

NOW AND FOREVER

The notice on the county boundary is stark and to the point –

'No room - this County is full!'

This is not a joke but reality. It's one thing to put a 'Full' notice at the entrance to a National Park during peak holiday time knowing many visitors will return home at light fall but it is deadly serious when the notice goes up in an English county.

A dear old lady, who had lived in a delightful village for almost the whole of her life, said to me 'These people just keep arriving - I've nothing against them and their wish to live here but how will the community cope? Looking out of her cottage that once stood on the very edge of the village surrounded by meadow, farmsteads and hayricks - and is now an ugly executive housing estate - she made a hard hitting statement.

'There's just no room for anymore people'.

People have to live somewhere, but she did have a point.

With some 56million souls attempting to live on 56million acres we are fast becoming a very crowded island - some would go as far as to say overcrowded. Logically, and with all things being equal, this would mean we each would have an acre of land, but as many know, including our beloved parliamentarians, this is just not the case. Long gone are the days when everyone could own an acre plus a cow, a pig and a sheep - most families are lucky to have a garden equivalent to just one twentieth of an acre!

It doesn't take long to recognise on a tour of villages and small towns across the breadth of the country that we are running out of 'new land' to develop - it just doesn't exist! The only change is in our use of existing land. Too long have we assumed that 'green field' sites should be used for development - what about recycling land that has been used once, twice or even 3 times before? Let's not deny people the joys of living in the 'country' but be sure to prevent suburbia overtaking the precious countryside. Errors a plenty have been perpetrated since the Industrial Revolution evolved over 3 centuries ago and we should take the lead in cleaning up this mess - not adding to it for future generations. Strangely to many - and these include estate agents, developers and the government - more people are rediscovering city and town dwelling and it's pleasures. Developers, Estate agents and the population of this tiny island have a lot to answer for - the agent's typical reaction to selling 'up market' houses on an ancient meadow in the heart of an unspoilt village is simply: 'It's a desirable place!' This cannot be a satisfactory answer. Are we all that short sighted and uncaring about our very own country? Sadly the answer is 'yes'. Only too often I despair at the attitude of the 'man in the street' and some would say little wonder when you look at politicians at national or local level - they hardly give a good image or lead by example!

We may have failed to address errors in times past but this cannot give us the right to blindly follow the same disastrous path like sheep. Surely we should have learnt our lesson by now? Our Prehistoric and Roman ancestors practised the very discipline we should be promoting in the 21st.century - time and time again they reused their

ancient sites even when they didn't have the pressure of 56million people living on 56million acres! These were the 'brown field' sites of ancient history and the archaeologists can prove it!

Brian Redhead, that well read author and much loved broadcaster, once said

'We need city life to prove that we are civilised and we need country to prove that we are whole'.

How true.

We all need to be assured that the countryside is safe, cared for and not plundered - now and forever!

Footnote: August 2006. We are now told the population has grown to 60 million! The country is certainly overcrowded! The present Government still insists that thousands of new properties will be built on Green Belt, whilst the opposition don't seem to offer any alternatives. We shall soon run out of open countryside just to walk the dog!

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