

## Women suffer divorce inequality over land

A PETITION HAS been lodged with the European Parliament demanding equal rights to land for women in divorce cases.

Petitioner Yorkshire farmer Patricia Mallaby has taken the action following her experience of England's divorce laws.

At present the law is prejudiced against female partners in land-based business break-ups that result from divorce proceedings.

When normal businesses are dissolved commercial law gives equal rights to all partners in land-based assets. But the petition argues that courts habitually use discretionary powers to deprive the

female partner of such equal rights.

In divorce cases the law treats the parties as matrimonial partners first and business partners second. Matrimonial and family law says the man gets to keep the land.

Mallaby recently launched the Scottish-based organisation Women's Land Reform Group.

"It was through fighting our own cases to retain ownership of our farms that we discovered a covert, sexist land policy in the UK," Mallaby reveals, adding: "Women cannot find legal advice or representation to safeguard their

proprietorship and land title, or their business assets. Courts routinely, but unlawfully, intervene in business partnership dissolutions and dispossess women."

Mallaby's petition is supported by her MEP Neil MacCormack, who said: "My understanding of the case is that the law of England at the moment effectively discriminates against women in their role as economic actors and participants in enterprise." He believes this is an example of gender discrimination prohibited by European Treaties.

## Call for LVT

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL has passed a motion to investigate the possibility of lobbying Government for powers to raise a land value tax.

A coalition of Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors passed the motion. It follows Liverpool City Council's project to use land tax as a means to fund urban regeneration.

The Liverpool Council scheme was explored in February's From the Ground Up conference held in Liverpool, run by the Henry George Foundation.

Affordable housing heads the Oxfordshire County Council's agenda according to their recently published Local Plan. The councillors backing the motion are interested in using a land value tax to address the county's problem.

There is scope for many different types of events. Waterfront's conferences are professionally-run, commercial events.

We believe they provide valuable forums for discussion. Where Waterfront differs from other commercial conference companies is that, in order to ensure a balanced attendance and improve the quality of debate, we offer discounted rates for public sector organisations and voluntary organisations, registered charities, academics and students.

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## In conference

WITH THE UK in desperate need of transport reform the Labour Government has pledged to do everything from repairing poorly maintained roads, modernising the rail network and supporting light rail. Stephen Mitchell reports from Waterfront's **Financing New Transport Infrastructure** conference.

### Bad investment

Notes of caution and criticism were offered by Tony Travers, of the London School of Economics, who reported that under Labour public expenditure on transport has been cut as a percentage of GDP, with major investment projects limited to those inherited from the last administration. The UK has the lowest capital investment in Europe for public transport, with higher fares at a time when our infrastructure is the most intensively used and most congested, according to Michael Roberts of the CBI.

### Closed for business

The scale of the figure involved (including £33.5 billion for rail), makes it inevitable the Treasury will have to be involved, claimed Tony Travers, Research Director of Greater London Group, LSE.

The Government has made clear its priorities belong to the NHS, education and law and order. The situation is compounded by controversy surrounding the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, PPP and Network Rail.

This leaves government, goes the argument, with the view that transport is a dangerous, if not a no-go area. With these demands on finances, the message

is clear: "Treasury sit back, do nothing, because the existing infrastructure will last for another year or two."

### Cash injection

UK transport initiatives are to receive £180 billion between 2002 and 2011. The scale can be appreciated when one considers that the Highways Agency estimates the value of its assets at £57 billion. The plan includes congestion targets and it caters for the maintenance and upgrading of roads and rail, with plans to reduce pollution, improve quality, reliability and oversee future growth.

### Private concern

The private sector has over-invested in transport relative to the rewards, said Jeremy Hosking, Director of Marathon Asset Management Ltd. If the capital costs of rail were included, fares would become prohibitively expensive compared with other modes of transport. This would create the need for huge public subsidy in recognition of the considerable external benefits conferred on the business community. Hosking sees the need for the regulatory structure to be symmetrical: with investors keeping profits, in return for carrying the risk. Only then will pension fund managers' interest return to the transport sector.

### Land value gains

Dave Wetzel, vice chair for Transport for London, showed delegates how capturing land value gains might be used to fund the numerous projects planned for London.