

PRESS RELEASE
Save our Green Spaces www.saveourgreenspaces.org
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35,000 'NIMBYs' want a word with Hazel Blears' successor

Following the departure of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, groups across the South West are now calling for the scrapping of her most unpopular policy in this region, the South West Regional Spatial Strategy. The Strategy contains proposals for the construction of 500,000 new homes over the next 20 years, 250,000 of which are destined for the countryside, in large new urban extensions beloved by developers but imposed on unwilling councils and local communities.

Jo Haywood, spokesperson for the new coalition of South West action groups, Save our Green Spaces, (<http://www.saveourgreenspaces.org/>) says, "Back in October 2008, local people sent in 35,000 objections to the South West Regional Spatial Strategy but the reply was nothing but an acknowledgement of their comment. The response from one Government Minister was a speech in which those groups actively opposing the SWRSS were attacked as NIMBYs and local councils were urged to stand up to us. Are people who value the green spaces around their towns and cities 'NIMBYs'? Are the rugby players that stands to lose their pitch NIMBYs, and what about the farmer that will lose her family farm? Whatever you want to call us, there are tens of thousands of angry people from across the region, including local councilors, wanting a word with John Denham, Hazel Blears' replacement."

Georgie Bigg, trustee for the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), is supporting the Save our Green Spaces campaign, "Support groups are located across the South West from Cheltenham, to Bristol, to Swindon, to Truro, with over 30 active groups. All of them are up in arms about the lack of local consultation and the way that this Government is ignoring previous planning protections."

Ron Morton, of Shortwood Green Belt Campaign says "Our cities do not need unsustainable urban sprawl. Whilst we recognize the need for extra housing within the area, it is totally unacceptable to eat into the Green Belt which has the sole purpose of preventing such an occurrence. That's what it was set up for 50 years ago. What about the 6,000 empty homes in Bristol?"

Save our Green Spaces supporters are fighting for a reduction in the massive 500,000 houses proposed, a commitment to regenerating previously developed land first, for an emphasis on affordable homes and for local consultation on where development is required.

Jo Haywood continues, "Our groups are planning to deliver thousands of letters, emails and postcards to Hazel Blears' successor to show our increasing frustration at the Government's plan to push ahead with the Strategy against strong opposition. We intend to take our campaign direct to new minister, John Denham in Westminster. We want to be one of the first groups to meet with him and will be writing to ask for an early appointment."

There are many people in the South West who need green spaces; sports people, girl guides, wildlife enthusiasts, ramblers, to name a few. In some cases the loss of land to development will destroy their very livelihood.

Jill Britten, an organic farmer on Green Belt land, stands to lose the family farm, "We have put 40 years of our lives into this farm; planting trees, creating wildlife sites, running an organic dairy herd and now a beef suckler herd. What a travesty to lose all this."

Helen Wells of Cheltenham is concerned that the government is dictating massive urban extensions for Green Belt and green field land without any real understanding of the local consequences. "The flooding two years ago in this area, caused millions of pounds of damage and massive disruption to families for many months. Concreting over more of this land will simply increase the threat of flooding. We do need housing, but we need to focus on building homes where they are really needed and wanted for the good of the whole town and its population, rather than in places that maximise profits for the developers. For instance, in small village locations, near to schools and local facilities. We should also prioritise reuse of the many derelict sites to meet new housing needs."

Pip Sheard of Bristol Friends of the Earth says "The RSS represents an environmental disaster for Bristol. We cannot afford to lose any of the countryside which surrounds our city to development. It represents the resource for the next generation of farmers to produce local food, recreational space, sports facilities, security against flooding in urban areas and a place we can enjoy wildlife, landscapes, peace, fresh air and tranquillity. It is simply vital to the wellbeing, health and happiness of Bristol residents. We must protect the countryside by transforming our urban areas with higher housing densities using land more efficiently, mixed developments and better public transport."

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