

BUILDING RESENTMENT

IN MAY last year the Tories got a kicking in English council elections, losing 44 councils. Local Tory spokespersons blamed the results on Brexit irritation but, as *Eye* 1496 pointed out, Tory fortresses such as Tunbridge Wells, Guildford and the Cotswolds took a battering because voters were angry about local issues – often involving high-handed, disproportionate developments – and felt they weren't being listened to.

One Tory stronghold that went a greenish shade of orange was South Oxfordshire district council (SODC), where Lib Dems and Greens took 13 and six seats respectively, reducing the Tory group from 32 to nine.

Voter anger had focused on the Tories' plan to impose unmanageable new housing numbers. Some 100,000 homes are scheduled to be built in Oxfordshire by 2034 – four times more, claim objectors, than are needed to fill projected housing needs, with damaging effects on the green belt and the climate. SODC's share could be up to 33,000 houses, spread across the Oxford green belt, the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty and the countryside in between.

The new Lib Dem/Green regime declared that it wouldn't implement the local plan – and would try to work out a new, less damaging one. Not so fast, said housing and communities secretary Robert Jenrick. He first banned SODC from discussing changes to the existing plan, and now says if it doesn't submit to it he'll take away its planning powers and hand them to Tory Oxfordshire county council. So *that's* what they mean by "taking back control"! The standoff continues.

PRIVATE EYE: ROTTEN

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