

## Is this it?

So that was it, then – or was it? The last legal limits on social contact were removed on 19 July. It was ‘Freedom Day’ according to the tabloid press, and yet we were encouraged to go on protecting ourselves and others by observing social distancing and wearing face coverings in shops and on public transport.

And this while in the middle of a third wave of Delta Covid, with hugely rising case numbers (over 11,000 in the Cherwell area and 20 cases in Deddington and the Astons). Those now affected were younger and unvaccinated, and there were also cases of double vaccinated people catching the virus. But they didn’t get so ill, so hospitalisations and deaths were far fewer. By the month end case numbers were falling but the effects of 19 July still had not fed through into the figures.

By now, nearly 90% of the adult population had received one jab, and over 70% two jabs, and the at-risk under-18s were also being vaccinated. The vaccine had successfully kept Covid at bay and the government thought it time to get England back to business.

But along came a new problem – the ‘pingdemic’ where people coming into a contact with a positive case were ‘pinged’ by the NHS phone app and advised to self-isolate for 10 days. Result: a shortage of key workers and gaps in supermarket shelves. This last restriction was due to be lifted on 16 August in England despite the loud protests of those who wanted it lifted earlier.

In Deddington, the Windmill Centre opened fully again, with indoor groups cautiously returning. The Library and Primary School were back in business and the refurbished Holly Tree Club opened its doors to the over 60s. In the church, social distancing and choir-only singing continued, but Songs of Praise resumed (mask-wearing encouraged!). Church bell practice resumed – and what a joy to hear the full peals again, a bit rusty but going full belt!

We still mostly wore masks in our small shops, and skirted round each other while out walking. We could meet inside the pub again and stand at the bar for a natter. There were a few casualties among the local shops, like the Antiques Centre and Jocys dress shop, but most survived. And with so many families having a staycation in this country, our new children’s play areas proved an invaluable community asset.

Looking back, in April 2020 we were in total lockdown, and an energetic local Covid Response Team, rapidly put together by the Parish Council, Church and younger members of the community, ensured no one went without support. Social events were cancelled one after the other, we retreated indoors in our bubbles and, for most, life went online thanks to our superfast broadband.

At the end of July, the ‘new normal’ was one where Covid was a background fact of life to be dealt with like a bad case of ‘flu. We were cautiously optimistic that the worst was over, but still awaited the approaching winter with trepidation.