

Bad Habits, Hard Choices – tackling obesity through the tax system (and why a sugar tax is not enough)

David Fell, Brook Lyndhurst

Seminar at **Monticello House, 45 Russell Square, WC1B 4JP**
5.30 (for 6.00) - 9.00 p.m., Monday 25th July 2016

At this seminar, David Fell will speak about his new book '[Bad Habits, Hard Choices](#)' in which he sets out a radical proposal for tackling the UK's obesity crisis, with an argument in three parts.

Part One – Bad Habits

Drawing on insights from behavioural economics, social psychology and linguistics, Fell suggests that the narratives of modern marketing have been comprehensively internalised by the majority of the population. These narratives frame some (lifestyle) choices as 'good' and some as 'bad'.

The choices we make as 'consumers' are frequently 'good' for capitalism and 'bad' for us. Over-buying and over-eating are conspicuous examples. The persistence of these 'bad habits', Fell argues, is the outcome of the mismatch in power between corporatized marketing, on the one hand, and frail and fallible individuals, on the other. Expecting those individuals each to overcome their bad habits is misguided. An effective solution needs to redress the power imbalance and has therefore to be of significant institutional scale.

Part Two – Hard Choices

Introducing the notion of 'commitment strategies' developed by the Nobel-laureate economist Thomas Schelling, and considering also the techniques of deliberative democracy, Fell offers a range of examples illustrating how power imbalances can be redressed in ways that are inclusive, fair, adaptable and resilient.

He suggests that a suitably configured 'socially determined commitment strategy' has the potential to counteract the power of modern marketing and to frame a new narrative in which healthy eating is both straightforward and affordable for everyone.

Part Three – A Proposition

Fell offers a concrete proposition for how such a strategy could be introduced. He proposes that **negative VAT should be charged on healthy foods**, and high VAT should be charged on unhealthy foods. He sets out a four step process to implement the new regime, each step of which depends on mechanisms that have already been used by Government. He concludes with some evidence indicating the feasibility of the programme; and hints at its future potential.

Speakers

Chair:

Anna Coote, Head of Social Policy, New Economics Foundation

Anna is Head of Social Policy, leading work on developing a new social settlement to meet the challenges of the 21st century. This aims to promote well-being for all and sustainable social justice. Her recent publications for NEF include *The Prevention Papers*, *The Wisdom of Prevention*, *The Big Society* and *The New Austerity and 21 Hours*.

A leading analyst, writer and advocate in the field of social policy, Anna was responsible for ground-breaking work on health and sustainable development as Commissioner for Health with the UK Sustainable Development Commission (2000-9). She led the Healthcare Commission's work on engaging patients and the public (2005-8) and was Director of Health Policy at the King's Fund (1998-2004).

Presenter:

David Fell, Director, Brook Lyndhurst Ltd

David Fell is a researcher, writer, presenter and activist in the field of sustainable economics. He is director and co-founder of the research and strategy consultancy [Brook Lyndhurst](#); supports community groups in London via the [Just Space](#) programme; and blogs as [EconEnough](#). His work is concerned, in particular, with the development of strategies for promoting changes in individual and institutional behaviour to bring about a more sustainable economy.

David has a degree in economics from Cambridge University; 25 years' research and strategy experience for clients in the government, private and not-for-profit sectors; and served for several years on the London Sustainable Development Commission.

Discussant:

Anita Charlesworth, Director of Research and Economics, The Health Foundation

Before joining the Health Foundation in May 2014, Anita was Chief Economist at the Nuffield Trust for four years where she led the Trust's work on health care financing and market mechanisms.

Anita was Chief Analyst and Chief Scientific Advisor at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport from 2007 to 2010 and, prior to this, she was Director of Public Spending at the Treasury from 1998-2007, where she led the team working with Sir Derek Wanless on his reform of NHS funding in 2002. Anita has a Masters in Health Economics from York University and has worked as an Economic Advisor in the Department of Health and for SmithKline Beecham pharmaceuticals in the UK and USA.

Christopher Snowdon, head of Lifestyle Economics, the Institute of Economic Affairs.

Chris's research focuses on lifestyle freedoms, prohibition and policy-based evidence. He is a regular contributor to *Spectator Health*, *City AM* and *The Telegraph* and often appears on TV and radio discussing social and economic issues.

Snowdon's work encompasses a diverse range of topics including 'sin taxes', state funding of charities, happiness economics, 'public health' regulation, gambling and the black market. He is the editor of the Nanny State Index and the author of four books: 'Selfishness, Greed and

Capitalism' (2015), 'The Art of Suppression' (2011), 'The Spirit Level Delusion' (2010) and 'Velvet Glove, Iron Fist' (2009).

Followed by discussion and refreshments

To register, e-mail epw@camecon.com

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'Bad Habits, Hard Choices' by David Fell is available from the London Publishing Partnership (<http://londonpublishingpartnership.co.uk/>)