

Lockdown 3, a Bad Start to 2021

Tier 4 morphed into Lockdown 3, but it wasn't like Lockdown 1 in March 2020. Traffic on the roads was normal; and more people went to work in offices which presumably had adapted to create safe working spaces with social distanced desks, masks, hand sanitisers, plastic screens – whatever was needed. It didn't look much different from the tail end of 2020.

Face-to-face schooling was again reserved for children of key workers – although that definition got stretched somewhat. Only one parent need now identify as a key worker for children to be allowed into school, which meant Deddington Primary School had many more children in school than last time. The rest had home schooling online, which threw up a problem of some children with no access to laptops – the Primary School Head identified 15. The school was able to buy laptops paid for by private donations and an OCC grant.

At the end of January, there was no prospect of schools reopening before March, possibly not until after Easter. Which meant almost a year with no formal schooling – a sobering thought with repercussions for children's mental health, as well as learning. To say nothing of the stress on parents trying to juggle their day jobs and supervise home schooling!

A food bank was to be set up in the church Living Room, an offshoot of the Trussell Trust-run Banbury Food Bank. The plan was for the Covid team to identify those in need, and deliver emergency food and compassionate, practical support to people in crisis. We liked to think of Deddington as a prosperous village – maybe not as much as we thought.

Cases resulting from family gatherings at Christmas began to appear in the statistics, leading to a national total of over 100,000 lives lost at the end of January – a truly dreadful number and the worst in Europe. In our local grouping (by electoral wards) of Deddington, Steeple Aston and the Heyfords, the number of new cases of Covid rose to 50 in mid-January, before dropping back to 15, as the effects of lockdown fed through. The Cherwell area remained one of the highest in the county. The new, more easily transmissible variant of the virus was ripping through the community with hospitals at full capacity and exhausted staff.

Our local vaccination programme started, with doses of the Pfizer/BionTech jab being delivered from Chipping Norton Health Centre. The pecking order of jabs, determined by the government was: (1) Care home residents and staff; (2) 80 years and over, and frontline health and social care workers; (3) 75 years and over; (4) 70 years and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals; (5) 65 years and over; (6) 16–65 years in an at-risk group; (7) 60 years and over; (8) 55 years of age and over; and (9) 50 years and over. As Deddington has a relatively elderly population, many in group (3) had been done by the end of January. A triumph for the desperately overstretched NHS!

The date of the second recommended jab was postponed from a 3-week to a 12-week interval, and an unseemly and worrying 'vaccine nationalism' spat between the UK and the EU broke out at the end of the month. But more vaccines were appearing on the scene so, although the picture was confusing, we were still going in the right direction.

The January and February Farmers' Markets were cancelled. This from the Market Group: 'Many people came from outside the area, some travelling an hour or so, as it was a legitimate journey. As someone said, "What else can you do for fun at the moment?". We felt our small community did not need an influx of people at this fragile time, so we are doing our bit to protect its health and safety. Look out for social media posts from our stallholders offering online orders and deliveries'

An unforeseen problem was that, because we could now only take exercise in our local area (i.e. not travel anywhere), many more people were out walking around the village, some on paths that cross open fields sown with winter crops. Social distancing, and the mud caused by recent heavy rains, meant that those paths got wider and wider, with farmers complaining about crops being trampled on.

Church services were available online only on the Church website. The church was, however, open for private prayer. The Windmill Centre took advantage of closure to do jobs like the long-awaited roof repair; and Deddington's first EV car charging points were opened at the rear of the building. Plans for a February reopening for the Library were postponed as a new Manager was appointed. Many clubs continued to operate by Zoom: Photographic, Book Club, Bookworms, Local Vocals, Brownies, Scouts, Explorers, etc. One that didn't was the History Society, partly through age and partly illness. And *Deddington News*, the local community magazine once again had to publish online only as the Windmill was closed for printing and collating.

Would the longer February days bring any substantial changes? Doubtful.