

The Friends of Linslade Wood – The Background Story

On Monday 26th January 2004 contractors were found carrying out clearance of the young trees in Linslade Wood close to Knaves Hill and the current picnic triangle by the public footpath, The Harold Leake Trust had employed them to clear an area of 2.22 hectares to be used as a picnic area which was also to have wildflowers sown. What the Leake Trust had not realised was the strength of feeling amongst the nearby residents. Immediately the word went around and within a few hours a group of residents were protesting, ably led by Victoria Harvey. With the protestors blocking the excavator, work soon stopped. The following day found a sizable protest group there for some time. Anglia TV news crew visited to cover the protest, and the local newspapers joined in.



Local Residents Protest – The Citizen Newspaper 5th February 2004

The Greensand Trust became involved, they requested the land agents had a cooling off period. The following Monday saw South Beds District Council impose a temporary tree preservation order on all the new woodland trees. The tree preservation order on the new woodland was made permanent three months later. The old Bluebell wood had a tree preservation order placed on it in 1980, and it was subsequently brought by the South Beds District Council in 1981 from the Leakes.

The Leake Trust's land agent David Jones of Robinson and Hall pointed out that the land was owned by the Trust who had allowed public access. The Leake Trust had done nothing wrong and had the permission of DEFRA and the Forestry Commission.



Local Residents celebrate the Permanent Tree Preservation Order - Citizen Newspaper 19th February 2004

Dorothy and Harold Leake had brought Corbets Farm and the Manor house in 1966 along with 236 acres of land, including the old Bluebell wood and had farmed the land. Harold decided to plant the new woodland, Trevor Smith of Beds County Council drew up planting plans, and the samplings were provided by the council's tree nursery in Clophill. The planting was done in phases starting in 1989 with the majority of the work being done by local residents. The phases were each supported by Forestry Commission grants for future maintenance. The final phase on the Stoke Hammond end was planted by contractors. In 1998 Harold decided to retire and put the woodland up for sale, there was no one interested in purchasing it, so it was put into the Harold Leake Trust with Harold's sons as Trustees.

The clearance of the trees meant that the commissions grant had finished for that area. The Greensand Trust, who had been managing the old wood for the Council since 2000, continued after the initial protests to mediate with The Leake Trust. The Leake Trust started allowing volunteers to do small amounts of management work in the new woodland under Greensand Trust supervision. This resulted in the creation of the Friends of Linslade Wood being formed in 2006. Esther Clarke (then Milne) the Greensand Trust Ranger for the old wood, arranged the inaugural meeting at Stockgrove on 26th September 2006.

In 2009 as the old South Beds District Council prepared to change into Central Beds Council, the mediation work of the Greensand Trust resulted in the Leake Trust selling the new woodland to South Beds District Council, which was completed the day before Central Beds Council came took over on 1st April 2009.

The Friends of Linslade Wood have been active ever since with Action Days organised and managed by the Greensand Trust in conjunction with the council, to carry out essential maintenance and some development work. They have also acted as the local residents representative with the Greensand Trust and Central Beds Council ever since. They discuss council plans and when necessary forward objections to planned developments that would affect the woodland, often proposing changes and alternatives which would be acceptable. They remain an active body and would welcome new members. For more information <https://www.linsladewood.info/>



The Friends first activity day,
erecting a fence with the Ranger
November 2006

Dave Booth

A Founder Member of Friends of Linslade Wood and Retired Volunteer Site Warden

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