

THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE



My family have recently enjoyed the benefits of the outstanding precautionary measures delivered by our health service. They reinforce my respect for Jane Jacobs' commitment to the cautious step by step "inductive process" of the natural sciences rather than the "deductive" handing down of some general principle as happens in

planning (e.g. Predict and Provide). We must acknowledge the increasing global threats we have created and take "**precautions**" which must be detailed (empirical) and effective. They must operate from the bottom up with "best practice" guidance and support from the top down.

HOW GOOD ARE OUR PRECAUTIONS?

☺ Effective ☹ Could Do Better ☹ Not Effective

1. National government should require Local Authorities to identify proven and possible flood dangers and assist them in taking **effective** precautions. ☹
2. National Government should identify the dangers of smoking, ban advertising and require Local Authorities to ban smoking in public places. ☺
3. National Government should accept research on causes of obesity by restoration of vigorous school sport with measurable targets for health related fitness and restore active involvement of local communities. ☹
4. Local Education Authorities and a regenerated network of volunteers (including teachers) should restore an exciting programme of competitive sport to channel young people away from antisocial 'gangs'. ☹
5. Local Authorities should restore/create local pride in neglected areas of Green Belt, and joint Provision Dual Use Green recreation space and urban forests. ☺
6. National government should seek to restore employment to communities with significant surplus living accommodation in order to reduce migration to the south / south west. ☹
7. National Government should now accept that there is a strong enough case to link global warming with climate change and instruct local authorities to find the most acceptable ways of reducing the incidence and length of car journeys and the expansion of air ports. ☹
8. National and Local Authorities should reduce the need for motorised journeys by regenerating mono-functional housing estates

with mixed use centres (hubs) within walking distance of residents.

This must replace plans for urban sprawl which lowers densities and increases car pollution, and it must be implemented through the detailed involvement of local communities. ☹

Astute Bristol Civic Society readers will have realised by now that all the issues raised are interrelated. Those connected with sport are not new and were being resolved in the '80s often on a voluntary basis. Demolition of playing fields and Regional Sports Councils satisfied the "Treasury Ethic" (revealed by John Major) and was encouraged by a crack pot clerisy who thought that sporting competition made children violent!

Imposition of 'contract hours' upon teachers was the last straw. 'Volunteers' faded away, playing fields were sold, sports activity collapsed. Many of the environmental benefits of mixed use development (which reduces the need for motorised journeys) existed in pre-war European cities. Where they have survived, the percentage of car commuters is less than the percentage in the mono-functional estates of the volume house builders.

The major obstacle to environmental improvement is summarised in the phrase which is insinuated into definitions of sustainability - 'EXPANDING ECONOMY'

This has been the justification for all the non sustainable travesties that increasingly warm our climate. Why do we need an expanding economy? Why not settle for a stable one? One answer is that global expansion makes an elite minority rich beyond belief. The poor are getting poorer.

Their main line of defence is "Let the market decide - musn't be too prescriptive. What right have you to limit people's travel? It may never happen."

When we were seriously threatened with cultural extinction in 1939 a series of detailed restraints seemed to appear almost overnight. Everyone was required to carry a gas mask, identity card and ration book (food, clothing and petrol were **rationed**). Posters on trains and buses demanded "Is your journey really necessary?" and useful tips about restricted healthy diets began to appear in cinemas. Those with gardens were issued with prefabricated Anderson bomb shelters. These empirical responses could not have appeared without months of preparation and public support. They were the result of detailed precautions for surviving a probable catastrophe and they did not favour an elite. Is this required today?

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