

Leisure

Wildlife Watching

Local news and views of the natural world

THE controversy over new housing, how much should be built and where continues to rage.

The latest episode locally is the decision of Broxtowe Borough Council to remove an area of green belt land near Toton from the list of sites suitable for new housing required to meet the targets set by the previous government.

Given the change of government and direction of approach to the issue as well as the status of the land as green belt, this was not, perhaps, a difficult decision to make. Nevertheless it was a timely one as it looks likely that, under the proposed changes to planning laws, any areas not specifically ruled out for housing in a local plan will be automatically ruled in! The council should be commended for responding to the concerns and opposition of groups such as the Toton Environmental Protection Society (TEPS) and the Friends of Toton Fields over the potential loss of this land to housing.

Our local MP has also weighed in with her opposition to further housing development not only in Toton but also throughout Broxtowe, arguing that the district has already, "done its bit". She is also keen, as are many others, that housing should be situated on so-called 'brownfield land'.

This approach can be sensible, as in the recent housing development on Bye Pass Road, Chilwell, which took place shortly after the former industrial premises on the site were demolished. The problem with 'brownfield' sites is that, if they are left alone for some years, they can grow into areas that are

valued by people and valuable for wildlife – like the woodlands at Toton sidings whose destruction has caused such a furor – and in heavily populated former industrial areas brownfield sites can represent the only open 'wild' areas within easy access.

Their possible industrial past can mean another obstacle to re-development. These sites sometimes contain the legacy of an era when the attitude to the control and disposal of hazardous waste was a little more casual than it is today. This means there are extra costs involved in re-using the land and in some cases the level of contamination is such that the best course of action is to let nature continue to stabilise it.

However attractive it might appear, the drawbacks of focusing development on brownfield sites, the limited amount of such land available and the potential loss of wildlife habitat it involves means that promoting their use as a solution to housing shortages is something of a red herring. What housebuilders really want is the easier access to greenfield sites – such as the one in Toton that has been reprieved – that the proposed changes to planning law will grant them, and to the additional profits which arise from them being cheaper to develop than brownfield sites.

This is an element of the proposed planning changes that has alarmed many, with a particular concern being the prospect of the loss of open countryside although, from a wildlife perspective, intensively farmed arable land can be less valuable

than mature brownfield land. The argument that productive agricultural land should be retained for the production of food is weakened when that land is used to grow crops, such as oilseed rape, which end up in distinctly inedible biofuels.

Though far from perfect in this respect, the current planning system does provide considerable protection for wildlife and can play an important, if not widely appreciated, role in its conservation. It seems certain that the new planning regime will severely reduce this protection. Some of its proponents have identified one of its advantages as doing away with the need to conduct irksome, costly and time consuming surveys for species such as bats and newts. Retention of the current guidelines regarding wildlife conservation could ease the fears of those concerned but there seems little prospect of this happening.

The proposed wholesale changes to the planning system are being promoted as providing the necessary conditions to enable housebuilders to perform their patriotic duty and solve the nation's housing crisis.

They are, however, being increasing seen as an opportunistic attempt by the industry to lobby a sympathetic government to adopt a planning system that will allow them to develop previously unavailable land whilst severely reducing the grounds on which objectors can prevent this happening.

The land at Toton may have been saved for now but many similar areas look likely to be lost, along with their wildlife, to housing development.

Jack Smith
Local ecologist

Cricket

Beeston and Toton Sycamore Cricket Awards

BEESTON and Toton Sycamore Cricket Club recently held their annual end of season presentation dinner at Belle & Jerome in Beeston with a special guest, ex-Essex, Surrey and England cricketer Alex Tudor.

Awards were presented to Dennis Burrell for 1st XI Batsman of the season and to Dave Fawcett for 1st XI Bowler of the season. A Special Award was made to Rob Howe for his overall performance in the

fixture at Epperstone. The Clubman award was made to Paul Smith.

Awards were also presented for the clubs' golf day, with Phil Fullwood taking the prize for 'the longest drive' and Martin Huffer winning the 'nearest pin' and also taken the championship title.

The club would like to thank Rob Darby and all his staff at Belle & Jerome for their kind sponsorship of this very well attended event. Thanks also to Tony

Beck for organising the event and to Alex Tudor for making the presentations.

The club will be beginning their preparations for next season when winter nets start in January at Trent Bridge, anyone who is interested in playing or helping off the pitch please contact the club via the website, www.sycamorecc.co.uk

Rugby

Green and Whites face tough outing

NOTTINGHAM Rugby set themselves up for this week's tough trip to Leeds Carnegie with back-to-back wins, convincingly beating Doncaster a fortnight ago and following it up with a nervy home win against London Scottish last weekend.

If anything, the 32-15 final score at Doncaster flattered the home side as the Green and Whites put in one of their best performances of the season, and arguably their first 80-minute performance of the season. Too many games in this campaign have seen them build up a decent lead only to lose concentration and undo

all that hard work.

That worrying habit returned at Meadow Lane last Sunday when they went in at half time with what seemed a comfortable 23-6 lead against a London Scottish side that had shown little threat. In the third quarter, though, Nottingham shipped two tries in quick succession and suddenly it was the visitors who looked by far the more likely winners.

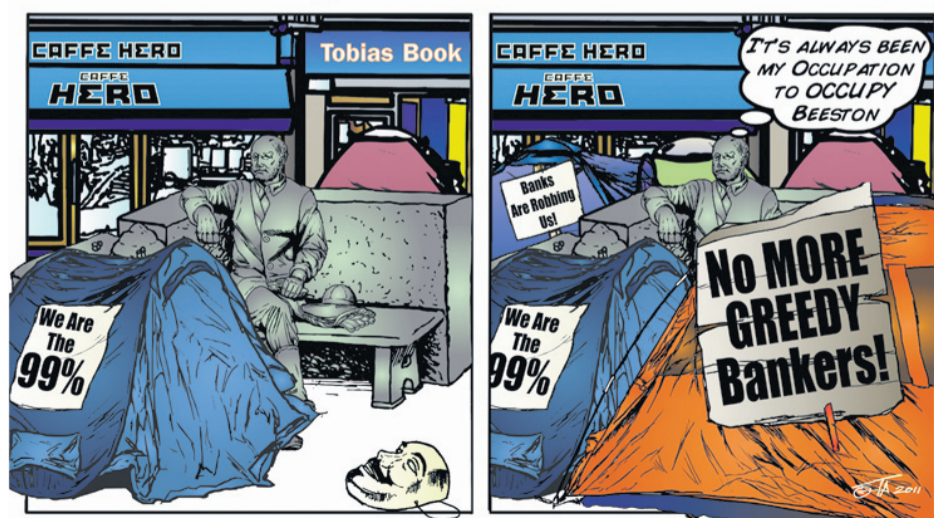
Fortunately they managed to scramble a bonus point 33-31 win thanks to a late try from Alex Shaw, but Coach Glenn Delaney was none too

pleased with the way his side let things slip in the third quarter, and suggested there could be changes for the trip to Leeds this Sunday.

"Some individual decisions in the second half put us under unnecessary pressure," he said. "There were a couple of guys who've done some things that we'll be looking quite closely at.

"We looked very composed and controlled in the first half but in the second, a couple of our players took us away from what we were doing."

The Bee Keeper



Thought for the Fortnight

Self-knowledge

What a fine thing experience is. It enables us to recognise a mistake every time we make it.