

David Moore: How do we protect green spaces? Use the NPPF!



So much attention has been focused on the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) document over the last few months that we've lost sight of what should be an integral part of any local plan, namely the green space strategy.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes it clear that the identification of green areas for special protection and the designation of such areas

as Local Green Spaces is an important part of the planning process.

Horsham District Council prepared an excellent document concerning Green Space Strategy 2013 – 2023, which was adopted by the council in November 2013. The intention was to produce an action plan to show how this would be implemented and the plan would be reviewed every four years.

This seems to have become forgotten in the furore over the number and location of new homes over the next 20 years. This is unfortunate. It has to be brought back into the light since the NPPF expects Local Green Spaces to be designated when a local plan is prepared or reviewed and we are, of

course, at the preparation stage of our local plan.

There have been many criticisms of the government's NPPF but it's difficult to find fault with the section on green areas. By designating an area as a Local Green Space, local communities are given the opportunity to rule out development on such land.

The criteria for designation are very simple. The green area has to be in reasonable close proximity to the community, which it serves, it has to be special to the local community and the area has to be local in character. Once an area has been designated as a Local Green Space, consideration of any proposed development within the area has to be consistent with the policy

that would be applied to development within Green Belts.

One obvious site for designation as a Local Green Space is Chesworth Farm, the council's hidden jewel in the crown. It's a fantastic site and it was listed in HDC's Green Space Strategy as a place worthy for consideration for designation as a Local Green Space.

Already, the re-creation of a wetlands area on the farm has started to improve natural habitats and their wildlife values. At the same time, Chesworth Farm continues to attract an ever increasing number of people for recreational purposes.

Horsham District is short of designated green spaces.

For example, we only have two Local Nature Reserves, Warnham Nature Reserve and Tottington Wood.

The area occupied by these nature reserves is well below that expected in the Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance produced by Natural England. The Green Space Strategy recognised that this was a problem and suggested that Chesworth Farm with its area of 37ha might help to fill at least part of the gap. Mind you, there's a long way to go before something like Nature Reserve status could be brought to reality.

So it's all there for us. We're in the process of preparing the next local plan for Horsham District.

Let's take the opportunity

to at least sort out the local green spaces that we need to protect and retain now so that we don't finish up with an urban sprawl.

We need to see a plan based on the Green Spaces Strategy before it's too late.

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 261640.