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Preventing town-dwellers owning second homes in the countryside [1]

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Sir Andrew Motion, head of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, has called for taxes [3] that will put countryside second homes beyond the reach of all except the very rich. His motivation is very clearly expressed. These second homes are:

> "? very often lived in by people who scoot down in their cars, see their smart friends, don't join in the life of the community and don't feed into it. They're townies in the countryside, they make sure they're back in London in time to catch the 10 o'clock news on Sunday night."

Clearly Sir Andrew does not like these people or their lifestyle choices, and does not want them in the countryside of rural England. The total number of people with 'weekend second homes' is put at over 165,000. Of the 25 million homes in Britain this represents less than 1 percent of the total. A somewhat larger number own a second home, but let it out for income instead of using it themselves.

Small though the number is, it clearly represents a problem for Sir Andrew, who does not like what these townies are doing. For the townies themselves this is not a problem, since they are making the choice to live in this way, and enjoying that choice. Sir Andrew and his CPRE think it quite legitimate to use the power of the law to prevent others making choices that they themselves disapprove of.

As times change, so do lifestyles. Affluence and mobility have given some people the option to enjoy the countryside at weekends or during holidays, and Sir Andrew and his friends want this stopped. They think it reasonable to use the law to make the world the way they would prefer it to be, rather than the way others prefer it to be. He doesn't want second homes to be illegal, just "very expensive."

This calls to mind the CPRE's ongoing campaign to prevent more housing in the countryside, keeping its pleasures confined to those who already enjoy living there. Sir Andrew and the CPRE should investigate whether it might be a lot cheaper simply to use barbed wire to keep townies out of the countryside. After all, similar measures have been used before in other countries.

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Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/planning-transport/preventing-town-dwellers-owning-second-homes-in-the-countryside
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5779
[3] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21979039
[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[5] http://disqus.com