

Letters to the editor

► *Brave New World*

It is taken for granted in all circles that the environment is a doom and gloom topic. The sensibilities of the sensitive are plagued with guilt every time the ignition starts and the spectre of global warming arises. So what is wrong with the view of the world as developing into ecological disaster? Not much, according to the evidence.

I was distracted recently in the departure lounge of Heathrow by a nugget of hope. The front cover of a magazine with a lead article 'Back to nature – as its population declines, rural Europe is returning to the wild'. Europe is a changing environment, and along with the wailing prophets of doom we can see a new world reverting to an old – a sort of 'environmental postmodernism'. Within the conundrum of collapse, the global warming and the autocracy of the car, there is an expanding hiatus, a gulf and scenes that remind me of science fiction films. It seems that we are witnessing a rolling back of the human tide.

Europe has a declining population, and a growing reality of 'post-agrarianism' – quite a dramatic shift from the past when almost everybody worked on the land. The villages are emptying as the young flee to the cities, attracted by the tinselled hope of employment. This leaves an ageing agrarian community of retirement-age farmers who so dominate the demographic that the delivery of medical care has to be rethought, and adverts placed to attract immigrants into some rural areas.

Wildcats and ospreys are returning to environments where they have not been seen for hundreds of years. Since the late 1990s packs of wolves have been multiplying in Germany as the forest spreads onto what was once farmland. Europe it seems is renaturalising and moving away from rural areas with the countryside losing a third of its population. In most communities for as long as anyone can remember, every area of land was fenced off and accounted for – now there are 6 million hectares of abandoned farmland in Italy.

I do not mean to devalue the activities of farming communities. It is always disheartening to see thriving communities collapse; but it is interesting to see

the change and the possible environmental benefits. Many people think that world processes are cyclical; I believe that those of us with a strong environmentalist plank in our thinking will see that natural social change (rural-urban migration) is allowing bigger forces to balance the environmental equation. In addition to re-forestation, (the sprouting of new lungs for the earth?), ultra low birth-rates will lead Europe to lose 41 million people by 2030, as the baby boomers start to die out and are not replaced by newborns. Almost everybody seems to agree that we need fewer people in the world if we are to survive as a species. Similarly, almost everybody seems to agree that the natural world needs to rejuvenate. So, perhaps in the long run maybe this is good news for everybody?

Ben Francis, Stroud, Glos.

► *Poor flag designs*

I am surprised at how unimaginative are the designs proposed for the flag. Where is the Lincoln Imp, the Jolly Fisherman, stuffed chine, Spalding's tulip or the cathedral skyline? What about combining the old arms of Lindsey, Kesteven and Holland? What about the potato?

What in there represents modern Lincolnshire with its commuters to Peterborough, its successful grammar schools, oil seed rape and flax fields, the lack of hospitals?

Where are references to Robert Manning, St Gilbert of Sempringham, James Usher, Matthew Flinders, Joseph Banks, George Boole, Sir Isaac Newton, John Harrison, or, for that matter, William Cecil, Robert Grosseteste, John Dee, Hereward the Wake or Henry Bolingbroke?

Nothing refers to the industrial history of Lincoln, the majestic spire of St Wulfram or St Botolph's stump. What about the castle at Castle Bytham, the George's arch in Stamford or Daniel Lambert, Roman Lindum Colonia, Pinchbeck Engine, the Bowthorpe Oak, Heckington Mill or the Maud Foster. The Eel Spear is known in Heraldry although speed skating is not. The Wakes Knot is a well-known device and many of the town crests, past and present, have included a Viking ship.

In short, it seems amazing that on a completely blank sheet of paper there was no room for a single thing that Lincolnshire Folk would recognise as belonging to them.

Robert E A Harvey, via email.

► *Excellent flag idea*

Having heard you on the radio I understand some people in our county are not overwhelmed by the choice of flag designs.

All I can say is, what a good idea it is even to think of a design to link our fragmented county together again. Goodness knows, the authorities have done their best to split us up, first by the creation of South Humberside and now these two new areas, north Lincolnshire and north east Lincolnshire.

As far as I am concerned there is, and always has been, just the one Lincolnshire and I look forward to seeing a single flag flying over every corner of our beautiful county.

Mr E A Williamson, Scunthorpe.

► *Urinal deserves mention*

The gentleman's urinal in the shadow of Lincoln's Roman Newport Arch, referred to by Maureen Sutton in her 'A Century of Memories' article in the September edition of 'Lincolnshire Life', deserves more than a passing mention.

Norwich City Council has made claim to have the oldest gentlemen's urinal in all Europe – the claim is that theirs dates back to 1882 – but theirs is not in use.

On the other hand, ours is in daily use and is much appreciated by late-night drinkers. It has been dated to coincide with the one-time adjoining police station/fire station which has a date medallion of 1880. Two years older and not only still in use but in active demand by tourists and revellers alike.

David A Ashley Hall, Lincoln.

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