



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS – OCTOBER 2020

It is customary for the Chairman to present his report in person to the Members at the Annual General Meeting. However, 2020 as we all know, has not been a normal year. Given the current government guidelines, our AGM is unable to accommodate all the Members and volunteers who have supported the Trust over the twelve months. I therefore felt it more appropriate to present my report this year in writing – and in the hope that we can hold next year's AGM as usual with everyone present.

This has been my first year as Chairman of the Harpenden Trust, having taken on the role at last year's AGM. It has certainly been a first twelve months that few (if indeed anyone) could have anticipated. I have often found myself referencing the 70 year history of the Harpenden Trust, the work that has been done by so many over the years in supporting the local community. Of all years, it felt so important this year that we were able to respond as a Trust to the current global pandemic, so clearly impacting the lives of many vulnerable individuals locally. It was important that we could act swiftly in delivering support where it was required. I believe we can all be very proud of our response.

Volunteers

Before I reference anything else, allow me first to focus on all the individuals who support the Trust.

At the heart of the Harpenden Trust are over 400 local volunteers.

At the outset, I simply wish to offer each and every one a huge thank you. Thank you to all those volunteers for the time you have committed to the work of the Trust. Thank you for all the roles you have undertaken in support of individuals across our community, so often on an anonymous basis. And thank you for the speed at which so many of you came forward in February and March this year to make the Harpenden Cares Contact Centre a reality - and thereby ensuring that we could then offer the support we did at that time. The Trust would simply not exist without the amazing enthusiasm and dedication of its volunteers.

Thank you all.



Harpenden Cares

The Directors' Annual Report accompanying the AGM Notice provides details of the Trust's activities up until 31 March, but it is naturally the most recent six months that have had the most dramatic impact on the Harpenden Trust and all our activities.

As part of the Harpenden Cares initiative, we substantially scaled-up our Care Fund operations, in particular establishing a fully staffed call-centre based at our main Southdown Halls to act as the 'Harpenden Cares Contact Centre'. This Contact Centre has provided the necessary and critical link between requests for assistance and the resources available to meet those requests.

Within a matter of a few days in early March we had transformed the original single telephone line in the Trust offices into a fully operational 12 line call centre, with a 24 hour answering service capability and all linked to the original Harpenden Trust telephone number (01582 460457). A newly recruited team of more than 20 Call Handlers, all local volunteers, stepped forward to handle the calls received between 10am and 2pm each weekday (including all Bank Holidays), ensuring all callers received an immediate, warm and empathetic response.

Over the weeks that followed, we became the voice of Harpenden Cares, handling a huge variety of requests. At the outset we were answering between 150 and 170 calls per week. Many calls related to assisted shopping and prescription / medication pickup, although in reality there was rarely such a thing as a "standard call". Over time, the Foodbank began to operate on a more regular delivery schedule, sometimes weekly but often fortnightly, reducing the overall volume of calls.

The single statistic that I feel best reflects the scale of what was achieved is that since March we have now answered over 2,000 calls from local individuals requesting support.

There has been an ever-rising demand for our Befriending activities, with currently 55 members. We were also asked by the St Albans, Harpenden and Redbourn GP Federation to take on the task of delivering and collecting back oxygen saturation monitors between the established Halley Stewart hub and patients' homes.

We also developed our internal Charity Log system to be accessible to our Harpenden Cares partners. This has allowed us to send requests for assistance directly from Charity Log to our partners, including a Foodbank operated by The Salvation Army; a shopping service coordinated by Bethany Church and for medical needs which mainly involves collecting and delivering prescriptions.

The Care Fund

In addition to its Harpenden Cares role, the Care Fund has continued to offer support for individuals, families and young people in the local community.

As in previous years, activities during this period included Home Visiting (calling on those in need and arranging confidential help, from funding utility bills, to providing food or clothing vouchers or assisting with the supply of new or recycled furniture and even white goods); Befriending (with a growing team regularly visiting people living on their own or feeling isolated for a cup of tea and a chat), and supporting young people whose families feel unable to meet the cost of school uniforms or essential school trips.

Naturally not all of the Care Fund's activities could be maintained into 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our home visitors and befrienders have maintained contact largely by telephone, with some limited face to face outdoor meetings when the lockdown rules have permitted. For our regular clients we were also able to give them a friendly call to check on their well-being and we have been able to provide a shopping service for clients who were self-isolated. However, aspects such as Harpenden's Seniors joining us on various day or half-day coach outings to the coast, countryside or garden centres and the Senior's coffee mornings had to be put on hold. We all hope such activities will resume in the months ahead. We certainly aim to maintain our gift and food parcels to those we understand to be either lonely or housebound again this Christmas.

The Community Fund

The Community Fund has continued to provide support for schemes and local projects which will benefit all sectors of the community; including young, old, disabled, sporting and educational.

In the last financial year we have continued to support schools significantly and have helped Sauncey Wood Primary School to erect an outside classroom. Teenagers have continued to benefit through our continuing support to Youth Talk, the Lions and Young Enterprise with money towards Life Skills programmes and Business Schemes. Musical Memories is greatly helping people with dementia through music and Pop-up Pottery has increased its equipment to meet rising demand. The community has benefitted from the re-laying of the very dilapidated car park at St Mary's Church which also serves many others who use the very popular hall. A new freezer has been purchased for the Human Breast Milk centre in Rothamsted and Batford Memorial Hall have been able to replace their antiquated heating system with modern radiators. After their recent move back to Harpenden, Citizens Advice Bureau were helped with IT set-up costs. We also made a one-off donation to the Samaritans, in acknowledgment that this is a time when some local residents may seek greater access to their services.

Since the creation of the Community Fund in 2008, nearly £700,000 has now been given to local organisations.

The Harpenden Trust Centre / Hall Hire

Through until March this year, the Harpenden Trust Centre had always been bustling with activity, seven days a week, involving children's theatre groups, yoga, pilates, parties,

boxercise classes, music groups for dementia sufferers, Jazzercise, and “Mini Professors” – to name only a small selection of our regular hirers.

The Halls sadly fell quiet as lockdowns were introduced but were swiftly repurposed to house the Harpenden Cares Contact Centre. Substantial efforts over more recent weeks, with new Health and Safety protocols having been established, have enabled us to carefully and slowly reopen our halls to a few local community groups who rely on our premises and felt able to recommence their activities.

Finance

The Trust continues to be indebted to so many experienced volunteers who oversee our financial affairs, the overall control environment and standards of governance. The Investment Committee continues to oversee the Trust’s investment portfolio at this more difficult time of increased market volatility; and the Audit and Governance Committee continues to review our policies and procedures and has recently updated our Risk Register.

A copy of the audited Statutory Accounts is enclosed and my thanks to all across the Trust who seek to maintain such high standards of governance that continues to underpin the Trust.

The Annual Christmas Appeal

Much of the work of the Care Fund relies heavily on the funds raised by the Harpenden Trust's Annual Christmas Appeal. This year’s Appeal will be as important as ever as the uncertainties surrounding the impact of future local lockdowns and Covid-19 remain. This also presents us with new challenges as we accelerate towards a more cashless society and the physical collection of our usual Appeal envelopes may become more challenging if local lockdowns emerge.

In addition to our usual Appeal envelopes, this year we are actively seeking to promote various other forms of giving: online through our website and Virgin Money giving page, by text, by phone or in person with a High Street collection planned for Saturday 19 December. Thank you again to so many of you who assist the Trust with such an important aspect of ensuring that each year the Care Fund has the financial resources to be able to support our community across the rest of the year.

Annual General Meeting

Whereas the Annual General Meeting has historically been an important opportunity for Members to meet and share in understanding the work of the Trust, it is clear that we simply cannot hold any form of restricted gathering at the Harpenden Trust Halls in a safe or appropriate manner. As such, the AGM in 2020 will be held in early November with a more limited agenda and format.

In addition to the approval of the audited annual Statutory Accounts, one important aspect of the AGM is the resignation and appointment of Directors at the Trust. Enclosed with the notice of AGM are the relevant proxy voting forms.

The Board welcomed two new Directors over the course of the year. Pat Ring was appointed People Director, an increasingly important role given the rising number of volunteers supporting the expanding areas of activity. Nigel Pritchard also agreed to take on the role of Company Secretary.

During the course of the last financial year Michael Imeson and Sarah McAlister stepped down from the Board. At this AGM, both Rodger Livesey and Norman Hoare are stepping down from the Board. Rodger was appointed to the Board in 2009 and has served as a Non-Executive Director, appointed Chairman in November 2018 and has most recently acted as our Senior Independent Director. Norman joined the Board in 2014 and has chaired the Community Fund for the last six years. Although Jan Seager will also step down from the Board at this time, we are all delighted that Jan has agreed to remain on the Community Fund Committee to offer very valuable support and continuity. On behalf of all at the Trust I would like to thank them all for the enormous contribution they have each made to the development and growth of the Trust – and we are all naturally delighted that they remain supporters of the work of the Trust going forward, and we thank them for their time, commitment and all they have achieved.

Queen's Birthday Honours List - British Empire Medal

And, of course, at the end of these last twelve months there was some fabulous additional news. This year's Queen's Birthday Honours List focused on recognising the hundreds of people who have helped the vulnerable and lifted the nation's spirits during the coronavirus pandemic. There are a huge number of such unsung heroes throughout the whole of The Harpenden Trust - all those volunteers who have made and continue to make such an exceptional contribution across our local community, in a year when so many have sought our support.

How fitting that our very own People Director, Pat Ring, was honoured and awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the community in Harpenden during COVID-19.

Hugely deserved. Many congratulations Pat!

In Summary

The 70-year history of the Harpenden Trust has centred around our ability to step up to the plate swiftly and support our local community when it has needed us most. Alongside all of our ongoing activities, in responding to the current global pandemic and its impact on the lives of so many local individuals, the Trust's response this last year has been exceptional.

The Trust has such a great team of volunteers who yet again have enabled us to achieve all we have done. I believe we can all be proud of what we have all accomplished in the last year.

Thank you all.

Kind regards,

Richard Nichols

Chairman