

Chairman' report to Annual Electors meeting. April 19th 2022.

Last year this meeting was conducted via zoom. We were just coming out of Covid restrictions and we were uncertain whether meetings, events and social activities could return to pre Covid levels and how we would all feel to meet up in large groups again. So over the last year the watch word has been community - to build on the community spirit shown during the pandemic and to help our residents to re-engage, to re start and to socialise again.

At the same time we had just received a local support grant from BDC for £18800. We've called this our re start grant .We surveyed the village to ask residents how to spend the money. The top three requests were for new playground equipment, a blossom avenue and a canopy for the hall. Following on behind were new Xmas lights for the Green, solar panels and EV charging points for the village hall and improvements to the Meadows. We decided to use portions of the BDC grant as matched funding for other applications in an effort to get maximum benefits for our village.

We were successful with a RCCE grant for Covid safe measures in village halls . A grant of £15000 meant we could build a canopy, install a pure air filter, fit a commercial dishwasher and buy enough chairs and tables for use under the canopy. It also bought a shed in which to store the outdoor furniture.

A £19500 grant application to Enover to help us plant a blossom avenue and make improvements to the Meadows fell at the last hurdle as they were unhappy that the cherry trees we had identified were not indigenous. However we went ahead and used just under £5000 from the BDC grant to plant 19 trees and I'm delighted to report that they are already in flower and looking wonderful. We have been invited to re apply and this time we will use the £5000 we have spent on the trees as matched funding.

It took us several months to obtain 3 good quotations for playground equipment. The application to Awards for All has been submitted and we hope to hear within the next 8 weeks. The project costs for this stand at £9000.

We will be working on further grants for solar energy and EV charging points over the next few months, although the charging points are causing a problem due to ECCs inability to proceed with the development of the land at the hall.

There were no grants available for Xmas lights so we used £1500 of the BDC grant to buy new uplighters, which were fitted within the trees. A new electric Xmas tree (generously donated by a resident) completed the display. As a re-start event we held a lighting up ceremony on the Green, with the lights being switched on by the Chairman of BDC. After the dark days of Covid our light display on the Green shone out as a beacon of hope.

We also learned from the village survey that residents fully appreciated the Meadows, so a new Friends of the Meadows group was formed. This group has met throughout the cooler months planting daffodils, new hedge lines, mixed spring bulbs and coppicing in the wooded areas.

The survey also identified that residents wanted to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee and a helpers group has been formed to organise our celebration on June 2nd.

In September , another community re start event , was the formation of a pop up café, open on the 2nd and 4th Friday of every month. Twelve ladies volunteer to run this not for profit venture. With our pure air filter in the hall and the canopy to sit under on bright days, residents have been

happy to come out and meet up. Neighbourhood police, the vicar and our district and county councillors have also attended which has been of mutual benefit.

Our hall booking clerk and cleaner, Julia Heathcote, retired in January and we thank her very much for all her hard work. We took the opportunity to trial an online booking system which has now gone live on our website. This has reduced the amount of work involved in the bookings. After several attempts at finding a new cleaner, we decided instead to employ a cleaning firm. Julia has remained as a volunteer and pops into the hall from time to time to check that all is ok. Our thanks to her. After a slow re start, bookings picked up in September with many of our regulars coming back to run classes. We now have several weekly classes of Yoga and Pilates plus a bridge club and a monthly village market. Children's parties are very popular too.

Two of our councillors retired during the year. Bill Paxton and Nick Saggars. Both had worked hard for the Council and we missed their financial expertise. Our thanks again to them both for their much appreciated contribution. Last month we were delighted to co opt John Jacobs to the Council. As a fairly "new" resident John brings a fresh outlook to the Council and we are excited to be working with him.

Our new clerk Petra Palfreyman has been with us now for just over a year and we have found her to be extremely efficient and diligent and is keeping us all on our toes. Thank you Petra for all your work. We have kept a tight reign on finances and agreed not to increase the precept again this year. We appreciate that we are all facing rising prices so it was important that we did not add to that burden by a rise in our portion of the rates.

Despite numerous emails, phone calls, and discussion I cannot advise of any progress with ECC on two fronts.

The development of the land at the hall has stalled ... again. I have nothing new to tell you. The state of the pavement outside Colneford House is deteriorating every day and a scheme to repair it has still not been agreed.

Planning has once again been challenging this year. We are often frustrated by our lack of power over decisions; we can only request a refusal with sound reasons, and advise on various aspects, but we are at least fortunate that our village has not been swamped by unwelcome development.

On the Environment, ECC has declared a climate emergency and as such this council is supporting their initiative. As Chairman I attended a Climate Change conference in January and as a follow up will be attending a couple of workshops at Essex University next month to help shape strategy and an action plan for a Climate Focus Area in Essex - we have a nature crisis as well as a climate crisis. The CFA will be an accelerated demonstration site for best practice in climate change adaptation and mitigation.

I cannot end this report without mentioning the war in Ukraine. I am sure we all feel helpless. As a council we have been in contact with BDC and offered our support. Our hall will be available if required for any refugee support, and in that situation I trust there will also be volunteers from this village willing to give their time to help others.

Lastly thank you very much to my fellow councillors for their continuing work and support and of course a special thanks to Jim Bond who as vice chairman makes my task of chairman so much easier.

Thank you everyone

