

# Kings Cliffe Endowed School Orchard Project

The idea of having some form of community orchard was broached at the very first 'Transition Kings Cliffe' meeting in May 2010. Rather daunted by the legal, organisational & fund raising skills needed to purchase land and create a community orchard (plus a lack of suitable, central village sites) I suggested we help the Endowed School build on its work as a recognised 'Eco School,' knowing that they owned a large plot of land that had been unused for many years.

We approached Mrs Dempster in Autumn 2010. Once we had managed to access the terribly overgrown site & assess whether it was feasible to plant an orchard on it, plans were drawn up & approved for the layout in Jan 2011 (see scan). Fund raising & ground clearance began in February 2011. Funds for clearance, fencing & trees came from a mixture of local sources - school PFA, TKC, the kids own fundraising, Ex-Serviceman's Club, private donations (we did not apply for any grant funding from local authorities etc). All labour on site is supplied by volunteers.

Clearing the site involved felling a large sycamore, plus around 20 other young trees, a deep bank of seven feet plus brambles, removing redundant concrete fence posts and dismantling an old railway engine carriage (which may have been used for livestock?) that had been hidden for many years. The cleared site measured approx. 35m x 17m. Clearance was achieved by a small team of volunteers chiefly including myself, Kirk, Keith Neville, Peter Lloyd Bennet, Jenny Groves & Chris Leuchars. During the Summer & early Autumn 2011 the site was mowed to keep down weeds and encourage grass. Stock fencing was erected in December - everything being done by hand because there is no access for machinery and the ground is too soft further down the plot.

Freya & Gabriel Emerson helped plant the very first trees - 4 more mature Red Falstaff & Egremont Russets which would produce some fruit for the children to see in the first year. The rest of the maiden trees arrived in January 2012 and by some miracle we managed to get them planted just before a severe cold spell when the ground became frozen. On the 27th January 2012 the whole school was involved in planting 27 trees with the local press invited (see scans).

Apple varieties were chosen to appeal to children - largely sweet, crisper varieties suitable for eating & juicing, plus some local varieties. The eleven varieties are Adam's Pearmain, Barnack Beauty, Charles Ross, Discovery, Egremont Russet, Ellison's Orange, Red Falstaff, Katy, Lord Lambourne, Spartan and Bramley.

During Summer 2012 we created a tiered, grassed seating area in the bank to encourage the school to use the orchard as an outdoor classroom. Wildflowers were seeded on the upper bank in the Autumn and gave a wonderful show in Summer 2013. Regular work parties continue to mow & maintain the site in the Summer months. The trees are all doing well & the Red Falstaff's & Egremont Russets provided enough apples for the kids to have a big giveaway before the October half term in 2013 (see pics).

This has been one of our most successful TKC products but, sadly, it may be under threat as the Governors & Foundation are considering selling off the school site to help create a new, purpose built school for 4-11yr olds elsewhere in the village.

Lisa Emerson