

# LECKHAMPTON GREEN LAND ACTION GROUP

Message from Kit Braunholtz  
Chairman of Leglag

July 2009

This note is being issued now instead of a full newsletter. We had intended to distribute a full newsletter at this time, to tell you about the Government's decision on the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (the SWRSS), but as the Government has now deferred this until the Autumn (probably), we think it is important to brief you on the current situation, and tell you what we (your committee) have done and what we would like you to do, in this unprecedented and critical situation. A full newsletter will be sent to you when the "final" version of the SWRSS is issued by the Government, probably early in the autumn. (The "final" version is subject to legal challenge, so may not be truly final.)

As you may remember from our last report on the planning situation, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, had decided that because of the unprecedented number of objections to her proposals issued last July, it would take longer than originally expected to consider all the objections, and she said she would issue her final version of the SWRSS at the end of June. But by the end of June Ms Blears had been replaced by John Denham and also another RSS (for the East) had been successfully challenged in a judicial review. The judge in that case found that insufficient consideration had been given to finding alternatives to some environmentally damaging proposals in that RSS, and this was contrary to EU law! This finding is however still subject to appeal, and the new S. of S. John Denham understandably wishes to see how this plays out in the courts, and what effect, if any, these arguments might have on the SWRSS, so has deferred issuing the SWRSS for the present. {A cynical view might be that he is trying to kick this hot political football into the long grass - but we couldn't possibly comment!}. LEGLAG is of course very much in favour of this delay, since according to the current Tewkesbury Local Development Plan, no planning permission can be granted on the land we are trying to protect until development here has been approved by the SWRSS and the whole development in our area has been jointly considered by all the relevant Local Authorities. With a little bit of luck, the SWRSS can be effectively deferred until after the next General Election, when a **possible /probable** new Government may abandon the whole RSS concept altogether (The Conservative spokesman for Local Government has pledged to do that, which would be good news, though much would depend on what it was to be replaced by!)

In the light of this situation it is clear that the best course for LEGLAG to pursue is to apply the maximum pressure on the Government to postpone or greatly modify the final SWRSS, because if it were to become effective in its present state, or with only slight modification, our cause would be almost hopeless. But LEGLAG is only a small and local group in an area where no Labour MP is likely to be elected in the foreseeable future anyway, so what pressure can we effectively apply? The answer that we have for some time been hoping for, is to join forces with other like-minded groups all over the South West Region. Indeed, we urged CPRE to take the lead in forming such an Alliance; and (possibly coincidentally) such an alliance, based mainly around Bristol, has emerged in the last few months, with about 30 local campaign groups similar to us, ranging as far as Poole in the South East and Cornwall in the South West.

This grouping has been helped to form with support from CPRE, Friends Of the Earth, and other campaigning organizations, and they include some very professional PR people, who have produced an excellent video and a web site and other essential campaigning tools.

This alliance is called **“Save Our Green Spaces”** and has issued a manifesto whose main points are that:- (A) the projected housing numbers should be reduced to a sustainable and economically justifiable level; (B) that local authorities should be able to determine their own housing requirement, not have it imposed from Westminster; and (C) that Greenfield development should only be allowed where no Brownfield development was feasible. LEGLAG has no difficulty in signing up to these demands!

Some of our members have queried whether we are right to join forces with other groups, eg **“Save The Countryside”** whose main concern is to save other pieces of land in the Cheltenham area, when we might eventually be in contention with them over which piece of land is to be developed first! But for the moment at least we are in complete agreement with them that the projected demand for houses in the SWRSS is totally unrealistic and must be reduced; moreover, people from “Save The Countryside” have been very supportive of us in our efforts to save SD2. We think much more is to be gained by working with other like-minded groups than by arguing unnecessarily about whose bit of land is most precious - that argument can wait until it is necessary, and maybe it never will be! But we have not lost sight of our primary objective, which is still and always will be to preserve the valuable green fields of Leckhampton - and some in Shurdington too - **from** inappropriate large scale development. It is just that at this moment, supporting “Save our Green Spaces” is the best way to do this!

Our main action so far in support of “Save our Green Spaces” has been to persuade members of the public to sign a card expressing their support with the manifesto objectives just described above; we collected nearly 1000 signed cards, and have sent them off to John Denham. We also took advantage of the County Council elections to ask all the candidates in our area (Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Districts) whether they supported our aims, and nearly all the successful candidates signed up: This could be very useful when it comes to getting influential support for our views.

That’s what we have done so far: Now here’s what we would like YOU to do! Together with this briefing note, you should be getting cards just like the ones we have already sent. If each of you can persuade 2/3 of your friends and/or neighbours to sign the cards, tear off the bottom part of the leaflet and give them back to you, and then you give your signed cards back to one of us, we can fairly painlessly collect another batch of 1000 cards to dump on John Denham’s desk! All part of keeping up the pressure ....

If you can’t get all the cards signed, please give them back to us anyway - they cost us 6p each!\*

Also please try to get a couple of friends to join LEGLAG; membership forms available on the web site.

Kit Brauhnoltz (Chairman)

\*Please return cards to

Margaret White, 11 Arden Road  
or to Gerry Potter, 18 Brizen Lane  
or to Anne Davis, 127 Church Road