

Joint statement by LACA and Long Ashton Parish Council

Let's keep our community heart beating!

LACA and the parish Council join forces to save the Community Centre!

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many unexpected problems for us all to come to terms with. Numerous organisations, both large and small, have been badly affected over the past few months, including many charities, community centres and village halls up and down the country. Here in Long Ashton our own Community Centre has had to close at various times over the past few months as a result of the COVID situation.

The Community Centre is run by an independent registered charity known as LACA (Long Ashton Community Association). Under normal circumstances the costs of running the Community Centre are met from the income generated by its use. The Parish Council each year awards a grant to LACA to cover the costs of maintaining the buildings and other facilities (this was around £30,000 in 2020/21) which are all ultimately owned by the Parish Council, but are run by LACA on a long lease. Sadly, the last few months have seen a considerable drop in LACA's income because of circumstances well beyond their control.

As a direct result of the COVID-19 situation, LACA have now reached a point where it is impossible for the Community Centre to stay open and to cover its operational costs without running at a substantial loss. With that in mind, LACA's trustees have decided that the Community Centre will sadly have to close most of its operations down until at least the end of March 2021, when the situation will be reviewed. It is hoped to keep running the café and a few sessions for a very limited number of specialist groups, such as the youth club. Outdoor facilities will remain open, such as the children's play areas, football pitch and tennis courts (see the Community Centre's web-site for exact details).

Various measures have been put in place to reduce costs, but with little opportunity to generate income over the coming months the situation is looking serious. We all want to see the Community Centre remain at the heart of village life, providing much needed community facilities and events to the people of Long Ashton. That's why the Parish Council has just agreed to provide some emergency funding to help LACA get through the next few months. An emergency grant of £20,000 was agreed at a special meeting of the council on Monday 14th December.

It is hoped that by the spring the COVID situation will be getting better, but we can't say when things will get back to normal. By then LACA will have used up all of their reserves and the additional funding given by the Parish Council. So, over the next few months both organisations have agreed to work together even more closely than usual to try to tackle the longer-term situation. The Parish Council and LACA have agreed to set up a Joint LACA COVID Recovery Working Group, who will be responsible for drawing up a COVID Recovery Plan to guide the Community Centre out of the difficult situation it currently finds itself in.

The Parish Council will consider earmarking some further funding but there is a limit to what can be found in the Council's funds. The Council is determined not to increase the council tax precept for 2021/22, so additional funds for LACA will need to be found through a fundraising campaign if the Community Centre is to survive. LACA will be launching a fundraising campaign in January. We hope you can help by finding ways to raise money or by offering practical help - look out for further details in the new year.

Both the Parish Council and LACA will be working hard over the next few months to get through this troubled time and we are looking forward to seeing the Community Centre come back stronger and better than ever. The two organisations have agreed to join forces and want to work with the community to reopen the Community Centre, hopefully by the summer of 2021.

Long Ashton Community centre is at the heart of our village and our community - with your help we can keep it beating!

Please get in touch if you want to help.

Contact Caroline Tarbuck, Long Ashton Parish Council's Community Engagement Officer, at:

community@longashtonparishcouncil.gov.uk

or Sally-Anne Tarsey, the Community Centre's Manager, at:

centremanager@longashtoncommunitycentre.org

Thank you.

This is a joint statement issued by Long Ashton Parish Council and LACA (Long Ashton Community Association) - 21st December, 2020.