



*Above: general view of Tyting Farm.
Left: Barbara Winkworth, Ken Tigwell, Linda Cannon and John Riggs protesting about Guildford Borough Council's bid to sell Tyting Farm, Halfpenny Lane. Pictures: Steve Porter.*

Big boost for conservation group

OPPONENTS fighting to stop the sale of a farm in the Surrey Hills received a massive boost after more than 1,700 people signed a petition to save the green belt site.

The Save Tyting Farm group collected an average of three signatures a minute in Guildford High Street on Saturday.

Protesters believe the land should remain under council ownership and in agricultural use, and fiercely oppose plans to sell it in six lots.

Campaign spokesman John Rigg claimed the fragmentation of the 115-acre site in Halfpenny Lane, St Martha's, near Chilworth, will inevitably lead to development in the future.

He said the petition clearly shows that many people were

against the sale. "It is one of the most beautiful areas in Surrey," he added.

"It goes without saying that this precious countryside, so close to Guildford town, is of enormous amenity value and will become even more precious as the town grows.

"The council said the farm will be sold with covenants to protect it against development. We know from experience that covenants never give full protection. People deserve better."

Members of the Executive at Guildford Borough Council (GBC) are due to consider all bids and representations on Thursday, April 6.

They will consider whether to revoke the previous decision to sell the land, proceed with

the sale of all lots or dispose of one or more of the lots.

If a decision was made to proceed with part-sale, members could consider disposing of the main farmhouse, the lodge and farm buildings. The remaining lots could either be let to farmers or managed by the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

The group's secretary Barbara Winkworth said Surrey County Council and the Ministry of Defence have concluded long-term successful leases with the trust for much of their land holdings in the interests of good stewardship.

"We believe GBC should fully investigate a similar arrangement for the farm," she added.

The outcome of a meeting between the authority and the

conservation group is due to be announced on April 6.

Cllr Tony Rooth, lead member for finance and resources, said public opinion was very important.

"However, I wonder if the people signing the petition were given the full facts," he said. "It is important that people understand Tyting Farm is no longer financially viable as it stands - a fact confirmed by independent assessment.

"GBC also wants to protect this very special area. The proposed covenants, clawback provision and stringent planning controls are all designed to do just that.

"They will secure the long-term future of the farm in this sensitive green belt location."