

the profits could be more fairly distributed."

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Developers — a fact of life...

By our
architectural
correspondent

IT MUST be a tough life being a developer these days — they are disliked by everyone in varying degrees. I can imagine them using a pseudonym and wearing dark glasses in an effort to become anonymous.

I was reminded of this fact on reading a report recently that two young journalists, of all people — Booker and Gray by name — are attempting to break the seeming stranglehold that property developers, in this instance Joe Levy, have gained on Britain's city centres.

I stress the word "stranglehold" because it indicates a considerable emotiveness. Also, if this word is used meaningfully, it could mean the death of our city centres and ultimately, I suppose, the nation.

Now, the strange thing is that development, as I understand the word, creates new growth and is a fact of life. Take those beloved Nash terraces, or that charming hamlet clustering in the trees, or even the trees themselves in some Capability Brown land-

scape — all the result of development.

And in 1973 this activity is even more important. That is, if you want to support the Prime Minister and achieve a five per cent growth rate in the economy.

Why then are developers so unpopular?

One reason is that the speculative developer — undoubtedly the most suspect breed — is often not interested in the function of the building which results

from his enterprise. But only in the degree of return on his investment. The building is simply a few pound signs in a mathematical equation.

This kind of developer would build a tower block of Chinese laundries shaped like a pagoda if he felt it would pay off. With this degree of detachment only planning regulations and a good architect can avert an environment disaster.

The other reason for unpopularity was expressed in the self same report on Joe Levy's activities at Tolmers Square, Euston. In a financial deal with Camden Council, Levy is hoping to gain their co-operation in building the inevitable money spinning block of offices. This deal was described by the Sunday Times as "Camden's crumbs from £20

million land deal profits."

Yes, Mr Developer, most people think you get an unreasonable profit, and this also makes you unpopular. How then can we encourage the enterprise of the developer, to give the community a better deal and achieve a better environment?

The answer must be to institute a system of land value taxation which automatically gives the community its due reward yet allows the developer a reasonable profit. And keep demanding high standards of design through control regulations.

Politicians, planners, and architects could combine in this way to make the poor old developer into some kind of public benefactor. While relieving him of the problem of knowing what to do with those ill-gotten gains.

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