

# Kingston Action Group Report

Ref: KPC Meeting 10 March 2021 Appendix 1

## Kingston Action Group – report to KPC March 2021

Our last report to the KPC was made in August 2020. Since then, our activities have of course been severely restricted by the restrictions made necessary by the virus but in between various lockdowns we have managed to accomplish a few things, most notably on the former allotment site at the lower end of The Street. This is now slowly beginning to take new form, as the next paragraphs describe.

### Former Allotment Site

Our appeal for help with clearing the site - made in a piece in the September issue of The Kingston News - met with some success. Over the next six weeks or so, volunteers put in well over 100 hours of work in removing the vegetative growth which had been accumulating for more than a decade. This was accomplished without any mechanical aids beyond the hedge trimmer (kindly purchased for us a few years ago by the KPC) and without weed-killer.

Lewes District Council (LDC) contractors very helpfully removed for us the enormous piles of bindweed, brambles, ivy, nettles etc (which apparently weighed well over one ton) and later put in a post and rail fence along the border with Gow's Croft. The other long border of the site – where it adjoins a garden and driveway in The Street – still remains to be precisely defined although it is clear enough roughly where it lies. We await a reply from LDC on this point. We are also waiting for them to put in a gate, which we were promised would happen January. No doubt the virus explains these delays.

Besides labour, we were given a shed (by John and Anna Carey) and a greenhouse (by Louise and Crispin Holloway). We managed to dismantle both of these and move them to the site at a time when outside gatherings of more than two people were still permitted but have yet to re-erect them. This will be done as soon as it becomes possible. Other very useful gifts have included a water butt, two compost bins and paving stones. Cash donations have allowed us to buy whips for hedging which will be planted by the end of February.

After internal discussion, visits to the site from the head-teacher of Iford and Kingston School, from others concerned either with Community Allotments or Orchards and from the apple tree expert at Stanmer Park; and also subsequent public consultation via the Kingston What's App group, we had decided by the end of 2020 that the best future for the site would be as a **Community Garden** and that is our now our firm goal.

The garden will include features to attract wildlife and engage the interests of children, as well as providing a new public space for people of all ages to enjoy.

There will be, we intend, hedges, a compost heap, flowers to attract pollinators, a pond, log piles for sheltering amphibians, bug “hotels”, nest-boxes, climbing shrubs, fruit trees and fruit bushes. In the greenhouse we will cultivate easy-to-grow seeds like sunflowers and cosmos (also with child appeal!) as well as plants, like primroses, whose eventual home will be elsewhere in the village. We have applied for a grant to an organisation called the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. If this is successful (we will know at the beginning of April) this will cover most of the costs of the seeds, plants and tools. Other potential sources of funding include the Chalk Hill Trust.

We have been in discussion with the South Downs Trust who are administering several grant schemes including one called the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF). This is currently suspended (as are its other two schemes) but will resume in April. A grant from the SCF could be invaluable for the future of our project as it could cover all our major capital costs including repairing the greenhouse and the shed, installing fencing and, crucially, providing a shelter. We can apply for 50% of the total costs. Of the remainder, we can meet half through volunteer labour but the remaining 25% must be cash. As we have none to spare, this can only come from other sources. **We are very hopeful that the KPC will be able to assist, thus unlocking the funds from the SCF and enabling the project to advance.** We will of course provide full details when these are available.

## **Bulbs**

Generous donations allowed us to buy an additional 500 snowdrop bulbs. These were planted in three verges in The Avenue in January.

There have been many positive comments from villagers about the flowering bulbs for which we have been responsible throughout the village but particularly the snowdrops now at their best along The Avenue and the wonderful display of crocus – now also at their peak – on Snednore.

This has led us to revive a long-term goal of planting all the verges in the estate with either snowdrops or crocuses. We understand from ESCC that this (unjustifiably from our viewpoint) may require a “cultivation licence”, the rationale being that the licence cost pays for checking whether underground services might be at risk (even though we would need to dig only to a maximum depth of 10cm (four inches) to plant bulbs!) . We have asked whether a licence is required for each of the 27 verges concerned and have pointed out that many of these verges support trees (most of them planted by ESCC itself) the roots of which must penetrate far deeper than any bulb.

ESCC also require us to obtain the permission of all householders affected before planting any bulbs. This would pose no problems and is a practice we have followed in the case of the verges in The Avenue.

Planting the number of bulbs required would perhaps have to be spread over a number of years, unless the KPC chose to select this project as one of those it could

fund itself. It would be transformative and – on the basis of people’s reactions to bulbs elsewhere – could be extremely popular. We could quickly produce estimates of the approximate cost.

### **Volunteers**

Apart from the work done on the former allotment site at a time when it was still permitted for groups of more than two to work outside, our volunteers’ activities have been severely restricted by the virus. Even so, many hours were spent clearing the Ashcombe Lane footway and in addition individuals have done some litter clearance.

### **In Bloom**

The Group’s very comprehensive entry to last year’s competition was rewarded with a further Silver-gilt prize. This was a source of considerable satisfaction in itself but the acknowledgement that it represents could be extremely useful as supporting information when making grant applications. This year’s competition may also have to be judged remotely but our entry will again be backed by many photographs highlighting some of the bulb planting and stressing the importance of community involvement and environmental responsibility.

### **Footway above Ashcombe Lane**

We are pleased and relieved that the mystery of which part of which authority is responsible for the maintenance of the Ashcombe Lane footway has now been solved! We hope that the KPC can now persuade Highways section of ESCC to keep the surface of this important path in a good state of repair.

### **Environment Policy**

We are delighted that the KPC has moved to adopt an Environmental Policy and look forward to working with the Council on its proposals to put this into action.

### **OVESCO**

In October 2020, an OVESCO representative gave given a presentation to the Action Group about renewable energy projects. Subsequently, on behalf of the Group, Tony Wheeler submitted four distinct to the KPC before its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> November. There may have been some misunderstanding but we do not yet seem to have received any response to these from the KPC.

### **Footpath to Swanborough**

This is still being degraded by horses to the point where it is almost impassable by pedestrians in wet weather. We had reached the point before the virus struck of

getting agreement for a meeting between the various parties involved but this then had to be abandoned. We will resume our efforts to find a solution when meetings become possible once more.