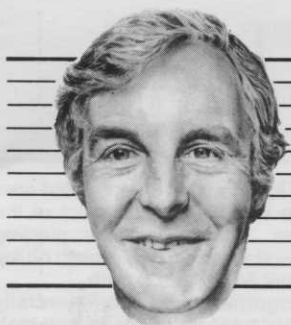


Greenside Comment...



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NOT IN MY BACK YARD !

The NTC Conference at Stoneleigh last month, was not only one of the most informative gatherings held in this country on the development of amenity turf grass, but was marked by a forthright introduction by the Minister of State for Agriculture, the Rt. Hon. John Selwyn Gummer.

From the facts given in an unusually frank address to the delegates, followed by searching questions from the floor, there is little doubt the Government are facing the question of surplus rural land head on and their policy is likely to lead to a considerable degree of controversy, not only with the district planning authorities, but those who live in the countryside.

Over production of food in Britain can be attributed to three principal factors. The increased use of fertilisers, the more efficient mechanisation of larger farming units and by no means least a greatly improved management structure by our Agriculture Industry.

So what are we going to do with the poorer grades of agricultural land?

The Government are currently being pressed to re-develop the

inner cities for housing, but there should be a choice. Not everyone wants to live in an inner city, particularly if sensible development can take place in rural areas.

The Minister made it clear the policy is to encourage farmers to develop other businesses on their land with the emphasis on leisure. Included in this plan is an expansion of sporting activities covering a range of projects from pony trekking to golf courses, though Mr Gummer delivered a body blow to some, with ideas of carving out an eighteen hole course on a spare one hundred acres, by saying there would be no Government funding for golf courses, but they would consider grants for other recreational development.

Now comes the dilemma. The demand for golf has increased from 0.5% of the population in 1959 to 2.4% in 1984, but in this period only around 250 new courses have been constructed, less, those established courses sold off for housing development.

We need many more golf courses in Britain to satisfy demand, but the cost of laying

out a new course plus the provision of an appropriate clubhouse can run into a minimum of £1 million, even if the developer owns the land. It must also be taken into consideration there will be no return on the investment for at least two years, the minimum time necessary for it to mature.

The fact must be faced, despite the objections from the planners and rural residents, the way this can be achieved is to follow the American pattern of linking golf courses with high class housing development. Only in this way can sufficient funds be generated to provide an amenity for all.

The selfish attitude by some rural residents, invariably those who have moved in last, of pulling down the portcullis on their preserve and opposing change to their community in any way, must be overcome.

The days of the member owned club in Britain have ended. The existing ones will continue, but if we are going to provide an expansion of golfing facilities for the new generation, commercial enterprise is the only way forward.

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