

# **Thompson Millennium Green Charitable Trust**

Registered Charity No. 1073130



## **Chairman's Report for 2019/2020**

Two events I mentioned at the last AGM continued to dominate our time this year – COVID-19 and the 16 August 2020 flood.

COVID-19 of course affected all our lives. We hope that for some, this great space in the heart of the upper part of the village, has provided a place of welcome respite. Unfortunately, for those who use the exercise and play areas, they have not been so fortunate. The broadly drafted language of the various government regulations has meant that these facilities have been closed throughout the lockdowns, this despite appeals to our local and county councils, to our MP and to the Minister. It was only in May, after repeated calls to Breckland that their Compliance Officer gave us the green light, albeit still subject to restrictions.

Our view all along has been that provided parents and responsible adults use their common sense, the facilities should be open to all. However, since the Green relies completely on volunteer support, there is no way that there could be the regular sanitizing and inspection which regulations required.

The 16 August flood caused great inconvenience and, in some cases, significant hardship across the community. Claims were made against the Green in respect of some of the resulting flood damage but I'm glad to say that these were subsequently amicably resolved.

The Committee raised the issue with the Parish Council (given their concern for the community as a whole). Joint meetings finally took place with Norfolk County Council who undertook to survey some of the key 'pinch points' adjacent to the Green. In the meantime, we were fortunate in finding an expert hydrologist in the village to advise the Committee which he then later joined.

The problem we face is largely due to the fact that the Green has become a key part of the water and flood management for surrounding roads and properties. Add to this, that there is only one water drainage outlet from the Green and this flows through a neighbouring property over which we have no control, and then via a drain under Hallfield Road. The problem has been exacerbated both by local Highways digging 'grips' or gully's into the Green to transfer water from the road to our land, and by previous owners building over the previously existing ditch network.

The Green itself acts as a sponge, absorbing significant quantities of water, and so benefitting surrounding areas in the village. However, if the water table is particularly high or the storm volume excessive (it was in excess of 185.6mm in the torrential August downpour), even its capacity can be breached.

The challenge we face, in what Norfolk County Council described as a 'one in a hundred year' event (but are now far more prevalent), is a County-wide one and will not go away. We will therefore continue to apply pressure to the Council to come up with a proper flood mitigation plan for the area. We have also had a number of conversations with the owner of the continuation of our outflow ditch and he has readily made welcome improvements to his ditch which we hope will go some way to improve the water flow in extreme conditions.

Meanwhile, we have continued to improve the Green, carrying out necessary hedgerow layering, removing dying ash trees and installing a gate and bollards. Committee members have worked hard to obtain funding and we are grateful to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Breckland Council for the funding they have made available. We have also met with Norfolk Wildlife Trust who have given advice on how to best maintain a balance between user friendly open spaces for visitors, and wildlife areas where local flora and fauna can flourish. Additional picnic tables will also be installed near the play area as soon as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted sufficiently to restart working parties.

So far as the Green's finances are concerned, our income was severely reduced due to the Covid pandemic and the associated governmental restrictions. As an example, we were forced to suspend collection of the Green's Bonus Ball lottery between March and early September, as many were reluctant to meet people who were not part of their household group. When we restarted collections in late summer, we recruited three new subscription collectors to replace one of our two long-standing collectors who had left the village. The Covid pandemic also affected our other significant source of income, the Thompson 10k and 5k Run. Uncertainty about what activities would be allowed in late September meant that the Run's organisation and promotion were not possible as a firm date could not be chosen.

Looking forward, it is difficult to predict how the Covid variants may reassert themselves on our lives, but we will adapt as best we can. The Green was officially opened (coincidentally by my wife!) in 2001 so we can now celebrate nearly 21 years of existence. So we will be asking local residents for their views on how they would like to see the Green develop over the next 21 years. One early celebration is planned for the Green, working with other village groups, on September 11, to celebrate the ending of restrictions - so fingers crossed for that! Later that month will be the reinstatement of the 5k and 10k Thompson Runs on September 26, and I'm particularly grateful to the Run Committee for all their efforts in arranging this event.

Finally, I would like to thank each member of the Green Committee for their significant contributions over what has been a difficult year. It is the nature of voluntary groups that it is always hard to find individuals who are prepared to commit both time and energy, particularly when there is often little public recognition of the help they provide to the community. So my sincere thanks to each and every one of them.

Martin Hayman, Chair, Thompson Millennium Green Committee