

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2021

Who could have envisaged when I wrote my last annual report that we are in the position that we are today with the uncertainty that the pandemic has brought and the problems that it has caused throughout our Nation.

Those problems have affected our village as well, as Covid took hold on the Island. Jobs, where people earned their income, folded, or people were furloughed which affected their income. Families with school age children, worried about coping with these limitations.

Along with Niton and Whitwell I was invited to join them and form a group called CRAB; which stands for Community Response And Backup. I formed a group of village volunteers, whose tasks included finding out about vulnerable and shielded people and how we could help them through this difficult period. It involved, delivering and collecting medical prescriptions; taking patients for medical appointments; shopping for those not able to and Post Office visits for a variety of reasons.

I set up a Helpline, with three dedicated mobile phones and with help from two couples, a lady Councillor and myself we covered the twenty-four periods; providing availability to be able to assist whenever we could. In those early days, face masks were difficult to acquire, so my wife started making masks and with thanks to Rapanui who supplied the material, gratis. She enlisted the help of two friends Roz and Jill and when they finished, they had supplied over 800 masks to local Carers and local NHS Nurses.

Then a village resident decided to set up a 'Pop Up' shop, in Town lane. With the help of Dave Badman and I, we made something to place on the pavement and with donations and a Grant from the IWC we were able to supply goods for people struggling to get to the shops or not able to afford to shop. We set up an honesty box for those taking goods. Rachael Peyton, whose idea it was, runs the Pop Up, and with help from the Soup Kitchen we get a regular supply of food and household essentials. This year with the aid of another Grant from DEFRA, I have set up a weekly fresh vegetable delivery from Hunts of Rookley.

We then identified vulnerable families, many too proud to ask for help, supplying food and household essentials in parcels, delivering them as required. Over a year on we are still doing so, although not on the scale we were doing originally, as gradually we find some families are working again or have Government help. I thank sincerely those volunteers who helped in this project.

With all this occurring, we still had Parish Council business to attend to; meetings with CRAB, the IW MP, these initially were on a weekly basis or sometimes less as the conditions changed. They have now changed to fortnightly and of course our own monthly Parish Council meetings.

Last year BT announced that the telephone box on the Green was to be made redundant, due to lack of use, and offered it to the village for the princely sum of one pound. Through an electrical firm, as a gift, they have made it so that we will move the Defibrillator into it as a permanent home. My thanks to Keith Joyce for giving it a temporary home on Stubbings wall.

Christmas brought little solace; but our thanks again to Brian and Cathy Harding for donating the Christmas tree again. To Keith and Kevin Joyce for supplying the vehicle and manpower to help Pete Gosling and I to erect the tree and put the lights up. To Andy Price and his musicians for playing carols near the tree, also, thank you for those people that turned out on the night with mask wearing and social distancing being obeyed.

Due to a family move to North Wales, Sue Waters our Clerk, retired in December and we had to interview for a new one. There were three applicants and the successful one was Michala Bailey, who many will remember her from when she worked in Chale Green Stores. Her 'Baptism' came at

an extremely busy time, for the Parish Council, but she has adapted so well and is coping with all the pressure.

With all the Covid 19 problems, I have also been busy this past year, receiving and dealing with over 4000 emails to date; I have never had such an amount during my five years in the Chair. I am indebted to Mikki, our Clerk, for her dedication and patience in dealing with problems that have arisen from many of the emails. Being new to the job, since December 2020, she has certainly had 'a baptism of fire'; but coped with the problems as they arose and between us many things have been resolved.

For the future we are continuing with virtual Parish Council meetings using Zoom, to avoid close contact and risk. This still allows members of the public to attend and if they ask, an invite will be sent to them. There has been a suggestion from the authorities that normal meetings could start, however members of the public would not be able to attend; myself and the PC opted to continue with virtual meetings until the situation changes; which means the public can still attend, which in effect means that the Public, by attending on Zoom will see that our meetings are Open and Transparent in all aspects of our Council Proceedings.

We have been severely restricted this year with our budget and had to make some difficult decisions regarding the precept and the Number 6 Bus on Sundays and Public holidays. We have asked that both Newport and Ventnor Councils support this service with financial help as residents from both towns use the service along with Niton, Whitwell, Chillerton and Gatcombe and Chale; currently only our villages supported the service financially. We are awaiting replies.

Chaler of the Year was postponed in terms of the presentation last year 2020; however, the Parish Council did select a worthy recipient and they will be presented this year along with the 2021 selected person. We have to thank Peter Cross of Walpen Manor, who not only generously sponsored our Chaler of the Year, pictures, but also arranged for copies to be made and framed for us, as well as two more copies for future years.

We are still 'battling' with BT over the extremely poor Broadband cover at the top end of the village and recently the problems have occurred and been reported in Spanners Close. This is frustrating as we challenged BT back in 2018 when they promised it would be resolved but it still has not been and we continue to press them, also through the Isle of Wight Council.

I thank my fellow Councillors, for their help and support during this testing year for all of us and sincerely hope that the situation with the Pandemic continues to improve, although we must still be aware that the virus knows no bounds.

To Mikki, our Clerk, well done and great support under some really testing and at times very trying circumstances.

Regards,

Ron Groves,

Chairman

