

Faith Comment

[by Michael Blakstad tel: 01730 823337]

Next month, my wife and I leave our home in East Meon after almost 40 happy and constructive years because our health is declining and there is no suitable retirement accommodation in this part of East Hampshire.

My doctor recommended that I read the American doctor Atul Gawande's *Being Mortal* which opened my eyes to the different levels of care which are needed: first, independent living without care, then independent living with assistance when needed, then one partner needing residential care, then possibly both. Most 'homes' in this country cater either for the independent or the bed-bound, but what my wife and I need is a mixture of the two. We still have a lot to contribute to our community, and to benefit in return, but I won't be able to care for her, nor she for me, when we sink another notch.

Councils would do well to analyse this need. There are already 5.4 million over 75s in the UK, 1.6 million over 85, and this figure is going to double in the next two decades. Over 300,000 carers are needed, plus caterers, administrators, drivers, maintenance people, hairdressers and medics. I gave evidence to the planning committee of South Downs National Park earlier this year when they discussed the proposal to build an independent living home on an industrial site on Frenchman's Road, and one councillor declared that we oldies should be located in the outskirts and 'bussed in'. Permission was denied partly because the site is 'economic zone', despite the numbers employed building and managing the complex. And we oldies would have benefited enormously from being in the centre of town.

My parting shot to our authorities is, study the figures and find it in your hearts to include the elderly, not all of us incompetent or incontinent, in planning the communities of the future. Psalm 71 v9 says: 'Do not cast me off in the time of old age: forsake me not when my strength is spent'. Not that ours is 'spent' yet.