Why should we sacrifice our green spaces unnecessarily?

THE FRIENDS of Chesworth Farm was formally launched in Horsham at a public meeting towards the end of August.

Work has started to commission and erect at least three information boards at strategic points on the farm for information, education and communication purposes.

Other projects are also under consideration. For the nature lovers, recent sightings at the farm included two types of unusual dragonflies and also

some nesting skylarks.
The continued presence of skylarks on Chesworth Farm is very encouraging and shows how well the site has been managed by



by

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Horsham District Council over recent years.

Unfortunately, the skylark population in this country has declined by more than half in the last 25 years.

There have been a number of reasons for this decline, one of which is the loss of its natural habitat. This is why the Government introduced a Biodiversity Action Plan for the species in 1995 to try and arrest the decline.

One great cause for excitement this year has been the discovery of a nesting pair of skylarks in Muggeridge Field, off Athelstan Way.

The ten acre field was purchased by West Sussex County Council in 1973 as a site for a potential school. No school was ever built and the field has been treated by the public as if it's part of Chesworth Farm for a long period of time.

Unfortunately, WSCC decided that it wanted to sell the land for housing development and this is being considered by a planning inspector on October 25.

Precisely what the outcome will be is unknown

but one can only hope that the inspector will take into account its public use over a long period of time as well as the loss of yet another natural habitat for the skylark.

One option for Muggeridge Field would be to put in an application for town green status.

Since the field has been in long term public use by the community for recreation, under the current legislation it would appear to be a prime candidate for greens' registration. This possibility remains under consideration.

The recent extensive media coverage of the Government's proposed changes to the planning laws, which has been the subject of a lot of criticism from a whole range of groups, including the WI, has acted as a smokescreen.

This has meant that other proposed changes to the law concerning the registration of new town or village greens have not attracted much attention. So why should we worry?

The justification for change seems to revolve primarily around cost, especially where the land is being considered for development, and the suggestion is that an application for town or village green status should be subject to a fee, set by the registration authority.

One can see the attraction

of making greens' registration more difficult if the primary reason is to free up land for development.

It would be better to leave the law unchanged. Let's not sacrifice our green spaces, such as Muggeridge Field, when there are lots of other sites more suitable for development.

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

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