

Leading light in countryside protection visits threatened hillfort



Left pic: Charles Green (on left: Joint Chair Oswestry CPRE), Shaun Spiers (centre: Chief Executive CPRE) and John Waine (on right: HOOOH) with green fields and hillfort views behind that would be obscured by housing.

Centre pic: Tim Malim of HOOOH (second from left) explains why Old Oswestry's landscape is as significant as the monument itself.

Right pic: From the top, visitors look out over the proposed housing site within the hillfort's south-eastern setting where many features of its multi-phase history are concentrated.

Deepening concerns over on-going plans to build by a Shropshire hillfort have prompted a visit by the head of a national campaigning body.

Shaun Spiers, Chief Executive of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), visited Old Oswestry hillfort this week (June 30) to speak to campaign group HOOOH and see the proposed location for the 117 houses.

Mr Spiers' visit follows Inspector Claire Sherratt's decision to keep the widely opposed site, known as OSW004, in Shropshire's SAMDev local plan. Her proposed modifications to the plan are open for public comment until July 13.

Mr Spiers was accompanied by colleagues from County CPRE branches including CPRE Shropshire president, Robin Thompson, chair Sarah Bury and vice chair Keith Ridland. Oswestry CPRE joint chairs, Charles Green and Dr Sally Whipple Green, also attended.

Mr Spiers, a long-standing supporter of HOOOH's campaign, said: "Old Oswestry Hillfort is a wonderful asset, the sort of treasure that any country or county should be celebrating and safeguarding. The hillfort is important in itself, but its importance is bound up with its setting and relationship to Oswestry. I cannot believe that it makes social or economic sense to build new housing estates at its foot, and I urge Shropshire Council to think again."

HOOOH adviser and heritage planning expert, Tim Malim, outlined planning points that campaigners believe should rule out development of OSW004 in the setting of the 3,000 year old Iron Age hillfort.

Mr Malim said: "At local plan stage, national planning policy (NPPF) requires local authorities to produce a positive strategy for conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, to sustain and enhance the significance of assets such as the hillfort. New development should make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness to support the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that our heritage brings.

"Shropshire Council has either failed to understand or is ignoring the spirit of this planning point by including OSW004 in SAMDev, so is clearly not implementing the NPPF correctly."

He continued: "In addition, the Inspector's modifications retain a scheme which is undeliverable without co-development of sites adjacent to the hillfort which are no longer on the SAMDev plan."

Afterwards, Mr Spiers headed south to Church Stretton to view another iconic Shropshire landmark threatened by development. Facing plans for almost 100 dwellings in its shadow, Caer Caradoc hill is a famed beauty spot which boasts an Iron Age hillfort and is said to be the site of Caradoc's last battle against the Roman Invaders in 50 AD.

Founded in 1926, CPRE is a charity that campaigns to protect, promote and enhance towns and countryside to make them better places to live, work and enjoy.

Mr Spiers is one of two leading figures in rural and heritage protection who will have visited Old Oswestry in the space of a week. Dr Mike Heyworth, director of the Council of British Archaeology, is due to meet HOOOH members for a tour on Monday (July 6).

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More on the Old Oswestry campaign here:

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Open letter from senior British academics here: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/1209>

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