

the Arden

Spring 2010



The newsletter for Voluntary Action Stratford on Avon District

Community celebrates volunteers' contribution

Civic leaders and representatives from voluntary and community organisations across the District packed Holy Trinity Church, Stratford upon Avon on a Sunday afternoon in February for a special service to celebrate the contribution by volunteers to the local community

The Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire, Mr Martin Dunne, accompanied by Mrs Dunne, led the congregation, which included the Major of Stratford, Coun. Jenny Fradgley and her husband Coun. Ian Fradgley, and other councillors. Ms Sharon Palmer, CEO of Regional Action West Midlands made the journey from Birmingham with members of her family in order to attend.



The service was organised jointly by the Vicar, the Rev. Martin Gorick and VASA, whose Chief Executive Julia Phillips said: "The idea came about last year during a conversation with the Vicar to explore ways in which we could work together more closely. The Rev Gorick came up with the idea of a service to give thanks for the work undertaken by volunteers in the community, which I thought was a marvellous idea.

Photos by Sharon Palmer

"While the whole community appreciates the value of the hundreds of volunteers who do so much work in so many ways, we agreed there should be one occasion during the year when their contribution was recognised and celebrated.

"It is an excellent example of partnership working, and the presence of the Lord Lieutenant conferred recognition and support for volunteering at the very highest level."

In his sermon, Mr Gorick told the congregation: "The voluntary work done by many of you will be in health, education or social care, and all the provision in those areas in this country came first from the church. The schools, hospitals and provision for the needy that we see now all arose from our Christian ancestors in this country, seeing a need, and responding to it through their church.

"If I'm going to be patriotic I think that voluntary work and the spirit of service behind it is one of the glories of our nation.

"The desire to be of service not just to yourself, not just to your family, but to people in need regardless of who they are or where they are from, and to do that with no expectation of recognition or reward - that's what our Christian heritage has given us. I give thanks for that today and for you who live it out."

Julia added: "The voluntary and community representatives who attended were hugely appreciative and the response by everyone at the service was so positive that hopefully this will become an annual celebration".



During the service the congregation was entertained by a choir comprising Church member Annie and her family and friends from Zimbabwe. They are all originally from the same village and delighted members of the congregation with their final piece, which has been passed down generation to generation, each adding their own unique contribution.

In the true spirit of volunteering, all guests enjoyed an afternoon tea at the Parish Hall following the service, which was arranged and serviced by a group of VASA's regular volunteers.



New Chair for VASA

Wendy Temple has been elected as VASA's new Chair, following the retirement of John Jackson. See page 5.

Community organisations across south Warwickshire were deeply saddened by the death of John Ridgley, the vice-chairman of VASA's Trustees and a staunch champion of the voluntary sector. He died in February after a short illness. See back page for In Memoriam.

Shining a Beacon on digital exclusion and partnership working

VASA was one of the official supporters of a major event to showcase how partnership working is tackling the problem of digital exclusion.



The event was co-organised by Stratford District Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council who both won Beacon status for using technology and working with others to target the vulnerable.

Over 400 people attended the event at the Heritage Motor Centre, with 90 councils, agencies, companies and voluntary organisation hosting stalls to demonstrate their projects.

VASA showcased two initiatives: the new Sport and Leisure Gateway, which is still in development but attracted a lot of interest from people who could see what a great service this will be to the District when it goes live this year.



The other service was VASA's new funding portal, which was launched in January and is proving to be the busiest page on VASA's website.

Chief Executive Julia Phillips and Project Manager (Rural Outreach) David Morgan were on hand to demonstrate the two services to the many partners and community groups attending.

David said: "The event was hugely successful and very impressive in showing the sheer scale and variety of what's being undertaken by the statutory, private and community sectors to close the digital divide."



Other participants included the NHS, NHS Direct (West Midlands) Coventry and Wolverhampton Universities, Warwickshire Police, BT, the West Midlands Ambulance Trust and councils from across the West Midlands region.

Julia said: "I was delighted to see community groups from our district taking part in the marketplace, confirming the sector's important role in addressing many of the issues around digital exclusion.

"Many rural residents find it difficult if not impossible to access services – local authority and others. Technology can help. The statutory authorities are having to change the way they deliver services and the voluntary sector must do so too."



Stratford District Council won its Beacon award for its Virtual District initiative. VASA has been involved in this throughout as a member of the Virtual District Partnership Board.

Photos by Julia Phillips

Above left: Balvinder Heran, the driving force behind SDC's Virtual District.

Left: Sam Hamilton and Paul Wu, who are developing VASA's Sport and Leisure Gateway.

Above top: Jan Roberts staffing the SCAN information stand.

Above: Lizzie Price and the SDC/WCC Stratford Area Office stand.

VASA takes to the road

VASA Trustees and staff are getting out and about across the District to meet local community leaders and voluntary and community groups to hear at first hand how the organisation can work more effectively with them on local issues.

The VASA road show has already visited Alcester and Shipston, where representatives from local voluntary and community groups enjoyed a buffet lunch and the chance to meet each other, as well as staff and Trustees, in a friendly, informal setting.

VASA Chair Wendy Temple says: "VASA works throughout the District, and while the Trustees come from different areas, it's important that collectively as an organisation we keep in close touch with the grassroots.

"The Alcester event went very well. Councillors and representatives from the voluntary sector seemed to welcome the opportunity to meet VASA, while we certainly gained new insights into things there.

"Partnership working is more important than ever, and nowhere more so than at the local level, in the community.

"By taking the VASA Trustees and staff into the community, we will learn at first hand how we can best contribute to what's going on there."

The next visit will be on 11th August, where the Trustees will meet representatives from local community and voluntary groups in Southam. If your group operates within the Southam area, please get in touch with Grazyna on 01789 298115 or grazyna.hominiemcreek@vasa.org.uk to ensure that you are included on the invitation list.

Changes in VASA's Governance

At an Extraordinary General Meeting on 5th May, VASA members voted to change the organisation's Memorandum and Articles of Association. The changes are to comply with the amendments to the *Companies Act* and to ensure that VASA is governed by its members.

Although two Trustees can be appointed to fill specific skills gaps, the majority of Trustees must now be nominated by one of VASA's members.

The changes come into effect immediately and will be implemented as Trustees resign and are re-elected, or new Trustees are elected.

MP supports stronger role for Voluntary and Community Sector

Nadhim Zahawi, the new MP for Stratford on Avon, has pledged to support a stronger role for voluntary and community organisations, both locally and nationally.

Talking to The Arden shortly after being elected, he said:

“I had an excellent meeting with VASA before I was elected and they gave me a thorough briefing on its work and the issues facing voluntary and community organisations in the constituency. I have also seen at first hand some of the work by local groups in our towns and villages. The organisations and their volunteers are doing a fantastic job.

“The Conservatives made it very clear in our manifesto that we want to strengthen the voluntary sector and give it a bigger role - and the sector will be called on to do more as we take tough decisions on public spending to address our economic problems.



“But we do have to recognise the limits on what the sector can do with its current resources and capacity so we will have to look at exactly how we can strengthen it.

“That applies locally too. I’m very encouraged that both the county and district councils have maintained their financial support to VASA and I will urge them to continue to do so whatever the pressures on their budgets. VASA made the point to me that the sector needs to move away from a dependence on local authority grants. I agree and will do whatever I can as MP to support that process.

“I am and will continue to be an enthusiastic champion of voluntary and community work - and organisations and groups can always count on my support.”

Mr Zahawi was speaking to VASA before the formation of the new Conservative-led coalition government but he pointed out that in their manifesto the Liberal Democrats also proposed a stronger role for the VC sector.

Stephen Gray is new SDC Leader

Coun. Stephen Gray, who represents Long Compton, will be the new Leader of Stratford District Council.

He has been elected Leader of the controlling Conservative Group and will take over as Council Leader at its annual meeting on May 19.

Coun. Gray rejoined the Council in 2005, and was previously Portfolio Holder for Revenues and Housing - which included responsibility for the voluntary and community sector and the local Compact.

He worked closely with VASA and was always supportive of the organisation - including taking the lead on extending SDC’s funding (see Page 8).

He said: “The Conservatives fought and won the elections on a clear set of policies - policies that we will aim to deliver in the coming year, and beyond.

“Our main priority will be to continue to keep our Council Tax as low as possible - through cutting Council costs and working collaboratively with others - while maintaining good quality services.

“Our other priorities are flood defences, keeping our neighbourhoods safe for everyone, promoting social inclusion, delivering more affordable homes for local people, supporting young people’s aspirations and supporting the visitor economy.

“We warned during the elections that the Council faces a difficult period with the likelihood of heavy pressure on our finances which will require difficult choices and decisions. But we are committed to protecting our priority areas.”

He added: “I am keen that we strengthen our communications with residents, listening to them - and in the case of Stratford trying to understand better their concerns - and informing them fully of the reasons for our decisions.”

Coun. Sue Wixey (Kineton) was re-elected Deputy Leader of the Group.



A new plan and new projects for the LSP



**STRATFORD DISTRICT
PARTNERSHIP**

Representatives from VASA, local community organisations, county and district councils and statutory agencies have agreed to draw up a new two-year action plan to take partnership working forward in the District.

The agreement came at the Local Strategic Partnership's annual conference where the partners reviewed progress to date and considered they could build on this to address key objectives in the county and District Sustainable Community Strategies and the Local Area Agreement.

The new plan will focus on partnership based activities that would not otherwise happen. Projects likely to be considered include:

- generating more inward investment into the district

- changing the concept of the role of the fire service to enhance its engagement activity with partners
- maximising the resource available via parish councils/access to services in rural communities
- better harnessing the power of partners to tackle issues around access to affordable housing
- tapping into opportunities from the commercial sector to tackle fuel poverty
- improving how people access public transport and how providers work better together - including the commercial sector
- building the capacity and potential of Community Forums including giving funding to them for community projects

The event also included a marketplace where partners had stands showing projects and demonstrations of partnership activities including the *Safer Schools* initiative in Shipston and *Cook and Eat* at Alcester.



The conference took a "hard critical look" at how the LSP is working currently, both its strengths and weaknesses, with the aim of improving its role and contribution.

Attendees recognised the value of partnership working and the need to strengthen it – and the agreement to develop a two-year action plan, in which the voluntary sector will be fully involved, marked a determination to do so.

Photo:

Charles Goody, Chair of the Stratford District Partnership, welcomes delegates to the annual conference, which was held at Stratford Racecourse.

For more information about Stratford's Local Partnership see <http://www.stratford-dp.org.uk/> or contact VASA.

West Midlands Forum

The West Midlands Third Sector Strategic Forum is up and running – with questions over how effective it will be, especially for rural areas.

The Forum was formed following a major shake-up of the way decisions on policy and investment will be taken in the West Midlands. An independent body, it is the route through which the Third Sector will have a voice on the Joint Strategy and Investment Board (JSIB) – the body responsible for policy and investment in the West Midlands from April.

The Board has six members of the West Midlands Local Authorities Leaders Board and up to six Board members of Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency, plus the private sector.

It will work closely with the Regional Minister and with other key regional funding agencies, and its remit includes providing advice on regional investment priorities for transport, housing and regeneration, and economic development and skills, worth over £800 million per year.

Confusion over Vetting and Barring Scheme

Research carried out by Volunteering England, the national umbrella body for volunteer centres in England, suggests that across the country two thirds of volunteer involving organisations don't fully understand who must register with the new Vetting and Barring Scheme.

The research uncovered that only one third of organisations said they 'fully understood' which of their volunteers would need to register. 37% of organisations reported that they weren't sure whether the scheme would mean that some of their activities would have to be stopped or cancelled.

The research was not wholly negative, however, with 52% of organisations believing that the Scheme will improve safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults.

VASA is working hard to raise local awareness of the scheme and what organisations have to do to stay on the right side of the law. Although the scheme is now up and running, the key date for many organi-

sations is 1 November 2010 when anyone moving into a "Regulated Activity" will have to apply for an enhanced CRB disclosure and apply for ISA registration before starting that activity.

Information is available from VASA and also the ISA and CRB websites: www.isa.gov.org.uk and www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk.

If any volunteer-involving organisations would like further advice on this, please contact Charles Barlow, VASA's Volunteer Centre Manager, on 01789 262889 or by email charles.barlow@vasa.org.uk.

New Chair of Trustees for VASA

Wendy Temple, former Chief Executive of the Heart of England Housing Group, is the new Chair of VASA's Trustees.

She was elected to the position at the Trustees' meeting in May – succeeding John Jackson who stepped down after two years.

“I was delighted to be asked”, says Wendy. “VASA is an extremely successful organisation with an excellent reputation within the district and the county as well as regionally and nationally, and I am looking forward enormously to leading it.”

Wendy has worked in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

In 1994 she joined Stratford District Council as Director of Housing and oversaw the transfer of the authority's entire housing stock to South Warwickshire Housing Association in 1996 – the biggest transfer of assets in SDC's history.

She became SWHA's Chief Executive and in 1998 became Chief Executive of the Heart of England Housing Group – a position she held until retiring in 2008 when the Group merged with Orbit Housing.

Wendy serves on the Board of Heritage Care and is a trustee of the National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC), which is leading on the Government's Life Care Strategy and is also Secretary of the Stratford Society.

She says: “John has left VASA in terrific shape – on a sound financial footing, staffed by very able people, providing high quality services and playing a central role in the whole partnership agenda.

“The next few years will be challenging for both the public and voluntary sectors. Money will be tight and they'll need to work together even more closely to maintain services to local communities – especially the most vulnerable. VASA's contribution will be more important than ever.”

John said: “It has been a privilege to play my part in steering VASA during what has been an exciting and at times daunting period of change and development. I am grateful to my fellow Trustees and the staff for their commitment and support, which made my job easier.

“We are fortunate that Wendy has agreed to become Chair. Her experience and skills will be invaluable in taking VASA forward.”



VASA's Chief Executive Julia Phillips says: “John made an important contribution as Chair.

“On his watch, we developed new partnership arrangements with other voluntary and community organisations in Warwickshire as well as the district and county councils, changed our identity, reorganised The Loft and introduced important new services.

“John handled those challenges with skill and sensitivity. I appreciated his reassuring presence, wise counsel and firm support. He was super to work with, always found time to talk to the staff and volunteers and we will miss him very much.”

She added: “I am delighted that Wendy is the new Chair, and all of us – staff and volunteers – are raring to go under her leadership.”

Calling all parishes – your help is needed

VASA is asking parish councils throughout the District to help to distribute key information affecting the financial wellbeing and safety and security of their parishioners

One is a booklet on financial wellbeing produced by Warwickshire County Council. The other is a CD containing a wealth of information on home safety (fire prevention and planning) and security (crime prevention), produced by VASA

David Morgan, the Parish Plans and Rural Outreach Project Manager, has given copies of both to 17 parishes – and will visit others who either have completed parish plans or would like the materials.

“Many of them have parish offices so I will be arranging my visit to coincide with

their opening hours. If they don't have a parish office, I would like parishes to tell me the best place and time to meet.

“The booklets can go in any public buildings in the village –village hall, churches, parish school, even the pub. It would help if parishes could tell me how many copies they need and I will arrange delivery – or re-stocking as required

“I would like to get two copies of the CD we have produced into every parish. I hope parishes will pass it to any interested party. For those parishes who want to start up a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, it includes details of the District NW Association who can offer support and funds to do this.”

For more information please contact David on david.morgan@vasa.org.uk or phone 01789 262889 (Mob: 07957 361053).

Silver Surfers' Day

If you are 50 plus and know a little about computing but want to learn more, then two free taster workshops being offered by Stratford District Council on May 21st – Silver Surfers' Day – will be ideal.

One workshop is a two-hour introduction to Windows – the other, lasting an hour, is about exploring the web.

Places are limited, so booking is essential. Please contact Jan Roberts, Stratford-on-Avon District Council : 01789 260108



Henley-in-Arden SCAN is relaunched

Henley-in-Arden Senior Citizens Action Network (SCAN), which closed in December 2008, is back in business – with a new look and playing a new role.

It has joined with the Henley Community Surgery, at which local residents can raise specific issues with the Community Police team, to create a wider forum covering both policing and other issues.

The decision to relaunch SCAN, which stopped meeting because the then Chair resigned and the number of attendees was declining, was taken after 12 months of discussions with local older people and community group.

It emerged that the Henley Community Surgery was also experiencing a drop in attendance, and their Chair, Councillor Chris Milsom, was keen to open up the forum to more residents. He offered to chair a shared meeting, and Annette Walker who had previously provided a secretarial function to SCAN was happy to re-assume this role.

It was decided to hold the meeting in the Baptist Churchrooms – following on from their regular coffee mornings, which were vibrant and attended by a wide cross-section of people from all age groups.

The inaugural meeting to bring the groups together took place in January, and meetings are now planned for every other month on the last Wednesdays at 11.30am. The next meeting is on May 26th.

Speakers from key organisations will be invited to attend the meetings and the Community Police Officer will attend to provide information and to seek comment and feedback from locals on policing matters.

County Councillor Mike Perry and Parish Councillor Carcina Goodman also support the meetings and are willing to pick up on local issues for residents.

VASA joins new transport partnership

VASA is one of the members of a new partnership set up to co-ordinate and strengthen the efforts of volunteer drivers across the county who ensure people can get to health services.

Warwickshire Voluntary Transport has been formed to

- give the five Warwickshire voluntary car schemes a new, common platform.
- improve relations and negotiations with health partners
- increase recognition for the valuable work by drivers
- ensure that standards and procedures can be rolled out across the county and
- provide support to each other to overcome operational and financial problems.

The new partnership also means that all new volunteer drivers must have a good driving record and at least three years' experience, together with a CRB check. They will also have use of the Warwickshire Voluntary Transport Logo while on duty, as well as access to a commonly agreed support and training procedure, all of which is designed for the benefit of both client and volunteer.

In addition to VASA, the members are Beeline Community Transport in North Warwickshire, Medi-Car Transport Service - Nuneaton & Bedworth, WCAVA Volunteer Centre Rugby's Hospital Car Scheme and the Health Travel Service serving the Older People of Warwick District.

There has been additional support from Warwickshire County Council and the Older Persons Forums.

Clarissa Roberts, VASA Manager for Volunteer Services, says: "The partnership will help everybody involved in voluntary transport, from drivers to service users, and will improve what has already been a resounding success in the Stratford District and across the county.

"The added support from the county council and the older people's forums will help to avert any financial problems and the pooling of the resources will ensure that operational problems – such as a shortage of vehicles – will become less likely.

"It fits well alongside Warwickshire County Council's joint working efforts with the PCT on an Improving Patient Access to Health project – and it's impressive to see so many different agencies coming together to deliver an even stronger service for the community."

PSB is heavily criticised

Warwickshire's Public Service Board, which is responsible for overseeing the Local Area Agreement (LAA), is "dysfunctional", lacks strategic leadership and political commitment, and needs a major shake-up, says a report.

A team of councillors and council officers from other areas prepared the report after a review of partnership working in the county.

The review found there were many examples of good partnership working – but in spite of not because of the LAA. Also, the voluntary and community sector is "engaged and feels valued".

But the PSB is failing to provide an agreed vision for Warwickshire, strategic leadership, a clear focus on outcomes, political commitment, the right attitudes and behaviour and pace.

The report says there are too many groups and partnerships, too much focus on process and not enough on outcomes, "people feel unprepared to take decisions" – and there is a dislocation between the LAA priorities and district LSPs' priorities.

It criticises the "fractured or non-existent relationships, missing connectivity and support in the structures and overly bureaucratic processes which appear to be designed to avoid tackling the real issues."

The review calls for the PSB to:

- have a simple clear focus on outcomes for the people of Warwickshire
- work to deliver two or three priorities e.g., narrowing the gap, demographic time bomb and the recession
- develop an open honest and positive culture
- understand and respect each other's business
- adopt a strong collaborative leadership style
- invest in leadership development

A summary of the findings presented by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) can be found here:

[http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/4984FC49F744F5E7802576850058391B/\\$file/IDeA+Summary+Results.pdf](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/4984FC49F744F5E7802576850058391B/$file/IDeA+Summary+Results.pdf)

LGBT 'Drop-In'

VASA is leading a new initiative in Stratford to offer advice and information to people who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or trans (LGBT).

With financial support from the Stratford upon Avon Town Trust, a Drop-In evening was launched on April 29 at Cox's Yard and will be open on the last Thursday of each month. The Drop-In will provide an opportunity for anyone who is LGBT – as well as their friends and family – to meet others for an informal chat or take part in a variety of positive activities.

Services will be available to all ages and will run in partnership with Warwickshire Police, Warwickshire Children and Voluntary Youth Service, Terrance Higgins Trust and Warwickshire County Council's Youth and Community Service.

Julia Phillips, VASA Chief Executive, said: "We initiated this project after identifying a major gap in services to and support for the LGBT community in Stratford.

"The backing of our partners has been first class and has ensured that the initiative could become a real partnership project that we believe will be of considerable benefit for the LGBT community."

"The first Drop-In welcomed local members of the community as well as visitors from Leicester, Rugby, Leamington Spa, and Dudley. We were particularly pleased to welcome Ian and Kevin from Leicester," she said. "Ian manages the Leicester LGBT Centre and has been a wonderful supporter of the project. Kevin is from Leicestershire County Council and he provided great encouragement when I first spoke about the project with him at the Diversity in Sport Conference in Birmingham last year."

Gail Newood, Area Youth Worker for Warwickshire County Council's Youth and Community Service, said: "The group offers information and support in addition to services already on offer to everyone in Warwickshire.

"It will provide a relaxed environment to chat to youth workers and other professionals, such as community support officers, about any issues or to simply hang out with other young people."

To find out more information contact Julia Phillips at VASA on 01789 298115 or email julia.phillips@vasa.org.uk.



Making regeneration work

Councillors and other representatives from market towns in south Warwickshire were among a sell-out audience for a seminar on regeneration organised by VASA as part of its rural outreach initiative.

The seminar, given by RegenWM, covered topics such as regeneration good practice, what works and does not work and a model for delivering regeneration in the current economic circumstances.

David Morgan, VASA's rural outreach manager, said: "There is a lot of excellent regeneration work going on Alcester, Shipston and elsewhere in the District. The seminar was designed to complement and reinforce that work, as well as introduce regeneration to those not yet involved."



Conrad Parke, head of skills development at Regen WM, with County Councillor Mike Gittis and VASA Trustee and District Councillor Sue Adams, both from Alcester.

There will be further regeneration seminars held in the District in the future. For more information and to ensure that your interest is noted, please contact David on david.morgan@vasa.org.uk or phone 01789 262889 (Mob: 07957 361053).

Awards for District groups

Two organisations in the Stratford District have been judged 'best in class' in the voluntary and community sector in Warwickshire.

Tom, Jack and Anna Coupland of Blackwell Youth Club won the Best Young Trustee category and the Norgren Social Club (now the Sheldon Bosley Hub) in Shipston won the Best Newcomer Group category in the CWIC Quality and Governance Project awards.

Tom, Jack and Anna had to show they had taken part in meetings, taken responsibility or joint responsibility for actions agreed by the committee and taken part in learning and training to improve their skills. The submission by the club said of them:

"We run a youth club that gives access to young people to activities in a safe environment. We ask what the young people would like to do and then try and source these activities. We currently run the club on a Tuesday – it has a homework club, chill out and activity areas.

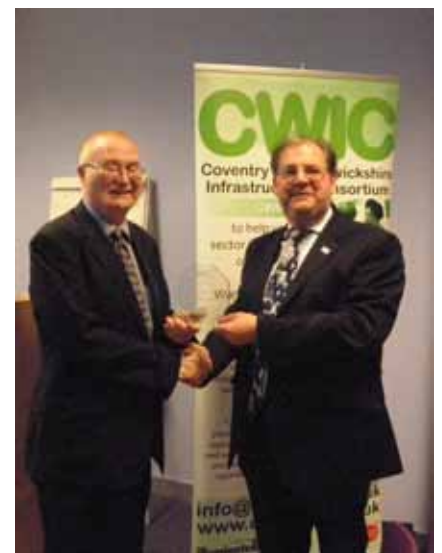
"The success of the Youth Club has been down to the Volunteers and that the older young people help or design activities for the younger members.

"This may be to help with their homework if they are struggling on a topic, help with revision etc. They have also set up activities around life skills. For example they will cook with the young people, sourcing

recipes and all the ingredients and then run the activity. They have proved very successful sessions. The young members are asking when the next one is.

"They have been involved in the organisation of the group and applying for funding. They are active members of a rural youth provision. They have been members since the start of the youth club 9 years ago and wanted to carry on attending but as volunteers. They regularly turn up and help set up the youth club and help with activities and sports."

Chris Howarth, the new chairman, received the Best Newcomer award from CWIC Chair William Clemmey, on behalf of the Norgren (see photo below).



SDC extends support for VASA

Stratford District Council has decided to extend its funding to VASA for a further 12 months – until March 2012 – following a report by officers on its performance against objectives set by SDC when it agreed in 2007 to fund the organisation.

The council then awarded an annual grant of £40,000 for three years, starting April 2008 and ending in March 2011 to resource VASA to develop the capacity of the voluntary sector to deliver services across the district, and participate in partnership working.

The report said VASA had achieved top marks for the Volunteer Centre's quality accreditation and full marks for Volunteering England accreditation, increased the number of volunteering opportunities, developed the LGBT drop in centre, and played a key role on a number of district and countywide groups.

"In addition, during the past two years VASA has undergone a significant period of change. Much has been achieved including successful community based projects, Gardening scheme and Rural Outreach. In addition, there has been a review of the governance arrangements including reorganising the structure of VASA in order to provide effective support to the organisations it represents.

"A further development has been the relationship between VASA and Warwickshire CAVA which is important in maximising effective support to third sector organisations."

In extending its funding until 2012, SDC's cabinet rejected three other options: extending for another three years, progressively reducing it over three years or stopping it altogether.

The officers' report to members said that "a reduction or withdrawal of funding would inevitably impact upon VASA's ability to provide support to the organisations it represents", adding that support for these organisations is essential", as well as that "VASA is making a significant contribution to the delivery of services."

The officers recommended that "any future funding should help maximise VASA's ability to provide as much direct support as possible to the many voluntary organisations it represents, some of which have struggled to remain viable during the economic downturn.

"This will require a more 'bottom up' approach that will ensure the needs of the voluntary organisations can be incorporated into VASA delivery plans. That will also help deliver better outcomes for the community, and make the COMPACT more robust and relevant to local organisations and support the delivery of local targets."

The Cabinet set new performance measures for VASA requiring the organisation to:

- take account of the emerging and changing needs of the third sector to help provide effective support to aid delivery of services across the district, including under-taking an analysis to identify gaps in third sector service provision.
- participate in partnership working on issues via the COMPACT, LAA, LSP, the Virtual

District Project etc. Specific objectives are to improve the quality and increase the quantity of volunteering district-wide, improve the management and quality of voluntary sector organisations, deliver services based on local needs through partnership work with the voluntary and statutory sector, and hold at least 4 events a year for VS organisations.

VASA Chief Executive Julia Phillips said: "Obviously we would have liked the assurance of another three years support. But it is a vote of confidence in our staff and volunteers and in the strong relationship we have with SDC at every level.

"It is to the members' credit that they have made the commitment when the Council faces considerable challenges with its own finances – and when councils throughout England are cutting their support to voluntary organisations.

"We must continue to explore options to reduce – and even eliminate – VASA's dependence upon grants in the future. Changing that requires not just changing the funding source but a complete culture change at every level."

Have you made use of VASA's Funding Portal Yet?

During March 2010, there were 230 individual visits to VASA's new funding portal, with 39 completed funding searches.

The portal is easy to use – just click on the part of the county where your group operates and then select from a range of drop-down menus to structure your funding search.

If you do not have access to the internet or need any assistance in making a funding search, contact VASA and one of our staff members will be happy to help you.

The screenshot shows the VASA website with a navigation menu including Home, Services, Funding, Volunteering, Projects, Initiatives, Councils, Jobs, What's On, News, and Contact. The main content area is titled "Can we help you with funding?" and includes a search bar, a map of the district, and a list of funding opportunities such as "Home Development - apply NOW", "Home Grants Programme extended", "Woodward Charitable Trust", "CIV Action Fund", "Civic Relief Trust", "Access to Volunteering", "MCC Executive Budget", "Health & Wellbeing", "Local Executive Initiative", "CIV Food Award", "We have Area Culture Team", "My Volunteering", "CIV Awards 2010", and "Charitable Foundation".

Why Community Forums are important you

Community Forums are local meetings where you and other residents can raise your concerns about local issues and get answers from:

- Local councillors
- Warwickshire County Council
- district and borough councils
- Warwickshire Police
- local health services
- local community groups
- VASA

At the meetings, the police and council representatives report back on what actions they have taken on items raised at previous forums and you and other residents choose their next priorities.

VASA staff are in attendance at every Forum and can help with advice on funding, governance, volunteers, setting up a new group, or just a helping hand with your community or sport club.

Dates for the next round of meetings are:

ALCESTER/BIDFORD
(Surgery 6.30pm, Forum 7.00pm)
Tuesday 22 June 2010 St Benedicts Catholic High School

HENLEY-IN-ARDEN/STUDLEY
(Surgery 7.00pm, Forum 7.30pm)
Thursday 1 July 2010 Henley High School

WELLESBOURNE/KINETON
(Surgery 6.30pm, Forum 7.00pm)
Thursday 10 June 2010 Kineton Primary School

SOUTHAM/FELDON
(Police Meeting 6.30pm, Forum 7.15pm)
Wednesday 23 June 2010 Priors Marston Village Hall

SHIPSTON/STOUR
(Surgery 6.30pm, Forum 7.00pm)
Tuesday 8 June 2010 Quinton & Admington Village Hall

STRATFORD
(Surgery 5.30pm, Forum 6.00pm)
Thursday 17 June 2010 Stratford Football Club

Fond farewell to Kay

Kay Wilson's colleagues at the Warwickshire Rural Community Council (WRCC) gave her a warm send-off in February when she retired as its Chief officer.

The Lord Lieutenant, Mr Martin Dunn was among the guests to attend the farewell party. It was in fact a double send-off – Mavis Wilkins, WRCC's village halls liaison officer, has also retired.

Julia Phillips, VASA Chief Executive said, "I shall miss Kay enormously. Her experience and expertise has been of great help both to me and to VASA, and she was a wonderful person to work with. Generous with her time and her knowledge, she will be greatly missed.

"I wish her a fantastic retirement although I very much hope that she will continue to be a driving force for the rural community for many years to come."

County Development Fund open

Warwickshire County Council's Community Development Fund is open for applications for grants of up to £8,000 for one-off projects that provide lasting benefit to the community.

The fund is designed to help communities, particularly in the more deprived parts of the County, to address issues of local concern to them. The county councillor for the electoral division in which the project is based should normally support the bid. A county councillor involved with the group concerned can support bids for a wider area.

Full details about the fund are set out in the application form and guidance notes available by email from stratford@warwickshire.gov.uk or warwickshire.gov.uk/stratfordarea.

The completed applications should be returned to the Stratford Area Office by 5 pm on Monday 5th July. Further information is available from Amanda Wilson-Patterson on 01789 290787 or amandawilsonpatterson@warwickshire.gov.uk

Due to the popularity of the Fund last year, WCC is inviting prospective applicants to a workshop on Thursday 17th June between 2 pm - 4 pm at Stratford District Council Offices. Applicants can find out more information. Places are limited and need to be booked.



Kay Wilson at her retirement party.

Do you live in Warwickshire's Best Village?

Warwickshire's Best Village Competition provides an opportunity to win prize money as well as to share ideas with other communities facing similar challenges.

Anyone living in a village with 5,000 inhabitants or less can enter and there are hundreds of pounds to be won. There are six categories to choose from:

- Community Buildings (sponsored by Galliford Try)
- Environment
- Communication (sponsored by Yorkshire Bank)
- Community Projects
- Community Heroes or businesses which benefit the community (sponsored by NFU Mutual)
- History and Heritage (sponsored by CEMEX)

All evidence is welcome (photos, DVDs, publications etc) and the closing date is Sunday 31 May.

The WRCC is also seeking volunteer judges who live in a village and have local knowledge to select the best at a meeting in July.

Competitions Organiser, Ariadne Uslu from the Warwickshire Rural Community Council said: "We're looking for the village people enjoy living in because there's so much going on. We hope the prize money will be used to fund more activities in the future."

For more information about how to enter the competition or to volunteer to be a judge, visit www.ruralwarwickshire.org.uk or telephone Ariadne on 02476 217390.

Who's Who at VASA?

Over the past year or so we have featured two of our Trustees in each issue of *The Arden*. We have recently been asked to do something similar to introduce VASA staff and provide information on their key areas of activity, so here is a brief summary of the staff and roles they undertake.

Julia Phillips (Chief Executive)

Julia's role is to ensure that VASA operates efficiently, within budget, and delivers the outcomes of the Business Plan as approved by the Board of Trustees. She ensures that VASA meets all the criteria required by funders and represents the voluntary and community sector on committees at national, regional and local level.

Clarissa Roberts MBE (Volunteer Services Manager)

Clarissa has been with VASA in a number of different roles since the day it first opened its doors more than 30 years ago. As Volunteer Services Manager she is responsible for the volunteer transport scheme, Community Links, the wheelchair loan service, the coffee shop at Stratford Hospital, and the Community Gardening Project.

Charles Barlow (Volunteer Centre Manager)

Charles is responsible for developing volunteering; in particular, working with organisations to develop volunteer opportunities and placing volunteers in positions that suit them. Charles also represents VASA on committees including South Warwickshire Volunteering Forum, Warwickshire Third Sector Emergency Planning Group, Local Strategic Partnership – Stronger Communities.

Grazyna Hominiec-Meek (Finance and Administration Manager)

Grazyna ensures that VASA's financial records are up to date and accurate. She also handles all administrative matters including insurance, building maintenance, liaison with members, arrangements for meetings, and so on. Grazyna also represents VASA on a range of committees including the Stratford Housing Forum and South Warwickshire Development Workers' Forum.

Sandra Blake (P/T Finance Officer)

Sandra helps to maintain the financial records, pay accounts, and ensure that payroll information is up to date.

Trevor Russel (P/T Marketing and Communications Manager)

Trevor handles VASA's communication, including promotional material, website, media releases, and e-bulletins. He represents VASA on various committees and steering groups. Trevor also sources or writes all the material that is published in *The Arden*.

David Morgan (P/T Project Manager Parish Plans and Rural Outreach)

David provides parish councils with a range of support and advice to assist them in achieving the outcomes of their parish plans. He arranges seminars, training, funding advice, and facilitates partnerships between parishes to enable them to work collaboratively.

Julie Young (P/T Parish Plans Officer)

Julie is employed by Stratford District Council, but is managed by David and works with him on a range of activities related to parish plans. Julie is a recent addition to the staff, still in her first month.

Clive Faulkner (P/T Project Manager, Community Gardening)

Clive and his team of volunteers provide a very welcome community service by helping to clear and maintain gardens for people who need support. Clive also manages two allotments, one for vegetables and one for community use.

Adele Geary (P/T Clerical Officer)

Adele handles the administration for VASA's 'Loft' project, including arranging for pick-up and delivery of donated furniture/electrical goods and maintaining records for service users registered with the woodworking workshop. She also assists Grazyna with administration, arranging meetings, etc.

Chris Upton (P/T Clerical Officer)

Chris maintains VASA's library of publications and periodicals. He also provides administrative support to other staff members.

David Meek and David Edmunds (P/T Recycling Assistants)

The two Davids are responsible for the collection and delivery of donated furniture and electrical goods through VASA's Loft Project. They manage the storage facility and ensure that items are in good order before being delivered to new owners.

Jason Dutton and Robert Burr (P/T Support Workers)

Jason and Robert have just been appointed and will begin work at the beginning of June. Their role is to provide guidance and support to service users registered with The Loft project. They help people recovering from mental health issues to gain confidence and develop new skills, using an excellent range of equipment in the woodworking workshop.

Louise Male (P/T)

Louise manages a craft group for women who need support and an opportunity to interact with others in a non-threatening and creative environment.

Gill Keeley and Louise Bennett (P/T)

Gill and Louise organise the busy Community Links bus service, which is a door to door service to help people who are stuck for transport to get to shops, libraries, visit friends and specifically help many people who are isolated. Five vehicles are organised during the week covering the rural towns and villages in our District and the town of Stratford upon Avon. Carrying more than 1,000 passengers a month, this is a vital service to the community.

Daryl Homer and Michelle Woodward (P/T)

Daryl and Michelle, with a team of volunteers at the Stratford, Alcester, Shipston and Southam offices, are responsible for the smooth running of the volunteer transport scheme. This service takes people daily to hospitals, doctors, day centres, etc., and is a lifeline to the most vulnerable members of our Community.

Who should you contact?

For anything related to volunteers or volunteering, the main contact person is Charles Barlow (01789 262889)

For assistance with funding, training, clubs or groups, the initial contact should be to Grazyna Hominiec-Meek (01789 298115). Grazyna will be able to direct you to the most appropriate person to help.

Anything to do with The Loft project should be directed to Adele Geary (01789 298115).

Finally, if you would like to include an article in *The Arden*, or would like assistance with marketing or communication, contact Trevor Russel (07771 855214).

You can also contact any staff member by email. All VASA email addresses are:

firstname.lastname@vasa.org.uk



Voluntary Action Stratford on Avon has just been awarded a national Quality Standard by the national body, NAVCA.

This is a great achievement and VASA would like to thank its partners and members for being interviewed and giving the auditor their opinions on VASA's performance.

The detailed assessment evaluated VASA's performance across five key areas of activity:

(1) The organisation pro-actively identifies needs in the local community and facilitates improvement in service provision to meet those needs.

(2) The organisation assists local voluntary and community organisations to function more effectively and deliver quality services to their users, members or constituents.

(3) The organisation facilitates effective communication or networking and collaboration amongst local voluntary and community groups.

(4) The organisation enables the diverse views of the local voluntary and community sector to be represented to external bodies, developing and facilitating structures which promote effective working relationships and two-way communication.

(5) The organisation enhances the voluntary and community sector's role as an integral part of local planning and policy making.

VASA will continue to strive to improve on its performance and the services it offers to the voluntary and community sector in Stratford on Avon. If there is any way in which we can assist you and your group, do get in touch with us.



Compact News

National and local government must "involve the third sector from the earliest stages of policy development on all relevant issues likely to affect it," says the recently-issued refreshed national Compact.

The Compact is an agreement setting out shared commitments and guidelines for effective partnership working between government and the third sector. The original Compact was agreed in 1998 and this new version was developed following extensive debate and consultation.

It focuses on three main areas: involvement in policy development, allocating resources and advancing equality

The document says government should "inform the sector of progress in developing policy" and "identify implications for the third sector when assessing the impact of new policies, legislation and guidance."

It pledges that government will "identify where there are costs to third sector organisations as a result of partnership work with government and offer support on a clear and consistent basis.

This can be especially important for infrastructure bodies that are helping to organise or run consultations."

In turn, the third sector has undertaken to "involve service users, beneficiaries, members, volunteers and trustees when preparing responses to consultations" and "explain whether views have been gathered directly (and from what audience), or whether the response is based on the organisation's knowledge and experience of the issues.

The Compact was signed by Simon Blake, Chair of Compact Voice, on behalf of the third sector and the Rt. Hon Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister, on behalf of government. Mr Blake said:

"The refreshed Compact is clearer, more effective and had the support of the majority of consultation responses. With so many different perspectives across sectors, there have been inevitable challenges getting to launch stage and some important issues still need addressing through implementation. Effective use of the Compact by both the third and public sectors will be vital in the coming period and success will depend on both commitment and resource. Refreshed Compact, renewed commitment, real opportunity - let's grasp it."

Angela Smith MP, Minister for the Third Sector, said:

"More than ever, a strong relationship based on trust between the third and public sector is crucial for supporting communities

and delivering strong public services. The refreshed Compact builds on the lessons of the last 10 years and sets out a clear agenda for future partnership."

Sir Bert Massie CBE, Commissioner for the Compact, said:

"The process of refreshing the Compact has been challenging - the process of reconciling often diverse points of view is never easy - but it demonstrates to me the importance of this agreement because it is the result of so much animated and positive discussion. This Compact places a greater emphasis on government and public bodies to explain and justify the decisions they make. It reaffirms the independence of third sector organisations and their right to campaign and comment on government policy."

To download a pdf of the Compact, please visit: www.thecompact.org.uk

The refreshed Compact consists of 95 commitments: 62 for government and 33 for the third sector.

Previously, the original agreement was accompanied by five Codes of Practice. However, these Codes combined both overall principle and detail on implementation with no clear differentiation, which was often confusing and hard to monitor. The new structure in the Compact is based on an overall set of commitments and this will be backed up by a series of implementation guidance for specific sectors or types of relationship. Therefore, the Compact will set the overall "rules of engagement" between the public sector and third sector while the implementation guidance will give them specific pointers on how to make these a reality in particular situations.

One key change reflected in the refreshed national Compact is on the subject of Allocating resources. This section includes new commitments for government to:

- Extend the scope of the Compact to ensure that prime and sub-contractors and all other public and private bodies work within Compact principles when distributing money.
- Engage early with third sector organisations in the design of services and programmes.
- Allow enough time for consortia and partnership bids.
- Apply Compact commitments when distributing EU funding.
- Make payments within 10 days of invoices being received.
- Consider how service users can be involved in monitoring and reporting.

Remembering John Ridgley

VASA and community organisations across south Warwickshire were deeply saddened by the death of John Ridgley, the vice-chairman of our Trustees and a staunch champion of the voluntary sector. He died in February after a short illness.

John will be remembered especially for his support for rural communities during his work with the county Council, as a Trustee and volunteer with VASA and with the Warwickshire Rural Community Council (WRCC) where he was a volunteer.

He joined the county council in 1971 working on derelict land reclamation, the newly designated Conservation Areas, and the Warwickshire Structure Plan, before becoming Principal Planning Officer: Countryside, heavily involved in the development of the Country Parks.

As Group Manager: Countryside Services he worked on the long distance Centenary Way and the Warwickshire Landscapes Project. His brief later covered the formal designation of rights of way. He subsequently took charge of producing the Rural Strategy before moving to manage the Regeneration section where he was heavily involved in the work in Southam, Shipston and Alcester.

John was also engaged with a major multi-disciplinary project to restore the Ryton former sand & gravel quarry to become the Ryton Fields Country Park, and played a key role in the county's response to the challenge of foot and mouth disease.



As a volunteer he continued to support the market towns initiatives, helped villages to produce design statements and parish plans and was always willing to act as a judge for the Best Village Competition.

John always saw trees as a legacy for future generations, and each December during National Tree Week was involved with significant tree planting activity by schools and community groups.

He was a pillar of the community in Harbury where he lived with Linda, who is Field Officer at the WRCC – enthusiastically helping with the Carnival/Christmas Tree lights, Bonfire Night, Scouts, Youth Drop In team, Village Hall fund-raising and the village design statement and parish plan.

John Jackson, Chair of VASA Trustees until his retirement in May 2010, said: “John was immensely popular and respected by everyone in the organisation – Trustees, staff and volunteers – and we will all miss him sorely.

“As vice-chair of VASA, he was enormously helpful to me, and I and all the Trustees always valued his wise and considered advice, his experience and professionalism and his calmness in even the most difficult situations.”

Julia Phillips, VASA Chief Executive, said: “John was simply a delight to work with – both because he was so knowledgeable and because his ability to relate to people made it so easy to discuss anything with him.

“John’s real legacy is that thanks to his work thousands of residents and visitors can now enjoy the heritage and beauty of Warwickshire’s landscapes and communities. But we will miss him as a good colleague and friend.”

Social enterprise advice site launches “The Archers” for the voluntary sector

The charity and social enterprise advice website KnowHow NonProfit has launched an animated docudrama on life in the voluntary sector.

Millcaster Tales, a fictional blog that tells the story of a small town’s non-profit organisations and the people who work there, launched on the KnowHow NonProfit website in February 2009 and has attracted a loyal following.

Now, KnowHow NonProfit is hoping to reach a new audience by producing an animated video version of the Millcaster Tales blog, which has been recorded using professional actors and features illustrations of the characters. The animated video is available on the KnowHow NonProfit and Society Guardian website in streaming audio and video, or as an MP3 download .

Each episode of Millcaster Tales is based on real-life situations faced by voluntary organisations and is brought to life through the screenwriting skills of Steve Trafford, who regularly writes for ITV series The Bill.

“We’re very excited to be launching the Millcaster Tales video. We feel that hearing the voices of the actors really brings the

story alive. Over time, we hope the Millcaster Tales recordings will become known as The Archers for the voluntary sector,” said Sahara Quli, CEO of KnowHow NonProfit.

“Each episode of Millcaster Tales features a moral story based on real-life situations experienced by voluntary organisations. As well as being entertaining, we hope people will learn something from each episode and that it will get people talking about how they would tackle the issues raised.”

The KnowHow NonProfit website (www.knowhownonprofit.org) provides advice and enables people to share knowledge on every aspect of running a non-profit organisation.