MATTER 2 / Laurence Keeley

CAMPAIGN-FOR-CHANGE.

Settlement Hierarchy and Rural Areas Strategy

Village shops

Often new shop rents are too high for new or small businesses to start. Council's or community land trusts should have some shops for rent at low cost. This would help to keep village life alive. In towns, shops should try not to sell everything, planning permission should be sought for all the different items intended to be sold in a shop, a florist for example would sell plants ect, a baker would stick to bread and cakes. The larger stores and superstores should try and not to sell everything like motor oil or newspaper but stick to food. This may mean a change of law.

If you look at the number of vehicles at any one time visiting an out of town superstore and consider the amount of energy and the build-up of exhaust fumes, surely it is more environmentally sound for one large lorry to take supplies to one village shop where local people can go and buy them. Create a village centre, a post office, baker, cafe etc. With village shops, pubs and post offices closing we need to look at an area in each village to create a hub where by a shop, a pub, maybe a community centre can be in one building. This may mean building a new site creating a new building or the possibility of using an existing building. There needs to be a centre whereby a couple of couples could live on site and look after such a premises, as explained above. Costs could be kept down by a number of means like making village shops business rate exempt if their income is less that the VAT exempt rate. The village shops themselves would have to be a large enough to carry the stock and choice required. They could also be a base for on line deliveries.

Superstores destroy every business by selling everything; they give no back-up service with repairs. Their petrol sales will destroy rural retailers. Country folk will have to go to town for food and fuel creating what we are trying to prevent, i.e. traffic pollution and parking. Will prescriptions be available locally, or will we rely on the nearest town.

Building houses with bricks increases CO2 emissions. We are destroying fish breeding beds by dredging the sea beds for shingle. I suggest houses should be built using timber on a steel frame; sheep's wool for insulation and fireproofing and solar panels on the roof. Growing trees would help the environment and create employment in rural areas.

WCS6 lists a number of villages where they have a number of new housing allocations. We should include every village in the district to have a portion of new houses, if we don't do this they will become a dormitory village for old people; we need new affordable houses for young people and create affordable work units and agricultural enterprises.

Farming

The average age of our working farmers is over 60. We need young, fit men and women to farm our land, yet 64% of the land sold is bought by non-farmers, these people are often city bonus people, who are able to get

EU subsidies. There is no comparison to land value and farm income. These new land owners would be ideal to create a new land lord tenant system for new younger entrants into farming. Older farm buildings could be used for light industry rather that converting into unaffordable homes.

It is said that a third of the world population is going to bed hungry. With the global population now 6 billion, it is estimated it will be 9 billion in twenty years. If we don't act on pollution and environment, the population could quickly go down to five billion with a mass of famine and disease. A forward looking plan is needed; the core strategy doesn't have one.

Whilst supermarkets promote cheap food, this is short-term gain, now Eastern Europe with in the EU we may find with cheap labour and unused land in the East European area, the West will be getting even cheaper food. British farms will be unable to continue in food production; the countryside will become bramble and rabbits. When wages and values rise in Eastern Europe, food in west Europe will become expensive. The people will say why don't we grow food here? But there won't be anyone left with the knowledge to produce food, unless we take a long term view.

One solution is to create small farms that one can enjoy and create employment. Instead of paying set aside or countryside stewardship, the money could be used to help create new local produce i.e. cheese, a smokery, cutting room for meat, bakery, local pies ect. A local dairy farm for milk supply, free range poultry for eggs, freezers for meat and fruit storage. Energy crops should be grown. It would be better for ten farmers to have forty cows each than one to have four hundred. Animals would have better care and attention. We need to create small farm enterprises in rural areas.

When converting old farm buildings in to houses there should be a small acreage to go with them to create small start-up farming units.

Recently i was at a talk on faring in the fifties, there were 40 people working on a large 1,000 area farm today there is just one, we should be taking the advantage of our technology that we have gained over the last fifty years.

May i invite you to visit www.the-democratic-link.co.uk see menu then click agriculture and food security.