

BLC Chair's Report 2019

Introduction

This report highlights some of the achievements BLC has made using the budget that was agreed for 2019. In the event, we were not able to develop a new plan and budget for some time and could not hold an AGM until October 2020, because we thought we were going to become registered with the Charity Commission, and partly because of the pandemic. So, the funding from 2019 lasted BLC quite a long time!

This report is largely a compilation of two documents - one written in March 2020 before covid struck, highlighting all that BLC was doing and planning at that time. The other was written in June to celebrate all that our fantastic volunteers had achieved during the first lockdown.

This report does not seek to be a comprehensive record of all that BLC has done, but rather to illustrate the sort of events and activities which it has undertaken on behalf of our community.

What does BLC do?

BLC provides a wide range of opportunities for residents (and non-residents) to volunteer to help with running the Partnership, planning and running events and activities.

We have health-related activities like a weekly Walking Group and Seated Yoga sessions. We have IT Training and are planning other skills development activities, run by volunteers for residents of all ages. We run art and craft activities which are intergenerational: older volunteers working with young people sharing skills and nurturing talents. We fund creche places which allow parents time off to involve themselves in crafting and the impact of this is well evidenced by what attendees and volunteers say.

We have other social activities like our regular Friday coffee morning and one-off events like summer coach trips and a Family Fun Day which reach a considerable number of our community, and are much enjoyed.

We are funding and organising activities in response to concerns young people tell us about - knife crime, gangs and mental health. These include two weekly boxing training sessions held at a local school for older and younger aged children. We are also piloting a "self-protection seminar" which aims to equip young people to monitor and manage the situations they find themselves in, so that they can avoid aggression from others.

It is well evidenced that volunteering is beneficial for volunteers in terms of mental and physical health and wellbeing and allows people to socialise and build relationships. This helps with their resilience and sense of self worth. Overall this will contribute to residents' pride at living in Conniburrow as well as social cohesion as they recognise the value of their volunteering, and enjoy closer relationships with their neighbours.

Our work on improving the physical environment is both routine, as in litter-picks and Community Orchard maintenance, and one-off projects like the refurbishment of the pond and surrounding area. We have engaged with the MK CCG to register these activities on their Directory of Services and are liaising with the local GP's surgery to assist with social prescribing.

As well as the benefits of volunteering which are mentioned above, these give the community a sense of ownership of their environment and pride in its improved appearance. We involve residents in deciding what we focus on and also determining the design of the 'product.'

We are working with our Parish Council to engage more residents and deliver activities to meet their needs. By working together we are able to provide economy of effort. Our Community Fridge receives surplus food donations from local supermarkets of items at their "best buy" date or surplus goods. This enables our community to reduce food wastage as well as help some people, probably a growing number, provide food at no cost whatsoever. Again, staffing this service provides volunteering opportunities as well as attracting residents who would otherwise not get involved with BLC, thus widening our engagement and reach. We are collaborating with the Fridge Network in MK (and nationally) to make sure food donations are spread out and wastage minimised.

Our Little Library which sits next to our park, provides books for all ages at no cost and is increasingly a recycling process. One of our workers who developed and brought the idea to fruition, received an award including a trip to the Houses of Parliament. We will now extend the Library boxes to the Orchard and Pond to provide gardening and wildlife books at the appropriate location.

We are working with the Parish and Borough Councils to address the issues surrounding Houses in Multiple Occupation. These are largely tenanted by people from diverse cultural groups and we are working to engage them to determine what involvement they want with their immediate community as well as helping them better understand their rights as tenants.

BLC's Response to the Covid 19 crisis

Before CV19, we had talked about opening the Hub longer and on more days - for the Fridge and for social/learning events and activities. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown meant that we could not manage that. What follows is a report which was written at the end of June 2020 and reports our activities in that time.

However, in the most trying of circumstances, with the help of committed volunteers, some from Conniburrow and some from nearby communities, BLC responded to the crisis in the following ways:

Hello, we're here to help!

We distributed leaflets to every one of the 1250 households in Conniburrow showing what support is available and how to access it



Big Local Conniburrow
Helping Conniburrow stay connected and safe

We will help anyone who is
Self Isolating
Shielding
Lonely

Prescriptions, food shopping are some of the ways we can help. If you need something else, we may be able to help.

Coming soon...
Virtual Cafe - come and connect with your neighbours in our online cafe - see our facebook page for how to join in

Storytime for the little ones and other activities all online!

f [biglocalconniburrow](https://www.facebook.com/biglocalconniburrow)
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FOOD

Typical fare at our Community Fridge



We joined FareShareGo which offered us waste food collections on a daily basis.

We collected food, which would otherwise be wasted, from supermarkets. Aldi in Bradwell Common and Buckingham, Tesco in Woburn Sands, Kingston, Oxley Park and Egerton Gate. Estimated minimum saving to the end of June 2020 was 858KGs; equivalent to 2042 meals and CO2 savings of 2,744 KGs.

Actual saving for the same period probably nearer 1500KGs; or 3,600 meals and 4,800 KGs of CO2 savings

We received food, donated by generous people - the Women's Hope Forum, individual residents, customers at Lidl in Oldbrook, Burney's Bakery. Thank you all for your generosity and good humour at a difficult time.

One of our Partners developed a safe way to operate the Fridge in the Hub, with 'customers' standing on the door step, at least two metres away from the 'shop assistant.'

We opened the Community Fridge at our Hub seven days per week, 10am-6pm at least, since April 18th. That is six weeks of opening every day for six weeks, a total of more than 350 hours of opening. This was largely down to one Partner on his own at the beginning, and then other members of BLC helped run the Fridge. Volunteers gave 450-500 hours of their time to make this happen during the period to the end of June.



We have given food, safely, to a large number of residents. Daily custom has varied between 9 and 47 people, with an estimated average of 15 per day. This means we have given food to more than several hundred people. One resident came and picked up food to deliver to six families every day.

We shared our food stock, when our collections meant we anticipated not being able to distribute all we had, with Fishermead and Great Linford fridges and with Fullers Slade via their Residents Association.

We applied for a grant from Neighbourly and received the maximum award of £400. We spent half of that money on food available for food parcels; gave out food parcels to residents in extreme need, i.e. those with no food at all. We donated £50 to a MKCV Community Support Group member who cooks food daily for residents, one on Conniburrow, and £50 to Karl Hanif's Homelessness Fund.

We delivered food to isolating, shielding or vulnerable residents; arranged Sofea Food Parcels to be delivered by GLPC's Rangers on a regular basis; collected and delivered cooked food from MK MEltng Pot, once per week to five households in Conniburrow

Small but important other things, we take for granted

In addition to all those things above, our volunteers collected prescriptions, did people's shopping, arranged a podiatrist's visit and delivery of a medical device to a Health Centre.

Making lockdown more bearable and productive

We launched an initiative to get residents to share their Covid pictures. Realising some would have no materials, we made up craft packs and gave them to people.



Photos from the top clockwise:
Pictures in the Hub window
The pack being put to good use



We recorded and posted stories for young children (all bar one done by our Mobiliser) on our Facebook Page

We ran Cyber Cafes but with little response

We received more than 70 Easter Eggs from Aldi and distributed these to 25 families. We received lots of lovely thank you messages.

We held online Seated Yoga sessions led by Trevor Heale - three times per week to about 8-10 people each time

We made contact with Clover Hogan (right), a climate volunteer who has designed online sessions for young people anxious about our climate. We will run a pilot with her in June.



Her website is here <https://www.forceofnature.xyz/>

We called or contacted 33 residents regularly to help them feel connected and cared for. Our Mobiliser has made many of these calls as has our Hub Manager)

We called our community together to celebrate NHS and key workers every Thursday - what a wonderful, collective noise!



Managing our team and the Partnership

Through Community Action: MK, we got details of over 30 volunteers willing to help at the start of the lockdown. Thank you CA: MK.

We had other people contact us (prompted by the leaflet) and ended up with over 40 volunteers, about 20 are residents of Conniburrow. We have been helped by more than 25 different volunteers. Thank you all so much for your time and effort; your acts of kindness.

We formed an Operations Team to get things organised and actioned. We communicated regularly via What'sApp, Zoom and email. A Partner set up two What'sApp groups which kept us in contact with what's needed and what's going on. The Ops Team had two catch-up meetings per week and held two Zoom Meetings for Partners.

We tried to record what we'd been doing. We didn't manage to capture every single act of kindness delivered by our volunteers, but have over 300 actions recorded.

We organised some training (free to BLC) with Wendy Sugarman Associates which will help us collect the right information to show the impact of BLC's activities.

And, finally, four stories about our volunteers

Sid has volunteered with BLC for about three years. He's an active and humorous 82 year-old with a real love of art, puzzles, quizzes and so on. He loves dreaming up ideas to help people socialise and have fun. He had been running a weekly drawing and painting session for residents before the lockdown came.

Photo on the right of Sid distributing prizes after last year's Treasure Hunt, one of his ideas.

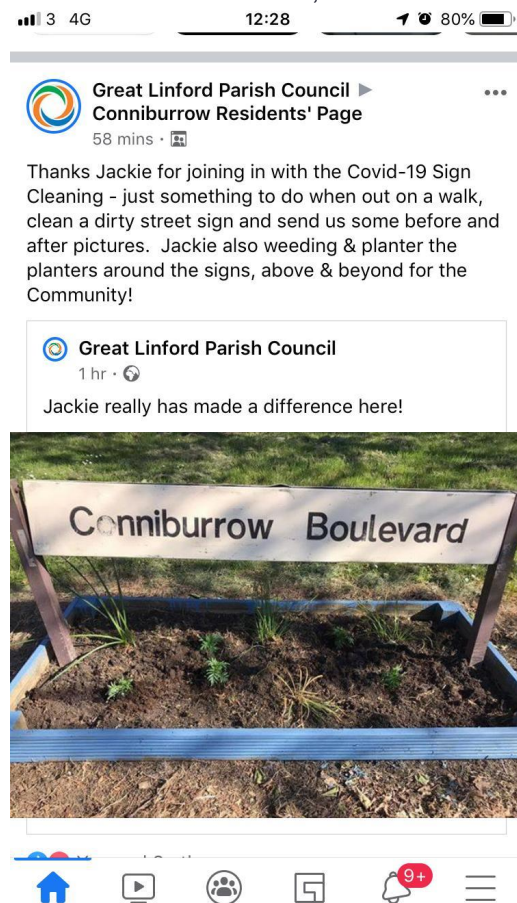


During the lockdown, Sid has kept himself busy and productive. He's kept his garden looking pristine. He's made up quizzes and riddles and devised lessons to keep the children on

Conniburrow learning and thinking. He's been making signs for our Family Fun Day which happens normally in August, but they'll be ready for use whenever we manage to run it. He's also been thinking up ideas for other events and activities for when we get back to normal mixing with each other.

But his biggest achievement is how he has progressed his IT skills. He was just starting to learn to use his laptop when we got locked down. Now, with a bit of help from his family, he has managed to get online and take part in video calls. He's started to use his email and the next challenge is to upload his photos from his digital camera to his computer and send them to his brother in France. Not bad for a man born in 1937, and now living on his own. Well done, Sid, and thank you for always being cheerful when we speak, and for thinking about others and helping them out.

Jackie has done a lot to help during the crisis. She supports one of our vulnerable residents by phone, several times per week, if not on a daily basis, keeping him engaged and connected. She collects donations from supermarkets several times per week, and, as described in the tweet from our Parish Council, decided to take the initiative of sprucing up signs and planters on the estate. Well done, Jackie!



One volunteer told us he felt BLC supported him in the past and so was very happy to think he was able to help us and make a difference for residents in Conniburrow. He collected food donations regularly, has done

shopping for people and collected their prescriptions. As anyone who tried to do this during the, this is really quite tricky. Pharmacies tell patients their prescriptions are ready for collection. A volunteer goes and picks them up, takes them to the resident. Then the patient discovers not everything is there. The patient contacts pharmacy who say the meds are now available. So we contact the volunteer and back he goes to the pharmacy. So, well done to this willing volunteer for all he has done for your community and thank you for your patience!

We want to finish by focusing on one Partner, who did more during the first lockdown than anyone to support residents in Conniburrow since CV19. He came up with the safe way of operating the Community Fridge, and, almost single-handedly, ran it for many days, every day of the week, from 10am-6pm. What an achievement! He has done numerous other things as well, from collecting prescriptions, posting parcels, delivering food for isolating residents. One evening he even took his own dinner to a resident we had suddenly discovered who had not eaten for several days.

His kindness and commitment to his community and his neighbours was immense. And he did all these things while taking on the Chair's role and addressing the challenges of managing BLC at a very difficult time. We owe this Partner a very great deal and want to recognise and celebrate his contribution.

Stand back and applaud our volunteers, please. They are all such generous, thoughtful and caring people.

We have continued to operate the Community Fridge but on a less frequent basis since restrictions eased. As we anticipated, demand from residents has grown as food poverty and employment problems have increased. Our Partnership numbers declined and we have been limited in the programme of social activities we can offer, both because of our limited human resource and because of government restrictions.

We anticipate developing a Covid Recovery Plan and hope to recruit more residents to the Partnership, develop and deliver a programme of events and activities residents tell us they want.

Constrained by volunteer resources, this report was compiled after the AGM and published on our website in October 2021.

Robbie Macpherson
Acting Secretary