Beacon Villages Community Library Annual Report 2022-2023

It may not seem that the old Ivinghoe Library has changed much since becoming Beacon Villages Community Library ten years ago, but we take change in our stride. In 2022 the whole County library service was reviewed and slimmed down yet again, but after the dust had settled our library manager was reappointed.

The manager is employed on our behalf by the Council and therefore subject to review and change, but the cost of employing the manager comes from the grant we receive towards the running of the library. Although we have stalwart volunteer staff, we also choose to employ a library manager, so rely on fundraising and grants to top up the grant. We run a small deficit budget covered by reserves. All our minutes and finances are available on our website.

The next few years may not turn out to be as comfortable as the past. It would come as no surprise if the Council was no longer able to afford to support community libraries as they do. With this constantly in mind the 15 community libraries in Buckinghamshire have met occasionally in the last year to try and understand and influence the basic principles that lie behind community library funding. When it was pointed out to the library service (by me) that increased energy prices were going to knock community libraries sideways the grant negotiations were postponed for a further 12 months. Unfortunately this did not reprieve BVCL in any way as our negotiations are out of line with other libraries and a new contract is due for 24-25 in any case.

Energy charges for the library last year increased by 53% despite the fact that the Council changed suppliers in order to get a better deal. Naturally we were not notified, and when the usual monthly statements did not arrive our Treasurer ended up in direct contact with the Council and then the energy supplier, and we absorbed the price increase. All credit to our treasurer Colin Arney that we still look like the proverbial Buckinghamshire Swan sailing on the surface of the water, but the amount of paddling that's been going on underneath has been quite considerable.

The library augments its income from the sale of donated new books and DVDs; with 100 club draws every month; BeaconLit and the associated writing competition BeaconFlash; and counter sales of generously donated home made fudge or craft items.

New members join the library every week. We know we are a valued resource. Our hours are almost back to pre-covid days and full Friday evening opening has resumed. This year we have, like others, joined the Warm Spaces initiative as a warm and welcoming venue in the depths of winter with hot drinks. We have also supported the local food bank, the refugee charity Hope and Aid Direct, and had a few donated warm blankets to gift locally.

The library service invited all community libraries to attend the staff and service conference in March. This year BVCL was invited to give a short, five minute presentation about the library which was warmly welcomed. It was an ideal opportunity to promote the Library's flagship fundraiser BeaconLit, which has always been well supported by the Council. Last year one of the participating authors went on to win a significant literary prize, this year another has been shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction. We are grateful for the continuing support of Brookmead School with whom both BeaconLit and the library have a good rapport. This year BeaconLit is all day on Saturday July 8th.

BVCL has also started a play reading group. In the depths of County Hall the library service holds about 100 sets of plays which go unread from year to year. We got some dusted out, chose an Alan Ayckbourn comedy for our first trial run, and had a very amusing Saturday lunchtime. The next play reading will be at the end of May. The Women's Institute random readers group has also decided to use the library for meetings as we can once again make the library available for private lettings for small groups.

Avril Davies
Chair BVCL