



DODFORD WITH GRAFTON PARISH COUNCIL CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2020

There is no doubt this has been a year that none of us will forget. For most, across all generations it will have been challenging, and on so many levels. For some it has allowed them the time to reflect on their life and re-evaluate their goals and values, to try new hobbies, and to catch up on the decorating and jobs around their home. For others it has created or heightened feelings of isolation and loneliness, sharpened the feelings of vulnerability and has made them incredibly sad. People's usual routine has been interrupted, their patience has been stretched, and their reactions have not always been as expected, leaving those on the receiving end confused and hurt, wanting to strike back.

So I would like to ask you all, to think carefully about what Christmas means, and how it is for some a very painful time, and to remember that we never know what is going on behind closed doors, the stresses that others are experiencing. And let us all start the new year afresh, thinking carefully about how social media affects us, and how what we post may hurt others, especially when they do not always have the ability to reply. To allow extra time on our journeys, so that we can travel more slowly through the village, or maybe leave it another way. To slow down to pass pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders and for those not in a car, to make sure we can clearly be seen and not be mistaken for part of the hedge or road. And for all of us to pay attention to those unfamiliar faces in the village, to keep being aware of all going on around us, and to smile and make those joining our community welcome.

If you are concerned about staying safe and making your property secure, please remember we still have some Smart Water kits available to residents. Please contact our Clerk, Kay Stone, for a Smart Water kit. Natalie Lowe, the West Mercia Rural Business crime officer, will be happy to visit and offer practical and impartial advice on 07773 638594 but this mobile number is not monitored 24/7 so Natalie suggests still dialling 999/101 for crime reporting. Natalie also welcomes reports of any suspicious activity, for prevention purposes, rather than just crimes committed. They have a team email address of ruralcrime@westmercia.pnn.police.uk or visit the West Mercia police website.

Well throughout this pandemic our Clerk has continued to do all that she can to keep the parish informed, to answer your queries and pass on your messages and questions to the most appropriate people, together with enabling us, (when the law was changed), as Parish Councillors to come together over zoom and continue to serve the community.

But this has come at a cost, as not all residents can access our meetings, and in what format they will be held, after this coming May, is unknown. So I would ask those of you who do not have access to the internet but who would like to be kept informed to ring and speak with our clerk to see how we can keep you connected to our work, and to keep her number at hand should you need support from the Parish Council later in the year. Please send Kay an email if you would like to receive monthly updates from the Parish Council and notifications of road closures etc by email. Contact details: KStone5757@aol.com or 07776 180207.

I would like to reassure all of you that your Parish Councillors take their role seriously; they endeavour to remain impartial and open to ideas; to represent the residents and to think about what is best for the parish. That said, we also have our own lives and families and are having to grow thick skin, when comments that we have made as individuals, or actions that we have taken in our own right, just like each and every one of you, are then interpreted and twisted, and accusations are made about our appropriateness to hold office, and council time is wasted. Naturally, this behaviour concerns me greatly and I hope will stop, as we all strive to be the best person that we can be.

I am also aware that some issues are not simple or possible to resolve, and that it is easy to become frustrated at what you perceive to be the lack of action, or lack of results by your Parish Council. But let me assure you it is not for lack of trying, and whilst the Parish Council

has no magic wand and very little power, we will always try to help, where-ever possible and appropriate.

I also wish to thank those of you who continue to volunteer, to support others, to keep the clubs, church, and societies going, who clear up the rubbish thoughtlessly left behind, who keep an eye out for those more vulnerable, as well as those who work hard behind the scenes. I do believe during this crisis new connections and friendships have been forged, and that perhaps we will all be a little more mindful, community spirited and resilient, adapting to change, and appreciating life as a whole.

None of you reading this will be able to disagree with me when I say we are very privileged to live in such an outstandingly beautiful area with such lovely countryside surrounding us. We don't want to see fences where once there was a healthy and beautiful hedge, we would like to ensure that we maintain and improve our environment, for future generations, and to provide sustainable habitats for the wildlife, for the whole parish, including Grafton.

So to that effect we would like you to put your thinking caps on and come up with suggestions as to what we might be able to do to improve the area, access to it, or even the experience of living in Dodford and Grafton, to let us know if a footpath is difficult to navigate; or a stile impossible to climb; to suggest possible wildlife projects or ideas for lowering our carbon footprint, or something else completely different. And just because you suggest something, does not mean we expect you to organise it, or to be instrumental in seeing it through, but we would like to work with you.

To get you started we have been given permission to utilise the grass triangle at the end of Priory Road where it meets Warbage lane, and we would like your ideas. You will find information on the flyer with this letter.

Worcestershire County Council and Central Government are providing funding to provide ultra-fast broadband speeds in rural areas. Homes and businesses in Dodford and Grafton Parish are not eligible to apply for these funds because they are already part of a Government funded scheme. All homes and businesses linked to the Bromsgrove exchange should be upgraded during the first 6 months of 2021. Homes and businesses can check if they are in the scheme by entering their postcode on www.communityfibre.openreach.co.uk. Those premises not in the scheme may be able to join the Worcester County Council and Central Government funded scheme. Should you need more information contact Cllr Andrew Beaumont your Bromsgrove District Councillor.

The Parish Council received some excellent nominations for the Phil Richardson Community Award 2020, which made the decision as to who should receive the Award exceedingly difficult. Award recipients this year are George Bryan and Paddy Crump for standing up to the mark when the village was in desperate need of a Parish Magazine Editor, and Alwyn Rea for his commitment to the village community over many years through Dodford Children's Holiday Farm, the Gardening Club and the Parish Council. The 2021 Phil Richardson Community Award will commence 1 January 2021 with a closing date of 30 June 2021 with the presentation(s) hopefully taking place at The Dodford Show in September 2021. The 2021 nomination form is enclosed.

Minutes of meetings and agendas are available on the web site: eservices.worcestershire.gov.uk/MyParish/ and on the Dodford Bromsgrove Facebook page. Dates for 2021 meetings are 25 January, 22 February, 22 March, 26 April, 17 May, 28 June, 26 July, 27 September, 25 October, and 22 November. All at 7.30pm.

So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank past Councillors, my fellow Councillors, our District and County Councillors, and to welcome Jenni Schuett and Scott Fuller, on to the Parish Council and to wish you all a peaceful and safe Christmas, and a Merry New Year.

Rachel Jennings, Chairman

This document can be made available in large print by contacting the Clerk