

Kingston Action Group Report

Ref: KPC Meeting 5 May 2021 Appendix 4

Kingston Action Group

Annual Report to Kingston Parish Council for the year to 31 March 2021

1 Meetings and Minutes

There have been eight meetings during the year although none before June 2020 because of Covid. All meetings have necessarily been held via Zoom with all the attendant problems of connection and audibility but we have struggled through! The minutes normally appear on the KPC website about six weeks after each meeting.

2 Volunteers

2.1 Action Group activity has continued to be supported by volunteers. In the last 12 months we recorded a total of 248 volunteer hours, compared with 212 person hours in the year to 1 April 2020. This is almost certainly, however, an understatement of the position as one person's devotion to litter removal has not been fully reported nor, therefore, recorded. Ray Harrison's efforts in this activity have been nothing short of extraordinary.

2.2 We have, among other things:

- Removed weeds from the area around The Pavilion
- Cleared litter from Ashcombe Lane - and from the cycle path
- Cut back dead and dying hollyhocks along The Street
- Removed a mass of dead ivy from St Pancras Green
- Cut back brambles along the cycle path

Work on the former allotment site is covered in para 3 below. This has amounted to date to 131 hours.

2.1 Litter clearance

2.1.1 We have recorded 117 hours of litter clearance. Much of this was attributable to a single person (see above). This total was considerably higher than last year's (75) despite the fact that our regular communal collecting efforts had to be discontinued for part of the year because of Covid.

2.1.2 The relationship established between the Group and Lewes District Council (LDC) has been somewhat patchy at best. The authority regularly and rapidly takes special steps to remove all the rubbish we collect, much of it beyond the village boundary and in particular along the stretch of Ashcombe Lane from the railway bridge to the A 27 roundabout. LDC has also supplied us with high visibility gilets and litter grabbers, including one with an especially long handle to foil those who enjoy throwing cans and bottles into hard-to-access places. However, this is probably no more than the minimum we might legitimately expect from them. On the downside, they have over a two year period failed completely to accept responsibility for the appalling state of the trunk roads in the district, claiming erroneously that they can only clear litter safely when these roads are closed. Many other LAs take a different view. While this problem extends far outside the confines of the village, it

does have an effect on everyone who lives here: the shocking litter along the A26 and A27 makes people both angry and ashamed at the inability of their elected authorities to tackle it.

2.1.3 We participated in an organised clearance day of the C7 in March which involved people from several of the villages in the Ouse Valley and made a striking impact on the litter problem there.

2.2.4 Much of the garbage along Ashcombe Lane is clearly directly traceable to the burger bar but, after a meeting, we have succeeded nonetheless in cultivating a reasonable relationship with the owner to the point where he has actually employed a litter picker himself who clears rubbish twice a week. He has also made efforts to dissuade customers from parking in the lay-by for the bus and has even put up a sign to discourage them from parking on the bend in the road at the foot of Ashcombe Lane. This has been at least partially successful.

3 Former allotment site, Gow's Croft

3.1 After an approach from the Group, Lewes District Council (LDC) agreed in May to lease us this site, although they let us have it rent-free until April 2021. Our first thought was to restore it as a working allotment managed for the benefit of the whole community but the absence of a water supply on the site would have posed a major obstacle and there seemed little enthusiasm for the idea among villagers when it was proposed in The Kingston News. We then considered using the site as a miniature orchard but have recently come to the conclusion that the site can function best as a Community Wildlife Garden and this is now our firm goal.

3.2 We spent about 80 hours last autumn clearing the area and have spent a further 50 since on other tasks, including planting part of a hedgerow. Apart from failing for months (and still, to some extent) to let us know where one of the boundaries is, LDC have been very helpful. Their contractors removed the cleared vegetation (which weighed more than two tons), erected a post and rail fence and, more recently, a gate. They have also provided us with a chestnut paling and wire fence which we plan to put up ourselves.

3.3 We have been gifted various items by villagers following appeals in The Kingston News. These have included:

- A greenhouse
- A shed
- Compost bins
- Wooden posts
- A water butt
- Paving stones

We have written a further appeal for help to appear in the May edition of the newsletter.

3.4 In the course of planning the future of the site we have had consultations with a number of people from different bodies including Common Cause, Lewes; the South Downs National Park; our school and a tree expert from Stanmer Park.

3.5 Over the course of the next year, we hope to develop the site as a wildlife garden incorporating as many features as we can both manage and afford. These should include:

- A pond

- Composting areas
- “Hotels” for solitary bees and other insects
- Dead wood, for insects and small mammals
- Planted areas with flowers to attract pollinating insects including butterflies and moths

We also plan some form of sheltered area with seating. We will shortly be writing to the school to ask pupils in Years 5 and 6 for further suggestions. We have considered, but reluctantly rejected, the idea of bee hives on the site.

4. Flowers in the village

4.1 The Council declined our proposal to plant wildflowers on St Pancras Green but did agree to an experimental planting on the green behind The Juggs.

4.2 In June, areas of this green were marked out for the contractor to leave uncut. Then, in October, we hired a turf stripper and removed turf from a smaller section which was then planted with a number of wildflower species and sown with colourful annuals including poppies. This area should begin to look good this summer.

4.3 In February, we planted an additional 500 snowdrop bulbs “in the green” on three verges in The Avenue where the adjoining house owners had previously agreed to this step. All the verges on this road have now been planted with snowdrops except four where the house owners, for varying reasons, have declined the chance to have them.

4.4 We have established with East Sussex County Council – owners of all the verges in the estate – that we would need “only” six cultivation licences (one per road) to plant bulbs in those verges rather than one per verge and therefore more than 30. It is the ambition of the Group to carry out such planting when funds are available – assuming that the proposal is approved by the householders concerned.

5 Finance

5.1 On 3 March (the date of the latest bank statement available), the Group’s account had an uncommitted balance of £435.43, although we have to set aside £73.00 for the rent of the former allotment plot (due on 1 April but not yet sought – see below) and up to £100 (at some stage) for insurance. This would leave c £265.

5.2 We are currently receiving contributions from the sale of Lewes lottery tickets at an annual rate of £416, although this is only from six supporters. In addition, one supporter is contributing just over £70 per annum via a Standing Order. We may renew efforts to produce a sustained income through this Lottery.

5.3 We heard during the year that two applications for grants had been unsuccessful. The first of these was to the pub and restaurant chain Hall & Woodhouse and the second to a body called the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. We are currently contemplating further applications, including two to the KPC.

6 Environmental Policy

6.1 We are delighted that our work on drafting an Environmental Policy was taken up by the KPC and we look forward to taking forward in particular two elements of the accompanying Action Plans, dealing with footpaths and bridleways; and green corridors. As far as the first of these is concerned,

we would like the Action Plan to look forward a number of years and to consider radical possibilities like re-routing existing rights of way and even creating new ones to link those we have.

6.2 We are pleased to have helped establish the ownership of the Ashcombe Lane footway and to have made a major contribution to its management over the last 12 months.

7 In Bloom

The entry to last year's competition was made jointly with the KPC – who covered the fee, as will be the case this year. It was supported by photographs highlighting some of the bulb planting and stressing the importance of community involvement and environmental responsibility. It won a Silver Gilt certificate, now displayed in The Pavilion. This was the second highest category of award. We hope our entry (which may have been delayed) to this year's competition can still be considered.

8 Community Energy Project

8.1 The Group made a submission to the SDNPA in the autumn of 2020 to receive professional mentoring on establishing a Community Energy Project in co-operation with KPC, the idea being to develop schemes to assist the village in reducing its carbon footprint. In March 2021 we were advised that we were one of five groups to have made a successful submission and a kick-off meeting was planned to take place in April between members of the Group including KPC's representative, and Community Energy South (CES), the mentors. The objective will be to develop one or more renewable energy power generation projects suitable for receiving funding for feasibility studies towards the end of 2021. At that time, two of the selected teams will be invited to develop proposals further through feasibility towards funding and implementation. CES will provide assistance in identifying funding possibilities. Other components of the energy project may include energy conservation schemes, community education and the possibility of an electric community bus, depending on the type of funding opportunities available. The Group understands that the SDNPA is particularly interested in collaborative projects with other parties in the area and making joint proposals.

8.2 During the rest of 2021, the Group will start to develop its approach and priorities for the project including inviting interested villagers to participate and setting out a work programme. The Group will provide regular progress reports to KPC and in Kingston News.

9 Conservation Character Appraisal

9.1 The Conservation Officer for the South Downs National Park worked both with members of the Parish Council and the Action Group on re-writing the Appraisal. The Group's comments on the draft were to be sent in April. The final report was to be sent to all households in the village.

10 Kingston News

10.1 We have made a point of ensuring that all the significant actions undertaken by the Group have been relayed to the community through the medium of The Kingston News: the next issue (May) will have features on community energy and the community wildlife garden.

10.2 This year, we have also used – for the first time – the new What's App groups that emerged in the village during the pandemic to convey messages or ask for comments. We will continue to use this channel (as well as the Kingston News) as it may reach a slightly different demographic within the community.