

Gove must end agricultural land being used as a tax haven say Greens



3 January 2018

Green Party MEP, Molly Scott Cato, is this week laying down a challenge to the Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, to end the use of agricultural land as a tax haven and tax shelter.

Molly, who sits on the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, will speak at the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) this week [1], which will also be attended by Mr Gove. He will be the first Defra secretary to take to the stage at this alternative farming event which runs parallel to the long-established Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) [2].

Ahead of her speech at ORFC [4], Molly Scott Cato said:

"Gove must call time on the UKs largest land owners who are using agricultural land to hide and shelter their wealth. Agricultural land offers generous tax breaks as it is exempt from inheritance tax after two years if it is actively farmed. The fact that the sale of a farming asset can be rolled over into a new business or acquisition offers further tax relief."

Last summer Michael Gove said that post-Brexit farm subsidies will be based on measures to protect the environment and enhance rural life, rather than on the amount of land farmers own [3]. But Dr Scott Cato says the Environment Secretary must go much further:

"Using land as a tax shelter undermines its productive use. Land banking and earning an income from land assets also encourages a rentier economy and stifles innovation. If Michael Gove is to bring about genuine radical reform he will need to challenge the large land owners. Nobody can seriously suggest that we should be subsidising set ups like that of international racehorse breeders Juddmonte Farms which is owned by Prince Khalid Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

"Significant taxation of estates and the abolition of inheritance relief could bring more land back into the market, reduce concentration of ownership and make land available to those who want to farm. We also need to take back control of our land so it can perform vital social and environmental functions especially to act as a carbon sink and to decrease the threat of flooding."

Notes

[1] <http://orfc.org.uk/>

[2] <https://www.ofc.org.uk/>

[3] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-40673559>

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[Greens: We need a “rail fare revolution”](#)



2 January 2018

***Co-Leader brands fare increases a “modern-day great train robbery”**

***Party unveils package of reforms to bring down rail fares**

The Green Party has announced a package of reforms that they say would bring down the cost of rail travel.

The launch comes as thousands of rail commuters are hit by the annual increase in ticket prices. Fares have gone up by 3.4% for 2018, the biggest increase in five years [1].

Under Green Party plans, fares would be reduced through a number of policies including:

*The creation of a National Railcard offering discounts on rail tickets

*A new scheme providing reduced ticket prices for low income travellers

*A National system which entitles people to travel on all public transport networks

The party would also bring the railways back into public ownership – a move they say would pump far more investment into the infrastructure and bring down fares.

Co-Leader of the Green Party Jonathan Bartley said:

“Very few workers will be going back to the office with a higher salary this week – but every one of them that commutes by train will be paying a higher price for their rail fares.

“While the cost of motoring has fallen the cost of rail travel has increased. This is a modern day great train robbery.

“It makes no sense for major public services to be broken up into disconnected monopolies, driven not to provide the best possible service but to deliver profits to shareholders. That’s why the Green Party is calling for railways to be brought back into public hands to create a connected, efficient, and reliable service that delivers for customers. And it is why we are calling for new action to immediately bring down the cost of fares to ensure that everyone – no matter what their income or where they live – can access an affordable, reliable, and quality rail service.”

Notes

[1] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42234488>

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[Green Party writes to Michael Gove calling for more ambitious policy on plastics](#)



21 December 2017

Deputy Leader of the Green Party Amelia Womack has today written to the Environment Secretary Michael Gove urging him to be much more ambitious in his pledge to reduce plastic waste.

Plastic hit the headlines when the BBC show Blue Planet II exposed the amount of waste that has entered our oceans. In the last few weeks Michael Gove has been unveiling the government’s plan to reduce plastic waste including consulting on a scheme for cutting single use plastics and creating bottle return schemes.

But the Green Party says that these “piecemeal” changes do not go nearly far enough and has urged the Environment Secretary to use the public concern created by Blue Planet to introduce a much more wide-ranging set of policies.

In her letter to Mr Gove, Womack, who recently tried living plastic free for a week [1], says [2]:

“To fix a problem as systemic as this [plastic waste] requires an holistic approach – one that I urge you to adopt.

“We need to design out waste from the very start of the consumer chain. That means ending the production of single-use plastics while providing the infrastructure necessary to enable large corporations and individuals to recycle close to 100% of the items they use.

“Second, we need to invest in alternatives to plastic. There is a slowly rising network of zero-waste shops across the UK and companies like Splosh and Lush create products designed to have a limited or no impact on the environment. Through government investment, grants, and rewards we can upscale the use of these products so that they are available to everyone and every business.

“Third, we need to discourage bad behaviour. The tax on plastic bags has already brought enormous benefits: since the tax was introduced in England, the use of plastic bags has reduced 85%. That same model should be applied to plastic bottles, single use plastics, and microplastics.”

Notes

[1] <https://theecologist.org/2017/dec/19/my-week-without-plastic-ameliawomack>

[2]

Full text of letter below:

Dear Michael,

I have been greatly heartened by your increased interest in and desire to do something about the toll that plastic is having on our environment.

I do worry, however, that at present your goals are not ambitious enough.

The last few months have represented an awakening in the nation's consciousness about the problems caused by plastic to our ecosystem: Blue Planet has given a very visual representation to an issue long overlooked. If ever there was an opportunity to be bold about how we tackle the problem, it is now.

Recently I tried going plastic free for a single week. I was amazed at the extent to which plastic has infected our lives. It's in our tea bags. It covers nearly any grocery item we might buy. Make-up is impossible to buy without plastic. Having lived for a week without it, I can now fully understand why plastic litters our countryside and infects our oceans.

To fix a problem as systemic as this requires an holistic approach – one that I urge you to adopt.

Reducing plastic and waste will only be achieved through a strategy devised and implemented by government and industry. We need to design out waste from the very start of the consumer chain. That means ending the production of single-use plastics while providing the infrastructure necessary to enable large corporations and individuals to recycle close to 100% of the items they

use.

Second, we need to invest in alternatives to plastic. There is a slowly rising network of zero-waste shops across the UK and companies like Splosh and Lush create products designed to have a limited or no impact on the environment. Through government investment, grants, and rewards we can upscale the use of these products so that they are available to everyone and every business.

Third, we need to discourage bad behaviour. The tax on plastic bags has already brought enormous benefits: since the tax was introduced in England, the use of plastic bags has reduced 85%. That same model should be applied to plastic bottles, single use plastics, and microplastics.

I would welcome the opportunity to share with you in person my experiences of living without plastic for a week or to talk about the policies we desperately need to preserve our blue planet.

Yours sincerely,

Amelia Womack, Deputy Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales

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[Greens: Climate change omission moment Trump authority expired](#)



18 December 2017

Green Party Co-Leader Jonathan Bartley has said the decision by Donald Trump to omit climate change from the US security strategy marks the moment when his authority “expired”.

Earlier today it was revealed [1] that, in a dramatic change from President Obama’s priorities, the Trump administration will drop climate change from a list of global threats in a new National Security Strategy.

Mr Bartley said:

“The first responsibility of any political leader is the protection and security of those in their charge. This will go down in history as the moment the US president abdicated responsibility for his country. Trump’s authority

had already gone well past its sell-by date. Now it has positively expired.

“All across America communities are rejecting his reckless leadership and he is being shunned abroad. His willful ignorance of the threats that the world faces and his denial of scientific fact will surely consign him to the same historical category as King Canute.”

Notes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/18/trump-drop-climate-change-national-security-strategy>

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[“We are winning” says Green Deputy Leader before visit to Yorkshire fracking site](#)



14 December 2017

Deputy Leader of the Green Party Amelia Womack says that campaigners are winning the fight to stop fracking for good ahead of her visit to the proposed fracking site at Kirby Misperton [1].

A decision to allow fracking to start at the Yorkshire site was expected last month but the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy Greg Clark, who has faced heavy lobbying from campaigners, has delayed giving the green light.

Womack believes a vital point in the fight to stop fracking across the UK has been reached as momentum is now with environmental protesters.

Womack said:

“To the people on the frontline against fracking in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and across the country I say thank you and just look at what you have achieved. A delay of even a few days or weeks might not seem like a great deal but it is so so important. It shows hesitation on the government’s part. It’s given us more space to make the arguments against fracking. It’s shown that the likes of Third Energy and Cuadrilla who are determined to get rich off the destruction of communities and ecosystems cannot have it all their

own way. It shows we are winning.

“We might look back at this moment in future as a time when the tide turned against the frackers. I’m looking forward to thanking you in person and to being with you once again in the fight to stop fracking.”

Both Cuadrilla and Third Energy have faced legal challenges against their attempts to frack in Lancashire and Yorkshire respectively [2]. Local residents have raised concerns that the companies are not carrying out necessary environmental monitoring and in Lancashire the government’s move to force through fracking against the wishes of the local council has caused outrage.

Notes

[1] Amelia Womack will arrive at Kirby Misperton at 12.30pm on 15th December 2017

[2]

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/aug/29/campaigners-launch-last-ditch-appeal-to-stop-fracking-in-lancashire>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/09/04/no-uk-fracking-this-year-as-yorkshire-legal-challenge-drag-on/>

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