



Leckhampton Green Land Action Group

Newsletter 34, September 2010

Introduction

Welcome to the latest edition of the LEGLAG Newsletter, bringing you up to date on developments over the last six months. It has again been a very busy time for committee members, with rapid changes in procedures which may affect the chances of development on our green fields.

Planning Report: All Change!

As we predicted in the last Newsletter, the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (the SWRSS) is now dead, and planners need no longer take any notice of the draft RSS that until recently had hung over their heads like the sword of Damocles. This does not mean that all the work that went into creating the RSS is totally wasted, because studies that were done for the RSS may still be valid and useful for future planning, but the housing figures that the draft RSS had demanded of each local authority are now dead and buried, thank goodness! This is because the Coalition Government has decided to replace “top down” planning by “bottom up” planning. This is known as “localism” and is expected to be a key feature of the new Planning Bill (or Bills). It remains to be seen what will emerge from this new philosophy of asking neighbourhoods to tell the planners what they want, rather than the other way round.

At present the Civil Servants at the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) are trying to produce a Bill, or Bills, embracing this idea by October or November this year – we think delays can be expected, but the Coalition Government hopes to have the Bills enacted into Law some time next Spring. LEGLAG has joined other groups, with similar concerns to ours – fellow members of SOGS (Save Our Green Spaces) - to influence these Bills by putting various points that we think are important to Ministers and top Civil Servants. This has mainly been done by email, but a delegation of five SOGS members recently spent over an hour talking to the Chief Planning Officer at the DCLG about things we thought ought or ought not to be in the Bill, and felt he had taken their messages on board.

Of course, we are not alone in trying to influence the people at DCLG. We know that CPRE (the Campaign to Protect Rural England - we are in touch with senior members of their planning team) is very active in this area; but so too are the housebuilders and developers and their professional lobbyists. It will be interesting to see which group of lobbyists has the most clout – we know which group has the most money!

Local Consequences of the New Planning Regime

One of the first consequences of the changes discussed above was that the Planning Inquiry into the application to build 350 houses and a Park-and-Ride at Brizen Farm has been cancelled; the developers, Newbridge Construction, have withdrawn their application. Presumably they thought that without the housing allocation of the SWRSS to support their case, they stood no chance of winning planning approval in the Green Belt – we certainly thought so! Meanwhile, judging from the many reports from our members of surveying activity in the area, we suspect that Bovis and Barratts are getting together to put in a joint application to build on parts of the “Green Land” (formerly “White Land”). If they do, LEGLAG will of course oppose it vigorously, as we have before.

But LEGLAG should not merely await development proposals and put in our objections, important though that is. At this crucial time of change your Committee thinks that LEGLAG should take a proactive stance. This is in fact exactly the right moment for us to promote as hard as we can our long-term aim of getting “Country Park” status for the Green Land, possibly including also some of the land at Brizen Farm, and/or at Burleyfield Lakes. We must now put forward a vision for the future that is not, perhaps, achievable in the next five years, but which we can now move towards, and hopefully achieve within ten years!

Campaign for “Leckhampton Country Park”

LEGLAG launched its petition for a “Country Park” at the “Paws in the Park” event in Burrows Field on August 1st. We want this “Country Park” to include at least the “Leckhampton Green Land” that we are particularly trying to save, formerly called the “Leckhampton White Land”. All this land was originally in Leckhampton, so we hope our friends and allies in Shurdington, who have also been campaigning vigorously to stop the proposed developments at Farm Lane and at Brizen Farm will not be too offended that we have proposed the name “Leckhampton Country Park” for the Country Park that we hope eventually will be created, even though we know that part of it will be in Shurdington.

The campaign will have two phases. In phase one, we shall be trying to get protection for the land we want to save – the Leckhampton Green Land – by getting it named as a “Site of Special Community Interest” (SSCI) or perhaps “Site of Special Community Value” (SSCV), because we understand that the forthcoming Planning Bill will contain a clause allowing such sites to be designated, and this will presumably give a strong degree of protection from future attempts to build too many houses on or near the SSCI.

The second Phase will be to convert the SSCI into a Country Park, but this may take longer, because the big landowners in the area will probably object to losing all hope of future development gain - more about this later.

What You Can Do Now

We are now in Phase One of our Campaign, to achieve SSCI or SSCV status, as explained above. Because of the new Planning Bills expected out in a few months, this decision to grant SSCI or SSCV status will NOT be made in Whitehall, but will be made locally, presumably by the two local Borough Councils, and we should probably first put pressure on the Planners who are currently engaged in producing the Joint Core Strategy (the JCS). This will be done by:

1. Direct communication with Council Planners. (ongoing)
2. A Petition to the two local Councils. (already launched)
3. A Public Meeting to launch our campaign. (29 Sept.)
4. A Walk across some of the fields under threat. (26 Sept.)
5. Lobbying Councillors. (ongoing)
6. Recruiting more LEGLAG members. (ongoing)

Petitioning and recruiting members

You will find a **Petition Sheet** with your newsletter. Please sign it and also try and fill the 13 columns by getting your friends, family and neighbours to do the same (but no one should sign more than once). Whilst doing this, urge them to join LEGLAG, explaining to them that **NOW** is the crucial time when their membership may tip the balance in our favour (**and it only costs three pounds for three years**).

We are aiming for over 5000 signatures on the petition forms, and over 500 new members. These ambitious targets can easily be achieved if every member recruits one new member and four signatures in addition to his own.

(LEGLAG membership forms can be obtained by printing off the appropriate part of the LEGLAG web site www.leglag.org.uk).

Completed petition sheets and membership application forms should be returned to Margaret White at 11 Arden Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, GL53 0HG. tel 523668

Public Meeting

There will be a **Public Meeting at Leckhampton Primary School in Hall Road on Wednesday 29 September starting at 7:30pm** at which the full campaign will be launched and we shall ask for the support of the public to be demonstrated by a show of hands. The main speaker will be Cheltenham's MP Martin Horwood, whose father was one of the founding members of LEGLAG, and other speakers will include Tracey Crews, who is one of the Senior Planners working on the Joint Core Strategy for both Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. We will also invite all local Councillors to attend and speak briefly about our campaign if they wish, and we shall set aside some time for audience participation. We hope to hold the vote in support of (or against) our campaign at about 9.30pm. The hall is likely to be full, so turn up early to get a seat!

Join the Annual LEGLAG walk

Join us for the first "**ANNUAL LEGLAG WALK**" on Sunday 26th September, commencing at 2.30pm from Burrows Field car park.

This will be an easy circular country walk of approximately 2 miles, and it may take about 2 hours to get around because there are lots of unavoidable stiles, also some fields may have cows or horses in them; and if it has been wet, it will be muddy in places. We hope this will be a fun family event - all children, dogs and well-behaved Councillors are welcome! There will be quizzes and a refreshment break about halfway round - tea and biscuits will be supplied by our LEGLAG treasurer.

During this walk we shall be crossing most of the fields under threat from developers, and enjoying the splendid views from many of them towards Leckhampton and Shurdington hills - bring your cameras! For further details on the walk please contact either Vivienne Matthews on 239122 or Anne Davis on 525939.

Lobbying Councillors

We shall probably ask you to write letters to Councillors when the time for decision on the JCS comes – we will let you know! It helps if you are on our email address list, so please register if you can with our hard working secretary Margaret White at secretary@leglag.org.uk. Meanwhile, spread the word at every opportunity – this is a time when community feeling can really make a difference!

Wildlife Sightings Steve Gladstone

Unfortunately, due to very tight deadlines for this newsletter, it has not been possible to bring you the wildlife sightings for the past few months. We will aim to provide these in our next issue.

We also gratefully acknowledge the support of various members who assist us from time to time on specific matters, and particularly thank Barbara Kelly who is our newsletter compiler.