

## **2020/21 Chairman's AGM Report**

I would like to welcome all of you to this Westbury & District Link annual general meeting and especially those for whom this is the first AGM they have attended.

### **Apologies for absence**

### **Confirmation of minutes of the AGM held 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019**

### **Matters arising**

This is the first report since 2019 as the Covid pandemic made it impossible to hold an AGM effectively and advice we took informed us that, in those circumstances, it was permitted to not have one in 2020.

It has been a completely exceptional period since that last AGM and imposed unprecedented restrictions on the service we were able to provide as well as severely limiting the number of drivers willing to transport others in their own cars.

Nevertheless we were able to maintain a service throughout that two year period and our sincere thanks go to those drivers willing to transport clients. At the same time we fully understand and respect those who felt they should not expose themselves to the inherent risks to their own health as well as those close to them.

During the pandemic a number of new drivers joined us to help specifically with the commencement of mass vaccination, several of whom were on furlough from their normal work.

We thank all our drivers who give up their time to help the many people of our community who would not be able to attend important appointments without that commitment. I hear all the time from our clients how grateful they are for what you do.

Also our coordinators John, Kathy, Maurice, Vaughan and Nick give up a morning a week on average to answer our phone to take our client requests for trips.

I can tell you from personal experience that some of those calls are not the easiest to deal with. Add the frustrations of finding a driver willing and able to take the trip makes for some interesting mornings.

Recently we were all extremely saddened by the loss of our Chair, Mike Parker. Mike served with Link for fourteen years, initially as a driver but then Chair. During that time he was totally selfless to his commitment to assist those in our community who relied upon Link for their transport needs. In doing so he displayed a great deal of humanity and kindness. In recent times I served with him as Vice Chair and I saw this displayed at first hand in every conversation we had about Link. I counted Mike as a personal friend and I know we all miss him personally.

During the year the committee have invoked several new policies.

It decided that any active Link volunteer and their partners who had a need to use the Link service for themselves could do so without the need to make a donation to Link in recognition of the personal service they give to Link. Since that time several volunteers have done just that.

It was also decided that if Link was unable to provide a previously agreed driver at short notice and no alternative was available then Link would pay for a taxi to deliver the client to their appointment. It would also contribute some part of the cost of their return journey. This arose when a driver was unable to transport a client at short notice because he had been in contact with someone who had Covid.

The pandemic also made it necessary to introduce measures to maximise the protection of drivers and their clients during transportation. This involved Link obtaining suitable supplies of protective equipment which was issued to drivers as well as creating guidance to drivers on the taking of precautionary actions during a trip.

As you will see in our accounts, for some time now Link has had a very large financial reserve in the bank. As it is extremely unlikely that we would ever need to call upon that for our operational needs, the committee took the view before the pandemic started that it should use some of those funds to support other local charitable organisations with similar objectives as our selves. That is assisting the elderly and infirm.

Over time our income from individual client donations cover our day to day costs and it was felt appropriate that the excess in donations we have accrued should be used to support other charities. After all, what could be better than using money donated to one charity to assist another with the same objectives? A double whammy so to speak!

Mike spoke with two such charities, The Alzheimer's Society and a Luncheon club for the elderly.

Alzheimer's Support Wiltshire holds group singing therapy sessions in Westbury Leigh and, in fact, Mavis Payne's husband Richard is one of the participants. Following discussions Mike had with them it was agreed to initially donate £1000 a year for three years towards their costs. We have done this now for the past two years. He also had initial discussions with the organisers of the luncheon club but the pandemic halted their operations. They are now back up running and it is intended to restart those discussions.

Finally, our accountant Andrew Chappell is planning on running the marathon in 2023 in aid of the deaf and blind. For a number of years now Andrew has not charged us for the services he provides so the committee feels it is appropriate to support his charitable run as a one-off.

In recent times most drivers have returned to us while some temporary drivers have returned to their work although several have remained with us and we are very pleased they have done so.

Several drivers have decided to discontinue their driving with us permanently and we thank them for their service to Link and the community.

These were Peter Gilliam, Nick Charlesworth, Mark Horseman, Stephen Lancaster, Val Stenning, Carol Barton, Julia Rhodes, Daniel Allen and Ken Wilson.

The pandemic and the necessary cessation of holding our monthly coffee mornings highlighted the value of informal contact between our volunteers and so, when government guidelines allowed, we organised a social get together at the White Horse Country Park which was very well attended and highly enjoyable for those who did. It is our intention to hold more of these events as part of our calendar.

When rules allowed us to meet again face to face for our coffee mornings our usual venue, the Methodist Hall, had imposed many restrictions on the use of their room that made using it un-viable. Charmian

investigated several alternative venues and the Hall at West End Baptist Church came out best and at no additional cost.

With Mike's passing I took on the office of Chair and the committee invited John Masson to assume the role of Vice Chair and we are both putting ourselves forward for election to those offices at this AGM.

I am also sad to report the passing of two individuals who have previously given service to Link. Rosemary Henderson had been a driver for us in the past and Rosemary Bevan had assisted us on our coffee mornings.

In closing I would like to express Link's gratitude to the members of the management committee who have had to operate in these challenging times.

Secretary Charmian Horseman, Treasurer Celia Carpenter, Mavis Payne, Ann Bizeray, drivers Bill Yeadon, Colin Gladwell and John Masson and not forgetting Marjorie Painter for her invaluable contribution in arranging the daily transfer of our telephone line.

**Paul Howard (Acting Chairman)**

**Nov. 2021**