

Standish Voice Chairperson's Annual Report 2020 - Gill Foster

This is the sixth annual report for Standish Neighbourhood Forum – Standish Voice, and I am pleased to report we have again continued to go from strength to strength as our profile and membership has continued to grow in the village. We now have almost 1,500 members and 10,000 followers on our Facebook page. In May 2020 we applied for and were redesignated by the Council to continue as a neighbourhood Forum which was approved and has allowed us to continue our work.

2020 has been an extraordinary year for us all because of the global Coronavirus pandemic which has had a devastating affect on all our lives. I do not think one year ago any of us could have imagined the impact this would have on everyone both worldwide and in our local community. I would especially like to extend our thoughts, prayers, and condolences to all those people in Standish who have lost a close family member, relative, friend, neighbour, or colleague to the COVID-19 virus. Also, to all those people in the village who have been ill, and those who continue to suffer the effects from long COVID-19 as a result of this infection.

Standish Voice realised very quickly that this pandemic was going to severely affect people within our community, so working with our three councillors, Councillor Adam Marsh, Councillor Ray Whittingham and Councillor Debbie Parkinson, Paul Ogden (vice chair), Karen Bliss (Treasurer) and myself, we rapidly set up the Standish Coronavirus support for our village. In less than a week we launched our support which included a 24-hour 7 day a week telephone helpline support, a call for volunteers which resulted in over 180 people signing up, we received crowd funding to help our more vulnerable residents, arranged the protocols that had to be followed to ensure the safety and protection for those involved and designed and had printed over 10,000 leaflets. I would particularly like to Thank Karen Bliss, our treasurer for all the work she has undertaken in processing and paying all the invoices for the coronavirus support. The way in which our village came together to help people who were having to isolate, by assistance with shopping, getting prescriptions and providing contact was phenomenal and I thank you all and especially all the volunteers.

Having established our Coronavirus support network, we were pleased that Wigan Council used our model and we worked closely and continue to do so to ensure that our residents' benefit. Through the Standish support network, we have the 24/7 essential telephone helpline, with thanks to Smart Strat for providing this and for their ongoing support. Leaflets were delivered to every house and business in Standish, we bought essential supplies and delivered 100 emergency food parcels and provided shopping and prescriptions to over 90 households. At Easter we spread a little cheer with delivering a bunch of tulips to those we were supporting. As the year progressed and restrictions were lifted, we continued to provide support to those who needed it and through continuing the support network we were rapidly able to ramp up our support when restrictions and lockdowns were re-introduced.

Christmas was a difficult time for us all and to help raise spirits for those who had spent much of the year isolated in their homes, we provided 90 Poinsettia plants which were delivered by Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteer Louis Martland and his mum Jo. Thank you and good luck with your Duke of Edinburgh's Award. With the assistance of The Hinds Head, we were able to provide a Christmas lunch on 16th December which they delivered to people we have been helping. I can personally say that in phoning and visiting people and listening to their own personal circumstances,

it has been very humbling to see how we have been able to help and how grateful people have been. We were also pleased to be able to donate some money to help St Wilfred's Church provide Christmas hampers to those people who would normally have attended the Christmas Lunch. Thank you to everyone involved who helped to bring about some Christmas Cheer.

I am pleased to say that our Coronavirus support will continue for as long as is needed, thanks to all our volunteers.

Moving onto other topics, we have continued to meet with the Chief Executive and senior council officers, and I would like to thank Alison and her officers for their continued support for Standish Voice and the work we do.

Together with our local councillors we have held discussions, virtually, with a number of officers as Wigan Council has been identifying projects which they consider the Section 106 developer contribution monies can be utilised. We have continued to stress that the Neighbourhood Plan, which was adopted in 2019 following extensive consultation, should be at the forefront of their thinking and development of projects. Wigan officers have identified a number of projects which the council will shortly be undertaking consultation on and we would urge you all to take part in the consultation and Standish Voice have been very clear that we will be responding to the consultation with our views.

We have also continued to respond to planning applications and in October last year we submitted a comprehensive response to the Government's White paper on proposed changes to the Planning System. Whilst we did not agree with a number of the proposals, we were pleased to see that there was recognition of neighbourhood plans and that these would be retained in planning considerations.

As in previous years the 15 committee members, who have been elected to office and voluntarily given their time, have each taken on responsibility for specific areas of expertise and have played a crucial role in the work of Standish Voice. Their contribution, dedication and hard work has been fantastic, and I would personally like to thank all the committee members for all their hard work and perseverance over the last year, and for the amount of time they have each devoted to getting us to the stage of implementation of the Neighbourhood plan. In particular, I would like to thank Paul Ogden and Ron Wade. More about Paul later. Ron has used his expertise and links with Lancashire Wildlife Trust to enable us to commission a report of the biodiversity and how green spaces in Standish can be improved. The report has been given to Wigan Council to assist them to develop projects to improve the environment in Standish.

Regretfully one of our committee members Nic McMillan has decided to stand down this year and I would like to thank Nic for all her hard work on producing the evidence base in the Neighbourhood Plan. This was an extremely lengthy and very professional document, and it was Nic's expertise, knowledge which was invaluable. This was also commented on, as being a good and thorough document, by the Planning Inspector who examined the Neighbourhood Plan before it could be put forward for referendum.

Unfortunately, we were not able to hold several events we had planned, and we had to cancel the celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower and of course our annual

Christmas market. However, thanks to Kathy Robertson and Ian Trafford we were able to have a virtual Christmas Market which Paul will tell you more about. My thanks go to them. We all hope we will be able to hold another successful Christmas market again this year.

We have continued to lobby Homes England and the Council regarding the Bradley Lane housing development in an attempt to get an increased level of the much-needed affordable housing on the site, beyond the basic level proposed of 25%, which is the minimum required by the planning department. I am pleased to report that Paul and Nicky recently held discussions with Torus Housing Group who are looking to develop the site for affordable housing which is greatly needed.

We have continued to actively raise the profile of the neighbourhood forum, locally, regionally, and nationally through a series of press releases, use of social media, meetings, and discussions with national bodies.

Paul Ogden, Vice-chairman, has undertaken the role of communications officer since we were established and has been responsible for producing the newsletters and keeping the website and face book page up to date with the latest information on the work of Standish Voice and other local issues. I am sure you will all agree he has done a wonderful job, particularly this year, in keeping us all informed of local issues. I would personally like to thank him for his valuable time, hard work and his passion for Standish Voice, which has not wavered. I feel sure that all the committee members would like to join me in thanking him.

In addition to the development of the neighbourhood plan Standish Voice committee members have been involved in a number of areas to help improve the village which Paul will talk about in more detail. When we signed up to "The Deal" we were asked by the Chief Executive what project would be of benefit to the local residents and we are pleased that The Line has continued to be well used by local residents walking, cycling and which reduces car journeys into the village.

So, what will the next twelve months hold?

We will need to continue to work with the Council to influence and ensure that the monies that are coming in as a result of the approved housing developments are maximised and spent to the benefit of the Standish community. As mentioned earlier the Council are shortly going to start to consult the residents and business in Standish on their proposals. We hope that some of these projects will start to be delivered in the forthcoming year.

In addition to the work on the Neighbourhood Plan, we hope we will be able to resume events and encourage people in the village to support the work of Standish Voice.

Special thanks, as I mentioned earlier, to Paul our Vice-chairperson, to Karen Bliss our treasurer, and to all our other committee members Fran Aiken, Sarah Djali, Allan Foster, Diane Gore, Reverend Andrew Holliday, Brian Jones, Dave King, Nic Macmillan, Janet Monks, Nicky Ogden, Kathy Robertson and Ron Wade.

It has been a privilege to work with such a diverse, dedicated and committed group of people.

In this report I have concentrated on the formal work of Standish Voice Committee. However there has been a considerable amount of other work which has been undertaken which Paul Ogden – Vice chair, will report on next.

As Chairperson, I am extremely proud of everything that the committee members have achieved so far on behalf of the village, and I hope that in the coming years Standish Voice Neighbourhood Forum continues to go from strength to strength.