

**Speech given by Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire - Countess Howe  
on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2024 at official KAVS Award Presentation in Brill Village Hall**

It is a great honour for me to be with you today to celebrate your award of the King's Award for Voluntary Service. Congratulations!

Before I come to the official presentation let me say a few words about the background to the Award which is equivalent to the MBE for individuals. It was decided by Her Late Majesty that there should be a new award to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of her accession to the throne in 1952.

The Queen's Golden Jubilee Award, as it was first known, was to be made annually to recognize and reward excellence in voluntary activities carried out by groups of people in the community. Subsequently the award was renamed the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. His Majesty The King has welcomed the chance to continue to recognise volunteering in its many facets. He understands only too well that every day millions of people across the UK are making a difference by volunteering and so he is keen to see outstanding examples of volunteering celebrated through the KAVS.

Since the start in 2002 just 58 organisations in Buckinghamshire have received the Monarch's Award for voluntary service. In 2023 we had 8 worthy recipients of the award. In addition to yourselves we have Trubys Garden Tea Room, Milton Keynes Green Gym, Wycombe Central Aid, The Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes Sexual Assault and Abuse Support Service, The One Can Trust, Wolverton Community Orchard And Queens Park Arts Centre.

All these winners demonstrate the extraordinary range of volunteering which is undertaken in the county and I feel particularly proud that Buckinghamshire residents are so invested in the welfare of their own communities.

There are just 262 award winners throughout the country this year so you are joining a very elite group.

As Lord-Lieutenant I have the privilege, together with a group of Deputy Lieutenants, to review the nominations made and to make comments. However, the decision as to who should receive the award is made by HM the King on the advice of a minister supported by a national expert's panel. The announcements are made annually on 14<sup>th</sup> November The King's birthday.

I would like to thank our county Panel members, who are all Deputy Lieutenants for their generous allocation of time and their skilful assessments of the work of the charities and for their commitment to the Kings's Awards and in particular to Amanda Nicholson who of course visited you. If you know of other groups who you think might qualify for a KAVS, please encourage them get in touch with us, to look at our website where KAVS has a separate tab, or just to type KAVS into their favourite browser, and register. Sheena Dykes

is heading up my Lieutenancy support for KAVS and I know you know her well, so do point anyone with queries in her direction.

And so now let me come to the reasons for your success:

As the first of its kind in the country, Brill Village Community Herd provides an inspired solution to the problem of reclaiming a public space and sustaining biodiversity. It is a shining example of an exceptionally committed team of volunteers uniting community participation with conservation.

Quite simply, without the BVCH, the uncultivable common land would revert to impenetrable scrub, inhospitable to flora, fauna and useless to local residents and visitors alike. The sheer volume and commitment of you as volunteers is extraordinary; 280 people contributing to the running of this enterprise. A daily rota of 35 'lookers' observing, counting and monitoring the cows and reporting any concerns for their welfare or safety. And 25 designated 'movers' who volunteer to move the cows to fresh pasture as conditions dictate, re-erecting the fencing on each occasion. Whatever the weather troughs are checked and hay provided. Your warden or her assistant, both experienced herdspersons, are on call at all times and assist with TB testing and cattle handling.

They go on to say; Skilled volunteers maintain plant and machinery and all participate in repairing storm damage, uprooting noxious weeds and guarding rare wild plants. The volunteers are totally committed to protecting, encouraging and recording the regeneration of wildlife on Brill Common. Their diligence is clearly making an impact, with Natural England's Interim report finding that significant improvement had been made in the conservation of the area.

Your annual BVCH newsletter is informative and well produced with articles about the flora and fauna discovered thriving on the grazed grassland, and it encourages more people to take part and share in the ownership and care of the herd. The BVCH website is detailed, accurate and kept up to date.

The herd is well run, with expert opinion sought from the outset as to the best breed of cow for the task. Placid, polled Dexter cows were recommended, and the nine non-breeding females that graze on Brill Common are exploited for neither milk nor meat. Regular mandatory testing and veterinary supervision are observed.

Your financial support has come from a local charitable trust and private donors who enable the purchase of essential equipment and storage. The Parish council is equally supportive obtaining grants to facilitate the purchase of water troughs, a tractor, and flails and through engaging a contractor to clear the dense impenetrable scrub in 2017.

They conclude by saying; this is an exemplary example of an innovative scheme run by a driven team of dedicated volunteers where the environment thrives, there are public benefits and the cows enjoy a wonderful life.