THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU ALL!

A message from Bigbury's Coronavirus Support Group

I write this update from my uninvited (by me!) position at the centre of Bigbury's efforts to deal with the effects on our community of the coronavirus pandemic. Mostly, this brief piece is my opportunity to indirectly thank everybody else that is involved in the Group (BCSG).

In Bigbury, most of us were slow to appreciate the enormity of the current coronavirus outbreak and its impact on just about everything we take for granted as being normal. We shared that sluggishness with almost everybody in the country, including our leaders and their many experts! Since mid-March, alerted and assisted by friends in Ringmore, we have been struggling to catch up - with some success. We now have a reasonably well-coordinated support system in place to help the many vulnerable people in our community, thanks to the efforts of lots of individuals.

Following our call for volunteers and for those in need to identify themselves through our flyers, distributed by volunteers with Bigbury News, we have been awestruck by the kindness and generosity of so many people offering to help out in a variety of ways;

* + by driving to collect and deliver foodstuffs and prescriptions,
	+ by mapping parish properties so that volunteer drivers can more easily find the properties of those in need,
	+ by phoning to help the lonely deal with their isolation,
	+ by making movies for Bigbury TV to help amuse us whilst in lockdown,
	+ by distributing or posting messages on notice boards etc, etc.

We now have over 36 volunteer households on our database and slightly fewer households asking for assistance in the provision of essential groceries and/or vital prescriptions via our 4 main coordinators, whom are located in different parts of the parish - Bigbury-on-Sea, Bigbury Village, St Ann's Chapel, Easton and far flung outposts. To date, our drivers have delivered well over a dozen food orders and around the same number of prescriptions.

Communication has been a vital component of all this work; made so much more difficult by the absence of conventional meetings and face-to-face contact. Many parishioners, me amongst them, may have surprised themselves by honing their emailing skills to a fresh sharpness with an urgency and speed dictated by their new situation. Your Parish Council has even learned to videoconference! Bigbury Drums has offered an almost daily diet of uplifting activities and information by direct email and the Bigbury News presses have turned out important notices for distribution around the parish with breakneck speed and efficiency.

It is important to clarify that the Bigbury Support Group is not a vehicle for policing the community or for ensuring compliance with HM Government guidelines to keep us safe. We are solely here to offer support where needed. Whilst some of our earlier activities were concerned with diminishing the coronavirus infection risk to our resident population by, for example, asking for the camp sites and car parks to be closed to deter visitors, the primary members of the BCSG recognise the longer term dependence of many local individuals and businesses on the income provided by such visitors. Striking the correct balance is not easy - especially with Easter approaching but, of course, we err on the side of safety and preserving lives. Many of us are in the vulnerable and very vulnerable groups and are understandably anxious. We sympathise with those unable to visit their homes in Bigbury or enjoy the island, beach and the sea.  There will be a wonderful homecoming when restrictions are finally eased. I'm told that many would-be visitors have sent letters of support to their friends and neighbours in Bigbury.

Rising above the pandemonium are all the staff at our village shop, Holywell Stores. What an effort they have put on, despite the risks to their personal wellbeing! They have been working like Trojans to satisfy extra demand by fetching supplies from distant sources to enable us all to carry on pretty much as normal without having to venture outside the parish. Even daily newspaper deliveries have carried on uninterrupted. Can I make a plea to help the shop staff and their customers to stay safe by repeating the following guidance, which you will also see elsewhere:-

1.  Try to ensure there is only one adult per household in the shop at any one time - keep children out of the shop, please

2.  If the shop looks busy, please wait your turn outside, at a safe distance from others in the queue.

3. Wait in your vehicle if possible

4. Please show respect and consideration for others at all times.

Although the main supermarkets may have long waiting lists for deliveries, you can relieve some of the pressure on our village shop by taking advantage of the 'farm to fork' delivery systems which several local farmers have set up with their excellent produce to make life safer and easier for us. Further details are available in Bigbury Drums and on the 'Charterlands Chatter' Facebook page. In addition, some of the shops in Kingsbridge, struggling against low customer numbers, have changed their operational models to offer home deliveries, as have some local restaurants and pubs. - check the pages of the Kingsbridge Gazette. You could be in for a surprise at what is on offer. For example, 'Catch of the Day' fishmonger of Fore Street is offering a Friday afternoon delivery to Bigbury for orders placed by Thursday morning, paid for by card over the phone (01548 852006) in advance.

Lastly, if you think our support operation can be improved in any way, please let me know by emailing  sdmw2@btopenworld.com or phoning 01548 810373.

Most importantly, stay safe!

Stuart Watts

6 April 2020