

The news last week, covered in this paper and elsewhere, about the potential sale of Blue Bell Hill's viewing and picnic site was a shock to everyone. I am not going to use this column to go over again what was accurately reported about the consultation process but instead talk about how stories like that remind us how important our outside space is.

This particular site, which is one of many being looked at for sale by KCC, is a SSSI and in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has important historic significance being so close to the Pilgrims Way and above Kits Coty, which has the highest concentration of Neolithic sites in the area. But its environmental value is also priceless.

It is managed by the brilliant Kent Wildlife Trust, who are based just outside the border of my constituency but who I know well. They take a very pragmatic approach to the environment, recognising that sometimes development or change will happen but managed effectively it can preserve natural habitats and on occasion even enhance it. They are not an organisation, in my experience, whose default position is no and as a result I have been privileged to see some wonderful local projects they manage to help protect our wildlife.

The site in Blue Bell Hill is an example of that work. I am not clever enough to walk past a flower or butterfly and tell you its type or how rare it might be. But I am able to appreciate its importance or significance not just to nature but to us as humans. And so are millions or others, which is why programmes like Countryfile and Winter Watch are increasingly popular. They tap into our appreciation of our natural environment and make us want to protect it and that was demonstrated by the sincere opposition to the proposed sale, and long may that continue.