

## Community and Partnerships

Faringdon has a strong and vibrant community, and we believe that Faringdon Town Council should consider this in all its actions. The Community and Partnerships Committee reflects the relationships the council has forged with a wide variety of groups, creating the calendar of events that normally run throughout the year, making Faringdon a unique place to live and work. Sadly, the last twelve months have been unprecedented, and the Community and Partnerships Committee has had to adapt and evolve alongside its residents in a time of national emergency.

Covid-19 has caused a massive change in the council's commitment to the community; many of our normal programmes were cancelled, and instead our officers worked tirelessly to support the community and to assist our most vulnerable residents. In the early stages of the pandemic the council moved swiftly to manage Faringdon Food Bank which had previously been run by volunteers, taking on the production and delivery of food parcels throughout the period of lock down and beyond. The food bank has been a vital asset to the community, and we are happy to support it now, as we had previously, as it is returned to its original management structure; together we will continue to explore related projects including a community fridge or larder for the town.

Similarly, Faringdon Town Council worked in close partnership with voluntary community group Faringdon Viral Kindness to support vulnerable residents as they were asked to shield throughout lockdown. Indeed, it was clear that most of the council's services needed to be directed towards those residents who were deemed most vulnerable, particularly as normal activities had to be suspended. The Place had to suspend all its normal outreach activities and has worked hard throughout the year to modify their programmes to online events and communicate with young parents in different ways. Despite this disruption The Place has now moved into its permanent residence in the Corn Exchange and has begun to re-establish normal activities.

As already stated, normal events like The Community Litter Pick, The Volunteers Day, and Play Day at Tuckers Park were all cancelled last year, and sadly the Regent Cinema closed its doors too. Out of all these events I am sure our regular cinema screenings have been missed most, and we are currently working on tentative steps to reopen and set up events for the future as restrictions relax. Obviously we must do this with caution, aware that conditions may fluctuate over the next twelve months.

On a more positive note, while some activities have been suspended, we have been able to work on new initiatives including the Community Warden Schemes, for ice and snow and footpath maintenance. Saturday Markets which are run by the town council have now been made a weekly event, reflective of the importance that has been placed on our markets and local businesses throughout the pandemic. In conjunction with this, we have just launched the weekly outdoor exercise programme, held in town park, all designed to bring footfall into the town centre.

While recognising the huge changes that we have experienced since the covid crisis began, we would still like to celebrate the fact that we worked hard to adapt to this change. We have created different ways of communicating with our residents who have also been able to attend our meetings online. Our partnerships with local groups are as strong as ever with regular communications from many, as well as grants awarded to key groups throughout Faringdon; we are also exploring the idea of setting up a youth club in partnership with other organisations for our younger residents.

While this year was not the year we were planning, it has retained the strong community feel that makes our town so special, and we would like to thank all of Faringdon's residents for the cooperation, good sense and generosity of spirit that has been shown since the crisis began; we look forward to activities returning to normal over the next twelve months and beyond.