

Outreach



Norris seeks win-win scenario for property owners and the tax payer

In May 2000 Steve Norris came a close second in the race for Mayor of London. The ex-Tory minister is still seen as one of Mayor Livingstone's closest rivals. Norris tells **Paul Brandon** why he believes capturing land value to pay for infrastructure is a win-win situation

Livingstone rival links local democracy and land value

ON LAND AND natural resources Steve Norris, former Tory transport minister and London mayoral candidate, believes in capturing land value gains to fund transport infrastructure.

Indeed he argues that a win-win scenario can be created where all people involved in the project, from landowners to the travelling public, can benefit. Some believe his robust views have the potential to inspire a revival in the Tory Party's fortunes.

Bob Kiley, Livingstone's transport commissioner (see L&L Winter 2001/02) and Don Riley – in his book *Taken for a Ride* – have both made the link between land and freedom.

Norris adopts a similar outlook. "What Don says is to a degree a reflection of what I have always felt about land value capture" says Norris. "It's direct and specific. I believe that had we tapped into a great many more property owners around the Jubilee line we could have relieved the taxpayer of the obligation to invest in the line.

"We would have still created the wealth that has been generated, but more of the cost would have been borne by the people

who have had the wealth created for them." The Norris view is that those who gain – in this case the landowners – pay for benefits received.

Asked whether community-created land values could be returned to the community Norris acknowledged the possibility was in his mind. On the more radical question of a substitution of the tax base, off labour and capital and on to land Norris is more cautious.

"I'm just wary. If you're talking about changing the nature of the burden of tax, then sensible people ought to listen. I'm nearly there with *Land&Liberty* but not quite."

But he acknowledges a London focus at present – "where my present interests lie is in relation to schemes like the Jubilee Line or Crossrail".

Quizzed on Labour's proposals to give the regions greater powers, following devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, Norris said he believed in devolution.

"I've always believed in the doctrine of subsidiarity. On a personal level I require government to do for me only those things which I cannot better do myself.

"You might translate that into European politics. I require Europe only to do for me that which the nation state cannot better do itself. In terms of whether you govern regionally, or locally, I think the same criteria applies... I can see the virtue of returning decisions to a regional level, allowing resources to be generated on a regional level."

But what about those regions being able to choose how they raise their funds?

"I am not at all adverse to that. I think if regional diversity means anything it means regions being able to choose how they raise their funds and what the purpose of raising those funds is."

Could that mean a land value tax?

Norris replied: "Absolutely and I wouldn't have any problem with that at all. That's what local democracy is all about, you would set out the options, the party would debate them and the champions of each of these courses would present their case and the community would make a decision."

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To read the unexpurgated interview please go to www.LandandLiberty.net