

## **SSEIB 2021 Kingston near Lewes, East Sussex**

### **Section A – Community Involvement**

#### **The Parish is working towards things such as:**

##### **Being inclusive of local people, including local ownership**

As a village community, Kingston has a strong track record in terms of local inclusivity and local ownership. This goes back to the post-First World War period with the building of the Parish Hall and enhancement of the parish church through individual philanthropy and the development of housing for service personnel returning from the different theatres of war. The Parish Hall is managed today by a Trust with representatives from the community managing and maintaining it. It has seen a number of recent improvements to flooring, accessible toilets, lighting and heating and is a well-used village asset. Covid-19 allowing, it hosts the pre-school playgroup every weekday morning and is used for leisure activities like Pilates and yoga as well as village events of varying type e.g. meetings of the very active Kingston WI, talks and lectures, village quiz nights etc.

In the immediate post-Second World War period, the parish saw the establishment of the Village Club and its wide range of activity areas for adults as well as children e.g. the drama club, children's events etc. Further Council housing was built for returning service personnel at that time. That tradition of community engagement and support continues through to today.

The Village Green was acquired by the Kingston Parish Council (KPC) in the 1950s through a planning gain deal for the village when the Juggs Pub was created – itself an important community venue. Since then, it has served as an important location for children's play, the village fete site and a range of other events and activities. Its upkeep is managed by the KPC for the local community and the Village Action Group has worked with the KPC to enhance its amenity value through a new planting regime.

St Pancras Green was similarly the result of planning gain in the 1960s when the housing estate was built. Today, it is used for tennis, football, Sussex stoolball and downland races. Its upkeep is managed by the KPC for the local community, and it is also used by other villages for shared sporting events. It has played an important role in supporting villagers' exercise routines during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The village school – Iford and Kingston Primary School - opened in the mid-1960s with the expansion of the village – and has played a huge role in the wider community, for example with its annual bonfire events and May Fairs. It has recently been extended to accommodate children from other villages in the area as a number of other local primary schools have closed.

St Pancras Church also plays an important role in village life and has been the centre of the community in many ways since its foundation in the twelfth/thirteenth century. Apart from its services, its members play an important role in community welfare and well-being and it hosts a wide range of musical events. The maintenance of its churchyard is supported by volunteers and a number of areas are managed specifically for biodiversity gain.

A recent addition to the list of village facilities in local ownership is the Community Pavilion (opened 2008) with its associated planting/green roof funded through external grants. It is managed by a Committee on behalf of the KPC which is the formal owner. It hosts meetings of a number of groups in the parish e.g. Tuesday coffee mornings for older residents, one of the several Bridge clubs and the Action Group.

The KPC supports and encourages a wide range of events and activities in the village and there is a considerable list of active clubs and associations, (cultural, sport and leisure) including the tennis club, history and heritage workshop, Scrabble group, WI etc. Its new website provides an accessible information platform for residents and visitors alike.

### **Making a difference to local people & involving local people in decision-making, communication & implementation**

Community involvement and communication continue to be important aspects of local life in Kingston. During the Covid-19 pandemic, local help groups were set up to provide support to vulnerable and elderly people and WhatsApp groups were organised to maintain communication between households. These groups have now become firmly embedded in the life of the village and are used by people of all ages. Whether you've found something or lost something, want to buy something or borrow or sell something, want help with anything from posting a letter to shopping to walking a dog, the What's App groups are the place to go.

The KPC and the Village Action Group were responsible for the development of a Village Plan some years ago which has proved a useful basis on which progressively to consider village development. The Village Plan complements the Conservation Area Character Appraisal published in 2007 which is currently undergoing a review and revision by the South Downs National Park Authority with assistance from the KPC and the community at large. The first draft of the new Appraisal includes a detailed review of the architectural heritage of the Conservation Area and a management plan for ensuring that any future development, including modifications to existing buildings as well as new build, respect the special character of our Conservation Area. The relationship of the built environment to the natural environment within the Conservation Area is recognised as an important dimension of the work in progress.

The KPC and the Action Group also worked together to develop an Environmental Policy for the parish to serve as a policy basis for the future. This aims to make a positive contribution to protecting and enhancing the local and global environment by promoting biodiversity, the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, and minimising environmental pollution. It includes Action Plans which will be regularly updated and these include proposals for footpaths, cycle ways and green corridors.

There are regular KPC meetings to which village residents are invited and (Covid allowing), and an Annual Parish meeting that was the predecessor of the KPC itself (founded in 1948) which provides feedback to the village on work undertaken through the preceding year and invites comment for future work. The KPC has a new website <https://kingston-pc.org.uk/> that enables local people to be kept up to date with the outcomes of meetings etc.

Complementing the three village noticeboards, the village newsletter, the Kingston News, continues to be produced monthly by an independent editor and distributed by a network of volunteers to all homes in the parish. Content is diverse and includes news and articles from the village school, different village organisations like the WI and the Kingston History and Heritage

Workshop, the KPC and Village Action Group, local businesses in the village and individual contributors. It is an important vehicle for raising environmental awareness and issues around climate change.

## **Planning for the future**

In terms of planning, the KPC is an important organisation for the parish and it seeks to balance both a proactive and a reactive role through its work. It responded in detail on behalf of the community to the South Downs National Park Plan (published in 2019) and regularly asks for community inputs to exercises like the SDNPA Local Plan and its ongoing work e.g. the SDNPA's review of the village Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

It also serves as a community voice on all planning matters for the village and liaises with the appropriate local authorities – Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council - and public agencies like Sussex Police, as required.

It provides a small grants scheme for parish organisations and is currently consulting on the use of moneys derived from a recent planning gain for capital projects.

It is considering the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish.

## **Working towards access for all.**

The Community Pavilion was designed very much with access for all in mind and meets all access standards.

The Parish Hall Committee has installed new wheelchair-accessible toilets as part of its general programme of upgrading facilities for the Hall.

## **Section B - Environmental Responsibility**

**The Parish is engaged in environmental activities such as:**

### **Conserving local habitats & heritage (wildlife, natural landscapes & built environment)**

The village remains actively engaged in a wide variety of environmental work and research – both natural and cultural - and the relationship between both. The parish has a number of important sites within and adjacent to its boundary, for example the Castle Hill SSSI National Nature Reserve one of the finest examples of ancient, unimproved wildflower-rich chalk grassland sites in the country and the Lewes Brooks SSSI, home to a diverse array of invertebrate fauna, especially water beetles as well as rare snails, flies and moths. There is also a range of archaeological sites including Bronze Age burial mounds along the South Downs Way running above the village.

On the natural heritage side, the Village Action Group has continued to undertake its year-round programme of developing new habitats e.g. the hedge line and associated planting on the Village Green, and new areas of wildflower planting and continues to promote proposals for wildflower planting areas on St Pancras Green.

It has an agreement with the KPC not to cut part of the Village Green to build up the wildflower resource there and increase biodiversity, especially pollinators. This programme will serve as a pilot over the next few years and will be monitored to assess results, with a view to extending the area planted at a later date. This season's results have been spectacular and welcomed by the community.

The existing woodland on St Pancras Green, though privately owned, is managed on a non-intervention basis, which is good for wildlife. The same is true of the (largely) ash woodlands at the top of The Street and at the foot of Kingston Hill although ash dieback is now presenting both areas with challenges.

On Kingston Ridge, the local Conservation Trust has created what is effectively a nature reserve at Kingston Hill Fields, together with a new pond, now home to grass snakes, newts, etc and providing a feeding area for bats, herons, swallows, etc. Hedge-laying along Juggs Way towards the Downs and its subsequent growth has also created new habitats and has been extended in 2021.

Articles on species sightings, biodiversity and conservation issues have appeared in Kingston News each month for more than a decade.

On the cultural heritage side, the Kingston History and Heritage Workshop has been actively promoting the significance of the cultural history and heritage of the village, through its monthly meetings programme, public lectures, articles in the Kingston News and publications e.g. its village historical walking guide.

### **Home or community composting, Green Recycling**

The village continues to have a high percentage of people involved in recycling – both garden waste and other. The village was an early promoter of recycling and worked with the LDC in a volunteer-led capacity in developing kerbside recycling a number of years ago.

In recognition of its work, the parish received an award from the Zero Heroes Fund which was used to help fund a new village walking guide.

### **Creating, maintaining or improving green spaces (Village Greens, parks & pocket parks, verges, woodlands, churchyards etc.).**

A huge amount of work has continued in the village with improving our green spaces and gardens.

The Village Action Group with its volunteers has continued with its major programme of planting – a river of snowdrops along The Avenue, a carpet of crocuses on Snednore Green and at the Parish Hall, daffodils along Ashcombe Lane, on the Village Green and at the end of Wellgreen Lane at the entrance to the village, and replacement heritage apple trees along The Avenue to reflect the village's earlier history in market gardening.

Ten years ago, the Group planted a new hedge along the northern edge of the Village Green. This was later under-planted with a range of different hedgerow flowers including primroses. These were bought as plug plants and then grown on by gardeners in the village before being planted out by volunteers. A new mixed planting programme along the footpath between The Street and St Pancras Green has also been undertaken with striking results. The planting of bulbs throughout the village with the support of grants has continued, some of it funded by donations from villagers.

The Parochial Church Council has an ongoing management regime for St Pancras churchyard, recognising it as an important village focus for biodiversity, including lichens on gravestones.

The Village Action Group has also successfully sought to limit damage by vehicles to the verges along Wellgreen Lane by the introduction of informal wooden bollards.

In addition to this work, the Action Group has continued to clear footpaths and tidies footpaths and walkways around the whole of the village as required.

### **The Parish is engaged in addressing environmental issues such as the control of Fly-tipping, Fly-posting, Litter, Graffiti & Dog fouling.**

The Village Action Group volunteers have a regular programme of litter-picking throughout the village, in particular along its approach roads. The Action Group has contributed to efforts to get the highways authorities to keep the A27 and C7 clean and litter-free.

The Action Group has worked closely with the KPC in taking action over dog-fouling. There are now bins for litter and dog waste sited throughout the village.

Damage from graffiti, fly-tipping and fly-posting remains, thankfully, not a problem here.

### **Formation of a new Community Energy Project.**

The Village Action Group working with KPC have been awarded mentoring from Community Energy South, which is being funded by the SDNPA, to set up a Community Energy Project. We were advised in March 2021 that we were one of five community groups in the South Downs National Park area to receive the support. The overall objective is to reduce the village's carbon footprint.

Two approaches are being adopted. Firstly, residents are being encouraged to appreciate how as individuals they can make reductions in emissions through changes in lifestyle as well as taking steps to reduce domestic energy consumption. Secondly, options for developing community-owned renewable energy are being examined which it is hoped can be taken forward for detailed consideration of technical and financial feasibility. Possible technologies include one based on the tidal flow of the Ouse, possibly in conjunction with the Ouse Valley CARES team, and the other based on a "pumped storage" hydro-type project using the natural geography of the Downs.

The Project team are proposing to hold a Community Energy fair later this year. Such a fair will enable us not only to develop interest in the project, but to allow us to start to provide "educational" material for residents on what they themselves can do to promote carbon reduction through direct action in their home and in their lifestyles.

## **Section C - Gardening/Horticulture/Conservation Achievement**

**The Parish Council is employing good gardening, horticultural and tree management practices.**

The KPC actively encourages residents to care for their gardens. Residential gardens throughout the village are generally well maintained and enhance the parish's appearance. There is growing awareness of the need to create 'wilderness' habitats in garden and woodland settings to enhance biodiversity and create green corridors, as exemplified by the KPC/Action Group's work on the Village Green. The number of front gardens where wildflowers are being allowed to bloom in lawns has increased notably over the last few years and more residents are planting spring bulbs in their verges. SDNPA policies around climate change, ecosystems and environmental enhancement are an important reference point for new planning applications in the parish.

KPC carries out regular surveys of trees and their safety. The Village Tree Warden has planted more than 20 apple trees in The Avenue to replace those which have died or been removed. All of these are old varieties exclusive to the local area. New challenges are arising with ash die-back and ash trees are being monitored for safety and disease.

KPC maintains St Pancras Green and the Village Green, together with the Community Pavilion surrounds and its green roof.

The KPC has continued to support the work of the Village Action Group in new planting and maintenance regimes and provided grants to buy maintenance equipment for that work.

### **A new Community Wildlife Garden**

In July 2020, the Village Action Group liaised with Lewes District Council (LDC) to acquire the lease of two overgrown allotments at the east end of The Street to create what will now become a Community Wildlife Garden.

Before the autumn lockdown intervened, volunteers spent more than 100 hours clearing the site. Work has now resumed there and a donated greenhouse is being erected. Villagers have also donated a shed, water butts, compost bins and paving stones. LDC installed a post and rail fence along one of the boundaries and a new hedge has been planted beneath this.

The Community Wildlife Garden will act as a practical focus for building awareness of climate change and conservation within the community at large. The Action Group is liaising with Plumpton Agricultural College's Horticultural Department at Stanmer Park about the involvement of horticultural students in the development of the new garden.

## **2020/2021**

### **Highlights**

- A new Environmental Policy has been developed by the Village Action Group and Kingston Parish Council. This will include Action Plans for Footpaths and Cycleways; and Green Corridors produced jointly by the KPC and the Action Group.

- A new wilding/planting programme for the Village Green has been initiated.
- Planting over the last ten years includes 10,000 crocus, 400 primroses, 4,000 snowdrops, 2,000 daffodils and a variety of wildflowers. Planting has continued during 2020/21.
- Successful fund-raising has been achieved to enable our planting programme to continue – snowdrops/crocuses/daffodils - on a number of village locations. Proposals have been developed to extend this programme to all verges on the estate.
- The Action Group has negotiated a lease from Lewes District Council and undertaken the initial development of a new Community Wildlife Garden.
- Our regular programme of litter-picking and maintenance of public realm has been continued throughout the year in the face of Covid-19 restrictions.
- There have been regular articles on wildlife in the Kingston News through the year.
- The development of a new Community Energy Project is underway.
- A detailed revision of the Conservation Area Character Appraisal has been undertaken by SDNPA in association with the KPC and the final draft is due for consultation shortly.

**Kingston Village Action Group July 2021**



*Daffodils and primroses planted by the Action Group along the path between The Street and St Pancras Green*



*Some of the snowdrops planted by the Action Group along the Avenue*



*Daffodils planted by the Action Group at the junction of Wellgreen Lane and the Lewes to Newhaven Road*



*Some of the daffodils planted by the Action Group along Ashcombe Lane*



*Crocuses planted by the Action Group along Wellgreen Lane by Snednore*



*Crocuses planted by the Action Group at Snednore*



*Members of the Action Group discussing community garden development at Plumpton College Horticultural Department's Stanmer Garden*



*Early stages of clearing the Community Wildlife Garden*



*Early stages of clearing the Community Wildlife Garden*



*Progress on clearing Community Wildlife Garden*



*Progress on clearing Community Wildlife Garden*



*Progress on clearing Community Wildlife Garden*



*Clearing the Community Wildlife Garden*



*Relocating the donated greenhouse to the new Community Wildlife Garden*



*Laying foundations for donated shed on Community Wildlife Garden – Greenhouse in foreground*



*Wildflowers on unmown areas of Village Green*



*Preparing stripped area on Village Green for plug plants and wildflower seeds*