

## **Peoples Anniversary Walk - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015**

*Riverside Cottage Speech Transcript:*

*Gary O'Leary, Chairman Friends of Panshanger Park*

Thank you all for coming out on this wind swept morning. This is a short speech from myself and then a few words from Kate Ashbrook General Secretary of the Open Spaces Society - which celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. We shall then take you for our guided walk through the unopened area of Panshanger Country Park.

So, why are we here today?

Today is the anniversary of the opening up of the first third of the Country Park on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.

Of course we thank Lafarge Tarmac, the park owners for this, but also point out that the public had to wait over 30 years for the opening of any part of their Country Park and note that the full park was due to be opened 20 years ago in 1995.

Looking at the last 10 years, when much of this park could have been opened, you find that for much of that time the park remained a private playground for wealthy shooting and fishing interests and the interests of the Wildlife Trust. The issue of public access was being completely ignored, as were many of the issues regarding preservation of the heritage landscape and listed buildings within the park.

In 2012 more pressure came to bear on the owners Lafarge Tarmac, thanks at the time to a particular council planning officer Felicity Hart and to individuals and groups who started to demand public access. In 2013 the Friends of Panshanger Park was formed to co-ordinate the activities and desires of a wide range of local organisations and individuals. Very soon progress towards opening of the Park was evident and the first part of the park opened on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.

The Friends now have 1000 members and a wide range of ongoing activities in the Country Park. Some examples; A weekly timed 5K parkrun every Saturday, Regular Guided Walks, Events & Talks on the History, Wildlife and Future of the Country Park, Volunteer Work Parties to improve areas of the park, Art and Photography activities and work on the Heritage landscape and buildings. We also lobby and work with Lafarge Tarmac and HCC to gain commitment to plans for the further and full opening of the Country Park and its needed facilities.

I would like to acknowledge the Friends committee and its supporting organisations today. The committee here today are Rab Harley, Will Davis, Geoff Cordingley, Don Street, Barry Simkins, Barrie Goldsmith, Louise Smith, Julie Brix, Richard Threlfall and David Stowe.

I also want to acknowledge our supporting organizations: Hertford & Ware Local History Society, Hertford Civic Society, Welwyn Garden City Society, Herts Garden Trust,

Friends of the Mimram, Hertingfordbury Parish Council, East Herts Ramblers,, Hertingfordbury Conservation Society, Panshanger People, Welwyn Planning & Amenity Group and Panshanger parkrun. Thank you all for the great support given to the Friends of Panshanger Park

The Friends objectives are to push for action whilst giving positive help and support. We want to:

- 1 Help preserve and enhance the environment of Panshanger Park and its magnificent Grade II\* landscape.
- 2 Gain full public access to a vibrant, high standard Country Park as soon as possible.
- 3 Ensure the Park is well managed and looked after by all.

At the heart of this is ensuring the public is not left short by Hertfordshire County Council or Lafarge Tarmac in delivery of our Country Park at Panshanger. That means focusing on the investment needed, the management & the timetable.

The potential here is huge: Already there are over 60,000 visitors per year. 150,000 people live within 5 miles of the park, so it is uniquely placed. It has an incredible landscape and social history. The longest publicly accessible stretch of the Mimram or any chalk stream in Hertfordshire. It has remarkable woodlands which include the Panshanger Great Oak. It has Reptons Broadwater and overall landscape design. It has stunning potential for facilities at the Orangery, the stables and riverside cottage. As well as the opportunity to provide well marked and surfaced trails for

cycling, walking, running, riding and other activities throughout the Country Park.

It should become 1000 acres of OUSTANDING Country Park of which Hertfordshire can be proud.

Today you will see a part of the Country Park that is NOT OPEN. We thank Lafarge Tarmac for allowing access today.

From our most recent meetings we are told that all areas you see today will become fully accessible in May of this year. Plus we expect that at the same time the central valley linking through to Welwyn Garden City will open.

You are standing in a Park and on land registered in ownership to Lafarge Tarmac. But that is just its legal status. Have no doubt THIS IS YOURS. This is your COUNTRY PARK.

Thank you again for coming along today to celebrate the anniversary and I hope you will enjoy your walk into the west of the Country Park.