

A Word...

### "Inevitable"

There are so many things in the world that we have come to believe are inevitable and which, because of their apparent certainty, we can comfortably base our arguments upon them. These inevitabilities can be quasi-mystical, such as the 'invisible hand' of the market, homely but ominous aphorisms like the one about 'death and taxes', or political expedients with hidden profit motives for the elites, such as the 'need' for austerity politics. One of Margaret Thatcher's slogans that still rules us today was TINA - "There Is No Alternative" - which tried to present the resurgence of cynical winner-takes-all capitalism, championed by her government, as inevitable. Austerity politics is just the most recent incarnation of this particular agenda. This also set up the now-familiar equation of hope and idealism with immaturity.

I have seen countless presentations in recent years that have based their arguments about landscape and urbanism on a couple of assumptions presented as inevitable which are certainly not, and which bear examination. The first is that human population will continue to grow, and the second is that the forces of urbanisation are everywhere relentless. These 'inevitabilities' are then presented as the bases for planning and policy from all scales local to global. The one thing that's actually certain about both of these factors, though, is their very uncertainty. The four horsemen of the apocalypse are always saddled up and ready to ride roughshod over population growth, and we might witness a 're-ruralisation' of populations for any number of reasons, from high property prices driving people out of world cities like London and New York, for example, or perhaps a scenario in which people have to return to working the land because of a need for more labour-intensive methods resulting from such true inevitabilities as the exhaustion of finite resources in agriculture.

The other thing we forget to bear in mind is that human populations and their geographic distribution are not just the basis for planning and policy, but are rightfully the *subject* of planning and policy in and of themselves.

I believe now that, in Britain as elsewhere, we need to begin to push back against these 'inevitabilities'. If urbanisation continues to empty our countryside, decisions there about how land is used will increasingly come to be made by the landed gentry and/or huge agribusiness concerns with no stake in places other than for productivity, efficiency, and as financial instruments (or, in the case of the gentry, as a scenic backdrop for shooting). And rural areas need to be populated by people with a stake in and stewardship of the land so that they are ecologically healthy, fulfilling, convivial, and supportive places to live.

We also need to reverse the process of the North's emptying out into the Southeast, and that will take prolonged efforts to ensure there are strong local economies, pleasant places, and meaningful work everywhere. This will take local planning, design, and funding everywhere - and small local landscape practices of all sorts from ecological to architectural everywhere too. We must replace the inevitability of austerity politics with the emergence of a hopeful and positive *prosperity politics* for city and country, north and south. Hope and idealism, far from being immature, are hallmarks of a sane and mature society. What we should make inevitable are prosperity, well-being, and the creation of great places everywhere and for everyone.