# King's Lynn community fights to keep public footpaths open through Spring Wood



In the Gaywood suburb of King's Lynn, a dispute over public access to Spring Wood has raised concerns among residents who have long used the woodland as a vital route to nearby amenities. This small copse, approximately 150 metres wide, has historically served as a cut-through for local schoolchildren and those visiting the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, alongside providing a haven for dog walkers and nature enthusiasts.

The conflict centres on a wish by landowner John Tomlinson, currently residing in Australia, to block off two public footpaths that traverse the woodland. Tomlinson has submitted an appeal to government officials seeking to overturn a 2022 ruling which confirmed these routes as public rights of way. Local speculation suggests that his motivation may stem from concerns about liability in the event of an accident occurring on the paths; however, he has not publicly clarified his reasons for attempting to close them.

A public inquiry is set to take place in August, managed by the Planning Inspectorate, which adjudicates disputes regarding footpath rights. Community members are hopeful that they can effectively demonstrate the long-standing use of the paths, which they argue have been walked for decades, to convince officials of their significance.

Spring Wood takes its name from a natural spring found within its bounds. Located in a valley known for its rare chalk stream, the woodland is bordered by Springwood High School on one side and the hospital on the other. Neighbouring Reffley Woods is historically tied to a secret society known as the Sons of Reffley, who once venerated the area's mineral springs, believing in their healing properties.

Residents allege that Mr Tomlinson acquired the woodland in the early 2000s for approximately £50,000, speculating he might have intended to develop housing on the site. Such proposals, however, have so far been unsuccessful. Numerous locals have expressed their strong attachment to the trees, which are under a protection order. Last year, tree surgeons were interrupted while working on the site due to concerns over potential damage to nesting birds, highlighting the community’s protective instincts towards the woodland.

Martin Platton, a tree surgeon familiar with the site, noted that he has received backing from local councillor Jo Rust to communicate with the community before proceeding with any work. He acknowledged the financial burden on Mr Tomlinson regarding the upkeep of the land.

Local campaigners have rallied support, providing evidence of regular footpath use over several years. According to common law, pathways that have been traversed by the public without interruption for 20 years can be designated as public rights of way.

Peter Frusher, a nearby resident for over three decades, lamented the potential loss of access to the woods, stating, "People move here because of the trees and the birds that live there. It would be a real shame if it is blocked."

John and Dawn Hopgood, regular users of the paths for running and walking their dog, cited the safety and convenience the route provides. Doctor Rapik Mangaser, who works at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, echoed these sentiments, voicing opposition to any closure of the paths.

Local councillor Rob Colwell, who has campaigned for the wood’s accessibility since 2016, expressed frustration at the situation, urging the community to supply additional evidence of footpath use to strengthen their case.

The inquiry is scheduled for August 12 at the South Lynn Community Centre, promising to be a pivotal moment for the future of Spring Wood and the ongoing community efforts to preserve access to this cherished local resource.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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