



LECKHAMPTON

GREEN LAND

ACTION GROUP

NEWSLETTER 30

FEBRUARY 2008

Annual General Meeting – 19 March @ 7-45p.m.

Planning Report for 2008 AGM by Kit Braunholtz

Regional Spatial Strategy

The Bad News The Panel of Inspectors who have been considering the draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (the draft RSS) issued their report on January 10th. They recommended modifying the draft RSS by increasing the rate of house-building for the whole region to 28,000 dwellings p.a. (instead of 23,000 in the draft RSS or 20,000 – the current building rate – which we had advocated). This has naturally had the consequence of increasing the proposed size and number of housing developments all over the region. For the land we are trying to protect, the former Leckhampton White Land, they propose a total of about 950 houses. (they actually give a figure of 1300 dwellings, but this would include about 350 houses at the M&G sports ground in Badgeworth but near Up Hatherley).

The Silver Lining Despite this bad news, there are some crumbs of comfort in the situation. First of all, this report is not the end of the story. The next step is for the Government to consider the Panel's report and either accept it or make its own modifications. Either way, there is then a further 12 week consultation period - presumably this Summer – for further comment and objections, during which we can argue our case for a much lower rate of building. The RSS will then be finalized by the Government, probably during the Autumn, and will then become the overall plan to which Local Development Frameworks (local plans) will have to conform.

Even if the modifications suggested by the Panel report are confirmed by the Government without any further modification, there are features in it which we can use to our advantage. Although the Inspectors reject Green Belt status for our land in their paragraphs dealing with Cheltenham South (\$4.3.30 – 4.3.35, pp 96,97), and they write “we are also content, from our own inspection of the area, that there is scope for sustainable development here without harm to the AONB, the outlook from Leckhampton Hill or to the local environment”, they also write “We emphasize that we do not make a site specific allocation here ... , rather we identify the land only as a broad area of search, which does not imply that all of it should be developed for housing. With a positive approach to the planning of the area, there is in the Panel's view ample scope to provide for high standards of public amenity and high quality development including family homes, and to provide improved community facilities and public transport. In our estimation it should be possible to provide about 1300 houses in the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Council's areas [shown elsewhere as 600 and 700 respectively] while meeting these objectives.” It is also stated that joint working by Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Councils will be necessary.

How does this help us? Well, in the first place, the requirement for Cheltenham and Tewkesbury to work together, and also together with the prospective developers, to form some sort of master plan for the area, is bound to slow things down and delay the start to any development. There should also be consultation with interested parties such as LEGLAG, so we will have some influence on what happens. It should also be noted that the number of houses allocated for the Cheltenham part of the site would probably require less than a quarter of the total area, so the most critical parts of the site could remain protected.

Finally, we can derive comfort of a sort from the fact that we have come out of this exercise less damaged than most areas of Gloucestershire or indeed the whole South West. That this is so is undoubtedly due to our strong and persistent arguments, and especially to the massive public support and letter writing by LEGLAG members and others, for which LEGLAG is very grateful.

What will Tewkesbury and Cheltenham Do? It is too early to say how Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Councils will react. I expect that both Councils will wait to see whether the Secretary of State accepts the

Panel's recommendations. If she does, they may well object to the scale of housing imposed on the borders of Cheltenham in Tewkesbury, and if so we can make common cause with them

Meanwhile Tewkesbury will be facing a lot of appeals against non-determination by various developers, and will probably give way in some. But the case for the prospective developers on our land seems to me likely to have to wait until the final version of the RSS is known. The developers are appealing against the judgement last April (in the Wimpey case) that struck their land out of the Tewkesbury Plan, but even if they win I don't think they will get a determination until the RSS is finalized.

What should LEGLAG do? If the final RSS confirms anything like the

projected rate of house-building that the Panel has adopted, it seems to me inevitable that some development on our land will be forced on the Local Authorities. So our only hope is to challenge the assumptions that have led the Panel to their conclusion about the appropriate rate of house-building over the next twenty years. These assumptions are in fact very simple. They assume that population growth will continue according to present trends. That means that the population is expected to rise by about 750,000 from the present roughly 5 million. This increase will nearly all be due to immigration, largely fuelled by economic growth (anticipated at 2.8% p.a.) but also by retirement to this region. The other factor which affects the number of houses needed is the expected average household size, which has been decreasing steadily. If this decrease is assumed to continue, which is what the statisticians do assume in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, the inevitable conclusion is indeed that house building must be accelerated to cater for both the increase in population and the extra number of houses per person.

One possible flaw in this argument is the assumption that household size will continue to decrease. If it is true – as the draft RSS states – that Climate Change is the biggest challenge that our society faces – then surely long before the twenty years of the plan are completed, our government will be forced to take serious measures to reduce our carbon footprint. I believe that the actions they will need to take will be quite inconsistent with current forecasts of continued economic growth and massive house building. We should therefore repeat our argument that forecasting in this manner is inconsistent with government policy to tackle climate change. Perhaps we can get extra data from CPRE or Friends of the Earth researchers to bolster this argument with more facts and figures, in an attempt to convince the Government planners.

What else is happening . There will probably be a campaign organized in Cheltenham to oppose the massive developments proposed by the Panel. So long as this campaign is non-political and concentrates on opposing the total housing numbers rather than specific areas (which would be bound to be divisive) LEGLAG should support it.

This report is being written over a month before the AGM. We hope to report any further developments at the meeting, and there will be a discussion afterwards when members' views and questions will be welcome. Questions and comments are also welcome in advance to me at planning@LEGLAG.org.uk.

Lorries in Church Road.

Some lorries are still using the narrow part of Church Road as a short cut. This is very dangerous. The only lorries that are allowed are those needing access to houses in Church road.

Please help us to reduce the menace by reporting infringements to Gloucester County Council's Lorry Watch:

Phone Tony Freeman 01452 426209

or Email tony.freeman@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Tell him as much as you can about :

- Date and time of the incident
- Full registration number
- Company name
- Description of the vehicle (e.g. 'large white articulated van, ten wheels /5 axles')
- Direction of travel (NE or SW)
- Details of any transgression (e.g. 'vehicle drove on pavement outside number xx')

Memorial to Don Horwood

The oak seat memorial to Don Horwood has now been erected in Burrows field, just outside the car park and facing across the sports ground towards Lott meadow. We have not yet had a dedication ceremony, but hope to arrange one in the near future.

Highlights from Wildlife Sightings in the LEGLAG area for the last 6 months of 2007

The LEGLAG area continues to be extremely rich in wildlife and provide a habitat for the odd rarity. A **Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker** (Red Listed) was sighted during a British Trust for Ornithology survey carried out in November. The highlights of the last 6 months of 2007 are as follows :

JULY

A **Heron** appeared flying low over Lotts/Common Meadow plus a **Buzzard** over Kidnappers Lane. A large flock of **Stock Doves** was seen over the smallholdings next to the A46, and a large number of **House Martins** around the pond in Lotts/Common Meadow.

AUGUST

A **Whitethroat** was seen in a hedge near Little Vatch. It seems highly likely that there are 2 separate pairs of **Little Owls**, the smallholdings providing a habitat for them.

SEPTEMBER

Chiff-Chaffs were heard, still singing in hedgerows near Cherringtons. A **Wren, Long-Tailed Tit, Bullfinch, Greenfinch** and **Chaffinch** were seen. (This range of finches, still resident, very encouraging).

OCTOBER

3 **Roe Deer** made a sudden appearance near Moat Cottage. A **Grey Wagtail** and a **Pied Wagtail** were seen in the pig field in Farm Lane. There was the dramatic appearance of a **Sparrowhawk** being chased off by a Crow over Little Vatch Orchard. A **Greater Spotted Woodpecker** appeared near Leckhampton Farm and 2 **Mistle Thrushes** near Lotts/Common Meadow. 2 small flocks of **Goldfinches** were seen, 1 near Leckhampton Farm, the other near Robinswood.

NOVEMBER

A good number of **Redwings** were seen, also, an overwintering. **Blackcap** near Cherringtons.

DECEMBER

A good range of species were present including: **Jackdaw, Dunnock, Song Thrush, House Sparrow, Collared Dove, Starling, Blackbird, Robin, Lesser Black Backed Gull, Fieldfare, Great Tit** and **Blue Tit**.

If more specific information is required on the wildlife seen, please contact me.

My thanks to those people who have contributed over this period, especially Tony and Frances Meredith. If anyone has any information on wildlife seen in the LEGLAG and surrounding area, could they please contact me.

(Steve Gladstone)

Membership.

Please check the bottom line of the address label on this newsletter – it gives the expiry date of your membership (4digits for the year followed by 2 for the month, Renewals cost £1 for one year or £5 for six years.

(Don Wilson)

LEGLAG committee

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