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WILD THOUGHTS

The heavy-handed Environment Police are out in force, infiltrating all corners of society. Launching Big Brother-style invasions of privacy, withdrawing centuries-old community services and dishing out hefty fines, they are forcing the rest of us to be environmentally-friendly whether we like it or not.

I'd be the last to complain about the Government and local councils taking environmental issues seriously – albeit a couple of decades too late – and I accept that brute force may be the only way of getting us to change our deep-rooted, comfortable lifestyles. But it'll never work unless we're provided with satisfactory alternatives.

You can't use Draconian measures to drive cars off the road, for example, without providing high-quality public transport. Standing room only on expensive trains that arrive late will ensure people continue to use their cars, despite seemingly ever-increasing fuel tax, parking costs and congestion charges.

Many council leaders learned this lesson the hard way. They lost power for deciding that dustbins should be emptied every fortnight instead of every week. Never mind Iraq or rising house prices – it was bin collections that had people up in arms. The councillors were right to want us to produce less rubbish, but they were wrong to expect us to do it without help. If recycling was made easier and the Government forced manufacturers to cut down on excessive packaging, we'd have less stuff to throw out.

The London Borough of Haringey, at least, is on the right track. It was criticised for using light aircraft fitted with thermal imagers to record the heat escaping from people's houses and then posting maps identifying the worst culprits on the internet.

True, that alone would have been heavy-handed. But now it is using this information to help homeowners cut their heating bills and limit their contribution to global warming. It's not rocket science – highlighting a problem and then offering a solution – but it's all we ask.

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