

CHAIR'S REPORT 2020/21

ADRIAN MOSS, MAYOR OF WOLVERTON AND GREENLEYS TOWN COUNCIL, MAY 2021

As we reach the end of my second year as Mayor and Chair of the Council, it gives me great pleasure to put together this end of year report and reflect on what the council has achieved in the last twelve months

The second year was very different to the first. The Council Year (May to April) coincided almost exactly with the start of serious changes to our way of life as the reality of Covid hit. In March 2020 I was sent by the "Day Job" to work from home, in April 2020 public gatherings were limited and (somehow) in May 2020 we had to sort the business of the Council year ahead.

Whilst the duties of "Chair" were at the forefront, it was obvious that those of "Mayor" were going to take a back seat for the foreseeable future. From May 2020 Council meetings moved online and we encountered (many times) the new catchphrase "You're on mute!"

The Town Hall, once a thriving and busy place, has become quiet and ghostlike. Several of our tenants are "essential workers" and continue their presence. The library has closed, opened, re-closed and re-opened. By the time you read this the Town Council will be starting to return to normal with a physical presence in the Town Hall but it's been a long 14 months.

COUNCIL'S ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2020/2021

Support for community

With Covid – almost everything stopped. With no events to organise or attend, and many other jobs declared "non-essential", WGTC turned its focus to supporting the community.

Funding from cancelled events was directed to helping residents who were in distress, or supporting local community projects which relied on (now dried up) funding from rental and visitors

Human Resource was diverted to assisting with the delivery of food parcels and hot meals for existing Community Support Agencies such as Kings Community Centre

Environmental

Enforcement

From early 2019 the Town Council had agreed to fund an Enforcement Officer to tackle fly tipping and litter in our community. This has proved so successful with a number of ongoing prosecutions that WGTC have not only renewed the Enforcement Officer contract but extended his hours.

The latest move has been to issue the Enforcement Officer with highly visible "stickers". These serve both to notify what has already been reported and to highlight areas of high volume fly tipping.

Britain in Bloom

The various Covid restrictions have had an impact on Britain in Bloom, although the team (in small groups) have been continuing to enhance the area by upcycling plastic bins for planters and improving the environment by recycling materials. The team are out every Wednesday 1pm-3pm and would welcome anyone who would like to join them

Presentation to Jess

Although the Town Council play a small role in keeping the streets tidy, the “Heavy Lifting” lies with MK Council and their contractors; Serco. You may have missed the unassuming character of “Jess”, cheerfully pushing her barrow and litter picker around the streets of Wolverton in all weathers and collecting dropped litter.

In Sept 2020, the Town Council arranged (unknown to Jess) to be in The Square for her lunch break and presented her with a “thank you” card and voucher.

War Memorial Vandalism

We were heartbroken when, in July 2020, we found serious vandalism around the Wolverton War Memorial. Flowers pulled out by their roots, wreaths smashed, a small memorial to Albert French destroyed and bins from adjacent houses emptied over the surrounding fence.

The police were quickly on site and reported this was one of three or four incidents the same night, presumed to be by the same individual. With thanks to Adrian Café of Thames Valley Police, the suspect was identified nearby, arrested and charged.

I’d also like to thank our Caretaking team who, in very short order, removed the wreckage, replanted flowers, replaced the small memorial and made it look as though nothing had happened.

Events

Lockdown not only reduced the number of events but (in some cases drastically) altered our participation. As a local Council we had a duty not only to be safe, but to be seen to be safe.

Albert Day(s)

Albert French plays a major part in the history of Wolverton. Without repeating the full story, his death in Flanders Fields, still too young to officially join the Army, is why we have a Belgian Twin Town.

Events were scaled back and socially distanced but on 15th June 2020 (the anniversary of his death) wreaths were laid at MK Rose (where Albert has a pillar) and the following Sunday, Wreaths were laid at the War Memorial in The Square.

Twinning

Regrettably, the decision was taken very early that a visit to Belgium (or them to us) would not be possible in 2021. Our hosts, the hotel, ferry company, coach operator and all involved were very understanding and we have high hopes of meeting again in 2022.

Virtual Fireworks

Even in the uncertainty of the early days of 2020, it was quite obvious that a gathering of several thousand people, in the dark, with street traders and fireworks was not going to be possible. However, we knew how important the event was seen to be in the community. I’d like to thank local historian and videographer Roger Kitchen and Cllr Victoria Bamisile for creating a Virtual Firework display and for arranging it’s release on Social Media at exactly the time the real fireworks would have started.

Remembrance Sunday – twice!

Even up to a few days before Remembrance Sunday we were not sure if the event would go ahead. So, with the help of many, including the Reverend Gill Barrow-Jones, the event was recorded earlier in the week. For those of us not used to acting this proved challenging as we had to say “Good Morning” (even though it was mid-afternoon) and a solemn two-minute silence was interrupted by “Sorry, can we do it again, the wreath’s blown over?”

Tree, Christmas

Many in Wolverton will remember Christmas 2020, and for all the wrong reasons. The Town Council were hit a double financial blow earlier in the year as MK Council revealed that lamp posts may be structurally incapable of bearing the weight of Christmas Lights (and if we wanted them, we'd have to pay a test fee – per lamp post) and our tree supplier almost doubled their prices. Council reluctantly agreed to cancel the tree and concentrate on festive illuminations; with hindsight (always useful) we could have said “Wolverton needs cheering up, we'll find the money”, but we didn't. My apologies.

Regeneration

Agora development

Plans for redevelopment of the Agora (like everything else) have slowed, but not stopped. Although permission was granted for demolition in late 2019, an application for construction was not submitted by the developer until late 2020. By accident or design the notification period spanned the Christmas Break and a “lively” Council meeting was held in January. Our comments (along with literally hundreds of others) have been fed into Milton Keynes Planning and a decision is expected sometime in June or July.

Conservation issues – “change of use” is not the same as “changing the use”

With furlough and an increase in working from home, the Town Council were aware that there might be an increase in home improvements. We also saw a dramatic rise in major works within the Conservation Area, either with no Planning Permission or where the developer appeared to have assumed that permission for “Change of Use” was equal to “whatever physical changes are needed to accommodate that change of use”. Suffice to say we've kept MK Enforcement busy during lockdown!

WHAT TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2021/2022

Cycle route

As part of our commitment to the environment the Town Council are looking to create a cycle route across the parish from South West to North East. Although the primary aim is to link to The Station, journeys can continue to New Bradwell and onwards.

Solar Panels and EV Charging

And, speaking of environmental commitment, the paperwork is now all in place for the installation of Solar Panels on the Town Hall roof and for an Electric Vehicle Charging point in the car park. The one will (long term) cut our energy bill as well as being kinder to the planet. The other will, we hope, encourage the take up of electric vehicles by those who live and work in Wolverton.

Living Archive

We look forward to working with the Living Archive and Gemini Rail on an exciting new project – the digitisation of tens of thousands of documents from the railway works. The work is expected to produce information of interest to historians of both Wolverton and Railways in general.

A Christmas tree!

After the strong opinions expressed by Local Residents last year regarding the Christmas Lights and Tree, plans are moving ahead for Christmas 2021 – No promises but we hope that this Christmas will be more cheerful than the last.

Barrel Planters at the station

It has been pointed out that The Station could benefit from the attention of our Wolverton in Bloom team. We have worked with London North-Western Trains to purchase planters in the form of an engine and small number of carriages constructed from old Whiskey Barrels which will adorn Platform 4 (the platform with the Booking Office). The Wolverton in Bloom team will plant the train; station staff will keep it watered.

Community Boat

Working with the Canal and River Trust and MK Community Boat to create a Canal mooring point with charging provision near the Secret Garden in order to promote tourism.

Events

Any events in the remainder of 2021 or early 2022 are likely to suffer from restrictions. Whilst official advice may change rapidly, events are organised weeks or months ahead and have to be cleared with insurance companies, equipment booked, and advertised to the public. The events below are subject to change; please check our Newsletter, Website and Social Media feeds for latest news.

A return to Ploegsteert, the first time we have met our Belgian Friends since 2019, is planned in June 2022 as part of our ongoing commitment to working with our Twin Town.

WGTC are providing support for the Dog Show in Victoria Rec in May 2022 and working with Woughton Council who plan a matching dog show every September.

Attending our council meetings is a good way to see how the council operates and the business that is discussed. Members of the public are always welcome to our meetings and can ask questions in relation to any item on the agenda in the Public Question Time, 15 minutes prior to the meeting. We currently have vacancies for councillors in Wolverton West. We welcome any one who has an interest in serving the community. This is an extremely good platform to learn from one another, share life experiences, gain confidence, work with communities and be a part of important decision making.

Cllr. Moss – Chair of the Town Council