

Developers cashing in, locals still priced out ... it's a tragedy

MUCH of the coverage of developers 'let off the leash' (Mail) has to do with the South-East, but the relaxation of the planning laws by David Cameron a few years ago is having a disastrous effect all over the country, especially in Devon. In the South Hams area, where I live, thousands of houses are going up, but not the affordable kind we were promised — they are mass estates of horrible, almost identical, houses. They are crowded onto greenfield sites around villages and towns — anywhere developers think they can sell them — and at prices local people can't afford. Planning laws have been swept away, giving the developers a green light to build what they want, where they want. And that is in the areas of outstanding natural beauty, fields near the sea and around pretty, unspoilt villages and towns. I live in Totnes, a town beloved by holidaymakers. The number of people

who want second homes here has meant developers have targeted us. There are 2,000 houses going up around Totnes, none of which is affordable by local people. They range from £750,000 executive villas on the Dart (100 on one field) to £350,000 buildings on old school fields, on a wood, on Dartington Trust land, on any available green space. It's out of control: the council hasn't managed to turn down a single mass development, and when it does try, it's taken to court and fined. Developers and landowners are making an absolute fortune, while local people are having their wishes ignored and their environment destroyed. The two main industries down here are farming and tourism. Farmland is being sold off at a dizzying speed to make way for housing, while the tourism industry is finding it hard to attract people to look at its beautiful countryside when that countryside is being covered by

enormous estates, with the accompanying traffic jams on local roads. No new infrastructure has been built alongside all this development, no new school places, no new services, just talk of new highways and supermarkets alongside pretty old villages. It's a tragedy, and it's happening so quickly people are powerless to stop it. In Brimhay, a small area of assisted housing for elderly people in Dartington, the organisation which owns it wants to knock down all the old people's houses and build two three-storey blocks of flats and 12 other houses on a small adjoining wood full of bats. The old people are being rehoused in the flats completely against their wishes. The Government must do a U-turn and give back to local councils the power to turn down some of these developments before we lose our green and pleasant land for ever.

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Picture: SWNS

Fears for our countryside: Georgina Allen