

GREENERY

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Most people are interested in the environment around them now. For those who live in, or visit, the countryside, this includes:

- the effects of intensive agriculture on the landscape, flora, fauna, fish and waterways;
- the effects of other kinds of development, notably new housing, in the countryside;
- access to the countryside (particularly, after privatisation, access to land now owned by the water boards).

There is a growing number of people with an interest in these matters. Many of them live in towns and cities, but visit the countryside for pleasure. At the same time, the composition of the rural population is changing. More and more articulate people, be they computer experts or retired businessmen, are moving into the countryside and expressing their own view of countryside interests.

The press have cottoned on to the fact that environmental issues are good business. The serious papers have all got environmental correspondents. Alarm stories make the

best copy, so people are regularly fed with a litany of woe about damage to the countryside, to birds, animals, flowers, waterways (and recently beaches). Brian Redhead writes regularly in this vein in "Country Living". A recent Labour Party political broadcast featured "England's green and pleasant land" very prominently.

It is right that people should be made more aware of man's potential to damage the environment irreversibly. It is wrong that they should gain the impression, as the result of a barrage from the media, that everything is getting worse. It is not. In many areas it is beginning to get better, and the Government can claim credit for this.

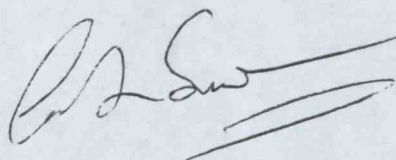
There are strong arguments for you putting the record straight and demonstrating your personal interest in the "micro" issues of greenery. The aim would be to affirm the Government's commitment to preserving all that is best in the countryside, while recognising the inevitability of change.

There is a European issue which is causing considerable concern in rural areas. Those interested in field sports are greatly exercised about the combined effect of several EC draft directives on the traditional management of game in the UK. This has maintained a careful balance, and has prevented the kind of indiscriminate shooting of birds which has occurred in some EC countries (resulting, of course, in pressure for blanket protection). Whatever view is taken of blood sports, conservationists broadly agree that the game management techniques used in the UK have helped to preserve the natural habitat for wildlife. Without this economic spur to conservation, it is likely that more areas of the countryside would have gone under the plough, or been given over to intensive grazing by sheep.

Attached is an outline of the kind of material you could use in a speech on the countryside. It could have considerable impact (witness your Royal Society speech).

There is no very obvious countryside occasion in your diary this year (your speech to the Royal Show in July will presumably focus more narrowly on agriculture). One possibility might be for you to give a speech at the Conference in the Queen Elizabeth II Centre on 13 December marking the fortieth anniversary of the legislation creating National Parks. Nicholas Ridley is currently slated for this. The only problem is that mid-December is a busy time in your diary.

Would you like us to do further work on these ideas?

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Carolyn Sinclair', with a stylized flourish at the end.

CAROLYN SINCLAIR

FUTURE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

The future of the countryside is being discussed as never before. More and more people want to live there. Between 1961 and 1981 the population in rural areas increased by 30 per cent in England and Wales. More and more people own cars and visit the countryside regularly - 18 million on a typical summer Sunday.

At the same time, there is growing awareness that much of what we value in the countryside is fragile. Careless development, including agricultural and forestry development, can cause serious damage to landscape, flora and fauna. Sometimes the damage is irreversible. Even where it can be reversed, the process is often slow, expensive and painstaking. We should not be building up an impossibly expensive repair bill for the next generation.

THE NEED FOR CAREFULLY MANAGED CHANGE

The current debate sometimes appears as conflict between those who want to develop in the countryside - farmers, forestry owners, housebuilders, businessmen - and those who want to prevent change.

The answer is that there need not be conflict, though creative friction will stimulate careful development. And those who think that the countryside is, or should be, an unchanging place do not know their history.

Our present landscape reflects economic development in the past. Change is the stuff of life in the countryside just as it is everywhere else. What is new is the pace of change, and the drastic effect it can have on our surroundings and wildlife. Man's capacity to affect his environment is now many times greater than it was in all previous centuries.

The challenge is thus to manage development in a way which safeguards the environment. While there is no room for complacency, we are beginning to make some progress in this direction. Some species have been reintroduced-the sea eagle and the large blue butterfly. The increased public concern about what is happening in the countryside reflects greater awareness rather than a faster rate of damage. This greater awareness is partly a result of Government action to preserve the environment. By acting the Government often draws people's attention to the fact that a problem exists.

THE NEW APPROACH TO AGRICULTURE

Farmers and landowners are increasingly alive to environmental considerations. At the same time the imperative behind agriculture has changed. The drive for ever more food production is over. This gives a real opportunity to reassess land use, and find sources of income for farmers which will enable them to manage their land in a way which will enable our children and grandchildren to enjoy what we have inherited. The Government is encouraging this process in a number of ways.

The set aside scheme enables farmers to keep fallow land in good condition. Set aside is not about paying farmers to neglect land while retaining legal ownership. Set aside land will still be tended, and the payments reflect the wider public interest in a managed landscape.

More recently, a system of further incentives has been introduced to encourage farmers to use set aside land for nature conservation or recreation, providing access or enhancing the landscape.

Another important initiative has been the establishment of Environmentally Sensitive Areas. In these areas farmers are paid an annual sum to follow environmentally friendly practices. The concept was pioneered in the UK, but has now been adopted within the European Community.

The new Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme directs capital grants to Conservation rather than increased production. Farmers will be given financial help towards the cost of retaining key landscape features such as stone-roofed barns, and copses of native trees. They will also get grants towards the cost of pollution control measures such as modern slurry pits.

Increasingly the thrust of payments to farmers is to support sustainable development on the land. We now pay farmers to plant hedges, not to dig them up.

ENCOURAGING THE RIGHT KIND OF FORESTRY

The Government's policies for encouraging the right type of forestry help farmers and landowners to diversify their sources of income while leaving a rich inheritance for later generations. Forestry gained a bad name in recent years through the blanket planting of conifers in the upland areas of Britain. The new schemes of support aim to promote the planting of native broadleaved trees in lowland areas.

The need for this was given added urgency by the Great Storm of 1987. We have made £25 million available to help restore the damage to the landscape left in the storm's wake.

We are encouraging the planting of native woodlands for a variety of reasons. To enhance the landscape. To help - albeit in a small way - to absorb the emissions of carbon dioxide which threaten us with global warming. To provide more of the country's timber needs - currently we produce only [] per cent of the timber we use. Last, but not least, to provide the cover needed by many of our native wildlife species.

These aims are reflected in the design of the Woodland Grant Scheme introduced last year. For the first time it is no longer necessary, in order to claim the grant, for timber production to be the primary purpose of planting. Encouragement of wildlife and recreational uses both qualify.

Forestry is an important alternative use of farmland. The Farm Woodland Scheme aims to encourage the planting of 36,000 hectares with mainly broad-leaved trees within three years. Such measures will help to restore a landscape which suffered as a result of Dutch Elm disease and the Great Storm.

Forestry can enrich the life of all of our population, particularly the lives of city dwellers and their children. Is it surprising that so many fairy stories have a woodland setting? Woods can be magical: dappled with flowers and rustling with secret bird and animal life. The Countryside Commission are working to promote the development of woodlands on urban fringes, to bring this magic closer to town children. Their most exciting idea is the planting of a vast new forest in the Midlands.

The Government's policies are designed to give the right signals to farmers and landowners. There are no longer any grants to encourage production at the cost of the environment. The way is open for entrepreneurial owners of land to find new sources of income which do not damage the environment. One possibility could be recreational use of land adjoining canals.

THE GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

The Government's commitment to preserve the richness and variety of our countryside cannot be in doubt. It was the Conservative Government which introduced the Wildlife and Countryside Act in 1981 to provide a framework for the protection of wildlife species and wildlife sites.

We are creating a National Rivers Authority to ensure clean water for drinking and recreational use. There is much to be done to improve water quality after the years of under-investment in the 1970s.

We are committed to maintaining the National Park system, and protecting Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In addition to encouraging tree planting, we have invited the Nature Conservancy Council to propose ways of regenerating heather in the upland regions.

GAME MANAGEMENT, CONSERVATION AND THE EC

It sometimes surprises people to learn that the traditional management of game in this country has contributed in no small way to preserving habitat for wildlife. Without the economic return from field sports, more land would have gone under the plough or been subject to intensive grazing by sheep. Whether people choose to practise field sports is a matter for them. But we are determined that those who wish to do so can continue to practise the carefully developed management techniques which have served us well over decades. We see no need for the UK to be pushed into an EC straitjacket which is not appropriate to our circumstances.

WATER PRIVATISATION AND ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

It is hardly surprising that a Conservative Government wants to conserve what is best. But this is sometimes questioned - for example, in the case of access to water authorities' land after privatisation.

It is suggested that private water companies will deny access to the land they hold. In fact they will not be able to do this. The Bill for water privatisation will put water companies under a duty to manage all their land with an eye to conservation and care. They must allow the public access to their land, and recreational use of it.

It is then argued that this is all very well, but what happens if water companies sell off some of the beautiful land which they own? If this happens access may be denied to the public.

Here we are proposing more stringent safeguards than exist now. The [Bill] [Act] providing for water privatisation will require water companies to obtain the Secretary of State's approval before they sell any land. Where the land is in a national park, or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Secretary of State will be able to impose covenants on the land preserving access, or require that it be offered to a conservation body. It is not necessary to have public ownership to ensure public access.

THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

To those who argue that the Government is the developer's friend and no friend to the countryside, I would say look at our record, and look around you. The land area of Britain remains overwhelmingly rural.

But the preservation of the countryside cannot and should not be preservation in aspic. People have moved about the countryside for hundreds of years, seeking a better future for themselves and their children. In the mid-nineteenth century people left rural areas to seek work in the industrial towns. Now the flow is from town to country.

There is room to accommodate all who want to live in the countryside - whether young couples who want to bring up their children in the freedom and space the countryside can offer, older people retiring to the peace of the countryside, or even townspeople wanting to escape at weekends. I cannot see how the party which stands for freedom of choice can deny people the right to live where they choose.

RURAL HOUSING

But the current changes in the countryside raise issues of deep concern to many people. A particular worry is that rising house prices, fuelled by prosperous incomers, will make it impossible for local young people to find housing in rural areas.

The Government recognises the importance of ensuring a supply of low cost housing in the countryside. We want to tap private initiative and private investment. We have put some public sector money upfront to get the process going.

We believe that rural housing associations have a key role to play. We have therefore:

- almost trebled the funding of the National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust to encourage rural communities to establish, or bring in, housing associations;
- increased Housing Corporation funding for rural schemes;
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Ultimately the key to the provision of low cost housing lies in local attitudes expressed through the planning system. We have introduced planning changes which will allow the release of small pockets of additional land for low cost housing to meet local needs. It is now up to those who live in the countryside to decide how to react. It is very encouraging that in many villages and rural areas people are prepared to take a much less restrictive attitude to housing development for local people. Such attitudes will do as much as anything to bring decent rural housing within affordable reach.

The result will be change: for example, some new houses at the edges of villages, or tucked behind a copse; perhaps whole new villages on land no longer needed for agricultural production. This will not be something new for the countryside. The density of splendid old churches in Norfolk reminds us of the density of population which once lived in that most fertile of counties.

To some, development has become a dirty word when it applies to the countryside. This has not been so in the past, and it need not be so now. Not all beautiful villages have grown up organically. Some of the most attractive - Milton Abbas in Dorset, Harewood in Yorkshire and Blanchland in Northumberland - were created at a stroke in the eighteenth century. The challenge for today's architects and planners is to produce housing which is attractive, and in tune with local surroundings.

CONCLUSION

Carefully managed change will invigorate rural communities. With care and thought, the development needed to provide homes and jobs can be combined with careful stewardship of our precious inheritance of landscape and wildlife. We know so much more than we used to. We can use that knowledge to preserve and foster what man has not created, as well as to maintain man-made beauties, and invent new ones.

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The truth is somewhat different. The Arcadian idyll was dreamt up by poets, not ploughmen. The nineteenth century paintings of rural scenes which are currently so much in

vogue conceal the wretchedness, damp, squalor and disease which were rife in those oh so charming cottages. Who would deny that rural life has changed immeasurably for the better since then, particularly during the second half of this century?

We should have confidence in our ability to manage change. We have accommodated a significant shift of population into rural areas over the last thirty years. We have begun to reverse the decline in the richness of our landscape and wildlife. Our countryside has a great future - as a home for many, and as a place of recreation and enjoyment for even more. It is one of our greatest national assets, and as such deserves to be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

16 June 1989

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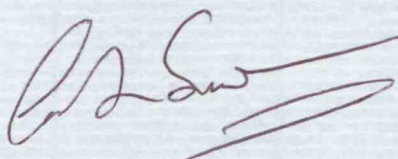
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PRIME MINISTER

GREENERY

I attach a note from Carolyn Sinclair suggesting that you might make a major speech on countryside and conservation issues; and attaching a draft of the sort of things you might say. She points to an opportunity in December and asks whether you would like her to work up further ideas.

You may not want to commit yourself yet to a major speech in this area but I think it would be a good idea for Carolyn to work up her ideas further. You might also incorporate some of her material in your speech to the Royal Agricultural Show on 3 July.

A speech by you on this subject would I think be taken as a signal of a major change of emphasis in policy. There is a danger that it might be interpreted as simply defensive. Critics may be looking for new initiatives, of which there is little so far in Carolyn's draft. Perhaps Carolyn might explore the possibilities for new initiatives in this field which you could announce.

Do you agree to:

- Carolyn working up further ideas? ✓
- looking at incorporating some of her material into the Royal Agricultural Show speech? *same*
- her looking at the scope for new initiatives? *Yes*
- not making any commitment yet to take on a speech on 13 December?

CAS
CAROLINE SLOCOCK
16 June 1989
DS2AQY

We have plenty of occasions for speeches - perhaps we had better get the speech made up first. We shall have the new Content of Publication Bill in 1989 - November