

Horsham council refuses to protect its green spaces

THE HORSHAM Society's campaign to protect our green spaces by registering them as town greens was dealt a severe blow last week when Horsham District Council refused to voluntarily register five of the greens it owns.

Knowing that we were asking the council to adopt a new approach we carefully chose five greens which on any objective test are not suitable for development.

The main reason for refusing our request was that town greens are already protected under planning policies and that registration



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would offer no additional protection. This argument is fundamentally flawed.

Registration would provide the strongest possible protection against development precisely because it is covered by separate legislation and planning authorities cannot over-ride it.

In contrast, Horsham

council's planning policies offer very little protection and virtually none against the biggest culprit of all, the council itself.

To suggest that the council will act to protect greens flies in the face of experience. It was the council that tried to appropriate the green in Ramsey Close, Horsham for house building. Even after the planning application it was supporting was thrown out by members, the council continued to use public funds to obstruct the registration of the green.

A report to the council's asset management group

accepted that the five greens were valuable community assets and in one case – Crawley Road, Roffey – was potentially at risk of future development.

New Street was a good example of the urban green spaces the council seeks to protect. Hill's Farm recreation ground was said to warrant protection as a town green. Redkiln Way made a considerable contribution to softening the urban street scene. Pennybrook Green in Guildford Road was a visually important green on a major route into the town.

So why on earth, you might

ask, did the council refuse to protect these valuable assets in the simplest and most effective way through registration as town greens?

Look no further than the report itself which says that 'whilst the council owns these pieces of land arguably they are already protected' – Ramsey Close shows this to be untrue – '... [and] it [would] tie the hands of future administrations that may want to use the land for other purposes'.

So there you have it. The council will not protect our greens because it wants to keep open the option of

developing them. It is ironic that it turns out that the greatest risk to our urban landscape comes from those who are elected to protect the public interest.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns.

For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 261905.