

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO BOWERHILL RESIDENTS ACTION GROUP'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2014

This has been yet another successful year for the Bowerhill Residents Action Group. At the last AGM we set some challenging targets for the next year and we have not only achieved them but have exceeded them. I'll start by reviewing the past year from the action plan points.

1. Improve the wildlife area next to the picnic benches.

BRAG have planted a flowering cherry tree in memory of Michelle Phillips who died in a road accident ten years ago using money given to us by Michelle's parents who have now moved away from Bowerhill and who wanted a lasting memory of their daughter. A flowering cherry was Michelle's favourite and the tree has a plaque on it. The Matt Dicks memorial bench has been renovated and now also has a plaque to remember Matt. We have planted more trees and flowers and now have planters with flowers growing to brighten up the area. The Community Payback team cleared and tidied the whole area for us and did their usual great job. We aim to use them twice a year to help keep the area under control. More bird and bat boxes have been erected.

2. Talk to Persimmon about the future of the community land at Hornchurch Road

The housing development is almost finished with just some more landscaping to complete. I think this is a well-constructed development that is in keeping with what the local residents wanted. The cast iron black fence at the front and side gives a good finish to the site. We have had some issues over the removal of the hedge at the back and I met with Wiltshire Council's planning monitoring officer who showed me what was supposedly the latest plans showing that the hedge was to be retained. A few days later he contacted me to say that although they were the latest plans they had not been updated with the approval of removing the hedge. I still do not know who approved the hedge removal or when but it has happened and the monitoring officer says all of this was legal. I have still had no explanation as to why the fence at the back of the properties has been moved to incorporate the few trees that still remained from the old hedge line. This means that Wiltshire Council must have agreed to give some of their land to the developers. All I get told now is that the trees are in private gardens so no action can be taken. It's a probability that the trees will be cut down when residents move in as the trees will dominate the very small gardens.

3. Campaign to get facilities for teenagers at the open space at Hornchurch Road

A multi game facility (MUGA) for teenagers was the planning gain from the development at Hornchurch Road. The developers paid £32500 to Wiltshire Council to cover the cost of the MUGA and as the money had been paid tenders to supply and erect the MUGA were sought and the best value quotation was chosen for the work.

However there has been considerable opposition to the concept of the MUGA at that location as local residents claim they knew nothing about the plan and would have opposed it if they had known. BRAG has no further involvement in this issue as the plan is with Wiltshire Council and Melksham Without Parish Council.

4. Apply to Wiltshire Council's Path Improvement Grant Scheme to complete the path from the back of Bowerhill School to link with the footpath from Hurricane Road.

This was unsuccessful as Wiltshire Council does not see the need for a footpath as one exists from Hurricane Road to the shops via Grasmere. However as the Path Improvement Scheme (PIGS) has been reintroduced Melksham Without Parish Council has applied again to get the work done.

5. Erect bird and bat boxes and plant trees and bulbs

Work done but this is a continuing job.

6. Talk to local businesses about sponsorships

I spoke to Tesco's local manager about sponsorships and the issue was referred to the regional manager. The local manager changed on a frequent basis so every time I asked for progress I had to explain the request again and again. I wrote to Tesco's head office explaining who we were and why we wanted sponsorship but our request was refused on the grounds that our request did not match the corporate aims. When you consider how much money Tesco's make locally I was very annoyed and surprised that our sponsorship request for a few hundred pounds was refused.

7. Litter clearance.

We have now volunteer residents who act as the litter warden for their area of Bowerhill who regularly do a litter pick in nearby streets. Because of this we will no longer organise litter picks across the estate. Instead we will concentrate on litter hot spots and we have asked the litter wardens to inform us of areas that have become untidy and we will organise a one off litter pick to clear that area.

8. Best Kept Village Competition

Bowerhill lost its best kept village title, not because of litter but for two reasons. The allotments were considered to be unkempt and not cultivated, a decision that totally baffled me. Also our bus shelters were dirty, something that was taken up by Melksham Without Parish Council. I also have raised this as a separate issue on Wiltshire Council's web site. My issue was closed as "work completed" which I disagreed with as no work had been done. The issue has been re-opened and I have been promised that all of the shelters will be properly cleaned. The judges were unable to find the canal path and the picnic area despite all of the signposts.

I said if they found the allotments they must have seen the sign for the picnic area. We are not permitted to accompany the judges and we never know exactly when they turn up.

8. Regular Working Parties

We have planted 105 trees on the bank at the back of Duxford Close that were given to us by the Woodland Trust. These are just whips at present but eventually they will grow and provide a screen to the Gompels factory. Wiltshire Council who own the land gave permission for the trees to be planted provided a path was left to allow their contractors to get to the ditch. Local residents were delighted with the work and are keeping an eye on the trees for us.

We will organise working parties as required to clear litter hot spots, to keep the borders at both ends of Brabazon Way cut and tidied and to do work at the picnic area.

If we are given more trees then I suggest that with the permission of Wiltshire Council that we plant trees next to the path at Catalina Court to replace the hedgerow that was removed.

We will also work with the residents of Locking Close to improve the open space there by planting shrubs and trees to prevent vehicles parking on the green or even using it as a short cut between Bowerhill Lane and Locking Close. We have already bought some plants for this work.

9. Campaign on issues that arise on behalf of residents.

We have been working with Wiltshire Council and Melksham Without Parish Council to resolve the long running problem of workers' vehicles parking all day in Halifax Road between De Havilland Place and Stirling Close and vehicles parking dangerously on the bend between Mitchell Close and Bader Park. The double yellow lines have been painted and the restrictions were legal from 14 April. So far drivers are obeying the rules and only a few workers' vehicles parking further down Halifax Road.

We were concerned about the plans to develop land on both sides of Pathfinder Way for houses and on behalf of BRAG I sent a letter of objection to the developers. I pointed out that Bowerhill is a village and has a strong community spirit and does not want to be part of Melksham and lose its identity. The rural buffer protects Bowerhill from coalescence with Melksham so building on that land could lead to Bowerhill becoming part of Melksham Town.

We are still waiting to hear about a meeting with Sam Gompel to discuss his plans for another extension to his factory. His architects were organising a meeting for residents of Duxford Close and Bader Park but so far I have not been told of the date.

10. Bowerhill Sports Fields

We look forward to the completion of the new pavilion which will replace the old changing rooms which will then be demolished to make room for Portal Road to be completed from the Semington By Pass to Lancaster Road. The arrival of such a distinguished company as Herman Miller is a vote of confidence in the Bowerhill Industrial Estate and a boost to the whole area when an ugly eyesore becomes a smart new factory.

11. Hastings Road balancing pond.

Rolf Brindle and I met with Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Wildlife to discuss the state of the balancing pond area, the consensus being that the area is fine as it is and we should not take any further action.

12. Melksham entry in South West in Bloom

Melksham Town Council has entered the town and the community area in the South West in Bloom competition after their success last year in being highly commended. They were looking for community areas to enter in the It's Your Neighbourhood part of the competition and I have entered the work of BRAG, particularly the picnic area and the tree planting at the back of Duxford Close. I'll find out exactly when the judging takes place but it will be at the start of July so we can organise a work party during the previous week to ensure the area is tidy. Not only can we help Melksham but we could win a certificate ourselves. I will put together some photographs of what we have done and a report.

13. BRAG minutes of meetings

The point has been made that the minutes of previous BRAG meetings are not held on line which is true. We are a small community group and do not have a web page. MWPC has now agreed that they will host minutes of our meetings and publicise future meetings on their web pages under community news. I'm very grateful to them.

14 Benches and Seats

BRAG was given an Area Board grant to erect more seats and benches round Bowerhill. We have already identified area where seats and benches should be erected but we still need more suggestions. I know from talking to residents who live near to the Hornchurch Road open space that they would like some seats. We will discuss this later under work plans for the coming year.

15. Conclusion

This has been yet another fantastic year for BRAG and we will not sit back on our laurels but will continue with more projects over the next year. This is where we need your help later in the agenda when we will be asking for new ideas.

My thanks and that of all the residents of Bowerhill are due to a hard working committee of volunteers who give their time freely to improve the area where we live. My congratulations are due to everyone who has helped.

Mike Mills

Chairman BRAG