

FRIENDS DELIGHTED AS OVER 800 JOIN FIGHT TO STOP DEVELOPMENT

# Keep your hands off our Dell beauty spot

by Bethan Dorsett

MORE than 800 people have joined the fight against the government's decision to allow houses to be built in one of Rochdale's beauty spots.

The Friends of Healey Dell group says it is thrilled to gain so much backing from the public but is still making an urgent appeal for more residents to join the campaign.

There is now just a month to register objections before Rochdale Council rules on the plans.

The group has been posting petitions across Rochdale since August, when a company wanting to develop part of the nature reserve now occupied by the former Healey Hall Mills was given the go-ahead by the Planning Inspectorate, following a public inquiry.

## Alternative

But Tracey Macdonald, of the Friends group, says the decision was made before the organisation was granted a £12,000 lottery boost to put together its alternative vision for the Dell.

Some of the proposals put forward by the public during a mass consultation include an ecology centre and more nature trails.

Miss Macdonald said: "That site is an eyesore but that doesn't automatically mean we have got to put houses on it."

"We are asking the council not to make a decision that cannot be reversed."

"Public opinion seems to favour alternatives like a better visitor centre."

David McClean Developments launched an appeal last year after planning officers altered a 15-year blueprint for the Dell.



FIGHTING to preserve beauty ... Clive Belgeonne, secretary of the Friends of Healey Dell, with Councillor Elwyn Watkins and members Ian and Becky Sharples.

They had designated the run-down Healey Hall Mills as 'developable' in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) but made a U-turn when the Friends group raised fears about the impact on wildlife.

Planning inspector Peter Davies refused to support this decision because he wanted to see the land to the east of the river developed and stated he was satisfied a housing plan could be found which was sympathetic to the character of the Dell.

But Miss Macdonald still insists the plans compromise its vision for the Dell and also says the group has been given fresh hope with the launch of a new planning framework next year.

The government's Regional Spatial Strategy, which will allow more protection for sites of ecological importance, has already encouraged Bury Council to delay finalising its planning blueprint, the Unitary Development Plan.

Anyone who wants to

write to the group or ask for a petition can write to the Friends of Healey Dell, PO BOX 84, Rochdale, OL12 7FB.

Residents can also sign petitions at Hollingworth Lake Visitor Centre, Touchstones' gallery and museum and the Healey Dell rangers' office near the visitor centre.

The group has until 22 December to register their objections before the final decision is made by the powerful Rochdale Cabinet on 20 March.

Planning officer Paul Simpson says the Friends must present new objections, as it is rare that the council would go against a government decision.

"If new information is put forward, there may be a second inquiry," he said.

"All of our arguments were considered by the inspector at the last inquiry."

"If the council went against the recommendation, there is a likely chance it would face a legal challenge from the developers."

Greater Manchester

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## Woman elects trial

A WOMAN accused of stabbing a man in the leg has elected Crown Court trial.

Emiliana Angelone, aged 34, of Walk Mill Close, Rochdale, is charged with assaulting Ian Cousin causing actual bodily harm. The case was adjourned until January 11 when she will be committed to trial.