

High flier eludes police

By Paul Keel

Police and air traffic controllers in southern England were searching yesterday for an airborne escapee: a 30ft long balloon.

Barratt Developments, the nation's biggest housebuilder and the flamboyant launchers of many an airborne advertising campaign, had it anchored over the company's new housing development at Swindon, Wiltshire.

But it proved less well-

rooted than the Barratt Oak, the builder's symbol, and went AWOL, drifting away towards Southampton.

Swindon police said it was last seen over the town, trailing its two 150ft nylon cables, at noon.

Police in neighbouring counties were asked to keep a lookout and an order went out from Thames Valley police for constables in local stations to pop outside and have a look. No sighting was reported.

Air traffic controllers at RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire and at

the London Air Traffic Control Centre joined the search without success.

No one had much idea about what to do with the balloon if it were located. A policeman in Swindon suggested "grabbing hold of the ropes," while the air traffic controllers' advice was to avoid it.

A harassed sounding saleswoman at the Barratt estate office in Swindon said she was too busy to talk about the balloon. Which left the last word with Swindon police: "It's probably on its way to Argentina," said their spokesman.

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Peter Roberts