

**LECKHAMPTON GREEN LAND ACTION GROUP (LEGLAG)**

**RECORD OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE GROUP HELD AT  
7.45 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 28<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2012 AT LECKHAMPTON  
VILLAGE HALL.**

Present: Leglag Committee: Mr. K. Braunholtz; (KB) (Chairman) Mr. P. Lee (Treasurer)  
Mr. I. Bickerton, Mrs. A. Davis; Mrs. V. Matthews; Dr. Elizabeth Pimley;  
Mr. G. Potter; Mrs. M. White (Secretary)

Apologies were received for absence from several members.

1) Introduction and Welcome:

The Chairman (KB) welcomed some 100 members to the 19<sup>th</sup> AGM of LEGLAG. This was a members only meeting, with one or two specially invited guests, with no Press in attendance. He thanked them warmly for their attendance.

2) Approval of Leglag AGM Minutes for 2011.

KB requested the approval of the Minutes of the AGM for 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2011. This was proposed by Mrs. Williams, seconded by: Mrs. D. Hodgson Wright and agreed by a show of hands from members present.

3) Matters Arising from the AGM Minutes – None.

4) Chairman's Statement:

KB told the Members that our new website had been set up by Mr. Dave Mullins – and asked the members to take the opportunity to look at all the information it contained at [www.leglag.co.uk](http://www.leglag.co.uk). KB stated that we owed a great debt to our previous webmaster, Mr. Jeremy Davis, who created our first website and managed it for many years, and he has now handed on the torch to Mr. Mullins. We are very grateful to Mr. Mullins for all the work that this has entailed. It is now the responsibility of the Committee to see that the website is kept up-to-date.

Mr. Jeremy Davis asked if we could reinstall on our website the picture showing people walking across the land known as “SD2” – part of the land under threat – and part of the Cheltenham Circular Walk. (Later – the Committee is organising this).

KB told the meeting that Mrs. Angela Rimmer, who had done much work for us on the publicity front and introduced us to Dave Mullins as our webmaster, has now moved to Devon, and therefore has resigned from the Committee. We thank her very much for all her work on our behalf. Councillor Klara Sudbury has also resigned from the Committee due to pressure of her workload with both Borough and County Councillor duties.

To replace these two losses, Mr. Ian Bickerton, who is also a Cheltenham Borough Councillor, and had been a planning advisor to the Committee, has joined the full Committee. We have also asked Dr. Elizabeth

Pimley, who is a Dr. of Ecology and a keen supporter of LEGLAG to join the Committee. KB stated we would be asking for their appointments to be confirmed shortly.

Whilst on the subject of Councillors, KB mentioned that Mr. Robin MacDonald who was for many years the LEGLAG Treasurer is retiring from the Borough Council this year. LEGLAG expressed their thanks to him for the work he did for LEGLAG in that capacity. KB mentioned that our two most recent Committee Members may both be on the Council after May, 2012, as Dr. Pimley is standing to represent Leckhampton in the coming local elections.

5) Treasurer's Report: Mr. Philip Lee. (PL)

PL stated that at 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2011, LEGLAG had £2,636 in the Bank.

Membership subscriptions for the year were £1,396 and expenditure was £998.

A surplus of £536. The total in the Bank at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2011 was £3,170.

Leglag's income/expenditure over the past 2-3 years have been:

2009 - Income: £885 - Expenditure: £927

2010 - Income: £751 - Expenditure: £767.

This year to-date our income has been: £1,458.75, which included generous donations, but our expenditure has been £2,359.83. A deficit of £901.08, so far this year.

The reason for this is that Leglag has had to respond to the Joint Core Strategy Consultation, put forward by the Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester City Councils, and this has resulted in the expenditure of £1,000 to pay for the services of Richard Fordham & Co., who prepared a comprehensive report for Leglag to submit to the JCS on Projected Future Housing Requirements. These services would normally be charged at £1,000 per day. However, we have been promised that in the future, should we need their services at an Inquiry, we would only be charged for expenses.

Additionally, the Committee considered it necessary to have produced and circulate some 10,000 leaflets to the local community to explain the consequences of accepting the Joint Core Strategy Consultation as presented. This incurred approx £1,000 of expense.

The Committee has therefore decided that to help adjust the deficit, Leglag should increase its subscriptions to £4.00 for 3 years as from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2012, instead of the present £3. for 3 years. It was the Committee's view that a larger increase at this time, would deter some members from renewing their membership. Also, PL said if Leglag needs to raise further funds quickly to fund specialist help, for an Appeal in front of an Inspector, or similar, Leglag will request donations from its membership.

After a short discussion amongst the members, acceptance of the financial report was proposed by Mr. Mike Bell and seconded by Ian Bickerton, with the membership also accepting the report.

6) Secretary/Membership Secretary's Report: Margaret White (MW)

MW reported that the Committee had met officially 10 times during the year, plus many, many other short meetings, email and telephone exchanges - The Minutes of the official meetings are available to the membership.

During the year some 450 new members had been enrolled. Total membership is now 1111.

7) Chairman's Statement: KB

KB reminded everyone of our activities during the past year. At the beginning of the year we presented our Petition for some or all of the fields in the area to be designated a "Country Park" to both Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough Councils, and both Councils decided, as we expected, to refer this Petition to the Planning Officers who are engaged on creating the Joint Core Strategy – already mentioned. So far we have heard nothing more about this from the planners, but we shall remind them of this Petition when next Leglag meets with the planning team, which should be in the next few months.

Another initiative was to apply for Village Green status for Lott Meadow, next to Burrows' Field. Village Green status, if agreed, could provide permanent protection for this lovely field. We submitted this application to the County Council last August, but so far, despite numerous reminders, they have done absolutely nothing about it. Leglag will pursue.

(Later Note: - Gloucester C.C. responded after the AGM – placing our applications as joint 6<sup>th</sup> – on the list – (Sites under immediate threat of development coming higher on the list). KB will ask GCC whether we will be upgraded on the list when an application for development is placed. )

The next spur to action by us – and you – was the publication by Government of a "draft National Planning Policy Framework" which as originally drafted was a "developers' charter" and would have been disastrous if not changed. Leglag joined with various campaigners – including CPRE, the National Trust, the Friends of the Earth, and even the Daily Telegraph – to protest vigorously, and many of our members wrote letters too. Yesterday, 27<sup>th</sup> March, we saw the result of all the protests – the draft NPPF has been significantly changed and is now much less damaging than the draft version, though it is not perfect. So the protests have had some effect!

Finally, and most importantly, we have seen the publication in December of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) consultation paper. This was a horrible shock to us, as according to this paper, all the acceptable alternatives proposed involved building no fewer than 1650 houses on the fields we are trying to protect!. (more even than the developers propose!)

Leglag immediately set about preparing a response, and also asking all the local people to respond too, and many of them did with thoughtful and well argued responses. Leglag recruited two outside experts to prepare papers countering the JCS proposals, as well as presenting papers by various committee members and advisers on the many arguments against development here (including the consequences for traffic, recreation, wildlife, schooling flooding etc.) One of our two outside experts were Ray Woolmore, who also works for the Countryside Commission. He wrote a paper demonstrating that building such a large development here would damage the Cotswold AONB and was contrary to various existing planning policies. Our other outside expert was Dr. Richard Fordham, a national expert on housing need, who wrote a paper

demonstrating that the JCS planners had considerably over-estimated the number of houses that needed to be built in the next twenty years. This paper was particularly important, because it was the housing numbers calculated by the JCS Officers that had led them to propose such a large development here.

Ray Woolmore, who lives in Cheltenham and is as keen as we are to preserve Cheltenham from excessive development, did not charge us anything for his work. We are very grateful to him. Richard Fordham, on the other hand, is a nationally known expert – who has indeed advised Gloucestershire County Council on housing needs in the recent past – and as such normally charges something like £1,000 per day for his services. As we are an environmental group, he charged us £1,000. This work must have taken him at least a week to prepare, and provides the bedrock of our response to the JCS, demonstrating that their estimate of housing needs not only could be challenged but was probably considerably too high.

We also discovered, fairly late on in the consultation period, that most people in Cheltenham were completely unaware of the consultation or of its importance. We, therefore, decided to prepare a leaflet to tell the general public, and arranged for it to be distributed over large areas of Cheltenham, so as to boost the public response to the consultation. This again, as mentioned by our Treasurer, involved us in considerable expense., but we decided that this was the time to spend the money we had accumulated over the years from our membership subscriptions.

Meanwhile, we organised a public protest meeting about the JCS proposals, at which both Jonathon Porritt and Martin Horwood spoke eloquently to a packed audience at Leckhampton Primary School – so eloquently that the collection afterwards raised nearly £400. That and a couple of generous donations have helped to restore our funds, which is as well, as we may have further expenditure later this year, or early next year.

We are now awaiting with great interest the outcome of the consultation and will arrange to talk to the JCS Officers about this in the next few months.

Recently, the Committee decided to attend the “Neighbourhood Forum” that has been set up by Ally Kennedy, of Curtin & Co., Agents for the Developers, who wish to build some 1300 houses on our Leckhampton green fields. Originally, we decided not to attend this Forum, as we had made it clear that we are totally opposed to the whole idea. However, on advice from various people, it was felt Leglag should attend, to show at least a willingness to listen to other local views, but without withdrawing our stance of total opposition. On attendance at the Forum we were pleased to find that most of the local people on the Forum were opposed to the development.

At the same time, one of our Committee members, Ian Bickerton, has arrange for Leckhampton and Shurdington Parish Councils to set up their own Neighbourhood Forum to discuss their vision – and the vision of local people – for the future of the land. This Forum is being set up in the spirit of the Government’s call for “Localism” and once it is set up and if we are asked to join it, we have decided that we shall join the Forum and leave the Agents’ Forum.

The foregoing completes my report on Leglag’s activities for the last year. The Developers have stated that they intend to submit an outline Planning Application for their proposed development this Summer. If they

do – in fact, whenever they do – we shall oppose it and ask all of you to write and express your objections as well. We expect Cheltenham Borough Council to turn down this application, which is totally contrary to the existing Local Plan. Indeed Cheltenham Borough Councillors, when they approved the JCS Consultation paper for publication, unanimously voted against the JCS proposed housing figures, so expressing support for us. The likely consequence will be an Appeal by the Developers, leading to a Public Inquiry some time next year, i.e. in 2013. So our main efforts later this year will probably be preparing our case for this Inquiry.

We may need to carry out another local traffic survey, because we do not necessarily trust the developers' information/figures on traffic. If there are any people here this evening, who would come forward to help with such a survey, please leave your details with one of the committee members.

Talking about volunteers, may I ask you who have a little time to consider volunteering in other ways to help our committee. It is important for societies such as ours to have a steady supply of new blood and new ideas. Please do come forward.

8) Election of New Committee Members:

Ian Bickerton:  
Proposer: Margaret White  
Seconder: Martin Williams  
Agreement from all present:

Dr. Elizabeth Pimley:  
Proposer: Gerry Potter  
Seconder: Martin Horwood  
Agreement from all present:

MW advised the membership that Ian had previously been on the committee, subsequently became an adviser and is now back with us. He is also a Borough Councillor and will be on our side on local issues.

Elizabeth Pimley – a dedicated Ecologist – passionate about our local fields and hedgerows, and a great Leglag supporter – is also standing for election as a Borough Councillor.

Look out for Elizabeth's notes later in the year, when we will advise you about further bat watches across our fields that she will be organising.

9) Re-election of other Committee Members

MW asked for the election of other Committee Members to be confirmed by those attending. Kit Braunholtz; Gerry Potter, Anne Davis, Vivienne Matthews, Philip Lee and Margaret White were unanimously reappointed.

10) Constitutional Changes:

i) KB asked that the petty cash be amended to allow £50 to be transferred from the bank account instead of £10 as shown in the Constitution – to meet current needs. This enables the Treasurer to reimburse small expenditure in a simple way.

Proposed by: Kit Brauhnoltz:  
Seconded by: Dee Hodgson-Wright  
Agreed by meeting.

ii) KB advised that the Auditor had requested that Leglag indicate what would happen to any funds in the unlikely event of Leglag's closure. The membership was asked to agree that in this event, any outstanding funds, after payment to any of its creditors will be passed on to the local branch of the CPRE, or the Gloucestershire CPRE/National CPRE

Proposed by: Margaret White  
Seconded by: Gerry Potter  
Agreed by a show of hands of membership.

11) Martin Horwood.

Martin Horwood spoke for a few moments about the last 12 months – the demise of the RSS (Regional Spatial Strategy) - and now the new Localism Bill and the announcement on the previous day of the revised NPPF.

He spoke about the current building application likely to come forward in the Summer and the prospect of a battle at the Appeal Stage. He will be supporting Leglag and asked the membership to take part in any action that is requested by Leglag.

MH reminded the meeting of the clauses shortly to be in the new legislation which should enable Leglag to fight even harder for the protection of our local fields.

The revised (50 page document) and now in force National Planning Policy Framework, has been dramatically altered from the draft edition, although the clause on sustainable development has not been removed. (The changes were brought about owing to the nationwide objections led by CPRE, FOE, RSPB, Green Peace, plus many others and even the Daily Telegraph, to the original draft NPPF which concentrated on the vision that economic growth was tied in with planning matters. )

The NPPF allows local planning authorities twelve months as from 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2012, to put forward their local proposals, before developers are allowed to push forward their own development plans. However, we subsequently learnt that it could be another six months before all the details of the revised NPPF are known. This will cause much concern.

The draft document allowed a default clause, which in the face of a delay or insufficient progress from local authorities in their planning programmes, would have given developers the right to build, this clause has now been rescinded.

Many changes to the original document are most helpful, but not everything has gone our way.

There followed a short interval for people to mingle and look at our notice boards.

12) Talk by Mr. Charlie Watson – Chairman of CPRE of Gloucestershire.

KB introduced CW who has been known to him for very many years. CW was involved for many years in planning and is now Chairman of Gloucestershire CPRE (**Campaign for the Protection of Rural England**)

CW spoke for 20 mins about CPRE, which was founded in the 1920's but at that time it was "**The Council for the Preservation of Rural England**" and over the years has done a tremendous amount to influence the UK planning regulations. In fact it was with the efforts of CPRE, that the planning laws of 1947 came into being which have very much protected/preserved our open spaces across the UK. The change in name and logo came about owing to the realisation over the years, that change is inevitable.

Led by the CPRE – such bodies as National Parks, AONB's, Green Belt areas have been set up.

CPRE were also highly critical of the original draft NPPF – and their influence with many other bodies' led to the new NPPF – which is now in force.

CW went on to outline the main points of the new NPPF - As previously mentioned, some in our favour – but others which could cause us concern. Unfortunately, CW indicated that some of the "devil is in the detail" and may not be known for up to six months. In the meantime, again as mentioned above by MH – Councils have 12 months to have their own local plans in being. Not an ideal situation, when much of the detail will not be known for six months of that time.

CW did feel that LEGLAG should develop a vision (concept) for the land under threat.

Adrian Phillips – of AONB - said the historical aspects of our area, might well be helpful in our efforts to safeguard the Leckhampton White Land. However, it is unlikely that because land is close to the AONB that that would protect the land.

CW answered some questions from the membership.

The meeting closed at 10.00 p.m. with thanks extended by the Chairman to our Speaker and to members for their attendance.