

The Sustainable Population Party

Purpose

The Sustainable Population Party ('Suspop') has been formed to provide a voting platform for the large and growing number of our people who recognise that the greatest challenge that confronts us all this century is that of human overpopulation. This problem is particularly severe for England, which is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

Most of us living in the UK do not give this much thought, but our country has a higher population than it can comfortably support and this is the root cause of many of the stresses and strains on our key public services such as transport, power, education and health services. The UK population is projected to increase by around 10.1 million people between 2007 and 2031 (Palgrave Macmillan: Social Trends) adding more pressure to already strained services and resources. The end result of ignoring the limitations of our country, in terms of space and resources will be degradation of our environment, and eventually, squalor.

'Suspop' believes that we should introduce strategies to initially balance our books - to make sure no more people enter the UK than leave each year. Then the only responsible course of action is to put coherent plans in place to reduce our population, gradually and naturally, through education and choice, to a sustainable level – at which our country can provide a good standard of living for its people without diminishing resources, or spoiling the environment, for future generations.

'Suspop' is the party for people who are appalled when a government spokesman announces that 'we must build hundreds of thousands of new homes each year to accommodate our growing population': as one of the most crowded countries in an overcrowded world, we should not have a growing population.

'Suspop' believes that the continuous drive for growth by other political parties is destructive, unsustainable, and ultimately futile; we should instead plan for a balanced economy and population size, living within the geographical and ecological limits of our country.

'Suspop' is the party for people who are convinced that the unending construction of massive new infrastructure like 'HS2', more airports or runways in the South-East of England, and new 'Garden Cities', as well as being hugely expensive, is destructive of our environment, and unnecessary if we plan to reduce our population to a sustainable level.

It is more important that we leave for our grandchildren and their families at the end of this century a beautiful country in which to enjoy their lives, than to indulge in reckless consumption of everything we can lay our hands on (including our green space) in selfish pursuit of 'prosperity' today.

Facts

Since the Second World War the human population has trebled, from fewer than 2.5 billion in about 1950 to 7.3 billion in 2014, and now there is overwhelming evidence of worldwide overpopulation: there are about a billion people in the world for whom hunger is a daily background ache in their lives; food production is endangered by soil erosion, depletion of aquifers, the effects of climate change, the replacement of farms by 'infrastructure', the growing of biofuel crops, and the probable absence or unaffordability of fertilisers as oil sources become exhausted in a few decades time; we observe the 'environmental and social problems that today afflict us and our poor battered planet' (Sir David Attenborough's address 'People and Planet' to the RSA on Google)- the extinction of species, traffic congestion, depletion of fossil fuels, human migration and immigration problems, urban sprawl, loss of arable and recreational land, unemployment, desertification, famine, air and ocean pollution, loss of rain forest, depletion of the oceans' fish stocks; many informed people believe that human overpopulation and activity are causing climate change.

Whether or not England is overcrowded is a matter of personal judgment, but it is a fact that our country is overpopulated. The population density (number of people per square kilometre) that a country can sustain depends on the geography and fertility of the land itself, and the stage of civilisation of its people. In countries where primitive man chose to live, 'hunter-gatherers' achieved a density of about 0.5 people per square kilometre. Once man discovered agriculture about 10,000 years ago, this density leapt a hundredfold, to about 50 people per square kilometre. Then the arrival of industry enabled it to grow again, approximately trebling, through the availability of machinery to grow more food, transport for moving food to markets (reducing susceptibility to famine, droughts, and seasonality of crops), and the production of goods to trade and to improve our living standards.

The Sustainable Population Party claims that a sustainable population density for England is about 150 people per square kilometre. This is broadly in line with the findings of The Optimum Population Trust, now called 'Population Matters', headed by Sir David Attenborough, and the Sustainable Development Commission which was established in 2000 to help governments 'rise above the limitations of short-term political and budgetary cycles', and closed down by the present government in March 2011. Inconvenient truth?

England's population density has recently grown to exceed 400. This is a convenient number to imagine, because there are precisely 400 fifty-metre squares in a square kilometre, so we get one each. It would be uncomfortable for us to try to survive in such a small space, of course; we could possibly grow enough food, providing we became vegetarian, but that fifty-metre square must also accommodate buildings, roads, recreation, waste disposal, and all the other stuff we expect as civilised people. Some people have the impression that there must be room for more infrastructure, more people, because there is lots of unspoilt countryside. But this is false: the whole population of the world would fit into England (about 20 square metres each), and nobody would argue that that would be 'sustainable'. The fact that we have visible space is not the only criterion for further growth; it is not even an important one. It is merely evidence that we tend to group together in cities and towns. We need open spaces.

The indicators that England is overpopulated are all around us: our food production would feed only a third of us; there is constant pressure to build hundreds of

thousands of new homes; our transport systems are loaded to the point of saturation so that the slightest interruption causes chaos; our beautiful city-centres are surrounded by miles of ugly urban sprawl engulfing once-pretty villages; the spaces between villages and towns are being in-filled creating faceless conurbations and destroying communities; we are constantly anxious about the decline in wild-life and habitat; an unsustainable population size results in widespread unemployment or underemployment. Anybody who doubts that England is overpopulated should take a driving holiday around the country, and then do the same in France, say, or Denmark, or any other European country, and observe the difference. (France and Denmark both have population densities below 150.)

So, if 400 people per square kilometre is unsustainable, how has it happened? The answer, of course, is historic. When our industrial revolution began, around 1750, the population of England was about 6.5million (density 40 psk); as a result of industrialisation it approximately trebled over the next hundred years to about 21million in 1850 (density 135 psk), and it continued to grow. For some 200 years, Britain was the 'cradle of the industrial revolution'; we were mass-exporters to the rest of the world. Our industries included spinning and weaving, mining and shipbuilding, iron and steel material and goods, building canals, roads and railways, chemicals, 'pig-iron and cheap tin trays'. Britain was the workshop of the world, and our population grew to provide the labour for all this activity. We were able to sustain a population much greater than 150 because we were net exporters on a massive scale.

The effect of this transformation from an agricultural to an industrial society is illustrated by the historic employment statistics: at the start of the industrial revolution in 1750, 65% of our active population were employed in agriculture, and by 1950 this had fallen to 5% (the lowest of all countries for which records exist). In comparison, in China in 1950, 70% of the population were still employed in agriculture, but since then China's industrial revolution (and that of India, Brazil, and all the other countries to which we previously sent the fruits of our mass-production) has roared ahead. To illustrate the effect of this on our industry, since 1950 Britain's population has risen from 50million to 63 million, but the number of manufacturing jobs has fallen from 8.7million to 2.5million.

Who seriously believes that we will regain our position as a major manufacturer of goods for the world? Should we just press on with growing our population as though nothing had changed? **The Sustainable Population Party believes that we should adjust our plans and ambitions to this new reality. We should plan to reduce our workforce and population accordingly, or we will achieve a decline to poverty and squalor.**

Action

The Sustainable Population Party accepts and endorses entirely the views and proposals of Population Matters, a leading international population concern group, which recently issued its manifesto for the 2015 UK general election (populationmatters.org). It calls for government action to slow and reverse UK population growth and encourage similar action globally.

The fertility rate (number of children per woman) in all European countries is lower than 2, which means that without immigration, their populations would be falling. Ten years ago, the UK fertility rate was 1.7, but recently it has risen to 1.9. The only

reason that our population continues to rise is through immigration. Net immigration in recent years has been in the region of 200,000 annually, resulting from about 550,000 immigrants and 350,000 emigrants. In order to gradually reduce our population to a sustainable level, we need to stop bringing in people faster than they are leaving, and encourage a fertility rate lower than 2.

The Sustainable Population Party calls for zero net immigration, and the following actions proposed by Population Matters:

- Promote the benefits of small families to parents, children and society at large, thereby furthering health and responsible relationships;
- Make sex and relationships education a statutory part of the school curriculum;
- Make reducing unplanned pregnancy at all ages a goal;
- Not provide child-related payments or tax reliefs after the first two children in a household, for children conceived after the policy comes into force, while ensuring that children are protected from poverty;
- Increase the proportion of foreign aid spent on family planning services and the empowerment of women.

By these actions, a fall in population of about ½% (300,000 people) per annum should be achievable without great stress, and the benefits would be immediate and long-term. But it will take some 140 years to get down to a sustainable level. Let us hope that future circumstances do not make it more urgent.

Effects

The immediate effect of The Sustainable Population Party's policies would be on current plans for massive infrastructure developments. If we recognise that their purpose is to cope with present and future capacity problems arising from our growing population, and then suddenly we don't have a growing population, these plans can be scrapped.

Brilliant! All those people who have been campaigning to save 'areas of outstanding beauty' from being torn apart to make way for HS2 can heave a sigh of relief. People who live in the vicinity of Heathrow need not worry about having another runway built. The ancient woodlands around Gatwick will be saved. We will not have to endure the construction of several new cities the size of Birmingham (the requirement arising from the currently predicted population increase in the next few years). **The money that would be needed to fund these massive developments can be used to reduce our debt.**

In the medium term, we can expect that there will be a noticeably reduced pressure on all services dealing with the public, perhaps within 5 years.

Within ten years, by which time our population could be 3million lower than now, there will be no housing shortage. House prices will become more 'affordable', so that they will become more accessible to our young people. House building programmes can be aimed at replacing our old and nasty housing stock, rather than building more houses.

The falling population will remove the need for continuous infrastructure expansion, which came at a great cost to taxpayers while bringing no improvement to their lives,

and caused increases to cost of living, the national debt, social tensions, and immense environmental damage.

A lower population will improve our lives in many ways: it will make our environment more beautiful, less crowded, and quieter; it will remove the discomfort and frustration associated with travel by reducing traffic volume; it will enable wildlife to proliferate by reducing pressure on their habitat; we will be able to demolish areas of squalid wasteland and have more forest, farmland, parks and wilderness. We will be able to improve our historic cities, sites, and landmarks by removing ugliness around them, which will enable growth in tourism. Eventually we could become self-sufficient in food, making us more secure.

Growth and Prosperity

If the human race had begun with just one couple at the start of the agricultural revolution, about 10,000 B.C., and multiplied at the rate of 1% per annum since then, the total population would form today a sphere of living flesh thousands of light years in diameter, and expanding with a radial velocity many times faster than light.

This could not happen of course, for many reasons (even without Einstein's theory), but it begs the question 'what is a sustainable rate of growth?' and the answer is Zero. In a finite space, growth cannot continue forever. Some economists argue that economic growth can continue by 'decoupling' it from 'material throughput', but normal people do not know what this means, possibly because it is meaningless. Give us an example, Mr Economist, of a significant business which has grown in such a way.

Our present government has recently expressed pleasure in observing a GDP growth rate of more than 2.5%, and certainly it must be a relief to have evidence that we are coming out of recession. However, if such a growth rate continued until the end of the century, our economy would have grown to eight times its present level, and it is difficult to understand what that means: will we have 8 times as many people, or 8 times as much stuff, or 8 times as many holidays, or a mixture of these and other things?

Prosperity is about things going well for us: in accordance with our hopes and expectations. It requires a good balance between short-term pleasure and long-term security. It is the capability to flourish that is important. The vision of prosperity as a continually expanding economic paradise may have appeared sustainable when economies were smaller and the world less populated; it is now 'not fit for purpose'.

The Sustainable Population Party believes that endless pursuit of growth as a means to achieving prosperity is costly, destructive and futile. Instead, we should have a vigorous economy which accepts our geographical and ecological limits, pay off our debt, and concentrate on improving the beauty and security of our country.

Taxation

If an ordinary man in the street were asked to guess the number of pages making up UK tax law, he could not get anywhere near the right answer: he could imagine that it could be more than 100 pages; he might suspect that it could be as many as 1000

(but why?); he would say that 10,000 was out of the question, there could not be that many rules, it would take an army of civil servants to operate, no-one could understand it.

But the true number is over 17,000, and it does take an army of civil servants to run it. The number of employees working for HMRC (full-time equivalent) is over 71,000, which is a remarkably large number considering that most of income tax, VAT, corporation tax, and other taxes are collected by employers and companies and sent in. It's not as if tax collectors have to go knocking on doors and demanding payment!

Our tax system is complicated because it has existed for 200 years, and every successive government fiddles around with it searching for some perceived electoral advantage. We will never make significant improvements to it by manipulating the details. We should tear it up and write a new, simple version. **We should have a tax system which looks as if it had been designed on purpose.**

The Sustainable Population Party entirely accepts and endorses the findings of the 2020 Tax Commission, and reported in their internationally acclaimed report 'The Single Income Tax'. The objective is that Government must reform taxes to make them lower, simpler and more transparent. The proposals would result in substantial tax cuts for households across the income distribution and stimulate the economy.

Perhaps they would also allow a reduction in HMRC workforce saving money which can be used to pay off the debt.

Long-term Outlook

We live in an interesting century, when the human population will reach a peak and then (hopefully) gently reduce to a sustainable level, and when fossil fuels on which we have depended for vast growth in the last century virtually run out.

There have been many forecasts of when natural oil and gas reserves will become commercially exhausted, but none of them go beyond the end of this century. We will of course find ways of satisfying our most serious energy needs, but the days when we could get all the fuel we needed by drilling a hole in the ground and the oil came out under its own pressure will be gone. We will have consumed in two centuries the product of two million centuries of sunlight and photosynthesis. Future energy will not be so cheap. We do not know what our lives will be like 'when the oil runs out', but we know it will be very different from today. We may have to live in a low-energy world.

Any long-term plan or vision of the future for our country should take into consideration the possibility of future world-wide overpopulation, food shortages, and increasing scarcity of other important resources. Our present relentless pursuit of growth as a way to prosperity does not do so.

The Sustainable Population Party calls for a long-term strategy to reduce our population to a sustainable level. There is no advantage in having a higher population, other than the ancient traditional one of military superiority, now obsolete. There are many advantages in having a lower population: we can become self-sufficient in food; our infrastructure will become generously adequate; we will be able to dismantle post-industrial squalor and engage in beautification of our country as a national endeavour; we will be able to recreate and extend natural habitat on a scale

enabling a wonderful recovery in our biodiversity; we will be happier as a nation as a result of engaging in the society of discrete communities (towns and villages) instead of massive impersonal conurbations.