**Bowerchalke and Broad Chalke COVID Support Network**

**Update for Parish Council Meeting on Wednesday 13th May 2020**

This report is written as we enter the sixth week of ‘lock down’. With no planned or projected end in sight but much discussion about what it might look like.

As you will be aware the Support Network was initiated by the Broad Chalke Parish Council at their meeting on Wednesday 9th March 2020. Its aim was:

*‘To facilitate and manage a network that supports the elderly and the vulnerable during any period of ‘lock down’ or self-isolation.’*

From the outset we have worked with John Nicholas the Clerk for Bowerchalke Parish Council to provide a two village response which reflected the individuality of each community. We are very grateful to John and to Chris Rothwell for working with us to deliver the Network’s objectives for the villages.

1. **To facilitate the delivery of essential medication**

The Chalke Valley Link Scheme has been invaluable in achieving this objective. Initially there were concerns that with 80% of the Link drivers being over 70 year of age they would be unable to deliver this service. However, a significant reduction in the need to drive people to medical appointments and village social activities has meant the the driver resource has been almost entirely targeted at collecting medication. Terry and Liz Jolly worked with the Surgery to establish amended policy for the collection of prescription medication which ensured the safety of drivers and the patients they were delivering to and reduced (as far as was possible) waiting times at the Surgery. Whilst there have been grumbles about waiting times at the Dispensary at Sixpenny Handley this has been nothing compared to the queuing that has been endured by other village support networks who have had to collect medication from chemists in Salisbury.

Since the start of the lock down the Link have collected and delivered 152 packages of medication to Bowerchalke and Broad Chalke residents.

1. **To support the delivery of food and other supplies from the Hub**

New arrangements at the Chalke Valley Stores to run a delivery service for the vulnerable and self-isolating and the introduction of safe social distancing protocols in queuing and access to the shop are now well established and working well. There are now upwards of 60 volunteer drivers delivering groceries to Bowerchalke, Bishopstone and Broad Chalke. 263 grocery deliveries have now been made by the Hub since the lock down. The Post Office has also managed to retain a service in Broad Chalke albeit for only one hour on three days per week.

Although not part of our original objectives, the decision for the Queens Head to offer a take away service has been an essential element of being able to offer a hot meal to everyone. The collection of pre-ordered meals has been a runaway success. The delivery service for the self-isolating and vulnerable hasn’t had a large take up although the precise numbers may be skewed by friends and neighbours collecting hot meals rather than the Pub’s delivery service being used. The Queens Head team have been preparing an increasing number of meals with numbers now topping more than 200 a week.

1. **To maintain communication with all people confined to their homes to mitigate the effects of loneliness and self- isolation**

Broad Chalke now has a network of 23 Area Co-ordinators covering specific geographic areas of the village. These area co-ordinators are our eyes and ears on the ground and maintain regular contact with all those who are vulnerable or very vulnerable and those who are self-isolating. The Area Co-ordinators have ensured that these residents are all aware of the services available to them in the village. They have also worked hard to ensure that social distancing guidelines are maintained by offering advice and guidance where required.

The Area Co-ordinators are updated by way of a regular emailed briefing sheet and fortnightly telephone calls. They also contact us where there are issues or concerns that they are unable to resolve or need advice.

The Chalke Valley Stores have kindly allowed the Bowerchalke and Broad Chalke COVID Support Network to use the the Home page of their website to publicise information about the pandemic and specifically about services available in the Chalke Valley. Initially this was reiterating Government information and sign posting to the services available in Broad Chalke and Bowerchalke, i.e. the Link, deliveries from the Hub and deliveries from the Queens Head. We have now tried to enhance this information to include other support services. This includes information from Wiltshire Council about benefits, council tax holidays etc; access to information and guidance on mental health and domestic abuse; and links to national guidance via HWB accountants’ website which sign posts both individuals and businesses to financial advice. This element of the website also gives the telephone number for Citizens Advice in Salisbury who have now recruited an additional 40 staff to offer financial advice.

We are well aware that initially vulnerability in relation to this pandemic was about age and underlying health conditions. As this crisis continues it is evident that ‘vulnerability’ will take a much broader definition and the services we seek to sign post to should reflect that. We are not finance experts or mental health professionals but we can be aware of what is available. We will continue to look out for new issues and challenges and try to provide an appropriate level of support and/or information. The Trussel Trust are now collecting donated non-perishable food items from the All Saints’ Church porch at 2pm every Thursday.

In terms of communication the importance of the Broadsheet as a way of getting easily accessible information to every household has been critical. We are indebted to everyone at the Broadsheet for keeping up the publication, in spite of a drop in advertising revenue, and for delivering throughout the village.

**Wiltshire Council**

Wiltshire Council have implemented a system of Community Engagement Managers each of whom has a geographic area of responsibility. Broad Chalke falls under the responsibility of Karen Linaker who is looking after SW Wiltshire. There are teleconferences every 2 or 3 weeks which enable the leaders of village networks to ask questions and to share best practice or their experiences and concerns. Up to 20 people as a teleconference is not a perfect solution but it does allow for concerns to be aired.

Wiltshire Council have also created a Well Being Hub. This is an email and telephone hotline for any residents who are struggling, particularly those who are vulnerable and self-isolating. Staff at the Well Being Hub is currently contacting people throughout the county who are in the shielded or very vulnerable group to ensure they have everything they need. Where needs are identified they contact the village network co-ordinators. To date we have had one telephone call from the Hub about a Broad Chalke resident and this issue was easily resolved.

A Community Group Directory and Volunteer Group Information Pack has also been developed and published by Wiltshire Council to support village networks.

**Looking Forwards**

We have held a scenario planning session with Roger Stockton from Bishopstone Emergency Planning Group who you will be aware had a published and very extensive Emergency Plan. This was an extremely useful session led by Roger who has considerable experience of emergency and contingency planning in the military and commercial sector. This session was very valuable in shaping thinking about the village response both to the current crisis and in future. As the route out of lock down is set out by HM Government we will need to ensure that our local critical services can be adapted and maintained for as long as required.

The current crisis has underpinned how lucky we all are to live in Broad Chalke. The existing key resources for the community have reacted positively and quickly to maintain and adapt their services for which we are extremely grateful. The community as a whole has pulled together to support each other. It is clear that this crisis is not going to disappear overnight and there will need to work to ensure that all the facilities for the residents of Broad Chalke are maintained. We are all so lucky to live in such a wonderful community.

Nicki and Nigel Tinkler

5th May 2020