

Chair's Report 2020

To say that this has been a year like no other would be something of an understatement and likely to be echoed at the start of every AGM report. Last year, with another highly successful Festival behind us it felt good to be able to endorse the approach of the Festival and celebrate, with a degree of pride, all that had been achieved.

This year, we were looking forward to cementing a third Festival by drawing in more community groups, local artists and, of course, a wider cross section of the community. Instead, the progress of the pandemic meant that the success and momentum established up until the end of January 2020, was thwarted with the inevitable postponement of the main Festival in July. Again. I'm indebted to our Webmaster, Frank, who did an amazing job in developing the Alpaca walking experiences at Pages Farm in Elstree, both lucrative in terms of income and community awareness and to our Events Manager, Liz, who has worked tirelessly to organise another successful January Music Crawl and further develop the Par 3 Music Club.

As with so many businesses and organisations, we have had to plan dynamically and focus on what is within our power to play a part in keeping people informed and aware of local initiatives. To this end, committee members responsible for social media posts, the website and monthly newsletter, in particular Louise, deserve huge credit.

Resigned but undeterred, we had planned to adapt the opening weekend theme, 'Bushey is Open' to engage as many community groups to opening their doors given the prospect of a relaxation of restrictions in the autumn. It was the energy and determination of the committee not to see our summer plans go completely to waste by staging an impressive and well-viewed Virtual Festival involving many of the artists who would have appeared live. Again, substituting for what would have been the focus of the Festival staged the aptly named, 'Festival Not in the Park', an online treat of different music styles and performances. [These can still be seen on the Festival Website](#). Adapting to the changing situation and coming up with ideas to keep the Festival live in the public eye, not least in helping to keep an important community asset buoyant and promote local talented musicians even under restrictions, has been key.

At the same time as the world appeared to be grinding to a halt, it gave us the opportunity to reflect again on how society has changed and is likely to change as a result of lockdown. Regular Zoom meetings have proved invaluable and there has been no excuses for some long overdue housekeeping. 30 years of Festival records have had to be relocated which has meant scanning documents and disposing of a mountain of paperwork.

Common themes of success and difficulties constantly appear but one review document, written in 2014, made several hard-hitting comments to do with the need to engage more community groups in the planning of events, how a 'reluctance to spend money' shouldn't be at the expense of our dwindling number of volunteers, why online ticket sales would appeal to a younger demographic and, perhaps most telling, how the programme was not representative of the population as a whole. I'm delighted that committee members both past and present have focused attention and continue to address these key issues.

If the pandemic has taught us anything it's that a community spirit is alive and well, that the power of ordinary people to make a difference can be profound. From our perspective, the measure of the Festival's standing in the community has been put to the test in a way that we could not have predicted. I'm immensely proud of the way the team have responded and to our supporters who remained loyal.