

Kotch – the coolest place to hang out

Young people today are no different from when Ronnie Wilkie was a lad. They just wear a different uniform – hoodies instead of tight jeans and winkle-pickers.

That's the view of the Ascot Racecourse operations director who, with strong support from the Royal Borough's youth and community and community warden services, has spearheaded the opening and development of Kotch youth club.

Kotch means 'chilled' and it is certainly the coolest place to be in Ascot on a Friday evening.

Right from the outset, young people – recruited by Ronnie

on a walk around the town in October 2007 – have been involved in the club's organisation and development and now there are around 120 members.

Kotch is a success story that has captured the imagination of over 14s, thanks to activities they themselves help devise and run, and to Ronnie's inspired leadership, supported by Tracey Ranson, who runs Charters Youth Club in near-by Sunningdale, and Ben

Page, Ascot's community warden.

Ronnie said: "It became clear to me very early on that there is nothing wrong with young people in Ascot. They are no worse than when I was their age. In

community work, life skills training and visits to concerts (recently 24 members had an unforgettable 'posh box' experience at the O2, donated by Cleanevent, Ascot's cleaning partner).

ple are worth the effort and the work is very rewarding."

Anyone who would like to volunteer should call Ronnie on 01344 878549.

■ Kotch sits under the aus-pices of Ascot

Neighbourhood Action Group whose chairman Cllr David Hilton said:

"The club, supported by both the police and the borough, has significantly reduced anti-social behaviour.

"Ronnie and his team are doing a great job."



1 IN TOUCH: Phoebe and Charlotte at a Friday night Kotch meeting.

2 NET RESULT: Charlie and Dan enjoy some table-top exercise.

3 COOL KIDS AT KOTCH: Ellie, Ryan and Chelsea.

4 IN THE FRAME: Adam polishes up his pool.

5 CAPTAINS OF KOTCH: Community warden Ben Page (left), Tracey Ranson (second right), of the borough's community and youth service, and volunteers Caroline Burgess and Ian Kirkwood who help out on Friday evenings.

fact, the majority are superb. They just wear a different uniform – hoodies instead of tight jeans and winkle-pickers."

With anti-social behaviour in Ascot now reduced to almost nil and Kotch on the up and up, Ronnie and his young hand are branching out into community support, working with the parish council to plant bulbs in Victory Fields and on the High Street. There are also plans for more

"New 14-year-olds are joining Kotch voluntarily and that is really exciting," said Ronnie. "If young people are in any doubt, we send groups of members to invite them in for a free introductory evening. We have a high level of recruitment success. The normal weekly fee is just £1, which includes a free soft drink and crisps or chocolate."

Ronnie paid tribute to the volunteers who work with the club every week: "We do this because young peo-

