

Friends of Chesworth Farm, where do we go next?

IT'S NOT that long ago that the possibility of forming a Friends of Chesworth Farm group in Horsham was first floated.

With any new idea, it's always difficult to judge what interest or support there will be for such a proposal.

We soon found out when a public meeting was held on the evening of April 11 in the Drill Hall in Denne Road.

This proved to be a resounding success with more than 90 people turning out on the night.

After brief introductions from Steve Delahunt, the head countryside warden for Horsham District Council,



by
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and Terry Slattery, from the Friends of Warnham Nature Reserve, the attendees split up into small groups to discuss the key issues that they felt a Friends group, if it was set up, should address.

Chesworth Farm is a classic example of a multi-use site. It's used by people with an interest in wildlife, walkers, horse riders, dog walkers, cyclists, families

looking for a picnic site and even the occasional angler.

It's estimated that there are currently about 50,000 footfall visits per year.

Obviously with such a variety of uses, sensible management of the site needs to be in place if it is to be protected and maintained for everyone's benefit.

For example, some work has already been taken to prevent erosion of the riverbank of the Arun in one area but it is clear that further action will need to be taken in other places.

The important question will be how to achieve this and any other changes that

might be required without affecting people's enjoyment of the site?

One might ask, what is the point of forming a Friends group? If you look at the Warnham Nature Reserve, the answer is obvious even though it is a completely different type of site when compared to Chesworth Farm.

A Friends group can help the countryside wardens to maintain and improve the site, especially in a climate of financial austerity for local authorities.

Interested people can also help to promote the site to a wider audience. Mind you, this has to be handled with

care as it would be very easy to swamp Chesworth Farm with too many visitors, causing extensive damage, if the right information and management systems were not in place.

So where do we go from here? The next step is to arrange a meeting of people, who will be prepared to establish a viable Friends group, and this took place on May 9.

This allowed the various issues to be discussed and a possible way forward to be identified.

What we've already seen is that there is a will to maintain, improve and

promote Chesworth Farm and, if the enthusiasm of the 90-plus people, who attended the public meeting, is anything to go by, it leaves me in no doubt that we shall see a positive outcome over the next few months.

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 our website www.horshamsociety.org or telephone 01403 263870.