

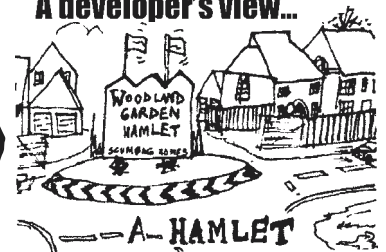


WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER HITTING THE ROOF

A developer's view...

# SchNEWS

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## BLOBBY'S HOUSE PARTY

**'The government is creating an army of middle-class Swampies. The protests against these new developments will make the Newbury Bypass campaign look like a teddy bears picnic'**

**Thomas Newell, Estate Agent**

**'If it means lying down in front of bulldozers, I'll be there'**

**Damian Green, Conservative MP for Ashford**

Estate Agents and Tory MP's threatening Direct Action? Surely not! But, strange as it may seem, something of a rebellion is brewing in the county towns and leafy suburbs of Southern England, brought about by the government's decision to build 43,000 new homes in the area every year until 2016; over 700,000 houses in a region of the country already groaning under the strain of massive over-development. Across the south-east, people are bracing themselves for the onslaught of housing developers and road-builders, and this time it seems that it won't just be yer usual eco-warrior types on the front line. Local opposition to greenbelt development has been steadily building over the past few years. In 1998, a planned greenfield housing scheme in Peacehaven was stopped after local people, including the mayor, teachers, families and pensioners threatened to 'lock on and be arrested' (SchNEWS 164). More recently, when a protest camp, set up to stop 66 luxury houses being built at Hockley, was surrounded by security barricades, locals stormed through with food and tat for the besieged protesters (SchNEWS 249). These were isolated incidents; this time round the grassroots protests are likely to be much more widespread, and looking at the sheer scale of the proposed developments, it's easy to see why.

For example, Ashford, a town with a population of 55,000, would almost treble in size to 150,000, while between Horsham and Crawley in West Sussex, an area of greenbelt 5 miles long and 2 miles wide would vanish under 45,000 new houses. It has been estimated by the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) that over 430 square kilometres of countryside in the south-east are under threat.

You may well be wondering why these huge numbers of new houses are actually needed, when so many are standing empty or derelict. Well, it's that old chestnut 'predict and provide', once so beloved of the road planners, based on a completely false concept of household formation that takes no account of empty and under-occupied houses. Or, for that matter, second homes. There are roughly 250,000 homeless households in Britain, and 224,000 second homes. As George Monbiot noted: 'The similarity

of the numbers is no coincidence. Every time a second home is purchased, another family is shoved out of the housing market. Rich people from the cities turn up in villages and buy up the houses at prices that local people couldn't possibly afford'. It has also been estimated that up to 26,500 new homes could be provided each year by converting old commercial and office buildings and re-developing existing housing.

All this is blatantly ignored by the house and road building lobbies, who assume that a nice new house and a convenient road to the out-of-town superstore will keep the natives happy, and that any protests will be small scale and localized. Wrong! If and when these crazy schemes get the go ahead, then the developers and the government will find themselves up against a direct action movement far beyond anything they've encountered before. In the words of Tony Burton of CPRE: 'The touchpaper has been lit and the fuse is burning. If he is not careful this is going to explode in John Prescott's face'.

\* Have other SchNEWS readers noticed a similarity between Mr.Blobby and Mr.Prescott?

### VERY DETACHED

\* The Weald of Sussex & Kent was 95% ancient woodland in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> first passed an environmental protection law. Today such woodland covers less than 5%.

\* Urban areas have grown by 58% since 1945, equivalent to a London sized city being built every decade.

\* Areas of Tranquility the size of Wales have been lost since the 1960s.

\* Area taken up by car parks in the UK; 366 square miles.

### HOME ALONE

There was nothing about empty properties in this week's green paper on housing, despite latest figures that show 765,000 empty homes in England, 90,000 of which are in the South East. (There was nothing in the green paper on second homes either).

Also worth considering is that as available housing becomes scarce, deposits and rents go up, less landlords are willing to take housing benefit, and if you haven't got pots of money there could be trouble ahead. So who owns all these empties? Well, step forward the gov't, who as England's most wasteful landlord are hardly setting a positive example to anyone. Currently around one fifth of their properties are standing empty.

But don't give up all hope. April 10th -14th is South East Action on Empty Homes. Community Action on Empty Homes (a project

### CRAP OF THE WEEK

April is National Spring Clean Month with the Tidy Britain Group targeting those nasty people who leave fast food restaurants and discard coke cans, McDonald wrappers, chewing gum and such like. The Tidy Group say "people who purchase these products and drop litter are the problem, these are the people we are trying to educate...we can spread the anti-littering message to the actual source."

We would be the last people who would rubbish their campaign, yet, who are sponsoring the month? McDonald, Coca-Cola, Wrigleys,... erm!. So there you have it: McDonalds are smothering the world in fast poo outlets, wrapping it up in old rubbish and then blaming the customer for making a mess. Sounds McFishy to us.

run by the Empty Homes Agency) are setting up a mock Estate Agents in Guildford (home of the Government housing office for the South East). But the publicity stunt isn't aiming to directly find homes for people. When SchNEWS rang up to get a list of empty properties in Brighton, the EHA told us that they couldn't pass it on because "Justice? ran a squatters estate agents (SchNews 64/5), and we can't encourage squatting."

Positive solutions to housing problems do exist - squatting, housing co-ops/associations, eco-villages. Check out

**Council for Protection of Rural England**, 020 7976 6373 [www.greenchannel.com.cpre/](http://www.greenchannel.com.cpre/)

**Empty Homes Agency**, 020 7928 6288, email [caeh@eha.globalnet.co.uk](mailto:caeh@eha.globalnet.co.uk)

**URGENT**, Box HN, 111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RQ tel: 01865 794800 [www.urgent.org.uk/](http://www.urgent.org.uk/) Sustainable housing policies, info, advice.

**Advisory Service for Squatters**, 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1 2QN, 020 7359 8814 [www.squat.freemove.co.uk](http://www.squat.freemove.co.uk)

**Radical Routes**, 0113 262 9365 Info etc on housing co-ops. [www.home.clara.net/carrot/rrepub/info.htm](http://www.home.clara.net/carrot/rrepub/info.htm).

**Groundswell**, 5-15 Cromer St., London, WC1H 8LS 020 7713 2880 [www.oneworld.org/groundswell](http://www.oneworld.org/groundswell). Part of the National Homeless Alliance, supporting self-help initiatives with homeless people and those living in poverty. "Unless people experiencing poverty really begin to do something, nothing is going to change!"

**Defend Council Housing** are an umbrella group fighting the mass transfer of council housing to private housing corporations. They are organising a series of Conferences across the country covering topics like 'alternatives to stock transfers' and 'why is New Labour selling our homes?' For details ring 020 7254 2312 [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)

## PICK-POCKETS

Imagine this...you're doing your weekly shopping. You've got just £25 to spend, you can only spend it on designated items and if there should happen to be change left over the store will keep it themselves! An estimated 4,000 retailers have signed up to the asylums seekers' voucher scheme, launched, ironically, on April Fool's Day as the Immigration and Asylum Act came into force. Asylum seekers are placed in a no-win situation, unable to work whilst awaiting application decisions, they are forced below the poverty line with an income that's 30% below the minimum necessary for survival. Begging often remains the only option, yet that's not tolerated. Faced with such facts, claims that refugees are cheats who come to Britain for an easy life fail to stand up. The truth is, they have no choice. What would you do if your homeland had been destroyed, if you had witnessed the deaths of your family, if you lived in constant fear for your life? Let's have a look at some of the other measures introduced to deal with this so-called social menace. Refugees are now being re-housed around the country, often separated from their families and friends as part of the 'dispersal scheme'; they face house and area 'curfews' and are prohibited from leaving their proscribed accommodation for more than 7 days; lorry drivers are subject to £2,000 fines for bringing in 'illegal immigrants'. The company awarded the prestigious honour of distributing the vouchers is Sodexo Pass, a French organisation who were once an inoffensive little catering company. However, they soon turned their hands to better things and have accumulated a nice history....They now own shares in the Corrections Corporation who run some of Britain's prisons; in 1998 they ruled Marriot, an American company, with an iron hand until their activities were declared unconstitutional by the US Labour Relations Board; and were also active in strike breaking operations in New England hospitals. What a nice bunch! In fact, just the sort of people you'd expect to be involved in such a scheme. Oxfam and Save the Children Fund have pulled out of the voucher scheme, describing it as a form of 'persecution'.

Charles Obinna, a Nigerian asylum seeker currently being held in Haslar Detention Centre described his feelings on Britain's attitude to refugees, "I now find myself in a new world where everything is deception and beyond credibility." Asylum seekers are not out for an easy life, they are simply seeking a better one, and they certainly won't find it here.

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 0121 554 6947, <http://ncadc.demon.co.uk/>

\*Four truckers were fined a total of £32,000 for bringing 16 people illegally through a port. The truckers became the first to fall foul of the new asylum act.

\* Under the new regulations toys will not be allowed to be exchanged for tokens, so people have started up a campaign to send toys to National Asylum Support Service, asking them to pass them it on to any support service for refugee children. Send the toys to National Asylum Support Service, Quest House, Cross Road, Croydon, Surrey CR9 6EL

\* This Saturday the National Front are marching in Margate. Well, probably about 30 of them. A counter-demo is planned- meet Margate train station at 12 noon.

SchNEWS pleads guilty to stealing much of the info above from journalist Nick Cohen's articles. Check out his book 'Cruel Britannia'.

## Subscribe!

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## SchNEWS in brief

**Hands off our Tube!** Balfour Beatty is part of a consortium shortlisted to take over some of the Underground under the 'public-private partnership'. They have an appalling record of health and safety for previous development projects and at present have a contract for building the Ilisu dam in Turkey which is set to displace thousands of mainly Kurdish people. (See SchNews 244) Tell Balfour Beatty what you think of them! Wed 12<sup>th</sup> April, 3pm, outside Angel Station. Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, 020 8533 1477 email [publictube@aol.com](mailto:publictube@aol.com) \*\* This Sunday (9th) there's a 'Crops a Flop Party' in Hemel Hempstead, where there are two farm scale trials of genetically modified oil seed rape. Meet 1pm at Gaddesden Row more info 01442 248657 \*\* April 22-28 is **TV Turn-off Week** organised by White Dot. The campaign publishes a quarterly magazine of TV-Free Living and recently wrote the book *Get A Life* (published by Bloomsbury Press) White Dot, PO Box 2116, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 3LR [www.whitedot.org](http://www.whitedot.org) \*\* 6 members of **Voices in the Wilderness'** campaign to end the ongoing economic sanctions on Iraq were arrested last week on suspicion of criminal damage to Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's house. They had displayed posters of Hans von Sponeck and Denis Halliday, former UN Humanitarian Co-ordinators for Iraq who have both resigned because of the humanitarian disaster in Iraq. Voices in the Wilderness, [voices@viwuk.freeseerve.co.uk](mailto:voices@viwuk.freeseerve.co.uk) 0171 607 2302 \*\* Discover the unknown side of Anarchy! The **Anarchist Heretics Fair** takes place at the Hanover Community Centre, Southover Road, Brighton on May 6 between 10am-5pm. It's a fair for the "outsiders and rejects from the mainstream anarchist movement." (mainstream anarchy?) More details 0181 459 5520. \*\* Last week we forgot to mention that the Haringey Solidarity Group have produced an excellent pamphlet on the Anti-Poll Tax struggle. **The Poll Tax Rebellion** in Haringey costs £1 plus postage from HSG PO Box 2474, London N8. \*\* **Carnival Against Junk Food.** Called by London Animal Action as part of Mayday 2000. Singing, dancing, protest and free veggieburgers! 1<sup>st</sup> May, 10am, The Strand, WC2. 020 7278 3068. \*\* The U'wa people of Colombia have won a temporary reprieve against oil drilling on their ancestral land. A Columbian judge ordered Occidental Petroleum to suspend their operations because the tribe had not been properly consulted about the project. The U'wa people have been fighting against oil exploration on their land since 1995, and were recently violently evicted after occupying the oil drilling area. (SchNews 244) [www.ran.org](http://www.ran.org) \*\* Peoples of the U'wa tribe will be speaking at midday on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup>, at 32 Stoneleigh Place, W11, tel: 0171 792 5023 \*\* A SchNEWS get well soon to Phil and Nuala and the rest of the **Headmix** crew \*\* We need new outlets around town to distribute SchNEWS now they've closed the **Kenny**. Any ideas then give us a ring. Please pick up large bundles of each weeks issue from the back of the Peace Centre and distribute freely.

## MAYDAY! MAYDAY!

Monday May 1st. Meet 11am Parliament Square for a bit of Guerilla Gardening! Followed by a free party at the Dome! Transport from Brighton. Tickets on sale next week.

## Inside SchNEWS

Zoora Shah, an Asian woman who received a 20 year sentence in 1993 for killing a man who had subjected her to ongoing sexual and physical abuse, has had her sentence reduced to 12 years. During an appeal against her conviction, which was lost, Shah described how Mohammed Azam had beaten and raped her for 12 years, using her 'as a bed' and becoming violent when she failed to bring him drugs from Pakistan. Azam was jailed for drug offences in 1984, during which time he allegedly encouraged his associates to visit Shah for sex. She told the appeal court how she had attempted to hire a hitman to kill him, but was compelled to take matters into her own hands when Azam began to show a sexual interest in her two teenage daughters.

Campaign group Southall Black Sisters criticised the criminal justice system for failing to distinguish between those who killed from a 'position of power' and those who did so out of desperation.

Southall Black Sisters, 59 Norwood Rd, Southall, Middlesex UB2 4DW, 0208 5719595.

**\*Women's Wednesdays in Whitehall** is a weekly protest and picket organised by the Wages for Work Campaign to highlight women's forgotten work and call for a change. 1-2pm every wednesday opposite Downing Street. Contact Crossroads Women's Centre, 0207482 2496, <http://womenstrike8m.server101.com>

\* Neill Chapman was recently sentenced to 6 months inside for his part in the June 18th protests in the City of London. Letters of support to Neill Chapman FF4529, HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, Thamesmead, London SE28 0EB

## DRIVEN TO HUNGER

Two people still imprisoned over their protests at Glen of the Downs near Dublin have gone on hunger strike. Meanwhile at the Glen of the Down Nature Reserve itself large boulders have been placed at the entrance of the carpark, and there are activists locked-on up in tree houses, trying to stop the European funded £20 million dual carriageway. One of the hunger strikers Michael Hammond is on a charge of 'attempting to enter a propelled vehicle while stationary(?)'. Apparently of the 13 arrested his is the most serious charge!! Dublin FoE 0035 31497 3773. [www.emc23.tp/glen](http://www.emc23.tp/glen)

## ...and finally...

Top tips for staying healthy  
·Don't be poor. If you can, stop. If you can't try not to be poor for long.  
·Don't have poor parents  
·Own a car  
·Don't work in a stressful, low paid manual job.  
·Don't live in damp, low quality housing  
·Be able to afford to go on a foreign holiday and sunbathe  
·Practise not losing your job, and don't become unemployed  
·Don't live next door to a busy major road or near a polluting factory  
·Learn how to fill in the complex housing benefit/asylum application forms before you become homeless or destitute  
(stolen from Groundswell newsletter, as a parody of top tips for better health in the 'Our Healthier Nation' white paper)

### disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers not to accommodate the housing market but home-in on shelter as a universal right. Then you'll be in a cardboard box under the pier. Honest