whole of the UK 20 years ago. Further to this, the knock on effect onto the local and wider economies, such as through tourism and diversified businesses has been considerable.<sup>11</sup>

There are significant lessons to be learnt from rewilding, particularly in just allowing natural processes to take place unfettered. Large scale projects, such as the Knepp Castle estate hedgerows project and the Avalon Marshes project are prime examples and have been met with universal support.

The challenge, however, is getting the support and approval of the landowners in the first place and the funding to support the projects.

With the right Government will, these types of projects could be replicated on the farmed landscape, but would require the financial support and collaboration by multiple agencies to deliver this.

There are further examples of where water companies have been improving catchment areas upstream – which have helped reduce flooding downstream in communities and where they have also taken areas of upland, recolonising it with plants and heathland, enabling nature to improve the water quality, and as such, reducing the costs from water companies to do this.

An example is at Dove Stone in the Pennines, where United Utilities and RSPB worked together to restore peatland bog.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, what the UK needs is a countryside that is a functioning ecosystem, so that the environment is healthy, working well and providing the natural services, such as improving air and water quality, reducing flooding, supporting pollinisation, and storing carbon.

With Government leading the way, putting the right policies and practices in place, this can be achieved.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://ecosystemsknowledge.net/events/building-prosperous-cities/blog/Ian\\_Dickie](http://ecosystemsknowledge.net/events/building-prosperous-cities/blog/Ian_Dickie)

<sup>10</sup> <http://knepp.co.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> [www.somersetwildlife.org/avalon.html](http://www.somersetwildlife.org/avalon.html)

<sup>12</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/2016-edition/winners/conservation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/2016-edition/winners/conservation/index_en.htm)