

Chairman's Report

12th October 2020

October 2019 - October 2020

Our AGM is being conducted observing regulations that apply to meetings. i.e. no more than 6 people, observing the 1 metres distance apart rule and hand sanitising .

As the period of this report runs from Oct 2019 to October 2020 it seems only right to include a mention of the Christmas meal held at Jackson Stops in December. Numbers attending seem to be falling year on year, and as discussed at our meeting in January 2020 a lunchtime event was suggested to attract volunteers who might prefer to drive during daylight hours.

However this fact seems almost insignificant compared with events that followed in the new year. News of a pandemic, that we now know to refer to as COVID 19, that was global but quickly became local, had a massive impact on our group.

Nationwide, all over 70's and those with underlying health issues were instructed to self-isolate during the lock down period of April/May. Approximately 90% of our volunteers fall into this category so it quickly became obvious our volunteer numbers would be greatly depleted.

Younger villagers soon recognised this too and readily came forward to offer their help to our scheme.

Others also responded to my email request for help and I created a database of new over 30 new volunteers . Their willingness to help with shopping, prescription collection and many other tasks for villagers who weren't able to do it for themselves was extremely gratifying. We also were offered the resources of a small number of admin staff at HM Stocken Prison .

Their kindness and generosity was evident, particularly as many declined payment, choosing instead to donate it to a charity of their choice. This was in addition to many other separate situations where neighbours were helping one another without the need to use our scheme.

A small number have now returned to employment so are unavailable as

volunteers. Those remaining we will offer the chance to become a permanent volunteer for us once a DBS check is in place.

It was quickly recognised that a reliable information service was required to share national and local bulletins and services with each other.

Our local county councillor, the Chair of the parish council and chair of W.I emailed information to me that I then forwarded on to all existing and new volunteers. To avoid some villagers being excluded, I asked for messages to be further forwarded or printed and posted through letter boxes.

As lunch club meetings were also stopped, it became apparent that preventing isolation and loneliness was just as important as protecting health.

So I set up a network of telephone befriending for those who wanted it.

There has been a slow but steady return of some of our volunteers offering their driving services. Medical appointments are resuming and so the need for drivers is more apparent.

Inevitably our annual Tea Party was not held thus preventing our clients and volunteers getting together for a sociable afternoon and our fund raising opportunity was missed.

On a disappointing note, it was decided to cancel our regular December booking for a Christmas meal this year. The "rule of 6" may well still apply in which case a Christmas gathering would be impossible.

This year has been a strange and difficult year for many people but our volunteer scheme has proved that neighbourly spirit and goodwill is still very abundant.

To end on a positive note, I'd like to thank you all personally for all your input and reliable support throughout this episode and beyond. And not forgetting our remaining volunteers who are our drivers and telephone coordinators.