

[Newsflash! Poverty doesn't make you unhappy](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Saturday 29 December 2012

I suppose we should have realised this: if money doesn't make you happy then poverty isn't, necessarily, going to make you unhappy. Fortunately we now have confirmation of this point from our trusted news source on all things poverty related, [The Guardian](#) [3].

Deprived areas of the country do not contain the unhappiest citizens, research by the government revealed as official statistics showed that one in eight people were struggling to manage financially during the economic slowdown. Speaking at the launch of the the latest release of data from the Office for National Statistics, David Halpern from the Cabinet Office pointed out that reported life satisfaction in Hartlepool was higher than in Blackburn despite similar levels of deprivation. "Look at Rutland, which is similarly wealthy to Wokingham. Yet levels of life satisfaction are much higher. Rutland is built near lakes. So we think environment does make a difference to happiness. It seems that if you can see a tree you are happier," said Halpern, who leads the government's Behavioural Insights Team.

That is, of course, fascinating. Most especially when we mix it with the new happiness economics which suggests, nay demands, that government policy should be about increasing the happiness of the citizenry, not the wealth.

For what it means is that instead of taxing the rich to give more money to the poor we should instead just organise things so that those poor can see a tree. I can't say I'm entirely convinced by this but it is the logic of these oh so currently fashionable ideas. And we here at the ASI have already worked out how to do this: [Land Economy](#) [4].

Land Economy proposes the most radical change in land use in decades, putting the case for redeveloping agricultural land into a combination of woodland, housing and infrastructure. By converting just 3 percent of the farms in England and Wales over a ten year period, covering 90 percent of the land with trees and the other 10 percent with houses, we would create 950,000 new homes and almost 130,000 hectares of new woodland.

At usual sort of occupancy rates that would mean 3 million people able to see a tree and mademuch happier by being able to do so. And even better, it doesn't actually cost anything to do: not from public funds at least. We just issue theplanning permissions and the market will happily take care of the rest. Indeed, the public purse will find the burdens upon it lessening as an increase in the housing stock of that size will lowerprices and thus the housing benefit bill.

All round it just sounds like the most lovely idea really. And so with it and hip, don't you think? Truly making people happier without doing anything so consumerist as having to spend a bean.

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