

Parish Council update report: May 2020

It has been a very busy few months for your Parish Council as we have attempted to pursue as many aspects of our work as possible whilst responding swiftly to the Coronavirus situation.

We initiated a coordinated **approach to the pandemic** on 12 March by arranging an early meeting with representatives of Neighbourcare Buriton and St Mary's Church: Doug Jones (Parish Council Chairman), Maggie Johnston (Parish Council Vice Chair), Peter Nixon (Neighbourcare Coordinator) and Rev Judith Bee (Parish Priest). The Group held regular meetings to coordinate a programme of activities until prohibited from meeting together on 23 March. Thereafter communications have taken place by other (electronic) means.

Plans were in place prior to the Prime Minister's statement of Monday 16 March and, within hours, two leaflets were delivered to every household in the parish: one requesting new volunteers to join the small but invaluable Neighbourcare team and the other offering help to anyone needing shopping / chemists / urgent supplies or posting mail etc. There was a swift response with about fifty new volunteers enrolling. Some shopping and prescription runs were also forthcoming and subsequently continued to grow in number – but have remained well within the enhanced capacity of the service. Sincere thanks are due to all the volunteers but most particularly to Peter Nixon and J-M for coordinating all the requests for the service.

Due to this service, no-one in the parish need feel that they are on their own – and no-one need go out against the Government advice. For anyone without family or friends nearby able to help them, the message is: “we can help”: just phone 07769 691919 or 01730 269034 or email pillmeadhouse@btinternet.com”.

In order to try to maintain awareness of any issues in any household in any part of the parish, Parish Councillors have been acting as ‘eyes and ears’ and encouraging everyone to keep in contact with neighbours.

The Parish Council has also created a special COVID-19 part of the community website with three separate sections providing: Buriton information; national, county and district information; and, thirdly, links to lots of ideas to help people pass time if they are self-isolating or have children at home etc. All are available via www.buriton.info

Sadly many fraudsters have been trying to exploit the situation with a number of scams attempting to take advantage of the crisis. We have endeavoured to draw attention to these on our website, asking parishioners to pass this vital information on to others without access to the internet.

We have also been able to use the website to promote appeals for the Petersfield Foodbank and for fabric to help make much-needed scrubs and other equipment for NHS workers.

Immediately after the Prime Minister's initial announcement the Playground was locked (as instructed by Government) and bookings for the Village Hall were cancelled. At the time of writing, the Recreation Ground remains open but must not become a place for groups of people to congregate or play.

At times parts of the parish have been busier than normal, with visitors from elsewhere swelling local numbers. It is good that this parish is able to offer some fresh air and tranquility for those less fortunate living nearby but, on occasions, people have been damaging farmers' fields and challenging the social-distancing criteria. Some reports have been submitted to the Police and extra patrols initiated as necessary.

Due to the Government Restrictions on Public Meetings during the virus outbreak (including those normally held by Parish Councils and all other Local Authorities), we have had to adopt alternative ways of working in order to continue with business whilst upholding democratic principles and compliance with public health guidance. Drawing upon opportunities provided in new Regulations,

meetings have been held remotely including allowing access by members of the public. Details are available via the website but if anyone has any query about any Parish Council matter, please continue to contact our Clerk, Mrs Petra Norris, in the normal way: via 07943 536065 or buritonparishcouncil@hotmail.co.uk

The loss of income from the Village Hall will inevitably have a significant effect on the Parish **Council's finances** but fortunately, after a number of years when the Council had spent deep into its Reserves, the new Parish Council had been taking a prudent approach and had re-built Reserves by obtaining funding for a number of projects from other sources. At the time of writing insurance companies seem unwilling to pay out for any losses of income because the disease was not one which was specified in policies. The overall financial effects of the virus pandemic on the Council will not, therefore, really be known for some time.

Prior to the virus crisis the Council had continued to make progress with a number of projects:

- Felling of potentially dangerous ash trees had continued with a small number yet to be addressed
- Fallen trees on Rights of Way had been cleared
- Plans were made for a number of new trees to be planted
- New equipment for the village hall had been obtained (replacement fridge-freezer, improved sound system and enhanced microphone options)
- Cost estimates were obtained for replacement windows and doors in the village hall – and potential sources of external funding identified
- Contractors were appointed to enhance the village hall car park – and thanks passed to Buriton Tennis Club for a useful contribution towards costs
- Investigations into obtaining a defibrillator for the community were being taken forward by a group of volunteers (led by Barbara Muir) so as to ensure the best type, in the best location, with any necessary cabinet, phone reception and electricity supply
- Detailed plans were made for the community's day of activities to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day
- Arrangements were made for the War Memorial to be cleaned in April (prior to VE Day)
- Contractors were appointed and work commenced on the commemorative bench project
- Ideas for the Annual Parish Meeting were drawn up to focus on the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

We have tried to continue with as many of these projects as possible during the 'lockdown' period and it may still be possible to complete more in the near future. If it is possible, the events and activities that had been planned for VE Day may be rearranged for VJ Day in August.

It was particularly pleasing to fulfil our aim of planting a special new tree to mark the 75th **anniversary of VE Day**: a splendid new Copper Beech tree on the Recreation Ground which is already about ten years old and is now fenced to help keep it safe for a while. A small new copse of Field Maples has also been planted on the Recreation Ground.

The Annual Parish Meeting was due to focus on the **challenges of climate change and biodiversity** loss – potentially with involvement of the school. Unfortunately, due to the Government Restrictions on Public Meetings, this has not been possible and ideas for local actions will need to be developed in due course.

On a related matter, we have learnt that we have been selected as one of six parishes in Hampshire to take part in a **pilot programme** aimed at developing low cost / maximum benefit actions to improve local environments for important pollinating species: to help increase general awareness of pollinator issues and the fact that people can take action locally and make a difference.

Finally we **pay tribute** to our Parish Clerk (Petra Norris), Hall Manager (Steve Franks) and Hall Cleaner (Darren Francis) for all their hard work and understanding during these unprecedented times.