

Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting

As an extraordinary year draws to a close the consequences of the COVID pandemic still linger - we are unable meet in person because of the restrictions enforced to inhibit the spread of the virus.

This meeting will be held by Zoom as was the meeting in January 2021. Our other meeting in July 2020 was held by prior consultation with Councillors whilst we were able to hold a socially distanced meeting with under 30 people in the Village Hall in mid September 2020, just before restrictions were reimposed.

Alwington's relative rural isolation has meant that comparably few people (compared to the UK average) have been directly affected by the virus. Nonetheless, to those that have and may have lost loved ones, on behalf of Alwington Parish Council, I offer our sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathy. We will remember them at our future AGMs.

I'd like to take this opportunity to propose a vote of thanks to all the NHS doctors, nurses and carers who have provided an unstinting service to our community from their various GP practices and from the Northern Devon Healthcare Trust based at their all hospitals, particularly keeping us safe in and around Bideford.

Key workers who provided essential services - a ubiquitous term for teachers, supermarket workers, Council staff (like our bin men), Care home workers and train and bus drivers amongst many others (if I've forgotten somebody please forgive my oversight), whilst not forgetting local farmers and their workers/contractors - also deserve our enormous and equal thanks for keeping our lives going particularly through the peaks of each wave of infection.

Whilst the Council has had very little of significance to adjudicate or address in the last year, it most gratifying to acknowledge the resurgence in local community spirit. My grateful thanks are due to all the Councillors who led and encouraged various initiatives to ensure all our residents, but especially the elderly and infirm who were supported with companionship, with their shopping and healthcare. Thank you.

Whether by email, WhatsApp groups or through the website everyone has pulled together to improve communications in the Parish. The Parish Council website came into its own at the start of the first lockdown. The COVID support page that emerged has now been archived, but its list of local coordinators and list of suppliers was an easily accessible reference for people to refer to. A particular highlight was the weekly dairy delivery to Woodtown organised by Lynne Lane and Alison Browning. Vey well done.

A new local newsletter (the "Alwington News") was also started last month, by Julie Harper (Village Hall), Hilary Dodge (St Andrews Church) and Alison Browning to fill a void as further evidence of the improvement.

At this point I'd like to acknowledge Dave Butterworth's support to me (as the nominated Council Officer for the website) using his detailed knowledge of the Joomla web technology to make updates and changes to the website quickly. I'm also grateful to him for waiving his fee for the last year. Unfortunately we did not achieve our plans to track website activity. As Joomla does not support Google Analytics (used by many websites to do this) we connected a dedicated app by Matamo to provide this data.

Unfortunately unbeknownst to us the connection became corrupted in May 2020. It has now been restored. From the data that we have the Parish Council page was the most visited to provide information about the Council's business. In this respect the website has achieved its primary purpose.

Looking forward, the success of the UK vaccination programme appears to be the foundation of our return to whatever normal is, after the pandemic subsides. We hope to meet in person as soon as is practical so the Council can be more directly held to account for its activities. We also look forward to the Village Hall and Church returning to the centre of our community events, whether the excitement of the Horticultural Show (in 2022, after a two year absence), the Hearty Breakfast or other fund-raising events at the Old School Room.

I commend this report to you.

Gordon Lester
Chairman