

Air your views about proposed farm sale

by Samantha Adler

MEMBERS of the public may be given a chance to express their views about a controversial plan to sell a farm in the Surrey Hills at a meeting next month.

Guildford Borough Council's Executive is set to consider a report outlining all representations and bids for Tyting Farm on April 6, although this has yet to be confirmed.

Campaigners believe the council's plan to sell the 115-acre site in six lots at 'development value' rather than agricultural value means it is doing everything possible to invite development and preclude agriculture.

More than 100 people have already pledged their support to

the Save Tyting Farm Campaign, which argues the council should keep the land and lease it to a farmer.

Campaign spokesman John Rigg urged residents to put forward their case at the forthcoming meeting.

"The Guildford community has expressed concerns at the proposed sale of Tyting Farm and deplore the council giving up its stewardship of this important part of the North Downs," he said.

"We continue to believe that the best way to protect agricultural landscape is by keeping it in agriculture and we have identified farmers who have expressed interest in keeping this farm in rural use.

"This should be considered before its sale for urbanisation."

Cllr Tony Rooth, lead member

for finance and resources, said the council would listen and respond to people's opinions and take them into account during their deliberations.

However, he said that anyone interested in giving a short presentation on the proposed sale of the site on Halfpenny Lane, St Martha's, should give notice to the council prior to the meeting.

"There is a debate in the sense that people can come along to express their points of view," he said. "However, there is a limitation to how many people can speak and for how long.

"The Executive will not make a decision if something emerges that requires further information."

Cllr Rooth added: "The decision to sell Tyting Farm as a whole or in plots was made with full cross party support.

"The council agreed the terms and conditions of the sale. No councillor has challenged the sale in any of the discussions at the council.

"In light of the public interest in the sale of the farm, the leader of the council, Cllr Andrew Hodges, took the initiative to refer back the various offers to the Executive for consideration."

Liberal Democrat councillors welcomed the news that the decision about the sale of Tyting Farm will be made at a public meeting.

County Cllr Sarah Di Caprio, said: "I believe there are some serious questions to be answered and this issue needs much more public debate before any decision is made. This is a precious area of green belt countryside, and many residents have contacted me to protest about the sale."