

breaking ground

Pickard exposes Lie of the Land

HGF Council Member Duncan Pickard's new book, *Lie of the Land*, was launched at *Reformers* (the Foundation's Edinburgh bookshop) on 11th May.

The book is garnering favourable reviews in the Scottish media. Pickard has been featured in the Scottish dailies, on the cover of the major trade weekly *Scottish Farmer* and on Lesley Riddoch's popular talk show on BBC Radio Scotland.

In his book Pickard exposes the culture of deception that underpins agriculture today. He sets out his radical solution - 'out of the box thinking': stop giving farmers EU subsidies, ditch the inland revenue and its red tape - and, fundamentally for him, start taxing the land.

Lie of the Land is published by Shephard-Walwyn and the Land Research Trust at £6.95. Buy it at *Reformers* - mailorder 0131 346 7139. Or now you can shop for books online at the Foundation's website - go to www.HenryGeorgeFoundation.org



Oxon trial - Step 1 nears completion

The site valuations in the Oxfordshire land value tax trial project (reported in the last edition of *Land&Liberty communiqué*) are nearing completion. A set of preliminary assessments for more than 3,500 sites is being lodged with the Council. Its in-house GIS Section will attach them to land parcel maps created for the purpose.

Tony Vickers is technical advisor to the project. A major one-day conference in Oxford is planned by the Waterfront Conference Company for 16th September. (A programme is included in this edition of *Land&Liberty communiqué*.)

Read more about the project, and follow developments at the project webpage at www.OxonLVT.org.uk

Conference success

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Over 100 senior delegates from the transport professions took part in the conference. Its acknowledged start point was that public spending enhanced land values are a proper source for project funding. It appears the momentum of the transport reform agenda is now self-sustaining - still needing directing, but not pushing.

Speaking to *L&L* at the event Fred Harrison from the Land Research Trust said "it's now incumbent on us to find ways of changing the political discourse, finding the kind of concepts and language that will enrich political philosophy in such a way that the case can be presented to the public, by politicians, in a manner that actually attracts support. Because only then will the political parties feel comfortable about going to the country, promoting this as a serious tax reform proposition". It is clear land tax reform in the UK is shifting on to a new stage.

Scots government tax review

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The review process itself is now being planned. In response to a Parliamentary Question, Mr Kerr confirmed membership of the team which will conduct the review: Sir Peter Burt (Chair) former CE of the Bank of Scotland; Professor John Baillie, University of Glasgow; Peter Daniels, CE of East Renfrewshire Council; and Janet Lowe, Principal of Lauder College.

In other Scottish news, as expected, Green MSP Mark Ballard's Council Tax Reform Bill has fallen on a technicality. Discussions are now taking place to launch a new Bill with cross-party support. (see *Madrid cover story*)

Professional Land Reform Group

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The new group sees its aim as 'progressing the use of land value for community benefit' among professionals, and seeks to promote land value taxation in an all-party non-sectarian way.

Elected chairman Dave Wetzel said "there is a need to step up a gear and for professionals to bring a new perspective and level of activity to the research and advocacy of lvt."

See *diary* for the group's next meeting.

letter from the editor

Is taxing land really the 'heads' of the deal or the 'tails'? Have we got our perspective upside down?

At the recent London conference *Financing transport infrastructure through land values*, the Conservative panelist John Redwood MP told delegates that as far as he was concerned "the good news for you is that although I am a Euro-sceptic by conviction, I am a land value tax sceptic by caution." He said he simply was not yet convinced.

But convincing people is what reformers need to do. Redwood, as the minister charged with clearing up the Poll Tax fiasco and introducing the now unpopular Council Tax, had an understandable view on the subject. He said "you have to be very careful with selling taxes. You have to *undersell*."

But to me that argument is something like telling turkeys just a *little bit* about Christmas, in the hope that it'll increase the chance that they'll vote for it. The strategy relies on either lying (by omission), on turkey stupidity, or on persuading turkeys that they're no longer on the menu.

I am not aware - but remain willing to be proved ignorant - of *any* tax introduced by positive democratic pressure. Historically, taxes (with their abatements) have arrived on our bills through the trading of interested political pressure. Turkeys simply don't vote for Christmas, no matter how bright we say the coloured lights will be, how beautiful the sleigh bells, how tasty the food. Still, Christmas comes anyway, for the rest of us.

So I believe Redwood is wrong. Taxes cannot be 'under-sold'. Taxes are never *sold* anyway, because they are never sought or bought by those on their receiving end. Taxes are merely accepted as 'a necessary evil'.

So we must turn our reforming perspective on its head. Because it seems to me that taxing land values will for most people never be the 'heads' of any toss: it's not the looked-for result, the aspirational goal. Taxing land can only be the obverse, the backside of the coin.

So taxing land values must become the strategic *means* only. It's what is needed to square the circle. It's the only means, we must argue, of enabling the two aspirations which *will be* democratically supported - quality public services and freedom from debilitating taxation. Thus taxing land values becomes the tool which people see they need to realise their goals: and nothing more than that. Our strategies must be based on this understanding. Our tactics and our projects must flow from it.

Success will come only when people *have* to weigh up in their mind what their real-world options are. When are forced to reflect upon the set of questions which includes the key inquiry - "if not like this, then how?"

We must ask our fellow citizens and our governments: "if you are not willing to reclaim for public purposes some of the value which public actions create through land values, then you must penalise your work, surcharge your purchases, punish your enterprise and permit the raiding of your savings: is that what you want?"

It seems to me that reformers have been getting it the wrong way round. We've been trying to sell a negative as a positive. A tails as a heads. Time to turn the coin over.

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