

## **Report on Public Meeting held on 29th September at Leckhampton Primary School**

**Kit Braunholtz**, Chairman of LEGLAG, opened the meeting by explaining that since 1993, LEGLAG had been campaigning to save the green fields around Cheltenham, previously known as Leckhampton White Land from large scale development.

The purpose of the present meeting was to put before those present a motion endorsing the aims of creating a Country Park, based on the Leckhampton White Land.

The Government will bring new planning laws before Parliament in November of this year. The objective is that the local people should decide when and where development should take place. Martin Horwood, MP for Cheltenham, had instigated the inclusion in the proposed new law, a clause which would give Local Councils the ability to give a special designation to an area of special interest/value to the local community - similar to the present SSSI's (Sites of Special Scientific Interest).

**Tracey Crews**, Spatial Planning Manager for Cheltenham and Tewkesbury, confirmed that the Regional Spatial Strategy had now been revoked, although not abolished until the new Bill has been passed. But plans for building to accommodate needs would still be required.

Tewkesbury and Cheltenham Councils objected to the RSS, and do not wish to go ahead with those projections, especially as the RSS was based on economic growth, (of about 3%) and now there is the possibility of a double dip recession - there is no likelihood of the growth previously forecast. Cheltenham and Tewkesbury are working together now within Gloucestershire.

There is a question mark as to what the requirements are for the future, and the Councils are working to update projected requirements with the GCC Research Team. Stakeholders (groups like LEGLAG, Statutory Groups, Environmental Groups and public consultations) were also being consulted.

**Klara Sudbury**, County and Borough Councillor, and a committee member of LEGLAG said that now we have a coalition government which is made up of the same parties local councillors are from, there is nowhere for politicians to hide. The campaign for Country Park status is of its time and should be supported.

The Campaign to protect Leckhampton's fields was consistent with the approach of the Borough Council which wants to make sure there is adequate housing provision to meet local need whilst also protecting green field sites. Protecting fields means that developers have to look to develop brown field sites first, to regenerate run down urban areas which is beneficial to the town.

It is important that people get involved again and sign the petition for the Leckhampton Country Park, fill out the questionnaires provided, and join LEGLAG.

**Alistair Cameron**, former Parliamentary Candidate for Tewkesbury, spoke about the flooding experienced in 2007. The RSS gave no real answers to the situation, and this must be considered along with the effects of climate change and he said that this must be dealt with, along with resources for supporting events of that kind.

**Kit Braunholtz** said that David Booth, who led the Landscape Architecture Students at Gloucestershire University was working with his students around the Leckhampton White Land, as part of their University Degree project, to put forward various proposals.

**David Booth** said that will be looking at approximately 75 hectares - which would include playing fields, allotments, hedgerows, small holdings, exercise areas, new road links, etc. etc. Consideration would be given for its use by the young and not so young. Members of the LEGLAG committee would have the opportunity to see their work around Christmas time. There is a website on Country Parks, which could be visited.

**Martin King** - gave a word of caution on the definition of "Country Park". It must be demonstrated as to why it was over and above an AONB.

**Martin Horwood, MP** said that there are 3,500 people on the waiting list for homes and they need to be looked after, but developers do not have these people in mind. However, 3,500 people don't need 15,000 new houses, which was approximately the figure previously calculated as being required in this area by the RSS. What was needed was for the councils to build more social housing for rental. There was a lot of evidence that we needed to keep our local green spaces not just for the physical health of the population, but also for the mental health of everyone, and this was being quoted by the group, MIND. In the past, in almost every case the Inspectors at Planning Enquiries have said that the Leckhampton White land area is not a suitable place to build, because of traffic, pollution and to add more houses would be unsustainable.

With the change to a coalition Government, we are now on the offensive and returning power back to communities. The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) was originally for use within the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), but the information obtained is now being used by the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Councils. So now is the time to lobby Councils on things that you want to see happen in your area.

A while ago, I was writing a Lib/Dem policy planning document, and because large building plans is a big issue here, and people are against it, I included within the paper, the suggestion of having a site of special value /interest to the local communities, which could be included, similar to the present SSSI's - sites of special scientific interest. Greg Clarke is very supportive of this - and said did we know of a possible "pilot site"?

We need to keep up public pressure for this on environmental grounds, and for Leckhampton White Land, there is a long-standing history of public usage. The work that David Booth and his students are doing, could be enormously helpful, showing that the Country Park is not a sterile project, but the idea that LEGLAG has been supporting - a place of local food production, education aspects, exercise park, sculpture trail and better still ensure that it remains environmentally friendly for decades to come.

Now is the time to fight off the next developer and the next developer and improve the environment in which we live.

Martin Horwood answered a few questions and finally, the Chairman put the following Motion to the Meeting -

**"This Meeting - consisting of people who care about the future of Leckhampton, urges both Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough Councils to take whatever steps are necessary, as soon as possible, with the aim of creating a Country Park, based on the Leckhampton Green Land".**

The Motion was passed unanimously by the Meeting.