

Congleton Partnership Project Report – June 2020

Congleton Creative – Vince Cutcliffe

Congleton Unplugged did take place, March 6, 7, 8 just before CV19 moved the country into lockdown, which seemed to start informally on the weekend on 14/15 March when events did start to get cancelled. I state this to put some context into the fact that Unplugged did happen very close to the beginning of official Lockdown (23rd March). The team were concerned about advice at the time, which after contact Cheshire East was based on their advice to use the HM Gov and the NHS websites. We referenced these notices on our website, there was considerable concern about how attendance would fare.

Attendance on Friday 6th March; there were a few quiet points/venues, on Saturday 7th March attendance was very busy with Sunday 8th March being somewhere in between the Friday and Saturday attendance. With respect to the business operation we think that the partnerships work very well indeed, MusicGofer and Biddulph Up In Arms provide access to a wider range audience and artist base, we will continue to work with them. The additional features this year, spoken word and creative art received a varied response, Poems and Pints was very well received and in a similar vein the poetry workshop, the art work shop was not well attended, we will consider ways to further these events for the next Unplugged.

Congleton Jazz and Blues 2020 will not take place, at least not as an attended event, we are looking at providing some online gigs/events. We are unsure whether it will be feasible to hold an Unplugged event first weekend of March 2021, we will review this as things progress this year. We are planning for Jazz and Blues to take place Aug 28/29 2021 and have put bands venues supporters sponsors etc on notice.

Heritage & Antiques Festival.(Creative Congleton)

As with many other events this year Congleton Heritage & Antiques Festival will now not take place as planned. We have however decided to put together an online festival to cover the same period, between Sept 12th and Sept 27th. We have been pleased with the response so far and have a varied programme in construction. There will be video tours, talks, theatre, music and film. We will be uploading links to the events each day of the festival. This will mean that the events will be available to a wider audience and hosted online for a longer time. Our current challenge is revamping our website so that it makes a suitable and attractive landing space for visitors. Any help with this or our social media output would be welcome.

Dementia Friendly Congleton May 2020

At the start of March, there were several Dementia friends awareness sessions booked and a guest speaker, from Manchester University Dementia Research centre arranging to give a talk to the steering group on March 17. The chatty cafe scheme was well supported at Bear Grills.

The guest speaker cancelled and, after due consideration, so was the steering group meeting.

All events at cafes and churches were put on hold. I contacted the hosts for the awareness sessions but none wished/were able to go ahead.

It has been possible for several of the steering group to stay in touch with their regular contacts by phone to ensure they were receiving support by way of food and medication supplies. An emergency supply of food, followed by regular food parcels, was arranged via 2 of the group working together by phone.

The chair has attended webinars run by the Alzheimers Society and Dementia Friends on scam warnings and 'How to run awareness sessions on Zoom'. The session contains many of the original features but is only 30 minutes in length. There are alterations eg the 5 key messages are run as an interactive multi-choice answer quiz to save the need for handouts. If there are any requests for sessions, these can now be run.

At some point we need to look at how we re-open/re-activate our activities using social distancing measures. More difficult, I think, will be getting support from organisations whose main priority will likely be survival. Once we can meet, in small numbers, I suggest a working party with some of the key players to look at this

Elizabeth's Group Report

Like everyone else we locked down in March and of course that means Elizabeth's Day on 2nd of May had to be postponed. This was a shame as we had a an exciting programme planned with the opening of our Elizabeth's Trail, prize-giving for our competition winners, an exhibition in the Town Hall, a talk with Dr Di Drummond and even a living statue. Also postponed was the inaugural Elizabeth Elmy Lecture that should take place on 28th May, at the Town Hall with Dr Maureen Wright. These things are paid for and are ready to have the dust blown off as soon as it is safe to hold events again.

In the meantime, we have been keeping busy during lockdown making some short films to keep people interested and these can be found on our Facebook page @elizabethsgroup. They have gone down extremely well and have created much interest and the Chronicle has featured us almost weekly as a result of our films.

Our Booklet and Map have been printed and the book is selling well with all proceeds going to the statue.

Looking forward to getting up and running in the real world again a.s.a.p

Congleton Sustainability Group:

Congleton Green: Congleton Green working group's met on Thursday 23rd April (Zoom), Jackie MacArthur had invited Dan Firth to explain Sustainable Procurement principles. it will to some degree lead to officers and councillors looking at the Town Council's procurement strategy – where appropriate build in higher standards for responsible procurement such as using materials from sustainable sources, consider local purchases (less mileage), ethics of company – avoid modern slavery. Carbon Footprint – Barry Speed updated the group on progress over the past three weeks. Now looking at the 2019/20 figures for the Town Hall. Hero Renewables to look at ways to reduce energy consumption in the Town Hall. An e learning version of the Sustainable Living in Congleton course has been put out to tender with the view to starting work in June.

Congleton Green Fayre: We had currently 17 exhibitors and 2 car dealers having confirmed their attendance for the event planned for 30th May. This event has now been cancelled in

the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working on the planned October 31st event with the pretext that this may be able to take place.

The Tree Group: 800+ trees planed. A plan for the proactive planting of trees, grants, permissions, being worked on, need to look outside of "Congleton" to achieve the volumes we want. Tree group to meet in May to discuss plans for the autumn. Publicity plan being developed to get public support.

Dane Valley Community Energy (Hydro Scheme): Funding of £740k now secure and work will start early June to operate within government COVID guidelines and CEBC Planning conditions. The Archimedes screw has been ordered as there is around a six month lead time on this item and the civils contract awarded. Plan is to generate power by the end of this year.

The Old Saw Mill : Currently closed, has now received a £10K grant from CEBC to support us over COVID-19. This will provide some welcome respite for a few months. Possibly will open (Government rules permitting) for small group sessions where self-isolating is not a problem. Started home delivery of Apple Juice/Vinegar which has been very well received.

Active Travel Congleton: (incorporating Congleton Cycling Campaign): The front page lead report in The Chronicle (30th April) served to lift the awareness of the campaign to improve facilities for both walking and cycling in Congleton. The group has asked CTC to meet and support 5 issues including pavement widening, one way system, removal of dismount signs and 20mph speed limit on some town centre streets.

Congleton & District U3A – Sue Ward

All face-to-face group meetings were suspended in March in line with Government's guidelines re social distancing.

Day trips (theatre, museum groups etc) due to take place in May and June have been cancelled.

UK holiday trips and a holiday to Alaska/Canada deferred to later dates (hopefully able to go ahead then – tbc)

Meanwhile, many members are keeping in touch by phone, email, and social platforms. Zoom, Skype and Jitsi have allowed for online get-togethers for some group meeting – Pilates, Line Dancing, Tap Dancing, Science Discussion, Ukulele etc and for quizzing. We have a weekly Bulletin going to members online, and other publications are sent from time to time – Puzzles / fun pages, and our last Spotlight magazine went out via email rather than hard copy. Some of the tennis group have been able to get together this week to play singles, thanks to easing of restrictions - small steps towards resumption of the group's usual format of doubles games – more fun and less challenging on the legs!

So, whilst normal service is, in the main, on hold, there is plenty of connectivity going on. In addition, our National Office is in the process of making a film about how members are coping during these unusual times, and Congleton has been asked to contribute video footage of various aspects e.g. Clapping for Carers on Thursday evening, taking daily exercise, keeping in touch ...

I look forward to being able to report on *regular* activities again soon. Stay safe and well everyone.

Community Projects – Jo Money

Whilst projects are on hold CCP has been one of the community leaders helping the Town Council and other voluntary groups with the COVID -19 helpline and attending weekly zoom meetings.

Food and Drink Festival June 14th has been cancelled but the team are communicating regularly and ideas are afloat to hold some kind of activity on line on Sunday June 14th. This will include food demo videos, Nick Barnes magic sessions on video, and hopefully some special deals from stallholders. By doing this we hope to support local producers and keep the Festival alive in people's minds. To demonstrate our commitment to local producers all stall holders have been fully refunded.

Play Day: Tuesday 4th August cancelled. This could be transferred to September. We could have a simpler event at short notice.

Get Involved index of Congleton voluntary groups and organisations. This is currently being updated but the printing date has been delayed because communication with groups and organisations has been hampered. However we hope to have the Index published by the middle of the year and certainly ready for the Green Fayre in September. The Index will contain a new Centre page spread to promote the development of Greening Congleton and all the new groups that have been established.

Group 2022 - CCP is leading on creating and managing a working group to raise funds, organise and deliver events and activities to celebrate 750 years of the Congleton Charter in 2020. Ongoing.

Christmas Lights Switch-on – currently Saturday November 21st. CCP and Congleton Town Council work in partnership to deliver this annual event. Planning is going ahead but the format may need to change. Only time will tell but meetings will continue and contingency plans developed. A parade is feasible it's just the very large gathering for the actual Lights Switch-on is unlikely.

Youth Forum activities – Skate Park project – on hold as renovation of the Leisure Centre has not even started. Inclusion of Young People in the Play day is on hold.

Arts and culture – will be supporting EPH in fund raising for and delivering school holiday arts workshops and creative workshops with Friends for Leisure and Young Carers towards the end of the year?

Hidden Places theatre project – may go ahead in October holidays?

CRTA theatre performance – may go ahead towards the end of the year??

CCP is always available to offer support, where needed in the town, during this crisis.

Cenotaph Project – Mike Smith

We are now looking at a start date for the project around mid June. Contracts are in the process of being drawn up, health and safety strategy being finalized (Covid 19 directives applying) and timing for the work (approx. 18weeks) being issued.

We have opted for the smaller wall design, with “rockery” landscaping for the whole bank behind the Cenotaph using the tree / shrub planting guide agreed with planning. As we still do not know if there will be any complications / set back because of Covid 19, any dedication event will be held in 2021.

South Cheshire Market Towns Trail. Completed, maps available from TIC, waymakers sited (Green and White) on most the route (except new link road section around Sandy Lane) people are using the route as of now. The opening ceremony planned for 9th April had to be canceled will organize a PR event as and when we will be allowed to.

Wellbeing Fayre. (Senior Forum)

Still provisional for early October, although no invitations have gone out yet. Will make a decision after the next major government briefing. I guess it may be unlikely that we can have around 250 people in the Town hall at any one time, just have to wait and see

Congleton Youth Forum-G.Williams

Four planned projects for 2020 have all been put on hold and we are now looking to deliver each of them in 2021.

Congleton Youth Forum held a workshop a few months ago which included young people to identify the needs of young people and projects that can support these needs during the next couple of years.

One of the projects suggested was to enhance the skate park provision in the short and medium term. It is recognised that to improve the facility in the longer term will require significant investment. There are though opportunities to make modest improvements in the short term that will bring immediate benefit and demonstrate and galvanise support and evidence to justify making longer term improvements. The facility is not properly managed and has outstanding repairs and only receives basic maintenance. It is looking tired and run down and needs an uplift and a way to attract positive usage of the area.

The Youth Forum working with users of the facility will offer a series of events to improve the appearance of the facility and to attract an increase in patronage encouraging more people to get involved and enjoy the space. In the short term we will tidy up the skate park, repair some of the existing features and create some art and sculpture pieces that will make it a more attractive area for users. An event will be offered that will bring in a new audience and additionally offer a unique music event for young people to enjoy. During these events we will also consult with existing and possible new users of what they would like the skate park to offer in the future. This could be a partial or total rebuild.

The project will improve the environment by tidying up the site and providing interesting art and sculpture pieces relating to youth culture and skating/bmxing & scootering offering a

much more vibrant space that attracts positive engagement of young people who gather there. The events will enable young people to make a difference, possibly as part of their Duke of Edinburgh or other award scheme and will allow them to shape the future of the skate park in the longer term. The events will also showcase local talent of those who skate, create art or perform music as these elements will be part of events we are looking to offer.

We have secured a promissory grant from the Margaret Williamson Trust of £220 which will be match funded by the partnership towards the event and short term refurbishment work. We will also approach Age UK Men in Sheds to see if there is an opportunity for inter-generational work.

I have met with officers from Cheshire East and Ansa as to the best way to longer term enhance the skate park facility and they support this initial approach and the need to work with key groups such as Friends of Congleton Park as the best way of drawing in necessary external funding.

The second was to offer a youth focussed day centred on the Olympics. This would be delivered with young people who would learn various skills linked to event management and planning. 2021 is 150 years of Congleton Park so will link into their festivities. The plan is to start progressing this from September if possible through Congleton High & Eaton Bank Academy.

The third was to work up ideas on how to involve schools and youth focussed groups in the tree planting initiative and ambitions of Congleton Tree Group to plant 30,000 trees in the next 5 years. The implementation will hopefully start in the autumn this year.

The fourth was for youth forum members to get more involved with the annual summer play day held in Congleton town centre with a DJ workshop and performance.

Town Centre Report – J. MacArthur.

Completely unprecedented time for the town centre. Fortunately most businesses were entitled to a grant of either £10k or £25k depending on their rateable value and were able to furlough staff where they employed staff which has helped a little, but still an incredibly challenging time for them coming on top of an already difficult year. The Association of Town Centre Managers reported that online sales jumped in 5 weeks to where they were expecting them to be in 5 years time.

We know that Car Phone Warehouse has closed and Laura Ashley went into administration. The owner of Bryans passed away and this shop is now closed. We understand a new mobile phone shop is planning to open in the shop on the corner of Little Street and Duke Street (was Foundations). Very little within the Town Centre has been able to stay open as an essential shop during the lock down – just the pharmacies, food shops, newsagents. Bare Health, Wild and Wild and Crema have been operating a delivery/ click and collect service. The outdoor Market (minus car boot) and indoor Food Market will re-open on Tuesday 2nd June with the rest of the Indoor minus the café looking to open from the 15th June. The Makers Market is hoping to return in some form from the end of June and discussions are underway on locations.

Any dates given have to be subject to caveats - if the levels of Coronavirus rise, stricter measures may be reintroduced.

Currently other 'non-essential' retail shops are planning to open from the 15th June. On the 10th May the government's road map suggested that businesses such as hair dressers, barbers, nail bars and beauty salons may be able to open from the 4th July. No dates was given for the Leisure and Hospitality industry (pubs and restaurants). The Town Council is working with Highways and other departments in Cheshire East to look at measures that could be taken to help build confidence and improve safety for those working and visiting the town centre.

Congleton Town Council has asked Cheshire East to look at the following measures:

The approved suggestions from CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL are below. Note item 1 you have been aware of for some time. The others are not in any specific order.

1. 20s Plenty for the Town Centre. Town Centre roads highlighted in Map A – Appendix 2 should be part of a 20mph Town Centre zone to make Congleton town centre a safer and more pleasant environment for all. The pedestrian area is accessible from 4pm – 10am for unloading and loading only and has not been shown as part of the road network.
2. Broadhurst Lane, off Clayton Bypass should become a 10mph zone due to its extreme narrowness and route to a business hub. *(notes there has also been a request from the residents in this road for a walkway/pavement widening on this route, this was not discussed by Councillors but we know residents would appreciate this being explored)*
3. Recommend that pavements are widened or pedestrian passing points introduced in the following areas (see pdf attached for more explanation)
 - a) Mill Street - pavements widened where possible plus loading and disabled bay added in the wide area by the bus stop
 - b) Swan Bank – pedestrian passing points introduced which will mean reducing some of parking bays to provide refuges for pedestrians
 - c) West Street – Highways to explore pavements widening on both sides of the road where possible but to the Waggs Road side if only one side possible - especially from the town centre to the car park.
 - d) High Street - bus stop temporarily moved to the bus station in Market Street. Pedestrian passing points introduced which will mean losing some parking spaces.
 - e) Market Street - widen the footpath running alongside Morrisons and B&M – work with Highways on what would be possible ensuring adequate turning circles for buses and access to the yard by Morrisons for delivery vehicles.
 - f) Lawton Street - create pedestrian passing points, which will need some reduction of the parking space.
4. Mountbatten Way Traffic Lights – introduce advance cyclist stop line (similar to Park Lane) to make it a safer route around the town for cyclists.

5. Introduce appropriate signage throughout the town centre to remind town centre users of social distancing.
6. May need to be some reallocation of space within the pedestrian area – such as recommending to Highways that Victoria Potatoes can have an alternative pitch to Victoria Street to enable social distancing, or alterations to the Alfresco policy. These will be on a case by case basis for officers to discuss with Highways.
7. Introduction of signage indicating one way direction on pavements and in the pedestrian area where possible. This may need the introduction of some safer crossings to make possible. Assume it would be keep right so that you are walking towards oncoming traffic? Traders did not want to see any barriers in the pedestrian area to restrict movement to get to shops.

NOT RECOMMENDED:

8. 20 mph for residential streets, although considered beneficial in some areas, is not a COVID-19 priority. The emphasis should be on Town Centre roads and so for this reason the Integrated Transport Group did not think this should be taken forward as an immediate priority. It will be considered in the future as a potential longer-term measure.
9. The proposal to allow cycling in the pedestrian area was not recommended by the group due to safety concerns raised and the emphasis on additional space being needed for pedestrians.
10. Considerations to increase time of pedestrianisation to 9am – 5pm were rejected by traders due to the need for both customer and trade deliveries. They also thought that footfall patterns would not warrant increased hours at the current time.

Note: The Integrated Transport Group believe that further work is required on traffic modelling of routes around and through the town to help meet Climate Change Emergency pledges, to make the town safer and more welcoming for all users and to reflect opportunities made possible with the opening of the Link Road. The Group will continue this work to create longer-term improvements, in addition to the short-term emergency measures in this proposal. A paper on proposals for temporary cycling lanes to get into the Town Centre will be discussed at Community and Environment next week.

COVID-19 WORK

During lock-down the Town Council has been working closely with many groups and organisation on helping to communicate messages and respond to the public. New measures include

- New pages added to the Town Council website as COVID-19 - up to 4,000 pages a week have been viewed on the website, with initially pages on shopping and takeaways proving the most popular.
- A Community Information line set up and staffed 7 days a week from 11 – 7pm

- Use of the Town Hall for a Community Food Hub for the first month – this has since moved to the Vale Club and has continued to be very successfully run by Shaun Radcliffe and a group of volunteers.
- Emergency food pack from the Town Hall and a Friday chilled meals on wheels service (started May 8th)
- Managing the Congleton Covid Community Group facebook page
- Taking out full page and half page advertorials in the Congleton Chronicle
- Produced a COVID-19 edition of Bear Necessities delivered to households across Congleton in April

EVENTS

Due to COVID-19 Congleton's usual busy events programme has needed to be put on hold. VE Day went online with video messages, interviews and posts – the reach of posts on VE week leapt to nearly 50,000 – considerably higher than the average of 9-10,000 in the previous weeks. There are currently no plans to open the Paddling Pool for this year as it would be impossible to manage the social distancing. Events that have needed to be postponed/ cancelled include: Easter Treats, Easter Hop around the Shops, Food and Drink, Congleton Pride, Brass in the Grass, Green Fayre, Jazz and Blues and Congleton Heritage and Antiques Festival. Many of the organisers, who have already devoted many, many hours work into these events are seeing what they can do to keep the spirit of the event alive through virtual events.

Mayor Making

Mayor Making was due to take place on the 21st May. Councillor have voted to keep Cllr Sally Ann Holland as Mayor and Cllr Denis Murphy as Deputy Mayor for another year. The next Mayor Making is scheduled for May 2021.

Bear Necessities

Another edition will come out mid July. Please send article to Jackie MacArthur by the end of June.

My thanks to all who have taken time to get their reports to me. Things are still happening, and as Sir / Capt Tom says, ***“tomorrow will be a good day”***

Congleton Partnership Report

June 2020

Mike Smith

