

## SOGS (Save Our Green Spaces) Conference at Portishead Sunday Dec 1

The First National conference of groups from across the country campaigning to save our green spaces was addressed by Shaun Spiers, Chief Exec of CPRE, Chris Skidmore (Cons, Chair of the All-Party group of MPs to save the green belt) and (after we'd left) Jacob Rees-Mogg (Cons).

(Ron Morton, organiser, recommended local groups make a video for YouTube)

Shaun Spiers: CPRE findings show developers almost always win over "localism", with inflated housing numbers dictating decisions. CPRE says there are one & a half million brownfield units but little precedence is given to these; planning inspectorate politicised, with planning process skewed in favour of building on greenfield sites. Big builders' annual reports all stress increasing profit margins. Reinststate sequential preferences for 1. refurbishing existing stock, then 2. for affordable local needs. Remove VAT on refurb/brownfld & introduce it for spec. bldg with infrastructure/pollution tax for building on greenfields.

From the floor: Govt should remove Vat payable on brownfield development. Govt should have a state-run building programme giving precedence to brownfields, to housing need, to low-cost housing instead of pandering to developers' profit, building unnecessary luxury houses on countryside and allowing land-banking

Chris Skidmore (Cons, Chair of All-Party group to Save Greenbelt, won seat from Labour with big swing standing on Greenfield issue; 60 MPs in group):

Invited us to send him news of our local issues and requests for help:

[appggreenbelt@gmail.com](mailto:appggreenbelt@gmail.com)

(check email later). Said Planning Inspectors were acting like gods & stressed need to "incentivise" building on brownfields and prevent landbanking.

Some positive suggestions for groups:

- send joint letter about NPPF focussing on reform of a specific section
- go to MP's surgery asking him to put in a parliamentary question
- contact Eric Pickles' private secretary, Mr Boles e.g. on S.Spiers' proposals above
- take petition to parliament informing MP 2 weeks in advance to meet there
- ask MP if he's a member of/supports local greenfield group(s)
- argue your case convincingly (win the battle intellectually)

Discussion groups focussed on priority concerns

In order of importance these seemed to be:

- the need to form a strong nation-wide network/website forum/hub, offering help/info, sharing and collating experience/issues from individual groups and to invite groups to join in countrywide actions such as meeting MPs and asking them to
- coordinate meetings with MPs (as above per Chris Skidmore)
- organising a Day-of-the-Countryside event e.g. on Shakespeare's birthday
- forming more umbrella groups from existing local groups(number in brackets) (e.g. Berks(4), Cheshire(7), Devon(5), Essex(4), Gloucs(4) Herts(3), Kent (3) Leics(4), Yorks(4), Somerset(5), Staffs(3) W.Sussex (9)
- choosing battles wisely ie. the winnable/most important ones
- pressing for a Community Right of Planning Appeal to level the playing field, also a simplification of planning system. More openness/publicity from local authorities
- campaigning against land-banking - "use it or lose it"
- urging local Councils to create a brownfield-to-greenfield ratio for housing, giving clear preference to the former & to "affordables", making this a condition(with penalty); using housing available over shops in towns...

SOGS will produce an order of priority for the above.