

FHRA - CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT - MARCH 2005

Executive Summary.

1. This report covers the period from April 2004 to March 2005; a period of major change for the organisation both in terms of structure and people. Over the last 9 months, we have become formally constituted as a Residents Association and have begun to go through the process to become a registered charity. We have held 2 Public meetings in the late autumn as part of the Government's Appraisal Scheme and, based on the inputs received from all those who attended, have published defined key objectives both in the short and longer term. We have forged positive links with many local government bodies and these are beginning to reap benefit. We have also mounted a membership campaign and are delighted that so many people have agreed to join the Association to give us moral and financial support. Indeed, the generosity of many has been overwhelming.

2. The sub-groups have achieved many successes over the year although, it must be said, that we might have accomplished more had we a greater number of active supporters to undertake the detailed work. It must also be said that we have not always achieved what we set out to because of local government bureaucracy, current legislation, and insurmountable practical problems. Nonetheless, the sub-groups continue to work towards the goals we have set but recognising that it may take longer than one would wish. In terms of enhancing community spirit within the village, we have organised several successful social events not least of all the Christmas tree and lights.

3. None of this would have been achieved had it not been for the active support of a small band of committee members who have devoted many hours of their precious time and some of their own money to make things happen for the benefit of the community at large. We have also been very well supported by both residents and businesses within the village many of whom have made especially generous donations. We have also applied for and received several small grants to help fund our start up activities; these include the Buckinghamshire Foundation, Wycombe District Council, and the Carrington Foundation. Finally, we are thrilled that both Lord Carrington and Ken Ross (Buckinghamshire's Deputy Lieutenant) have agreed to be Patrons of our Association.

4. On the future, we have now reviewed the Key Objectives and have reissued the document for 2005/06 with several new aims added. To meet many of these goals, we need to improve significantly our financial status. Although we can now cover our routine administrative costs, we lack the funds to undertake major projects. We will therefore apply for further grants wherever we can. We also need to continue to recruit more members and to encourage greater involvement with the Association's activities.

5. Meantime, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support over the past year and I look forward to achieving even better results during the coming 12 months.

Detailed Report.

1. At the beginning of 2004, our organisation was called the Flackwell Heath Residents Committee and was chaired by Mr Mark Walker. Mark was one of the original “gang of 5” who started the Residents Committee in 2003, held public meetings, and identified the issues and general concerns of villagers. From these meetings, the Residents Committee identified a number of key objectives and created several sub groups to take these forward.
2. Around this same time, the Government introduced the “Appraisal Scheme” which aimed to achieve a greater involvement by residents in local decision making. Bodies such as the Residents Committee were asked to help facilitate village appraisals that would identify key issues that needed to be addressed by local councils. The Residents Committee was also asked to be the focus for the village for on-going activities. At this point, Mark Walker, like many of the original “Gang of 5”, felt that he had achieved what he had set out to do with the spare time that he had available. He therefore concluded that it was now time for new Committee members to take the organisation forward and resigned as Chairman.
3. In June 2004, I agreed to become interim Chairman of the Residents Committee with the caveats that we must become a formally constituted organisation and ordinary members must duly elect the core committee members on the Executive Committee. With the valuable and active support of WDC, a constitution was drafted and was approved in August 2004. It was also decided that for financial and legal reasons, the Association would apply for charitable status. We then embarked on a 3-month recruitment campaign that included the delivery of letters and application forms to every house in the village courtesy of the Scouts. These members would then be asked to elect the Association’s officials at the first Annual General Meeting and this was set for 29th March 2005. We also applied for and received grants from the Buckinghamshire Foundation, Wycombe District Council, and the Carrington Foundation to help set-up the Association.
4. Meantime, the sub groups continued to pursue their detailed objectives. The Police & Traffic groups were merged into one because of the overlap of interests and the need for both of them to interface with Thames Valley Police (TVP). Regular meetings have been held with police officers from PC to Chief Superintendent in order to convince TVP that Flackwell Heath is not a crime free area and that they needed to take a more proactive role in making the community a safer place. Lack of resources has been blamed for the absence of a regular police presence but it is clear that the village is seen by TVP as a low-crime area despite the fact that there have been numerous incidents of serious anti-social behaviour in the village. It is also clear that incidents often goes unreported and so the PAT group has introduced a crime reporting scheme to help ensure that all incidents are properly reported to TVP. This does not circumvent the need for everyone to report crime directly to the police, particularly in an emergency, but it does ensure that all incidents are correctly recorded. Over the year, it is clear that the on-going pressure applied by the PAT group has born fruit although the current situation is still far from perfect. The recent reorganisation of the police generally has meant that the village will now be regularly patrolled by a PC Support Officer (PCSO) who, whilst lacking the full powers of a Police Constable, will provide a presence and will be able to quickly summon help where necessary.

5. Traffic issues particularly illegal parking and speeding remain a serious concern. Enforcement of parking regulations has been discussed ad nauseum with the TVP but the police have not spent adequate time dealing with offenders. We have also discussed with Bucks County Council (BCC) Traffic Department staff other measures that might improve both the parking and speeding situation. Following the FHRC traffic survey in early 2004, we had been hoping that it might be possible to remove the speed cushions through the village and install alternative traffic calming measures that did not have the disadvantages identified with the bumps. BCC are proposing to undertake another formal traffic survey in 2005 and review the traffic management measures in the village. The results of this exercise will be published as soon as they become known.

6. The PAT Group must also take credit for pressurising the Council to refurbish the toilet block on the Recreation Ground. Indeed, the block has been replaced rather than refurbished and we hope that it will not be abused and spoiled by a mindless minority.

7. Turning now to the Decorations group. Once again, in conjunction with WDC, they successfully organised the Christmas tree and lights with the switch-on ceremony occurring on 4th December 2004. The Cherry Tree pub once again donated the Christmas tree and donations towards the costs of the lights were gratefully received from many of Flackwell Heath's residents and businesses. It was hoped that in 2005, the group would help arrange floral decorations and hanging baskets around the centre of the village. Unfortunately, this has not been possible this year because of Health & Safety concerns but the Chair will continue to work with WDC to pursue this goal in the longer term. Meantime, the group will focus on an Open Gardens afternoon and expanding next year's Christmas decorations to Acorn House.

8. The Youth group has achieved a number of firsts this year with the help and support of WDC, the Royal British Legion and the Methodist Church. A WDC mobile skateboard park was set up in Carrington School for 2 days during the summer and further days are being arranged. The British Legion generously agreed to let the village youngsters use their pool table on a Thursday evening and, recently, their functions room has been used for discos organised by the teenagers themselves. Similarly, the Methodist Church has opened its doors to all the village youngsters on a Friday evening. Attempts to arrange 10-pin bowling evenings at Daws Hill base have been thwarted so far because of security concerns and the need to clear people in advance. However, the group will continue to pursue this option.

9. The Youth group has devoted much time to locating a suitable building for a "walk-in" centre for the youngsters. Currently, the various halls within the village (Community Centre, British Legion, Church etc) are fully booked. Nonetheless, the group has explored the use of the old betting shop and the Temperance Hall. The latter is being sold by the Roman Catholic Church for development and may therefore not be available in the longer term - see Planning & Environment below. Discussions with Tote continue on the old betting shop.

10. During the last year, 2 new sub groups have been formed; one to cover fund-raising and the other Planning & Environment. Sufficient people could not be recruited to support the fund-raising group, but the one member (Ian Leeds)

successfully organised 2 events in conjunction with the Community Association. The first was a Quiz Night which was held in October and the second the Cabaret evening that immediately followed the Christmas tree festivities and was equally a success. Unfortunately, Ian could not reasonably keep up the pace and retired gracefully. As we have been unable to find any further volunteers, our hard-pressed Vice Chairman has agreed to act as Events Co-ordinator and a programme agreed for 2005 as follows:

- 13th May - Jazz Supper - Christ Church Hall.
- 19th June - Open Garden Afternoon 2 – 5pm.
- 17th July - Cherry Fayre
- October - Quiz Night.
- 3rd December - Christmas Tree Lights + Cabaret.

11. A Cherry Fayre has not been held for many years and is a major undertaking for the Association. However, with the help and support of village organisations, people and businesses, it will hopefully reinvigorate the community spirit in the village and, again, become an annual event.

12. Finally, Planning & Environment (P&E); this group is in its infancy and, again limited in numbers. This year it has concentrated on major redevelopments within the village (including the A&W College site and the temperance Hall) and the production of a “Village Design Statement” (VDS). The latter is a major project, will involve several consultations with the whole community, and is expected to take about a year to complete. Providing we implement the scheme correctly, the VDS will be adopted by the WDC Planning Department and will hopefully minimise the number of inappropriate developments that are submitted for approval.

13. Concerning the Temperance Hall, the potential loss of this valuable community facility has been the subject of much correspondence and reporting in the press. Unfortunately, we were unable to get a mandate at our appraisal meetings to make procurement of the hall a primary aim of the Association. Indeed, we could see little likelihood of raising the monies necessary to purchase the property let alone refurbish it to meet modern standards. Although the building has recently been “Locally Listed”, which restricts what a future developer might be allowed to do, this is unlikely to change the final outcome greatly.

14. There are a number of other longer term objectives which we have been unable to address because of limited resources and time. The first is to plan for Flackwell Heath to be included in the “Village in Bloom” competition. The other is addressing “Value For Money” when it comes to community charges. We have had some initial discussions about the nationwide “IsItFair?” campaign with a local resident (Archie Wye), and as a result we are setting up a meeting with the Wycombe Area co-ordinator (Mr. Parr) to find out more about the organisation. We can then decide whether it is appropriate for the Residents Association to support that particular campaign.

15. Looking towards the future, we have reviewed and updated our current objectives to reflect progress to date and newly identified aims. These revised objectives are available for viewing at the AGM, in the library, and on the Flackwell Heath website. Our main focus for the coming year must be to:

- Continue to increase membership.
- Undertake fund-raising activities to make the Association financially stable.
- Seek grants to support capital projects in the village.
- Arrange more community events.

16. Again, I would like to thank everyone who has supported the organisation over the last 12 months and the Committee members who have devoted many hours of their spare time to make a positive contribution to the life of people living in Flackwell Heath.

David Johncock
Chairman

28th March 2005