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## **‘The field of grain is gone; It’s now a Tesco Superstore’: representations of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ within historical and contemporary discourses opposing urban expansion in England**

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Ideas about the difference between rural and urban areas are woven into the fabric of English society. This paper asks how two different campaigns against urban expansion and rural homebuilding in England – one interwar and one more contemporary (related to the production of the ‘National Planning Policy Framework’ document) – represent the difference between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ and how they use these representations to justify and naturalize their arguments. Utilizing interpretive textual analysis to compare the two periods, we show that, whilst planning has undergone significant paradigm shifts during the period between the two campaigns, in both archives a dominant ‘rural idyll’ is (re)produced and reinforced through the representational themes of beauty, nature, purity, an elite educated class, and a traditional social order. This is strongly contrasted to the representation of the ‘urban sphere’ as an unnatural, ugly, modern, and socially fragmented dystopia. ‘Urban’ areas are therefore constructed as the constitutive ‘Other’ to the rural idyll. In this way, the apparently natural urban characteristics associated with built-up areas are represented as ‘out of place’ within the rural sphere. These representations work to justify the argument that ‘development’ is a threat to the intrinsic characteristics of the countryside and should not be allowed to take place. This rural idyll/urban dystopia binary is argued to continue to have an important influence on shaping policy debate.

**Keywords:** representation; rural idyll; countryside; urban development; England; planning

### **Introduction: the National Planning Policy Framework and a ‘rural’–‘urban’ divide?**

The notion of a distinct divide between the ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ spheres is woven into the fabric of English society, perhaps nowhere more so than in planning and policy discourse. The way in which we think about the ‘town’, the ‘country’, and the differences and relationships between them fundamentally shapes how we design policy and make planning decisions. There is, however, no consistent evidence base or consensus on the existence or nature of an urban–rural ‘divide’.<sup>1</sup> This was recently demonstrated in a clash between ministers and environmental groups sparked by the publication of the UK Coalition Government’s *Draft National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) in summer 2011.<sup>2</sup>

Comprising just 52 pages of principles and key policies from central government for local government and other actors to follow in administering the planning system, the introduction of the NPPF was a major part of sweeping reforms to ‘streamline’ the planning system in

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England, replacing over 1000 pages of previous detailed planning policy guidance. This reflected the Coalition Government's 'localism' agenda, which ostensibly aimed to 'hand back' power to town halls and local communities by reducing top-down policy stipulations in favour of general guiding principles.<sup>3</sup> The desire to reduce bureaucracy and stimulate economic growth was one major driver of this, as was a perceived housing shortage for which the planning system was blamed by the 2006 *Barker Review*.<sup>4</sup>

The publication of the draft NPPF was met with widespread indignation by campaigners who feared that the document was a 'Builder's Charter' which would herald the spread of unchecked development across the country's rural areas, thanks to the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' where 'the default answer [to development proposals] is yes'.<sup>5</sup> The furore garnered extremely high levels of coverage in the national media, with campaigns led by several prominent national newspapers (across the political spectrum) and many local ones, as well as environmental conservation groups such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the National Trust (NT). The focus of this paper is the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, run in the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper and supported and contributed to by many high profile figures and organizations including the CPRE and NT.

The issues of rural development and urban expansion were central themes in this debate, with the relationship between housing shortage, economic growth, and an onerous planning regime proving particularly contentious and adding an additional dimension to the debate over the NPPF. The ability of different stakeholders to shape dominant representations bestows great power to influence public and political understandings of the countryside and attitudes towards its management.<sup>6</sup>

The charged debate over the NPPF was, of course, certainly not the first time that concerns have been raised over the perceived threat of the English countryside 'being concreted over'. During the interwar period, there was a similarly vociferous campaign denouncing the house-building boom of that era and the unregulated speculative activity which drove 'sprawling' patterns of development. Whether even the draft NPPF would have opened the door to urban expansion and rural development on an unprecedented scale is clearly open to debate and this contention has been at the heart of 'one of the greatest planning rows in history'.<sup>7</sup> Such debate is not, however, the focus of this paper. Instead, we simply note that campaigners involved in 'Hands Off Our Land' believed and strongly argued that urban sprawl and significant rural development were real and dangerous threats to the distinct landscape, society, and qualities of the 'English countryside' and must therefore be strongly opposed, and that there were distinct echoes between this and the campaign against (sub)urban sprawl encroaching into rural England in the 1920s and 1930s.

This paper critically analyses and deconstructs the representations of 'rural' and 'urban' areas which underpin these two campaigns' arguments about rural development, comparing an archive from the interwar period (1919–1939) with the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign (2011–2012). The aim is to examine how particular (and potentially problematic) understandings or visions of the differences between urban and rural areas are used to justify and legitimize their arguments. The two 'campaigns' take place in very different eras in the history of planning and in very different social, economic, and political contexts. However, they both take to task the same basic issue – the threat of development, particularly large-scale house-building, to the 'essential' characteristics and value of the countryside. By comparing and contrasting the interwar archive with the more contemporary campaign, we investigate the extent to which the way

in which we talk about ‘town’ and ‘country’ has changed between the two eras, the degree to which representations of ‘rurality’ have been mobilized in opposition to development, and examine how current attitudes and standpoints are coloured by historical precedent.

In order to investigate this, we briefly contextualize representations of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ in English planning discourse, then introduce the archives studied, before highlighting the continuities and discontinuities in the representations of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ between the texts from the two periods. This is structured around five key ‘rural–urban’ binaries which appear to be important constructs in texts from both archives and which emerged from our analysis of them.

## The ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ in context

### *‘Rural idylls’ and ‘urban hells’*

The discourse of ‘city’ and ‘country’ has been an identifiable dichotomy since at least medieval times. Raymond Williams points to the early sixteenth century as the time when the two terms began to be widely used in opposition to one another, to signify a difference between the two spheres (although he believes it could be seen even in classical times). Williams relates this to the increasing urbanization of England at that time, at first particularly associated with the capital but more generally as larger towns developed. However, the understanding of ‘city’ and ‘country-side’ as representing distinctive patterns of economic organization, and therefore ways of life, is most closely linked to the Industrial Revolution and the changes wrought in the way society and economy were organized spatially: Peter Hall suggests the roots of interwar ‘alarm’ at suburban growth, ‘go deep into the sociology of the Industrial Revolution ... traditional groups in the counties felt threatened by the forces of the industrial city’.<sup>8</sup> This city–country dualism has never, and could never, be a neutral reflection of an objective ‘reality’. From its inception, the city/country binary has been loaded with associations, representations, and meanings, as Williams shows.<sup>9</sup>

The idea that ‘knowledge’ and ‘social realities’ are powerfully constructed, rather than merely reflected, through systems of representation encompassing language, speech, and images (or ‘discourses’) has been influential since the writings of early ‘post-structural’ thinkers such as Foucault.<sup>10</sup> The aim of post-structural research is to deconstruct contingent representations of the world and uncover the powerful interests they serve.<sup>11</sup> Thus, whilst much of the traditional debate in Rural Studies has revolved around the quest to accurately define what made an area ‘rural’ through a set of objective criteria,<sup>12</sup> or to uncover the ‘realities’ of living in a rural area,<sup>13</sup> more contemporary critical approaches maintain that we should instead explore how and why different representations of rurality, as social constructs, ‘serve, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relationships of domination’.<sup>14</sup> It is not a matter of which images are most ‘accurate’ but which are most powerful, which are neglected and what interests this serves.

Whilst there is much work, particularly from Human Geographers, that has shown how the representation of space and place has the power to influence politics and policy making, questions of representation have failed to gain widespread purchase in the Planning arena. This may be because planning has traditionally been viewed as a ‘rational’ activity, concerned with collecting evidence to ‘predict and provide’ for the future growth and change of areas,<sup>15</sup> whereas

critical post-structuralist approaches have been criticized for being esoteric, inaccessible, and not producing anything ‘useful’ for the improvement of society.<sup>16</sup>

One powerful ‘discourse’ of rurality, which in turn has many different dimensions, has been identified by researchers as being particularly dominant in Britain.<sup>17</sup> This discourse conceptualizes the English countryside in romantic, nostalgic, and aesthetic terms as a ‘rural idyll’, through imagery representing England as a ‘Green and Pleasant Land’ where family values, strong community, a ‘slow pace of life’, picturesque scenery, and traditional agriculture prevail.<sup>18</sup> It is widely argued that the existence of the ‘rural idyll’ is based upon ‘antipathy to the dual opposite of the urban’ and could not exist without a hellish, dystopic urban ‘Other’ which helps to define the idyllic rural ‘Self’.<sup>19</sup> These ideas draw on work by Sibley,<sup>20</sup> and Edward Said on the social construction of difference through mutually constitutive unequal binaries.<sup>21</sup>

In his critical examination of English literature and poetry, Raymond Williams confirms these particular representations are dominant; and not only this, but they have persisted throughout history with a remarkable durability in the face of social, political, and economic change. They are by no means new; Williams highlights that writers have been lamenting the imminent ruination of a rural idyll since classical times; although such representations have been informed by and brought to bear on different issues at different times – be it religious, political, or cultural.<sup>22</sup>

Critical research has also explored how contrasting and unequal discourses of ‘the countryside’ and ‘the city’ may be co-constructed with other socially constructed categories such as national identity, class, gender, and race.<sup>23</sup> The countryside has often been linked to a particular bourgeois identity, whilst Cloke has argued that the rural idyll constructs the countryside as a ‘purified space where boundaries are policed and the rejection of difference is embedded in the social system’.<sup>24</sup> Studies have shown how notions of the countryside as a ‘purified space’ have been used to exclude undesirable, ‘incongruous’, or essentially ‘urban’ types of development.<sup>25</sup> There has also been a strong focus within the literature on how the rural idyll is transmitted and (re)produced through childhood entertainment, education, and popular culture such as soap opera. An important additional dimension for our purposes is added by analysing representations of rurality within more recent planning discourse and public policy related debates.

### ***Rural idylls in planning and rural development***

Representations of the countryside in planning discourse are extremely powerful because ‘they shape views not only on what the countryside is like, but what it should be like’ which may frame debate and thus influence policy making.<sup>26</sup> Satsangi et al. argue that the evolution of the English planning system and rural policy into its current form ‘expresses a particular representation of the countryside and certain beliefs regarding the proper use of rural land’,<sup>27</sup> whilst Hall suggests that the key figures working for the establishment of a statutory planning system in the early twentieth century UK were ‘deeply committed to maintaining and preserving the traditional British countryside ... One of the strongest values of the planning movement was and is the preservation of rural England’.<sup>28</sup> Going one step further to actively criticize the influence of the rural idyll on British planning policy, Abram argues that ‘the cultural construction of rurality which associates England with some form of arcadian and pastoral idyll has exerted a pervasive yet obfuscatory influence’ over the ability or desire of decision-makers to recognize or even comprehend rural problems such as poverty, homelessness, domestic

violence, and other issues which could include housing shortage.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Abram believes that this ‘rural gaze’ ‘determines much of contemporary politics of development, but the details of how this may be so has hitherto been under explored’.<sup>30</sup>

Especially relevant is the fact that an unwavering desire to ‘save’ an idealized English rural idyll from the threat of urban ‘encroachment’ was fundamental to the ‘containment’-oriented attitudes towards planning in the early twentieth century, leading to the birth of the modern British town and country planning system in the post-Second World War period and beyond.<sup>31</sup> The interwar period was characterized by new mobilities and approaches to urban development catalysing the building of 4 million houses (1919–1939),<sup>32</sup> much of it in the form of sprawling suburban and ribbon development which was a source of extreme concern for the educated classes and rural elite.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in this period Greater London expanded in population from 6 to 8 million but grew in areas five times due to this new low-density growth.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst there is some argument over the actual vintage of rural nostalgia in England,<sup>35</sup> Jeans argues that ‘it is possible to see the period following the First World War as a time of perceived crisis for the rural landscape’.<sup>36</sup> As Tewdwr-Jones notes, the reaction of the British literati to this urban encroachment during the 1920s and 1930s was to call for new, more protectionist town and country planning<sup>37</sup>; it was during this period that dreams of Garden Cities, green belts, and ‘model villages’ like Portmeirion were born and given reality.<sup>38</sup> Such attitudes clearly helped shape the statutory comprehensive town and country planning system enacted in the UK from 1947, yet scholars have not yet conducted much systematic analysis into the texts to come from this period.

Almost a century later, the dominant paradigm and language of English planning policy has evolved considerably from the philosophy of ‘containment’ through strict land-use planning controls, and is now firmly rooted in discourses of ‘sustainable development’ as an overarching goal for an integrative ‘spatial planning’. Satsangi et al. ask whether this shift has been accompanied by a ‘step change’ in the way we understand, conceptualize, and plan for rural areas.<sup>39</sup> Sturzaker and Shucksmith believe that it has not, and that whilst discussion of rural planning policy is often couched in the politically acceptable, neutral, and scientific language of environmental sustainability, opposition to rural development is as fervent and sensational as ever. They give examples of how the principles of ‘sustainability’ have often been used in problematic ways to justify resisting and freezing development in ‘Village England’.<sup>40</sup>

There is a great deal of scholarship on rural idylls and conceptions of ‘rurality’. Whilst some of this work hints at the relevance of such debates to contemporary planning, there is little that asks how representations of the countryside are at work in discussions over rural planning policy in England today and the extent to which representations of the countryside have changed between the eras of ‘containment’ and ‘sustainable development’. We address this through a critical deconstruction of the way in which the rural and urban spheres have been represented within two archives, within a post-structural framework that conceptualizes concepts such as the ‘English countryside’ as complex and powerful social constructions (re)produced through cultural representation.<sup>41</sup>

### **The archives studied**

In order to uncover the way ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ are constructed in planning literature, we utilized a systematic interpretive textual analysis to uncover ‘naturalized’ or taken-for-granted

representations and attempted to expose how they may be used to further particular agendas, ideologies, or arguments against rural development.<sup>42</sup> The analysis was conducted on two archives which formed the corpus of texts. The first consisted of a collection of 25 polemical essays written in the early twentieth century interwar period by famous conservationists and planning campaigners in Britain, such as Patrick Abercrombie (a planning academic, government advisor, and closely involved with the founding of the CPRE), Thomas Sharp (a planner and writer), G.M. Trevelyan (a historian and closely involved with the NT), and Clough Williams-Ellis (an architect). Twenty-four of these were subsequently collected into a single volume entitled *Britain and the Beast* and edited by Williams-Ellis,<sup>43</sup> who had previously authored a single volume entitled *England and the Octopus*,<sup>44</sup> which forms the final part of the archive.

These particular sources were chosen because they are in-depth texts written by many different authors on the subject of urban expansion and have been referenced by the now-former Chairman of the NT as being sources of inspiration for that organization's role in the anti-NPPF campaign.<sup>45</sup> As already noted, these texts were written during a period of rapid suburban development in England, when some (arguably) weak planning legislation existed but before the introduction of the comprehensive, statutory system of town and country planning introduced by the post-war Labour government in 1947 (which these campaigners influenced).<sup>46</sup>

These essays were compared and contrasted with a more recent archive, also consisting of a collection of 25 separate articles, blogs, opinion pieces, and reports published online and in print by the *Daily Telegraph* as part of their 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, which began on 1 September 2011. All of the articles published between 1 September 2011 and 1 August 2012 were read and considered by the researcher, with the final 25 being selected on the basis of their content being most interesting and relevant to the study. This selection achieves a good spread across the whole time period of the campaign.<sup>47</sup> A number of high profile individuals and organizations opposed to the draft NPPF contributed to this campaign, with texts written by authors including journalists such as Robert Chesshyre and Christopher Hope but also the novelist Richard Adams, Member of Parliament Hilary Benn, philosopher and writer Roger Scruton, and historian and writer Roy Strong.

As a form of mass media, newspapers – both their print and electronic editions – are dominant sites of contemporary cultural and social (re)production.<sup>48</sup> They attract wide readership audiences.<sup>49</sup> As in the case of the *Daily Telegraph's* 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, newspapers also often claim to be the 'voice of the people' and act as self-appointed guardians of the 'public interest'. Although it is important to note that circulation and reach is not the same as articles actually being read, understood, or cared about, judging by the number of comments made online in response to 'Hands Off Our Land' articles and the extremely high level of general coverage the debate received in the media, it can be argued that the campaign was highly significant in the debate over the draft NPPF. These texts were written during a period of rapid reform of the planning system in England, primarily (but not exclusively) driven by central government concerns to improve economic growth and housing delivery by reducing restrictions on development and increasing the efficiency of the planning system.<sup>50</sup>

Both archives thus represent the writings of a mixed group of campaigners, journalists, and interested intellectuals, produced during periods of heightened interest in planning and house-building in England. The method used for studying both was the same: a systematic



interpretative analysis involving an initial read through for familiarization with the texts and then a re-read highlighting words and phrases referring to or representing the ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ spheres. These words and phrases were then transcribed and grouped into themes, which were then compared back to both archives. From this analysis, five key ‘rural–urban’ binaries emerged: imaginations of ‘rural nature’ versus ‘urban culture’; ‘picturesque rural beauty’ versus ‘urban blight and disorder’; ‘traditional rural social order’ versus ‘modern urban social progress’; ‘the rural elite’ versus ‘the urban poor’; and ‘rural community’ versus ‘urban social unrest’. We now turn to consider the archival texts in relation to how each of these binaries is represented in them.

### **Imaging the rural and the urban in the historic and contemporary archives**

#### ***‘Rural nature’ (pure, healthy, and pristine) and ‘urban culture’ (defiled, diseased, and spoilt)***

The division between the countryside as representing nature, and all that is natural, whilst the city is the home of culture and that which is manmade is a key binary which underpins many of the other dimensions to the ‘rural idyll’ discourse which will be discussed here. The discursive separation between nature and culture has been identified as a key feature of Judeo-Christian thought occurring as long ago as Biblical references to the Garden of Eden and man’s corrupting influence upon it<sup>51</sup>; it is also a key feature of these archives. There can be no doubt as to which is considered superior in the minds of the authors within both archives, with ‘urban sprawl’ and ‘ribbon development’ representing a particularly unwelcome instance of man’s negative impact on nature. Eder and Ritter’s work helps to explain this finding – they have also noted that the ‘split’ was fundamental to Enlightenment thought, with ‘Nature’ considered superior to ‘Culture’.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, they argue that this binary distinction is deeply problematic because even the concept of ‘nature’ itself is a social construction.

This distinction and relationship between nature and mankind is, however, highly influential in the way the countryside and towns are represented in the interwar archive. For instance, rural buildings and villages are frequently described as if they just arose from the earth; works of nature rather than mankind:

The walls of ruddy golden brick, the tarred weather boarding, the thatched roofs, coloured like dead bracken, the tiled roofs red and gold and russet as that same bracken in autumn, the oasts black or red with their snow white cowls, all suggest a natural growth rather than an artificial construction.<sup>53</sup>

Whether the great manors or the smallest cottages, they seem to have grown out of the earth, as indeed they have, being built with Cotswold stone and roofed with Cotswold tiles. They are as much a part of the landscape as the stone walls and the trees.<sup>54</sup>

Emerging out of this core nature/culture binary is a series of related discourses which serve to underline and strengthen the argument that urban development is an ‘unnatural’ and unwelcome incursion into the rural sphere. The countryside is repeatedly represented as being ‘pure’, healthy, and free of any disease or contagion because it has not been tarnished by mankind’s influence (see Table 1). Through these representations, developers and builders who carry out work in the countryside are seen as spreading contagion, defilement, and disfigurement wherever they go, literally ‘poisoning’ nature.<sup>55</sup>



Table 1. 'Rural nature–urban culture' key words and phrases.

<i>A Interwar Campaign</i>	<i>B Hands Off Our Land Campaign</i>
Rural: Nature as a 'kind landlord', Unsmirched country, Sacred Natural beauty, Unspoilt, Harmony	Rural: Unspoilt, 'Green Lung', Open Country, 'Gloriously untouched', Unspoiled
Urban: Disfigurement, Epidemic, Malady, Destruction, Foul, Disease, Ravish, Defile, Violation, 'Shrivelling up' the countryside	Urban: Ruin, Swamped, Carved Up, Invasion, Wound

Another especially predominant theme in the language use of this historic archive is that of sexual metaphor to describe the corrupting influence of man upon nature, with woman portrayed as 'nature' and man as 'culture'. For example, Williams-Ellis argues that developers are committing 'an outrage upon the mother that bore them',<sup>56</sup> and 'ravishing and defiling the most divine landscape in the world'.<sup>57</sup> This cements in a reader's mind the belief that rapid urban expansion is an unnatural and immoral abomination in the most serious sense; no language or metaphor is too strong to portray the author's disgust at what is taking place. The representation of nature as 'woman' may also help to reinforce the notion of the countryside as something innocent and vulnerable that needs protection from the ravages of development.

Although the language of sexual metaphor, disease, and defilement is virtually absent from the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, the contrast between 'pristine' and 'unspoilt' countryside landscapes and the ruination of nature brought about by development is an equally strong theme. The countryside is described in terms of its beauty, openness, 'loveliness', and 'gloriously untouched ecology'<sup>58</sup>; beloved landscapes which are effectively 'spoiled' by development and house-building. McCarthy, for instance, believes that rural areas should be 'green and rural and unspoiled enough to inspire us, not semi-invaded by the town',<sup>59</sup> with the implication that the 'unspoiled' natural world is inspiring in a way that towns and cities can never be. Bunce and Eder and Ritter believe that modern environmentalism, which so often frames issues through the discourse of pristine/spoiled, is directly linked to the Romantic and Enlightenment thought on the unequal division of nature and culture, as discussed above.<sup>60</sup>

These representations are used within both archives to justify the position that 'natural' landscapes are 'spoilt' by building activity and that development in the countryside constitutes an unwelcome imposition that negatively affects nature. We can further see this stance in the core language of the modern environmental movement, which describes countryside management in terms of 'conservation', 'preservation', and 'protection' from the ruinous influence of change and development which is repeatedly portrayed in a negative light. For example, Gilligan and Watts write that a 'new city' development planned for the Midlands would 'obliterate' open countryside, from which it must be 'protected'.<sup>61</sup>

This discourse is, of course, by no means a given: Bate points out that in American discourses on nature/culture, man's influence is often celebrated as domination of and over nature.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the discourse of nature/culture uncovered in these archives may also have a bearing upon other arenas of man's influence upon the landscape, for example through farming and recreation. Although not dealt with explicitly in either campaign, there are the potential conflicts, confusions, and contradictions in their stance as to where other types of rural land use 'fit in' to the countryside.

**Picturesque rural beauty – urban blight and disorder**

Both archives strongly paint an idyllic, beautiful, and picturesque vision of rural England; one of small, compact, and ‘perfectly lovely’ villages,<sup>63</sup> often with ‘traditional’ stone buildings, set within an open, green, and pastoral landscape of fields, hedgerows, lanes, and copses which they fear will soon be lost forever (see Table 2). For example, Williams-Ellis describes his vision of ‘the loveliest village in England’:

The rose brick walls of the kitchen gardens neatly enclose the village allotments . . . groups of cottages are pleasantly dispersed between the beech clumps and cedars on the old lawns . . . the village is full of flowers and comely trees, it lies compact within a park and is approached by gracious avenues.<sup>64</sup>

The predominance of this stereotypical ‘Village England’ imagery is uncannily strong between the two archives, with common motifs within the contemporary archive also including silent churchyards, country lanes, and historic stone villages surrounded by the ‘beautiful Bluebell Copse, at its loveliest in April and May, when the whole wood is a carpet of scented bluebells amongst the silver birches’, to take but one example.<sup>65</sup> Once again, we can note the strong connection between beauty and the natural elements of the landscape in this theme, with nature once again privileged as the source of the beauty cherished by the authors.

The comparison between the two archives indicates that, over the course of nearly a century, very little has changed in our collective vision of what the ‘perfect’ rural village looks like. In fact, from this analysis it may be argued that the representation of an idyllic, idealized, and stereotypical countryside is even stronger within the ‘Hands Off Our Land’ campaign. This may be because we have travelled even further from having a mostly agrarian landscape and economy. Birmingham, for instance, has linked the rise and persistence of the rural idyll and ‘Village England’ aesthetic to ‘the actual loss and imaginative recovery’ of a pastoral countryside.<sup>66</sup>

Some of the authors from both eras clearly recognize that Britain is also home to wilder landscapes. In the ‘Hands Off Our Land’ campaign, Benn describes ‘the moors and tors, the mountains and lakes, the rivers and coasts’ of rural areas in terms of a rugged, wild landscape,<sup>67</sup> whilst Williams-Ellis describes the ‘lovely valley of grey crags and tumbling water that must have entranced all who have passed that way for time immemorial’ in the ‘wild’ mountains of Wales.<sup>68</sup> However, the dominant representational theme remains one of the ‘picturesque’ villages which are ordered, quaint, peaceful, and civilized. ‘Picturesque’ is a term meaning ‘from the point of view of a painter’ and is an aesthetic tradition where ‘everything is supposed to be in its right place, organised, precisely composed and controlled’.<sup>69</sup> Once again, this

Table 2. ‘Rural beauty–urban blight’ key words and phrases.

<i>A- Interwar Campaign</i>	<i>B- Hands Off Our Land Campaign</i>
Rural: Beauty; Tranquillity; Health; Soul; Loveliness; Order	Rural: Beauty; Eden; Green and Pleasant Land; Romantic; Sweetness; Glorious; Unique
Urban: Overcrowding; Haphazard; Ugly; Hideous; Drab; Mean; Squalor	Urban: Endless Sprawl; Ugliness; Neon; Garish

contrasts to the American landscape tradition, for example, which often represented landscapes as wild, out of control, and dangerous.<sup>70</sup> In fact, it is interesting to note that within the interwar archive, it is the towns which are described as a 'dreary wilderness'.<sup>71</sup>

In the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, the importance of the 'picturesque' is reinforced by an overt emphasis on the importance of vistas and panoramic views over the landscape, with authors quite literally 'gazing' over the landscape and appreciating the beauty of the idyllic scene from lofty viewpoints. For example, when journalist David Harrison meets Welsh farmer Jonathan Wilkinson, who we are told 'from his farmhouse . . . looks out across a glorious stretch of the Vyrnwy valley, rolling hills and acres of woodland rich in wildlife' which he believes is 'a view that could soon be lost forever' due to plans for a new wind farm.<sup>72</sup> This is reinforced by the use of panoramic photographs which appear at the head of each article and are taken from elevated viewpoints or 'beauty spots' and are delicately composed, with small compact villages nestling amongst the rolling hills with church spires emerging against the backdrop of green fields, hedgerows, and woods. These photographs are a very powerful visual representation and reproduction of the 'picturesque' nature of the rural idyll for the reader, which the campaigners argue should be protected from the 'threat' of development.

If the English rural idyll is encapsulated by the image of a quaint, picturesque, 'chocolate-box' village, then these idealized representations of the countryside are powerfully contrasted with the characteristics of the towns and industrial landscapes and the chaos, disorder, and ugliness they harbour. This theme is particularly strong in the interwar campaign, where the authors decry the towns for their crowded, poor quality, dense, and 'unplanned' development, in the form of 'gaunt, grimy and forlorn workers dwellings [which], whether singly, in terraces or in rows, huddle darkly in the hollows or sprawl haphazard about a desolate and treeless waste'.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Mais describes the village of Aston Rowant in Oxfordshire as 'honey-combed with hideous shacks thrown haphazard like splodges of mud against a hill side once covered with trees'.<sup>74</sup> The growing industrial towns such as Manchester, Newcastle, and Hull are also reviled for their unpleasant atmosphere, 'the dirt and the stench and the foul air and the overcrowding and the hideous buildings and shattering racket of these places'.<sup>75</sup>

The key contrast here is between the order and harmony of the picturesque rural idyll and haphazard, disorderly, and ugly blight of the urban. These writings clearly reflect the language of the conventional or dominant 'rural idyll' and the 'urban hell', as highlighted in previous studies.<sup>76</sup> Of course, the dire situation within the towns has been well documented.<sup>77</sup> There is some debate as to how anti-urban some of the key writers in the interwar archive actually were: Hardy suggests Thomas Sharp's work is characterized by 'an enduring strain of anti-urbanism'<sup>78</sup> whilst Matless argues that Abercrombie was not anti-urban and much of his work 'was devoted precisely to city planning'.<sup>79</sup> However, the important point to make about the interwar archive is that the disorderly expansion of the towns is represented as 'blighting' the scenic landscape of the countryside; indeed the 'Octopus . . . symbolically represented urban sprawl, with the tentacles of ribbon development . . . encroaching the surrounding tranquil countryside',<sup>80</sup> and presented 'a picture of vigorous disorder'.<sup>81</sup>

In the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, urban areas are also referenced with regards to their ugly, overcrowded, and generally displeasing nature. In a telling example, American conurbations such as New Jersey are described as a 'nightmare' by former head of the NT Fiona Reynolds – which they fear will happen in the UK if the NPPF reforms go ahead. Here, she paints a sensational picture of a stereotypical 'urban hell' that is 'an endless sprawl of shopping malls,

gas stations, light industry and huge advertising hoardings, wooden or neon but all garish, along every major road between town A and B'.<sup>82</sup> American-born author Bill Bryson reinforces this imagery, calling on readers to 'look around [and] observe the zones of ugliness ringing almost every town' caused by the proliferation of supermarkets and shopping centres.<sup>83</sup> On the whole, however, explicit references to the 'blighting' characteristics of urban areas are not as frequent – or vitriolic – as in the historical archive. We might speculate that this is due to a number of factors; urban conditions have improved immensely and it is likely that many of the columnists are themselves urban-dwellers. Using such strong, condemning language may also be likely to attract derision and scorn from detractors.

Both archives clearly draw a sharp distinction between the characteristics of the countryside and the city by conceptualizing the difference between them in terms of the binary of 'beauty' and 'blight'. Creating these problematic contrasts helps to bolster the argument that built-up areas are diametrically opposed to the physical character of the countryside, what makes it special and where its value lies; this means that they cannot be reconciled, with urban areas being universally represented as aesthetically inferior to the rural idyll. For example, in the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, Adams claims that 'a residential development [in Sandleford, Berkshire] would destroy the area's character and ... I must say, constitute an ugly addition, sticking out rather nastily from the rest of Newbury' – without any explanation of the details or design of the development which are apparently unimportant.<sup>84</sup> It may also be argued that by conceptualizing the landscape in aesthetic and visual terms, the authors are free to argue against development on these grounds rather than engaging with more complicated – and perhaps less easily argued against – productive or functional land-use issues.

Similarly, the strong language and frequent appeals to aesthetic judgement in the interwar campaign allows the authors to decry the encroachment of these 'hideous' towns upon the idyllic countryside, blighting the scenic idyll with modern construction and jerry building. The authors protest vigorously at speculative homebuilders being allowed to build into the countryside, with the solution being authoritative and energetic national and town planning (for example through contained and designed new towns) rather than unplanned sprawl.<sup>85</sup> In the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign, the rural beauty/urban blight discourse is used to justify support for the 'brownfield first' stance, championed by the NT, which would see homes built on inner-city brownfield land before greenfield development could be considered.<sup>86</sup> This policy is arguably aimed at keeping housing growth 'where it belongs', in towns and cities, so it cannot 'blight' the countryside.

### ***Traditional rural social order – modern urban social progress***

Bunce argues that the rural idyll is underpinned by 'a political and philosophical discourse about industrial capitalism itself which dominated the nineteenth century' and was characterized by a 'critique of industrialism, modernism and the general ideology of material progress'.<sup>87</sup> The interwar archive clearly confirms this; the rise of industrial capitalism and modern social progress is explicitly contrasted unfavourably with the traditional rigid social order of rural areas.

This anti-capitalist ideology is expressed explicitly within this campaign through many of the authors' contempt for the new capitalist class and their values; for example Sharp describes industrial pit heaps as 'doomed forever to stand visible over half a county, a stark memorial to the industrialists' philosophy of muck and money'.<sup>88</sup> The vast majority of the authors clearly

feel an utter hatred for developers and ‘jerry builders’; they are described as being ‘stupid’ and ‘greedy’ ‘filchers’ with ‘mean little minds’,<sup>89</sup> and a ‘perverted sense of values’, who ‘swarm like destructive ants over the countryside [as] we stand aside and watch their depredations helplessly’.<sup>90</sup> The opinion that speculators will stop at nothing to make money is a particular source of disdain and works to delegitimize their building activities for being motivated solely by money and greed.

Although there is no direct or overt evidence of hatred for property developers in the ‘Hands Off Our Land’ campaign, they are still regarded with mistrust and contempt, largely on the basis of what campaigners regard as an inappropriately close and ‘unhealthy’ relationship between developers and Government.<sup>91</sup> One writer claims that the ‘fingerprints of rich builders are all over the reforms’,<sup>92</sup> which could be interpreted as an attempt to delegitimize the reforms by suggesting that developers had an inappropriate level of involvement. Roger Scruton also voices his anger at the reforms, declaring developers to be ‘big business . . . which has no interest in conserving a cherished habitat and which is no more the friend of civil society than was the dictatorial state’.<sup>93</sup> The campaign was interesting in that it reversed the traditional antipathy of the *Daily Telegraph* towards planners and planning as an activity, which had previously been referred to in the paper as ‘Stalinist’.<sup>94</sup>

Whilst, on the one hand, disparaging the industrious activities of the new capitalist class, the authors in the interwar campaign simultaneously lament the loss of the traditional, rigid social order of rural areas. This is most clearly expressed through sorrow at the break-up of landed estates and the loss of stately homes ‘great in their architecture, their associations and the beauty of their settings’.<sup>95</sup> The authors fear that they are being ‘whittled away’ as a result of landowners selling off their lands in response to economic pressure.<sup>96</sup> This belief that estates are indispensable aspects of the English countryside’s character is a prominent thread within this archive and is also highlighted by Bunce, who argues that the picturesque image of a rural idyll is of a country composed of quaint villages built around stately homes which ‘was created by the process of enclosure and gentrification which accompanied the spread of landed estates’ and as such represents a very rigid and unequal social order.<sup>97</sup> It may be therefore argued that the elite or bourgeois concept of a ‘rural idyll’ became even more important during the period of this campaign, as traditional social stratification was increasingly threatened by industrial progress and the growth of the urban middle and working classes.

This contrast is used within the interwar campaign to further reinforce the argument against development, by framing it once again as a threat to the ‘proper’ social order encapsulated by the rural idyll, although the creation of landed estates and great houses themselves had only really occurred since the 1800s.<sup>98</sup> It is possible that these representations also played to the concerns of an entire social class over the threat of social and economic change. Bearing in mind the *Daily Telegraph*’s status as a right-wing newspaper, there is no evidence in the ‘Hands Off Our Land’ campaign to make the claim that the debate about the NPPF is based on an ideological conflict between preserving elite privilege and social progress. There can, however, be no doubt that this campaign does suggest that the NPPF privileges economics over environment, culture, and history, with Fiona Reynolds proclaiming that ‘the whole tone of the document is fundamentally wrong’.<sup>99</sup> In this way, both archives work to build a fundamental (and deeply problematic) conflict between the countryside and the forces of capitalist economic growth, adding weight to their stance against the reforms (Table 3).

Table 3. Rural social order and urban social progress key words and phrases.

<p><i>A- Interwar Campaign</i>  <i>Descriptions of Speculators and Industry:</i>          Commercialism; Profits; Industry; Exploitation;          Depredation; Perverted Values; Unscrupulous;          Greedy; Enemy; Rogues</p>	<p><i>B- Hands Off Our Land</i>  <i>Descriptions of developers and their influence:</i>          Big Business, 'Huge lobbying War Chest',          'Fingerprints' all over the reforms, Disinterested,          Removed from communities</p>
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***The rural elite and the urban poor***

In a similar vein to the contempt for developers and possibly rooted in the same class-based prejudice, the negative representation of a rapidly growing population of impoverished urbanites is another one of the most significant features of the interwar archive. Almost without exception, the 'urban poor' are criticized for being poorly educated and therefore lacking in the appreciation of aesthetic beauty, which explains how they can tolerate living in the city.<sup>100</sup> They are also portrayed as feckless, without morals, and 'anti-socially or even criminally minded'.<sup>101</sup>

A 'monstrously swollen population' is seen as a key driving force for urban expansion, along with growing propensity for urban populations to take their holidays outside of the city.<sup>102</sup> Williams-Ellis believed that 'as [the countryside] is colonised by refugees fleeing from intolerable towns, who have no natural instinct for country life ... the movement is calamitous'.<sup>103</sup> This is significant because it portrays impoverished urban residents as having no natural instinct for 'country life', setting up a divide between 'town folk' and 'country folk' and making the urban poor seem 'naturally' out of place in the countryside.

The presence of urbanites in the country as 'fish out of water' and incompatible with life in the countryside is seen as highly detrimental to the integrity of the countryside itself, which further reinforces the argument against rural homebuilding as it may attract urban émigrés 'fleeing' the towns. As Beach-Thomas laments, 'the nightingale, we fancy, cannot endure the waste paper and cigarette cases which are the slot of the urban migrant'.<sup>104</sup> Describing the issue in even more shocking language, Hines laments that 'those that bring slumland habits to the new estates have been born, bred and hardened to that semi savage way of life which is the only possible one for six people who have to dwell in two rooms'.<sup>105</sup> Williams-Ellis also decries the emigration of the urban 'Joneses' and the 'infection' they are bringing to the countryside:

as the joneses fly from the town, so does the country fly from the pink bungalow that they have purchased so hopefully ... the true countryman will know that the area is infected – the Joneses have brought the blight of the town or suburb with them – and in all probability they and their home will be followed by the incursion of like minded people.<sup>106</sup>

These kinds of representation show no sympathy for the condition of the working classes in the towns, but are actively contemptuous and belie the belief that urbanites are a distinct underclass; they are clearly the 'Others' to the rural elite's 'Self'.

Where the rural poor appear in the interwar campaign, they are variously represented as hapless, feckless, deserters, and victims who are always uneducated. The authors argue that only the landed classes have the capacity to care for and safeguard the countryside (that is, maintain the rural idyll). Spence, for example, believes that 'the breaking up of large estates may



throw whole valleys and lakes into the market, which nowadays means into danger'.<sup>107</sup> These authors believe that only the educated elite are capable of appreciating or understanding the true value of the countryside and are therefore the only ones qualified to make decisions regarding its management and planning.

As Williams-Ellis puts it, guardianship of the 'country's beauty' must be assumed by 'the few who care for it' including the newly formed CPRE.<sup>108</sup> This may help to further explain Satsangi et al.'s argument that the eighteenth-century upper class rural idyll became enshrined in the planning system through the influence of these powerful voices and continues to this day.<sup>109</sup> Writing in 1973, Peter Hall was concerned about the way 'conservationist planning' had been used by the rural elite to 'defend a way of life which they regard as traditionally their right' and the results this caused in reduced housing delivery and increased land values.<sup>110</sup> Forty years later, the NT, CPRE, and other lobby groups still raise themselves up as guardians and protectors of the countryside.<sup>111</sup> This can be problematic, as environmental lobby groups inevitably only represent one viewpoint amongst a range of interests in countryside management.

Class prejudice also subtly comes through in the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign. In one telling example, Lambert complains that 'parents will no longer have space to teach their children to hunt for butterflies and lichen ... the earth won't be padded on by poets but ripped up by quad bikes. There is even talk of a Center Parcs' [a European chain of family oriented holiday resorts usually built in rural settings].<sup>112</sup> In another example, Deacon parodies Parker's 1939 hymn 'There'll Always Be An England' as follows:

'There'll always be an England,  
While there's a Wetherspoon,  
With pound shops and 'To Let' signs, the high street's gaily strewn.  
The country lane's a toll road,  
The cottage small's no more.  
The field of grain is gone; it's now A Tesco Superstore'.<sup>113</sup>

It is possible to argue that these contemptuous references to quad biking, Center Parcs, Tesco [a widespread UK and international grocery store chain], Wetherspoon's [a chain of moderately priced public houses in the UK], and Pound Shops [a chain of discount retailers in the UK] are significant because they stand as symbols for the less affluent sectors of society (and places in the country), which these two authors clearly resent having a presence in the countryside. In a further example of what could be interpreted as the exclusionary impulses of the rural middle class, Rayner recounts an interview with a resident of Buckland Newton in Dorset, which is held up as a positive example of community-owned affordable housing in a rural village.<sup>114</sup> His respondent boasts that 'here, essentially the village owns the houses so it can control who lives in them' whilst she suggests that with other housing developments this may not be the case. This example clearly demonstrates that there are 'types' of people that the community would not want in their village.

Although these examples point towards a potential vein of class prejudice running through arguments against new housing in rural areas in the contemporary archive, we cannot claim clear or widespread evidence within it to suggest a systemic and deeply rooted prejudice against the urban poor, which the campaign has previously been criticized for. Durkin for example, referred to those spearheading the campaign as 'reactionary toffs' in his widely read planning blog.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, we can say that both archives demonstrate a sense of who 'belongs' in the



Table 4. Rural elite and urban poor key words and phrases.

<p><i>A - Interwar Campaign</i></p> <p><i>Descriptions of the Urban Poor:</i> Barbarism; Savage; Victims; Madness; Soulless Age; Anti-Social; Criminal; Blind; Inured</p>	<p><i>B- Hands Off Our Land</i></p> <p><i>Cultural References and signifiers:</i> Center Parcs; Tesco; Wetherspoons; ‘To-Let’ signs; quad bikes; shopping centres; neon advertising hoardings; small blocks of flats</p>
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countryside, naturalizing the view that urban development and, most importantly, the certain ‘types’ of people it brings with it, are out of place in the countryside (Table 4). This finding may also help to confirm the view from the literature that class is a strong element of the discursive divide between town and country, with the rural idyll being an essentially upper class, bourgeois concept,<sup>116</sup> which Williams argues really developed as an identity following industrialization in England in the late nineteenth century<sup>117</sup>.

***Rural community – urban social unrest***

The last theme that this analysis has uncovered is the association between rurality and the ‘good life’ for the middle classes. One of the strongest themes is a repeated link between rurality and an idealized middle-class family lifestyle. Authors recount families going for walks, picking berries, fishing, eating picnics, and meeting a friendly, stereotypical cast of characters for example ‘the formidable fisherman Dr Mottram, out with his rod on the Enborne ... as we watched he cast a fly, caught and landed a nice trout and presented it to us to take home for supper’.<sup>118</sup> Another author recounts how her childhood ‘annual August pilgrimages to pick bilberries on the Quantock Hills in Somerset were a highlight of the summer holidays ... high on the ridge we’d eat squashy egg sandwiches, the salty wind whipping hair across our faces as we gazed out towards Bridgewater Bay’.<sup>119</sup>

These two scenes and others like them paint a very middle-class picture of an idyllic childhood. Safety for children is clearly an important characteristic of the rural idyll, one implication from the children’s encounter with ‘Dr Mottram’ is that children can wander as they choose and all will be well. These findings reinforce Cloke and Little’s work about idealized ruralities potentially obscuring ‘Other’ rural experiences such as poverty, homelessness, drug use, domestic violence, and crime, which are completely absent from the image of a perfect country life presented in the archive.<sup>120</sup>

We can see, however, that the authors believe that the values of family and community, acceptable morals, and behaviours have been lost in the cities, the epitome of ‘Broken Britain’. This is exemplified by an article for the ‘Hands Off Our Land’ campaign in which ‘wilderness expert’ Ray Mears says ‘I think we saw earlier this year what attitudes that can spawn in the people who are oppressed in those areas. You didn’t see people rioting in the bits of London that border big parks’.<sup>121</sup> This implies that social breakdown and unrest are uniquely urban phenomena caused by a lack of open space, which is a highly simplified and deeply problematic argument. Mears seems to wilfully ignore the fact that proximity to open space in cities such as London is closely and historically correlated with wealth, socio-economic status, and opportunity. These concerns and fears are reflected by one of the residents

Table 5. 'Rural community–social unrest' key words and phrases.

<i>A- Interwar Archive</i>	<i>B- Hands Off Our Land campaign</i>
<i>Rural:</i> A 'cure for neuroses of the mind', countryside as 'good for the soul'	<i>Rural:</i> Quiet; Retreat; Lonely; Peaceful; Tranquil; Sense of Community; Safety; Neighbourliness
<i>Urban:</i> Very few references in this context in the interwar archive	<i>Urban:</i> Pollution; Crime; Gangs; 'Social Strife'; Noise; Frustration; Oppression

interviewed by a journalist who explains why he 'fled' London for the 'picturesque' village of East Coker, now 'threatened' by an extension to the nearby town of Yeovil:

[The respondent] has two reasons to oppose the extension. The first, commercial, is the danger to his shop, and the second is personal, in that the family (he has two daughters, 11 and 6) fled an urban environment with its 'gangs, noise, traffic and pollution' to enjoy the peace, safety and neighbourliness of a village.<sup>122</sup>

Perhaps less boldly, the American writer Bill Bryson, also writing for the campaign, links life in suburbia and cities with a lack of community, complaining that 'everybody shops in malls – you don't find a sense of community in malls'.<sup>123</sup> These negative representations, alongside the language of 'fleeing' the city for the country, further strengthen the perceived divide between the city and the country, reinforcing negative stereotypes of urban living. They allow the authors to paint sensationally dystopic and negative pictures of what the countryside might become if the expected development boom is allowed to take place. These representations also limit the possibility for 'other' experiences of rurality to be recognized which may not necessarily oppose development; for example isolation, lack of access to services, and unaffordable house prices. These arguments and representations allow the authors to add weight to their opposition to rural development and reduce the tarnish of NIMBYism by claiming that the argument is a matter of much wider importance than just environmental conservation.

The idea that the 'country sights and sounds' may be a cure for 'neuroses of the mind' is also a theme which is touched upon, but was not as fully developed, in the interwar archive.<sup>124</sup> Here, the theme is used in isolated instances to further reinforce the importance of keeping the countryside separate from the corrupting influence of the countryside, for the health of rural dwellers. Predating the interwar campaign, the writings of Ebenezer Howard certainly play-up the health benefits of the rural environment, yet the binary construction of rural health versus urban social unrest was much more fully developed in the contemporary archive than the interwar one (Table 5).<sup>125</sup> That this theme is more predominant within the contemporary campaign could be because the notion of the countryside as a 'retreat' or sanctuary from modern life has grown in importance in recent times, with rural (second) homes and country breaks now desirable symbols of an aspirational middle-class lifestyle.<sup>126</sup> Overall, however, there are far more continuities than discontinuities in the construction of notions of the 'rural' and 'urban' in the two archives, particularly in relation to the threat of large-scale housing development.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown a number of striking similarities between the interwar campaign against speculative urban expansion and the 2011–2012 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign

against 'pro-development' policies included in the draft NPPF in England. Both campaigns have come at particularly important periods in the history of planning in England: the interwar campaign at a time of a growing 'planning movement' campaigning for a comprehensive, statutory planning system to tackle both the urban blight of densely populated industrial cities, and the perceived threat of uncontrolled suburban sprawl to the countryside and the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign at a time of rapid reform to the planning system and the public sector context within which it sits, when the planning system has been particularly criticized by central government politicians as being overly restrictive of development.

In both archives, a dominant 'rural idyll' is (re)produced and reinforced through the themes of beauty, nature, purity, an elite educated class, and traditional social order. This is strongly contrasted to the representation of the 'urban sphere' as a dystopia or hell-like place, characterized by social and architectural disorder, crime, pollution, disease, and ugliness. 'Urban' areas are therefore constructed as the constitutive and inferior 'Other' to the rural idyll. The apparently 'natural' urban traits associated with built-up areas are represented as 'out of place' within the rural sphere and as such, these representations work in many different ways to justify the argument that general development, particularly large-scale homebuilding, is a threat to the intrinsic characteristics of the countryside and should not be allowed.

There are also, however, some key differences between the two archives, with an anti-capitalist ideology featuring strongly in the interwar campaign, portraying social progress and the growth of a new capitalist class as a threat to the traditional social order of the 'rural idyll'. In contrast, the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign focuses more strongly on the differences in lifestyle, social harmony, and sense of community between urban and rural areas. These differences may be related to changes to the social, political, and economic context of the two archives' production, of which there have clearly been many. There is also some difference in that the contemporary archive was published in a newspaper which is generally to the right politically, *The Daily Telegraph*, as opposed to the interwar archive which was published as pamphlets and book manuscripts.

In justifying their respective arguments, the authors of the interwar text also use much stronger, more sensational language to make their point and many of the authors see the solution as a return to landed estates. In contrast, the language of the 'Hands Off Our Land' campaign is more sentimental and nostalgic, with policy suggestions often framed through the more neutral or technical language of planning (for example the 'brownfield first' policy). On the whole, however, we can conclude from this research that the rhetoric, representations, and arguments are very similar considering the huge differences in social, economic, and political context and how much planning has changed from an era or ideology of 'containment' to one of 'sustainable development' and 'spatial planning'. These findings provide a tentative answer to Satsangi et al.'s question about how much, if anything, has changed in the way we regard the countryside between these two eras: surprisingly little.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, as Williams argues, 'a contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times' and English attitudes to the country and rural life have persisted with extraordinary power since at least the nineteenth century.<sup>128</sup> This highlights the importance of understanding historic precedent and intertextuality when engaging in contemporary planning debate.

It is vital we better understand the rhetoric and discourse of groups that potentially hold great power to shape politics and planning policy in England. The 'Hands Off Our Land' campaigners claimed that their campaign was responsible for forcing major changes to the NPPF, including a

removal of the ‘default yes to development’ policy, the inclusion of a policy to force builders and councils to build on brownfield land first, and greater protection for ‘ordinary’ rural landscapes. If this is the case, it may give planners cause for concern because these environmental conservation groups represent only one – particularly vociferous – vested interest in planning and rural management, drowning out other discourses of rurality which may entail different strategies for management. This is not to disagree with all the criticisms raised by the campaigners, who raise some important issues relating to scattered, sprawling development, but instead to argue that it is important for policy and debate to be based on a reasoned consideration of the evidence and a balanced view from different interest groups, as opposed to the idealized, romantic notions of the rural idyll. This would give greater weight and legitimacy to the debate, as opposed to the reactionary quality it arguably currently has.

It is vital that planners, politicians, and environmental groups become more aware of the problematic discourses surrounding rural development, given their potential influence in shaping the agendas and direction for national planning policy. The enduring strength of the imaginary of the ‘rural idyll’ and its constitutive ‘urban/development dystopia’ ‘Other’ revealed by our historical comparative analysis makes such a task challenging.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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### **Notes**

1. Scott et al., *The Urban–Rural Divide*; James, *The Urban–Rural Divide*; and Pahl, “The Rural–Urban Continuum.”
2. DCLG, *Draft National Planning Policy*.
3. DCLG, Localism Act.
4. Barker, *Review of Land Use*.
5. DCLG, *Draft National Planning Policy*, 1.
6. Satsangi et al., *The Rural Housing Question*.
7. CPRE, “50 Days.”
8. Hall, *Containment of Urban England I*, 626.

9. Williams, *Keywords*.
10. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* and Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.
11. Dixon and Jones, "Poststructuralism," 79–107.
12. Hoggart, "Do Away with Rural."
13. James, *The Urban–Rural Divide*.
14. Phillips et al., "Putting Together Ruralities," 2.
15. Tewdwr-Jones, "Spatial Planning: Principles."
16. Viles, "A Divided Discipline," 26–39.
17. Cloke, *Country Visions*; Halfacree, "Out of Place"; and Mingay, *The Rural Idyll*.
18. Bunce, "Reproducing Rural Idylls."
19. Satsangi et al., *The Rural Housing Question*, 9.
20. Sibley, "Self-Other," 85–8.
21. Said, *Orientalism*.
22. Williams, *Country and the City*.
23. Hubbard, "Inappropriate and Incongruous" and Halfacree, "Out of Place."
24. Cloke, *Country Visions*, 74.
25. Hubbard, "Inappropriate and Incongruous" and d'Hauseterre, "Representations of Rurality."
26. Satsangi et al., *The Rural Housing Question*, 10.
27. *Ibid.*, 19.
28. Hall, *Containment of Urban England II*, 371.
29. Abram, "The Rural Gaze," 3.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Satsangi et al., *The Rural Housing Question*; see also Hall, "Containment of Urban England."
32. Jeans, "English Countryside," 253.
33. Murray, "Preservation of Rural England," 28.
34. Hall, *Containment of Urban England I*, 83–4.
35. Mandler, "Against 'Englishness,'" 155.
36. Jeans, "Planning and the Myths of the English Countryside," 249.
37. Tewdwr-Jones, "Planners Did Their Best," 391.
38. Miller, "Garden Cities and Suburbs."
39. Satsangi et al., *The Rural Housing Question*.
40. Sturzaker and Shucksmith, "Housing in Rural England."
41. Hardy and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*.
42. Lees, "Urban Geography."
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