

Mayor's Report

April 2020

Whilst we are in the midst of a lockdown as a response to the Coronavirus pandemic, using my usual log/diary format listing meetings, social gatherings and attendance at civic functions is of little use.

Therefore as I have been mainly working from home either video conferencing, writing emails or on the telephone I am providing an overview of some of the work I have been involved in since my last report:

The Forming and Functioning of BECS (Bungay Emergency Community Support)

There was only one other actual meeting following our last full town council meeting. It was held on Friday 20th March at 6 pm. I had invited representatives of local volunteer groups, members of local support and business organisations, councillors and representatives of our local churches to meet and plan for a joined-up response to the Coronavirus crisis. Eighteen people attended and within the space of just over an hour we had formed a structure and a strategy to respond to those within our area who would need practical and/or emotional support during the Coronavirus crisis.

We now have a team of 12 key operatives: from Bungay Town Council Bob Prior; Phil Love; Judy Cloke; Emma Beese and myself. Reverend Ian Byrne represents Bungay churches, and volunteers from within the town are Kate Jackson; Sophie Wood; Gillie Shiner; Lucy Walker; Eddie Rosier; and Tony Dawes. This team manages two small armies of volunteers, one consisting of 20 driver/shoppers and another team of 20+ active phone handlers. During this period Emma who has been central to the team has become unwell and is still recovering. It is a tribute to the group and our Town Clerk that immediate remedial action was taken and solutions found so that the efficient functioning of BECS was not adversely affected.

As an organisation BECS provides the friendly voice for those who are lonely and isolated as well as the practical support of collecting prescriptions and shopping for those who must stay at home. The system went live on 30th March and at the time of writing (Tuesday 14th April) we had responded to 131 calls for assistance, the majority of which came from residents within the town, but 33 calls came from the wider environs of Bungay including Ditchingham and the Saints.

Funding has been received from Suffolk Community Foundation (Hardship Fund) £1,000, BUC (Bungay United Charities) £2,000. We have also received a grant from ESC COVID-19 Community Fund of £2,500 and have been pledged a further £2,000 from Bungay Medical Practice Charitable Trust. In addition we have been offered the opportunity of diverting funds made available by BTC to the Bungay Festival and Bungay Christmas Lights to support BECS.

I wish to take this opportunity to say how immensely privileged I feel to be working with such a great team of operatives, call handlers and drivers all of whom have pulled together, supported each other and given so much time and effort, way beyond the call of duty, to provide a comprehensive service to all who have temporarily lost their independence, have become isolated or are vulnerable due to the extraordinary circumstances we find ourselves in. I am told that there are many comments on local social media appreciating the help that is being provided.

Broad Street Asset Acquisition

In addition to the above now that BTC has secured local assets from ESC including the freehold of the Council offices in Broad Street, the working party tasked with this project is pushing forward to progress the plans for refurbishment. It is unfortunate that the press release so carefully constructed by the team was then so misinterpreted and badly reported upon in the EADT and BBJ, that it included factually incorrect statements regarding the siting of the ATM. This caused considerable concern with residents believing that they would need to go to the Riverside building in order draw cash. After considerable effort by the Town Clerk this has only just been corrected and apologies given by the journalist concerned.

Planning Application St John's Hill

The other work that is requiring immediate attention at the moment is the Council's response to the planning applications for the development around the swimming pool on St. John's Road: DC/18/4429/ARM and DC/18/5082/FUL. These were deferred on 20th February due in the main to objections raised by BTC and BNDP Steering Group. There have been some modifications made to these plans which will go before a convened ESC Planning Advisory Panel on Tuesday 21st April. An extraordinary virtual meeting of BTC Planning, Environment and Highways Committee has been called for Wednesday 15th April to consider our response.

Changes for Bungay NDP Steering Group

Also during the last weeks there has been a change in the Chair of the Bungay Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group. Ken Lodge has stepped down from this role and John Adams has taken on the position. My sincere thanks goes to Cllr Lodge for the incredible amount of hard work, commitment and dedication he has brought to the role over the years. The draft plan is close to the pre-submission stage and I understand that Cllr Adams is in the process of collating documents to bring before Council in the near future.

In all it has been an extremely busy period where we have all had to adapt to new methods of working and supporting each other whether we are confined to our homes or not. I am grateful for the incredible team spirit and 'can do' attitude exhibited by many of our councillors, BTC staff and the brilliant volunteers within our community.

Thank you

Sue Collins