

Black Park Shed

Chairman's report 2017-2018

It is a great pleasure and honour to be writing this first report on Black Park Shed. It has been great to have seen, and been part of the development of the Shed from nothing to a well equipped functioning workshop.

The inaugural meeting was held at the Park on September 29th 2017 following locally placed advertisements and was facilitated by Tim Williams, Team Leader, Country Parks and Jacqueline Austin-Lavery, Community Links Officer, both from Buckinghamshire County Council. About 10 interested people turned up and the Shed was formed – with an elected committee of Keith Gillard, Chairman, Les Stone, Treasurer and Geoff Cox, Secretary, and a constitution.

The premises originally allocated comprised two units, later extended to three, each about 4m square. One was closed, the others open fronted. The idea was that we would enclose them with timber cut and prepared for us but before we could do any structural work we had to have a formal lease with BCC. One of the first tasks of the committee was to negotiate and agree this lease which, in the event took the lawyers some 9 months to finalise – even though there were no substantive differences between the parties!

One of the sheds was full of logs which Tim donated to us and which we sold and which gave us a good initial injection of cash.

In the meantime the Shed was offered a contract to refurbish some 30 sets of tables and benches from the Park Cafe. This proved to be a godsend by providing an activity for members and a source of revenue.

Also in the meantime, the Committee, with Jacqueline's help had been busy applying for various grants to help with the considerable set up costs involved. With a lot of hard work, particularly from Les, we secured grants from a number of sources and these are detailed in the Treasurer's report. We were extremely fortunate to obtain these grants which have meant we have been able to hit the ground running.

Geoff Cox decided to leave the group early on and was replaced as Secretary by Clare Lawson.

Our neighbours at Pinewood Studios kindly offered us free use of their cinema for a fund raising film and in November we showed White Christmas, selling around 100 tickets and giving us an income of about £1,000.

During March 2018 it was found that there were problems with the structure of the sheds we had been offered – basically as well as no fronts, they had no backs except slats covered with flimsy soft board. The work of converting them to a watertight and sound condition was clearly considerable. The Park turned up trumps and offered us an alternative building – a lean-to on the disused sawmill. What's more, since the lease was virtually agreed, if not finalised, Tim offered to give us access under a Tenancy at Will which meant we could finally start work on “making our Shed”.

At this time, Keith decided to leave the group and I agreed to take over as Chairman, which is how I come to be writing this now. Keith had really been a driving force in getting the Shed established and a debt of gratitude is owed to him for this.

During March we established our own website (blackparkshed.org.uk) which has proved to be a valuable source of both new members and donations.

Once we had access to the premises we began work on the structure, fitting doors, moving windows, rebuilding missing sections of wall between the Shed and the main Sawmill, insulating and lining the walls and installing electrics. It has been a very busy 6 months, there has been a lot of hard work and most of us have had to learn new skills along the way, but we have ended up with a Shed to be proud of, with a separate machine shop and main workshop and a Mess room where some of the more important activities of drinking tea, eating cake and putting the world to rights go on.

The lease was finally signed in July 2018 giving us a 10 year tenancy at a peppercorn rent.

We have been donated a large quantity of tools, including woodworking machines. Ryobi tools gave us a generous donation of cordless power tools which have been absolutely invaluable during the structural work. Individuals have contacted us with gifts of hand tools, and some of our grant money will be used to provide other essential equipment.

The present situation, therefore, is that we have (virtually) completed all the structural work and have a usable and functional workshop. We can now begin to think about activities for the future. We are hoping to be able to stock a stall with items we have made to open in the Park during December near Santa's Grotto. We have members who are interested in green woodworking and are planning to develop that, along with wood turning. Our lease provides us with an area of “garden” which we plan to develop. Unfortunately we cannot get full access to this until the end of the year as it is housing some saplings required for planting in the Park. We have another contract with the Cafe for further refurbishment work. Another possibility is to develop a general repair and refurbishment facility for furniture etc.

I feel that the Shed is now on a firm footing with a good future ahead of it. Membership now stands at 19 and we regularly open for two days a week.

In closing, I must offer up some heartfelt thanks: we have been so fortunate in having been offered great premises in a fantastic location. Tim Williams, who started the ball rolling has been tremendous in the help and support he has given. In addition the staff at the Park and the Rangers have been extremely helpful to us. Also Jacqueline Austin-Lavery has been instrumental in pointing us to grant sources and to passing on experience of other Sheds. Pinewood Studios have been generous in allowing us to use their cinema (and also gave us a tour of the Studios). The charities, Heart of Bucks, Local Area Forum (Wexham and the Ivers) and RVS-Asda Foundation have provided generous start-up grants without which we would be floundering financially.

My personal thanks are to Les and Clare who have provided great support since I took over but above all my thanks are to the members of the Black Park Shed who have worked so hard and willingly to get us to where we are today. And it really has been physically hard work! Everyone can be proud of the achievement.

Derek Hooper
Chairman, Black Park Shed
1 October 2018