

Building in the most scenic parts of Britain

Sir, Besides the reasons given in your leader (Dec 27), there are two further grounds why building in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is generally inappropriate. First, employment opportunities in rural areas are minimal and hence housing needs for those who actually work in the locality are limited. Demand for such housing derives from those who work in urban centres but cannot afford the higher cost of living closer to their workplace. Second, in the absence of adequate public transport, these developments create additional road congestion and pollution.

It is indeed imperative that Sajid Javid, the communities secretary, takes a close look at contentious planning decisions and ensures that new housing is concentrated where the true need exists. This involves building close to employment centres, using brownfield sites, higher building densities and, possibly, the sensitive realignment of greenbelt boundaries.

OLIVER CHAPPLE
Milton under Wychwood, Oxon

Sir, In this area of Somerset we have some of the richest agricultural soil in England. However, this is no barrier to housing development, which is proceeding apace on greenfield sites all around. Hundreds of acres,

particularly around Yeovil, are being covered by new housing estates while the town centre is becoming more and more down at heel. The new developments take no account of infrastructure facilities, which become overstretched. Furthermore, most of the housing is "bog standard" in design and layout, and pays little or no attention to vernacular architecture in these hamstone towns and villages.

Signs on entry roads to Yeovil boast of it being "in the heart of the country but with the mind of a city". The countryside is fast disappearing while the "city" disintegrates. Heaven help us if this is the norm.

RICHARD ENGLISH
South Petherton, Somerset

Sir, The demand to build more homes in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty highlights a conflict between where people wish to live and a public duty to maintain the natural beauty of landscapes. Here in the Brecon Beacons National Park, the planners make it as hard as possible to allow any form of residential development, thus perpetuating a gradual depopulation of fragile rural communities that increasingly depend on tourism — which itself is further limited by underinvestment in infrastructure. Until we are prepared

to pay for the higher costs of developing brownfield sites or promote well-designed higher-density housing in urban areas, the strict protection of desirable swathes of countryside from housing developments may become harder to justify.

ROB YORKE, FRICS
Abergavenny, Monmouthshire

Sir, Neil Lawson-May (letter, Dec 19) hits the nail on the head when he observes that much of the countryside is undeserving of protection and would be better used if developed for much-needed housing.

Up and down the land, planning policies originally designed to protect the best of our countryside are being used by councils to prohibit any rural development, regardless of its quality.

As a result, after decades of restraint on new rural housing development, young adults have been priced out of many areas, leaving entire villages bereft of the vitality that youth brings. Those who do stay end up, as in my area, stuck in their childhood bedrooms, living with their parents. Local councils, meanwhile, continue to refuse to permit development outside tightly drawn village settlement policy areas.

KULWINDER SINGH RAI
Wilden, Beds