



Surely it would be better to encourage people to eat a more varied diet of naturally produced food, or better still open more allotments and encourage more people to grow their own?

Since my column on the subject of the surveillance society, the government have announced further new plans to create an all-consuming information database, which would gather, and store information on all types of communication. I guess they have been watching Spooks and have been spooked! In my mind, all of these things appear to have a common thread, control. We already live in the most watched society in the world and are sleep walking into further losses of civil liberties and respect for the right to privacy. The supermarkets have a stranglehold on food production and distribution and with GM; they will be able to take this control to the next level. They have systematically destroyed community based supply along with local high streets for the pleasures of the mall and the superstore.

The government has systematically eroded our rights and freedoms to the extent that will soon have reached a point of no return. Meanwhile back in the real world we are all facing what is going to be a very tough year.

Our fuel and energy costs have risen at a higher rate than any other E.U. country. German firms now own all of the major energy companies, with little interest in fuel poverty. We are now more or less reliant on Russia for our gas supplies. The government are on the verge of approving a third runway at Heathrow, which will have further, damaging effects on climate change and the environment in general. By the time, you read this approval will probably have been granted.

These are all issues that are fundamental to how the society we live in is ordered. Globalisation has only added to the depth of the problems we now face and will face to an even greater extent in the next couple of years.

Our cities are now full to bursting with uninhabited poorly designed and built apartment blocks. Driving through Manchester this morning, I happened to notice two different apartment blocks, in different parts of town and built by different development companies, where large parts of the external cladding had fallen off.

During the recent crisis in banking the great and the good could be seen and heard on TV and in the papers stating that we must not slide into socialism and avoid over regulation of the markets. This would seem to be the stock in trade answer of the few who wish to protect their own interests, to the detriment of the majority. I agree with one aspect and that is that socialism would be a mistake but I also think that our current model of capitalism is a mistake and is unworkable if we are to have any hope of protecting our societal stability, environment and planet. To my mind where the concept breaks down is the interpretation or concept of capitalism.

I believe the main difference is the gulf between entrepreneurs whose businesses are based on actually making or supplying something tangible whether it is goods and services. On the other side of the coin, we have banks and financial institutions that exploit these markets without any tangible benefits to society as a whole and in the process add to the destruction of society and the planet. Either way the reality is, we will all have to find a new concept for living. ■

Award winning garden designer David Keegan works from a dedicated design studio in Manchester on commissions for both private and commercial clients. To contact David visit: [www.dkgardendesign.co.uk](http://www.dkgardendesign.co.uk) or tel. 0161 224 4020.



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## The Last Word: THOUGHTS ON THE YEAR AHEAD

Award winning garden designer David Keegan makes some predictions about the year ahead.

**A new year is historically** a time when most of us take stock of the year that has just passed. Over the past few weeks, the idea of a concept for living has been racing around in my head. It seems like the most apt title for the current turmoil in the economy and the environment.

A concept for living? In reality, we need a new concept for living if we are not to destroy this three and a half billion-year-old planet.

I guess it is easy to lose sight of the fact that in the grand scheme of things we have not been around for very long. If you look back through some of my earlier columns, you will notice that some of the issues I am concerned about are starting to happen. The GM lobby as I suspected is finding new and ingenious ways in which to try to change public opinion on its eventual introduction into this country. To do this they have changed the focus from the reduced use of herbicides, which nobody really bought into or believed, to medicinal benefits with the introduction of the purple tomato. They claimed this new wonder food would be genetically modified to have health benefits for those who did not quite manage to eat there five a day. The research for this was carried out in the UK.

This to me would seem totally insane. Surely it would be better to encourage people to eat a more varied diet of naturally produced food, or better still open more allotments and encourage more people to grow their own?

Meanwhile the Japanese have gleefully announced that they have successfully genetically modified a rose to produce blue flowers. A picture accompanied this announcement and personally, I thought it looked hideous. Sometimes there is no accounting for taste. I expect we will see a renewed push on GM in the UK in 2009.