



HKD Transition Report on Activities 2019-20

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ... it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness'. Dicken's famous opening to *A Tale of Two Cities* was written for a time when the threat of the French Revolution crossing the Channel was as real as the threat of Covid-19 is to us. Yet throughout that famous opening his emphasis was on the positive. Good would come out of the 'winter of despair'. This report covers the twelve months (July 2019 to August 2020). A few months of normal life, then increasingly alarming news of a deadly virus, followed by five months of lockdown. Yet we also have identified new strengths and opportunities.

Face to face contact is the life blood of local groups, so we had to adapt quickly. Management committee members learned to Zoom. 'Lockdown Lounges' became a regular feature, giving new opportunities for members to enjoy talks and discussion on current topics via Zoom. Amongst others, Charlie Burrell inspired us with an account of the rewinding of the Knepp estate. Laurie Jackson shared her concerns about climate change and wildlife whilst Colin McFarlane and Kayla Ente respectively brought us up to date on recycling in West Sussex and home energy saving. A valuable group discussion focussed on life after COVID. This was a follow-up of a survey of our members. Respondents had concentrated on their positive reactions to lockdown: the blossoming of help and kindness, the welcome slower pace of life with its reduction in traffic. Concerns included the need for government intervention to promote a 'new normal' sustainable future. Undoubtedly, this is a theme we will be returning to, whilst continuing 'lockdown lounges' into 2021.

Lockdown also provided us with an unexpected opportunity to serve our community. There was a huge demand for seeds from new and enthusiastic gardeners. All the local shops were sold out. Our seed swap came into its own! We managed to provide a socially distanced delivery service in Hurst, Hassocks and Ditchling, distributing over 70 batches to grateful gardeners.

The Floods & SuDs team's work on reducing Hassocks flood risks continued and was highlighted in a two minute video *Slowing the Flow*. (Available on our website and on YouTube.) Volunteers built more debris dams in Lag Wood to slow the flow of peak rainfall into the village and also helped Downlands School plant trees in the school grounds. An interpretation board explaining natural flood management and highlighting our work

around the village was installed in Adastra Park. Peter King, director of the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, led a very popular stream walk and Jane Reeves from the FLOW project on the Manhood Peninsula described their flood management and habitat creation work.

If any of our projects deserved to come to a triumphant conclusion this year, it is the cycling initiative. Surely the huge increase in popularity plus Government funding would have guaranteed success? Not so, reports Chris Thomson. 'Although the summer saw the first stage of making the B2116 more cycle friendly, with the installation of bike lights at the Stonepound crossroads, the past year has been more about waiting than campaigning! We now await – we hope – the creation of a cycle-friendly route from Hurstpierpoint to Downlands School and in the meantime we are beginning to think about how we might bring pressure to bear for the implementation of traffic-calming measures on the road between Keymer and Ditchling.'

HKD Energy quietly continued its work. A Community Benefit Society, established in 2014, it aims to increase the amount of renewable energy generated in our area and to deliver benefits to the local community by demonstrating that community energy works. The 80 kW Downlands School Solar Project installed in 2015 continues to operate very successfully, with more than 300 solar panels saving carbon emissions and reducing the school's energy costs. Most recently attention has been transferred to efforts geared to improve the energy efficiency of local buildings such as Adastra Hall in Hassocks.

All in all, despite COVID and lockdown, our year can probably be remembered as Dickens's 'Spring of hope' rather than this 'winter of despair'. But back in October there was no doubt. Before we had an inkling of what was to come, we held our 6th Apple Day on Ditchling Village Green. John Willis paints the picture:

'We were blessed with very good weather and it was a great success. As usual, Tae Chisholm did a brilliant job of getting many enthusiastic helpers involved. As there had been a lot of rain beforehand, the layout was successfully changed to minimise the use of the village green. Special thanks were due to the White Horse, the Macs Farm, Spoilt for Choice and Ditchling Morris as well as to the Ditchling school PTA, the Brownies and Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft who all ran activities. New this year and very popular were plants from the Museum garden and Hurst Hedgehog Haven. The Welly Wanging was as popular as ever. The day was brought to a close with Ditchling Morris dancing for us and leading our procession up to the orchard where we tasted the different types of local apples we grow there. We are raising funds towards a green roofed shelter for the Orchard, and the amazing net profit this year (approx. £1150) means that we have now been able to proceed with finalising the design ready for the planning application.'

If Dickens had a welly he would have been there wanging with the best of us.