



20 January 2005

Residents rally to transform estate

Upstanding residents have come together to turn around their neighbourhood and improve the quality of life for others.

Nine keen community-spirited individuals have joined forces with Whitefriars Housing Group to ensure the New Deal for Communities area, including Wood End, Manor Farm and Henley Green, gets the services residents want.

The group has spent the last few months training to negotiate, communicate and innovate in a bid to assert themselves with local service providers including the council, Whitefriars and the police. Issues they will tackle includes grounds maintenance, refuse collection and empty properties.

They will soon be heading to the board room and negotiating with organisations to make sure the level of service provided is what residents expect. With support from Whitefriars staff, the group will draw up an estate agreement which the service providers will sign up and agree to. Once the agreement has been signed, the group will monitor whether it is being followed.

Group member John Marriott said they hoped to make a difference: "I got involved because I am the one always moaning about things I want to change such as fly tipping, untidy grass verges, street lighting and the drug problem in the area. These things are part and parcel of what the group has been discussing.

"I truly hope we can make a difference. I think it a very good idea to get residents involved in what happens to their own community and it is good to have a voice and to be taken notice of. I think the police and Whitefriars genuinely do want to make a difference."

The group's first task will be to liaise with grounds maintenance staff. They will be setting out the standard of service residents can expect and negotiating with Whitefriars and the council to ensure garden services are co-ordinated.

Another group member, Josie Kenny, said she was looking forward to the challenge.

She said: "I moved here ten months ago and thought there was a lot going on here - a lot positive but some not so wonderful. I think the community has got to have a say. We live here so we know what services are needed rather than someone telling us what we need and leaving us to live with it.

"I am really looking forward to being able to develop the services although I know it is not going to be easy and it will take a lot of effort to make a difference. What we are saying to people is that if something is wrong you don't have to put up with it. One lone voice is difficult to be heard, but two or three voices shouting together make far more noise."

Whitefriars customer involvement officer Sue Howarth said: "The idea is to equip the group with the tools needed to make a difference in their community.

"The group are very committed and so are we. This is a long-term project which may take two years to get fully into place but we have already made huge progress.

"The idea is that we, and the other service providers, will work with the residents to negotiate around the estate agreement to ensure it is a success. Once the key priorities and standards have been agreed, then the group can communicate these to the rest of the area."

END

For further information please contact Nikki Cheung at The Bridge Group on 02476 217 398 or n.cheung@bridge-group.co.uk