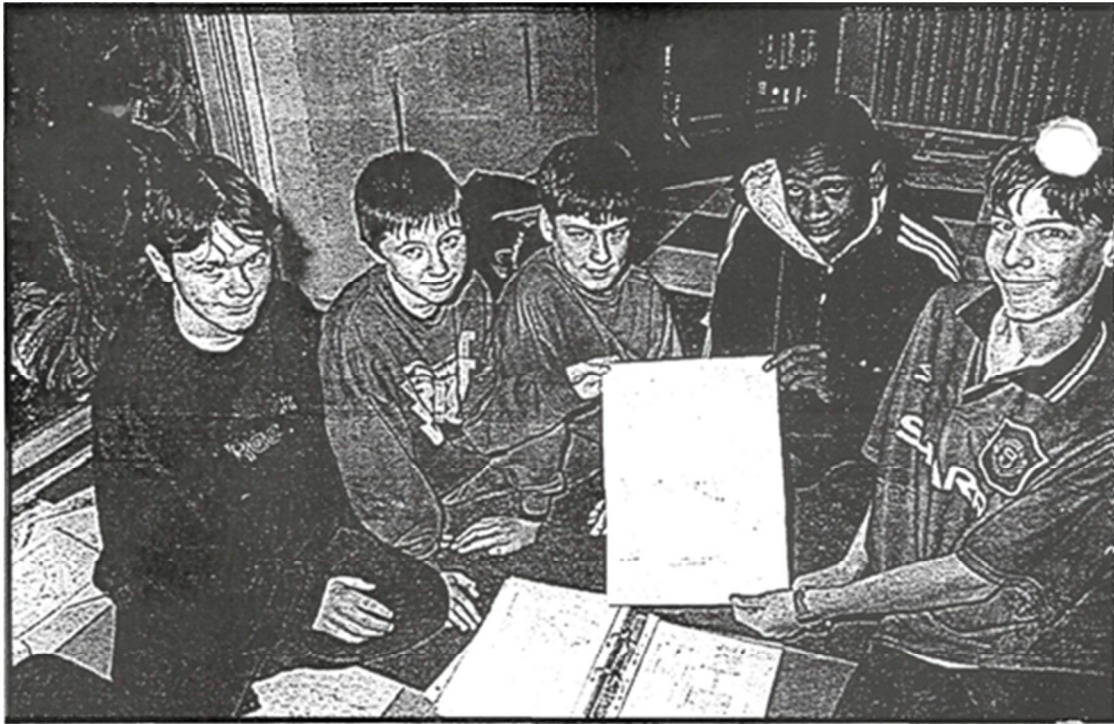


COMMENT

WE DON'T WANT ANY MORE HOUSES BUILT

By Kevin Peake



• **CAMPAIGN TEAM:** Kevin Peake (far left) with some of his friends who have monitored wildlife Slade Farm where a housing development is planned

FOR the past two years we have been fighting to save Slade Farm from development. It is the last large open space in Bicester and we need it as a park, not another housing estate.

Slade Farm is a triangular piece of land lying between the Banbury Road, Lords Lane and the railway line.

It is about 144 acres in size consisting of meadow fields, ancient hedgerows, a brook called the River Bure, a large pond, the railway embankment and a flood plain.

This site has not been farmed for about 25 years and during this time has changed back to a more natural state.

Many of the trees have grown there for 250 years and many wild plants have moved in since it was actively farmed. This mixed habitat suits a wide range of animals, birds and insects.

Now the Council wants Slade Farm to be developed. They want to put 1200 houses there "For the needs of a growing population in Oxfordshire." Bicester has already met its requirements "for the growing population."

So why Slade Farm? Well the only way I can think why they chose Slade Farm was because if you think of Bicester as cake shaped, the last remaining wedge is Slade Farm. Fill that in with housing and Bicester will be an inner city with no green space whatsoever: Garth Park is just not a large enough recreation area for the whole of Bicester. People want to get away from the stresses of life. They need a wide open space. At the moment Slade Farm is that space.

We aim to stop them! We have had enough of developers destroying the real Bicester and replacing it with a soulless concrete jungle. The developer sees Bicester as an easy option. Our councillors are just too scared to go against them, to say NO!

We aim to save as much land and its associated wildlife as possible. So far 30 per cent of Slade Farm has been saved, that is about 43.5 acres. We have saved hundreds of trees in the valley running through the site and newt pond, along with many of the hedges. We have recently completed some surveys on the wildlife at Slade Farm. There are 76 species of birds, 25 species of trees, 87 species of wildlife flowers and plants, five species of amphibians and five species of snakes and lizards. I'm sure you will agree this is quite impressive. Our main arguments are about the stunning amount of wildlife there. It will be a huge mistake to develop this land - if they do, the sand lizards, barn owls, water voles, skylarks, firecrests and great crested newts will become even rarer. Such is the UK's population of these creatures that some like the sand lizard is teetering on the brink of extinction.

Our other argument is the lack of green space in Bicester. Where can people go? What do many people my age do if there is nothing to do? All medium to large towns and cities have large parks open to the public, why not Bicester? In terms of housing, Bicester has already met the needs of the growing population by developing Southwold and Langford Village. Slade Farm does not need to be developed. Instead of saying more houses are needed, what about the quality of life for people already housed?

They need a healthy environment. A healthy environment consists of wide open spaces not row upon rows of meaningless houses. People need to escape from the stresses of life. Slade Farm is regarded by the people of Bicester as their park. LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY

4,500 people sign in protest

By Peter Barrington
Bicester Reporter

CAMPAIGN IS BOOSTED BY PETITION HAND-OVER

PETITION: Olive Moore and Kevin Peake present it to Cherwell District Chairman Ron Groves, far left, watched by Bicester's town mayor.



SLADE FARM: Olive Moore, pictured at the site, which campaigners want to save from builders bulldozers

A 4,500-signature petition calling for a ban on housing on farmland on the edge of Bicester has been handed over.

Campaigners Olive Moore and schoolboy Kevin Peake, 14, presented their petition to Ron Groves, chairman of Cherwell District Council, in Bicester on Tuesday night.

The petitioners want to save the 144-acre Slade Farm site from housing, although it has been earmarked for development in local plans.

Mrs Moore said: "We obtained the signatures over six weeks and very few people refused to sign.

"I think it shows the strength of feeling in Bicester against losing valuable open space.

"Alternatively, we want to ensure that as much open space land is preserved than the developers have proposed so far."

Slade Farm is regarded as the last "green lung" of Bicester. The site is bounded by the Banbury Road.

Mr Groves said he would pass the petition on to Cherwell's planning department and councillors on the south area planning subcommittee.

The planning sub-committee is due to have an initial report on the developers' proposals for the site today.

Councillors are being asked to defer their decision until the completion of reports on various aspects including ecology, archaeology and traffic.

Town councillors have called for an independent nature survey in a bid to protect wildlife on the site.

The area is rich in flora and fauna and is home to 29 different species of trees, many rare and protected.

Over 80 types of flowers grace the unspoilt countryside.