



TO: the Environmental Audit Committee of the House of Commons

From: Oxfordshire Green Party

September 2016

**Submission: response to inquiry into the future of the natural environment in the light of the EU referendum**

Oxfordshire Green Party is a local party of the Green Party of England and Wales. Responses to the questions raised by the Committee have been addressed by policy working groups of the local party and by members of its continuing European Campaign Committee. Addressing the Committee's questions directly:

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

This depends on how support to agriculture is reconstructed post-Brexit. Up to the present, support has been skewed towards larger landowners and has had insufficient regard for biodiversity, climate change or sustainability. It is misleading to think about this as purely a matter of agricultural policy: the general failure to protect land for food, farming in general, biodiversity, landscape value, recreation and forestry is a feature of a defective planning process which empowers development and disempowers all those who would protect the land for other purposes. In line with Green Party policy, and having regard to the immense employment potential of holding land in uses other than for development, protecting biodiversity is primarily a planning matter rather than one of agricultural policy. In line with Green Party Countryside policy, we need to protect the land from development and make development use of the existing built environment and brownfield sites.

In the view of our Housing and Land Use policy working group, we should:

- “Work to maintain a healthy environment, which necessitates the maintenance of species diversity and the vigorous protection of wild habitats.
- Ensure that wildlife-rich sites are adequately protected and extend a basic level of habitat protection to the whole countryside. We will ensure that there are sufficient resources to enforce the legislation in the hands of local government throughout Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire Green Party notes how the current Conservative Government is engaged in a relentless effort to marginalise environmental considerations in public policy.<sup>1</sup>
- Strive to make it a general offence to cause cruelty to wild animals or suffering where it can be practicably avoided. Those committing such acts will be prosecuted in the same way as for domestic animals. Humane methods of killing, for instance in pest control, will be researched and implemented; the Green Party will bring in an outright ban on snaring.
- Work to ensure that legislation is adequate to prevent wildlife crime and that there are sufficient resources to enforce the law and prosecute perpetrators.
- Work with appropriate partners to strengthen international wildlife law and to ensure that it is implemented, where relevant to Oxfordshire.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jul/24/the-9-green-policies-killed-off-by-tory-government>



- Support work at the European level to strengthen protection of habitats through the Habitats Directive and ensure that Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy continues to provide environmental and habitat protection.
- Support the Nature 2000 network of Special Areas of Conservation established by the European Habitat Directive and its associated legislation. Although the UK has a good record of reporting on such sites, biodiversity is still threatened at many types of sites in particular grassland, wetland and coastal sites.
- Work to address with the problem that introduction of non-native wild plants and non-native genotypes of British species may have a negative impact on wild plant populations and communities in the UK.
- Pay more heed to the findings of the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study<sup>2</sup> which identified several priority habitats which must be protected. The majority of these are designated as sites of special scientific interest or County wildlife sites.
- Work to ensure that Ramsar Convention sites within Oxfordshire remain highly protected and that other designated areas retain a high degree of protection from development.
- Maintain funding for Oxfordshire's Road Verge Nature Reserves<sup>3</sup> which connect all areas of the county allowing wildlife to move through an inhospitable landscape in some areas.
- Oppose badger culling."

As with the other questions in this sequence, it is necessary to contextualise responses to offer comments for an integrated agricultural policy. Concerning the CAP, the Green Party advocates:

"FA521 The Green Party will work towards replacing the Common Agricultural Policy. While it still exists, we support a progressive reorientation of the CAP to:

(a) support global food security and regional self-reliance, rather than 'global competitiveness';

(b) support sustainable agricultural practices, farming livelihoods and the rural economy, and phase out subsidies which encourage highly intensified farming, pesticides, artificial fertilisers, pollution, large land holdings and habitat damage;

(c) support a restructuring of subsidies to encourage all farmers to make a transition towards sustainable practices and 'best practice', and to establish sustainability as the rule rather than the exception;

(d) protect soil and water resources;

(e) promote agricultural systems that sequester carbon in soils and have a low greenhouse gas footprint;

---

<sup>2</sup> The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study can be accessed here: <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OWLS/Home/>

<sup>3</sup> Read more about the reserves here: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/road-verge-nature-reserves>



(f) support habitats and biodiversity throughout farmland, and particularly in woods, orchards, hedges, ponds, headlands and designated areas of farms;

(g) respect animal welfare;

(h) support secure and fair farm incomes and farm gate prices, especially for smaller farms, and link payments to the labour force employed on farms;

(i) ensure fair, non-discriminatory CAP payments for all Member States, particularly those that have joined the EU more recently;

(j) end export subsidies and dumping of exports on poor countries (See also [FA501\(a\)](#));

(k) support the 'Qualified Market Access' principle of restricting imports based on environmental and ethical criteria applied to domestic agricultural production (See also [FA502\(c\)](#));

(l) support innovation and diversity in agricultural systems;

(m) return decision making on agricultural policy to local and national level, while keeping a role at European level for coordination and regulation."

FROM: <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/fa.html>

Biodiversity is to exist and be enhanced within this overall approach as we substitute new policies for ones influenced by the CAP.

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

Initiatives to support biodiversity in the UK depend far more on enforcement of policies of protection and enhancement than minimalist EU funds. Cuts to the Environment Agency and Natural England, combined with exceptionally damaging cuts to relevant posts in local government mean that biodiversity policy is notional without a general end to austerity policies which have undermined statutory bodies of all kinds. The Green Party supports the introduction of a fair taxation systems and new forms of taxation, such as Land Value Taxation, to ensure effective public services.

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

The risk of scrapping current levels of environmental, consumer, food, agricultural and employment protection for the sake of trade deals should concern the Committee. The risk of giving more power to foreign-based corporations over our land than they have already via TTIP or CETA treaties, if ever concluded, is very high. The opportunities to construct an ecologically-sound agricultural system to decrease food imports, improve animal welfare and enhance the landscape for many difference uses are considerable but only if overall State funds are increased to ensure effective policies can be followed.

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



In principle, the Green Party wants the following guiding ideas to be implemented:

“We will use the following policy instruments as appropriate to specific areas of policy:

(a) Economic measures: we will support environmentally and socially beneficial practices through subsidies and financial incentives, balanced with taxation of practices that are environmentally or socially detrimental.

(b) Standards and regulation: we will set higher minimum environmental, ethical and safety standards than at present and will restrict or ban harmful practices.

(c) Education and information: we will promote sustainable food production and healthy eating through education at all levels, including public health campaigns, school curriculum activities and higher education programmes. We will provide better public information, for example through food labelling and government websites.”

FROM: <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/fa.html>

Overall, food security and food sovereignty for the UK would be increased and the role of large food processing corporations and supermarkets would be reduced by the consumption of more fresh food, bought direct from producers via an enhanced network of farmers’ markets and farm shops.

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

Overall, there is insufficient money in the system for statutory bodies to do useful things as we have stressed above. We note an absence of effective schemes which would reduce the use of fossil fuels in the agricultural system, reduce emissions throughout the entire production and distribution process and give access to land for those who want to be farmers, run smallholdings, engage in horticulture and the like. We recognise the value of cooperatives as a means of pooling capital and skills to maximise the success rates of new enterprises. This effectively responds to the next question, along with our previous responses:

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

**What are the prospects and challenges for future environmental stewardship schemes in the devolved administrations? How much divergence in policy between the nations of the United Kingdom is likely? How can divergence be managed?**

Matter concerning agriculture in Northern Ireland and Scotland are a matter for the Northern Ireland Green Party & the Scottish Green Party. The Wales Green Party, as a constituent region of the Green Party of England and Wales, is free to add regional modifications to agricultural policies to serve Wales.

**What are the future risks and opportunities to innovative land practices, such as managed rewilding? What role can rewilding play in conservation and restoration of habitats and wildlife? What evidence is there to support the incentivising of such schemes in any new land management policies?**



The Green Party does not believe that zoos or private collections of animals should be in use except where there is benefit to the particular species:

“AR425 To abolish zoos and private collections of animals except where they are for the benefit of the animal concerned. Licences will only be granted to establishments involved in either captive breeding of endangered species for eventual return to the wild or else those offering genuine sanctuary to animals unable, through injury and other cause, to be returned to the wild and where their living conditions are as close as possible to the animal's natural habitat.”

From: <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/ar.html>

Following such a policy does imply some degree of rewilding, although not all of this would be appropriate in a UK context given the species involved. Resources may be brought into some parts of the country, such as through enhanced tourism, if successful rewilding of some species occurs. We recognise that rewilding raises a variety of questions that will need to be considered stage by stage. For example, reintroduction of wolves certainly has implications for the currently expanding population of deer. Species and area specific initiatives will need to be considered very carefully in this type of initiative.

#### **Additional comments:**

Bearing in mind the needs of rural England, the Housing and Land Use policy working group of Oxfordshire Green Party has these specific policies in mind with regard to agriculture in Oxfordshire, which are relevant to this submission's range of topics:

“Green county councillors will:

- Work to ensure that policies on Food and Agriculture aim to improve farming livelihoods, provide safe and nutritious food, improve long-term food security and increase regional and local self-reliance in food.
- Support shorter supply chains and direct links between producers and consumers to maximise income generation in rural areas and to supply healthier, fresher food. We will discourage large-scale agribusiness, processors and retailers which take large profit margins, concentrate jobs in urban centres and cause the closure of small, local retailers.
- Discourage the amalgamation of farms, support family farms, improve access to land for new entrants to farming and horticulture and favour the setting up of sustainable, small-scale and labour-intensive enterprises and their associated dwellings. Land Value Taxation will contribute to this effort. We support the sustainable diversification and multiple use of agricultural land and buildings, for instance for appropriate renewable energy, tourism, recreational pursuits and low-impact enterprises.
- Support small-scale, environmentally benign farming systems that protect the soil, biodiversity and water resources, minimise greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, support 'joined-up' wildlife habitats and provide secure jobs in rural communities. We support farming and land management which conserve and, where appropriate, increase woods, orchards, agroforestry, hedges and other trees. We will phase out 'factory farming' and discourage farming systems highly dependent on fossil fuels and imported feed that have large-scale environmental impacts and tend to reduce rural income and employment.
- Through legislation and support for agri-environment schemes, the Green Party will ensure that all farming and land uses protect and enhance the soil. Soil is the biggest pool of carbon stored in the land, and is an important wildlife habitat in its own right. Soil is



also an essential resource without which human civilisation cannot survive, yet farming is too often responsible for depletion and degradation of the soil.

- Support a strategy to reduce the release of nitrogen compounds and other pollutants, increase monitoring of watercourses and enforce penalties for pollution of watercourses and unsafe or inappropriate use of pesticides. Agriculture accounts for a large proportion of the pollution of watercourses with nitrates, phosphates and sediments from fertilisers, inappropriate application and disposal of manure and from soil erosion. Release and deposition of nitrogen compounds pose threats to biodiversity. Pesticide spraying can threaten watercourses and the health of farm workers, rural communities and consumers. We also oppose the use of neonicotinoids and support an EU wide ban of these types of pesticides that are a serious risk to pollinating insects.
- Work towards replacing the Common Agricultural Policy, and while it still exists, support a radical reorientation of the CAP to support sustainable farming systems that protect and enhance wildlife habitats and biodiversity, ensure fair and secure farm incomes, support sustainable and thriving rural communities and promote regional and local self-reliance in food.
- Promote organic and local farms and seeks to ease their sale of local food to local communities and schools.
- Encourage young people to consider farming as an option, after full-time education. “

Compiled by Steve Dawe, Policy Coordinator, Oxfordshire Green Party – 53 Bulan Road, Oxford OX3 7HU – 07747 036192 – [stevedawe@gp.org](mailto:stevedawe@gp.org)