**Big Debate 3: Can protecting your countryside save the Earth?**

Chaired by Guardian journalist **Peter Hetherington**

15.30-16.30 hrs

*Do small actions by individuals and communities really make a difference, or can we only achieve environmental sustainability by acting at government or international level?*

**Speaking for: “Protecting your countryside can save the Earth”**

**Mark Reed**, University of Aberdeen

**Roger Clarke**, Peak District National Park Authority

**Speaking against: “Protecting your countryside can’t save the Earth”**

**Andrew Watkinson**, Living With Environmental Change programme

**Richard Wakeford, independent consultant**

Chair’s intro:

* Coalition is ostensibly committed to a green agenda but is this rhetoric or reality?
* Localism Act now enacted but how does it relate to the national agenda?

Mark Reed:

* Things we do locally have a global impact.
* It is morally right to act with this in mind.
* Eg the uplands project’s findings – storage of peat has a climate change impact.
* There are simple things we can do personally
* If we lose species that is a tragedy and we can protect those on our doorstep
* Comes down to what we believe is right.
* What makes us human is our ability to empathise. So even if our actions seem insignificant we owe it to other humans to do what we can. So rich nations have a moral responsibility to fix our own problems.
* Boils down to our values and what nature is worth to us.

Andrew Watkinson:

* Look at wording of the motion carefully: the Earth will survive whatever we do.
* What is at stake is life as we know it ie can we maintain the status quo?
* We can’t rely on individuals to do this fairly.
* Eg climate change: individual actions are very slow, we need governments and businesses to act. We need regulation not individual action, this is the only way to save life as we know it, for governments and the international community to act.

Roger Clarke:

* This isn’t just a debate about climate change.
* It concerns all of us.
* Awareness and engagement starts in our own countryside, that might not make a huge planetary difference but it stimulates engagement and space for political action.
* We need to demonstrate management of our backyard if we are to convince others on a global level.
* Integration occurs at a local level eg national parks.
* Globally we are leaders and need to be seen to be.
* Every little helps.

Richard Wakeford:

* Agrees with all the other speakers but the answer to the question on the motion is “no”.
* The majority of the global population is urban so we can’t just look at the countryside.
* In future rural areas will be more important for ecosystem services so need to make the best of them.
* So who does the protecting? There are limits to what government can do eg current planning changes.
* Need to promote 1947 type approach to a global scale, eg along the lines of the Relu briefing notes.
* Relu’s best legacy would be to trigger an equivalent international programme.
* There are limits on government and we do need to change people’s mindsets.

Floor:

* It all boils down to how you construe the words
* Getting people engaged is critical.
* One of the few things guaranteed to engage people politically is green space.
* Change has to start at the top with the government.
* Too much money being sent abroad.
* I do lots but I live in a developed country – we shouldn’t delude ourselves that we aren’t consuming too much.

Chair: The division is not as wide as it might be but is local action enough?

Floor:

* Main issue is that bulk of population is urban.
* How do you manage the interface between urban and rural space – greenbelts,
* We get views of vocal minority, need more informed dialogue than just CPRE.
* Role of government is huge.
* You can have a fuel efficient car but it is the government that has huge impact.
* What part might the countryside and its resources play in a new sustainable order?

Mark Reed:

* It’s a strange debate where the two sides have synergies that go hand in hand.
* I encourage you to look at the question: we aren’t saying it’s only the countryside we need to protect.

Andrew Watkinson:

* Again let’s revisit the question.
* The earth is not at threat, it is our way of life.
* Individual potential cannot be achieved unless supported by government and business.
* No substantial improvement in environment has occurred without regulation.
* We need financial incentives and government intervention.
* We need large scale action

Roger Clarke

* The countryside is popular.
* The opposition can’t make their mind up.
* The countryside is evolving and will produce different services.
* If we say actions don’t matter it sends the wrong message to other people.

Richard Wakeford:

* Protection is necessary but not sufficient. We also need sustainable exploitation.
* Leadership is not the sole prerogative of politicians.
* Governments can only go so far.
* To get the best of the package every government in the world must contribute.
* In the UK we have a good story to tell and we should convey that nationally.

**Vote before the debate: 29 said yes, 42 said no, 17 abstained**

**Vote after debate: 29 voted yes, 44 voted no, 16 abstained.**

Chair: There is a carbon challenge to be met.