

# ANNUAL REVIEW 2019/20



Making a difference to lives in Shropshire

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Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner (middle) and Shropshire RCC Chairman Hugh Strickland presenting CEO Julia Baron with flowers in recognition of her 20-year anniversary at Shropshire RCC.

## Chairman and CEO's Report

Putting together an annual review involves reflecting on events that may have happened over 12 months ago and can feel slightly strange and disjointed to what an organisation is currently doing. Never has that feeling been more prevalent than this year.

However, while all our lives are immeasurably different in 2020 than they were in 2019, we are still keen to celebrate Shropshire RCC's past achievements while looking forward to the, albeit rather different, future. In 2019 we were delighted to welcome the new Lord-Lieutenant of Shropshire, Anna Turner, as our patron. Anna has taken the time to get to know us and is a vocal supporter of our work. We are very grateful to have her as a champion of our cause.

We continued to grow our Shropshire Community Fund through fundraising events and were able to distribute some of that funding to community groups through our resilience fund. Initially this was to support groups that had been financially impacted by the February 2020 floods, but then to the wider cause of groups experiencing hardship as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In October 2019 we successfully hosted our biennial Village Halls Conference, offering advice and ideas on how to 'run, fund and fill' your hall, while our services also continued to provide support. We have shared some stories of how we made a difference throughout this review.

This year has certainly been demanding, but we're proud to say our staff and volunteers have risen to the occasion. And through all this change one thing stays the same – we're still continuing to support people and communities in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin facing challenges.

**Hugh Strickland**  
Chairman

**Julia Baron**  
CEO

## Who We Are

**Shropshire Rural Communities Charity (RCC) is committed to making life better for people and communities facing challenges.**

We support people to stay active and connected to their community and to maintain their health and independence so they live life to the full.

We help people improve their prospects with access to work opportunities, and give a helping hand to those in need through small grants.

We work with local meeting places and groups to build thriving communities and we partner with organisations and policy makers to make sure the people of Shropshire have a fair voice.

## Our History

Shropshire RCC is part of a national network of similar organisations with a long and proud history of supporting rural communities throughout England.

The first RCC was set up in Oxfordshire in 1920, in the days before the Welfare State operated. A booming economy led to a migration of agricultural workers and younger people to the cities in favour of better-paid factory work, and rural social life went into decline.

Oxfordshire RCC provided support with projects around community cohesion, education, retraining and rehabilitation. On the strength of its success, a number of RCCs were established.

Shropshire RCC held its inaugural meeting 4 November 1960 with the aim of bringing people in communities together and finding practical solutions to rural problems – functions we still carry out today.

## Our Highlights in 2019/20

**191**

the number of people that attended our Functional Fitness MOT events

**1,093,125**

the amount of litres of oil brokered through our community fuel buying scheme

**4**

the number of Care and Share groups set up and established across Shropshire

**21**

the number of locations our energy champion travelled to, sharing energy saving advice

**£12,683**

the amount raised for the Shropshire Community Fund through fundraising events

**87**

the number of people who have been supported by our Wheels2Work service

**861**

the number of hours our volunteers have spent supporting people as Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

**4.5**

the average number of hours of volunteer support each Good Neighbours client received over the year

**£2,701**

the amount raised from supporters who donated their Winter Fuel Allowance to be redistributed as grants to those in fuel poverty

**4,233**

the number of people advised by the Hearing Loss Support Service through home visits, clinic visits and effective hearing programmes

## Combatting Rural Isolation

**To develop and support practical solutions that combat rural isolation and deliver social benefits to people in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.**

In 2019/20 our hearing loss volunteers continued to offer peer support to hearing aid users to help them adjust to their aids or resolve any issues they might have. During the year the team made 908 home visits (including care home visits) - 558 in Shropshire and 350 in Telford & Wrekin. They also helped 3,224 people at our drop-in clinics around Shropshire, and over 100 people who attended our Effective Hearing Programmes, a half-day session offering information and advice on how people can 'make the most of' their hearing aids.

Our Wise and Well team continued to help people to stay fit, well and connected through talks about issues including health and physical activities, as well as activities to keep people active in their community. In 2019, 191 people aged over 65 who were nervous of falling attended our Functional Fitness 'MOTs', which were delivered at nine events across the county.

The team also facilitated groups to support people through Good Neighbour schemes, Musketeers and Maidens (a support group for adults with disabilities) and a county-wide network of Boccia groups.

Our Care and Share groups in Albrighton and Market Drayton continued to provide peer support and respite for people caring for someone with dementia. The award from Big Lottery "Building Connections" Fund to tackle loneliness, awarded to us in early 2019, enabled the set up of groups in Church Stretton, Much Wenlock, Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury. However during March, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we regretfully had to pause the groups with immediate effect.

## Our Impact

### Social group offers support and a safe space to Kirsty

Kirsty is an active member of two Shropshire RCC social groups for people with sight loss – 'SLOG' (Sight Loss Opportunity Group) and the Shrewsbury cycling group. She worked as a sergeant in the Police Force before suffering a stroke, which resulted in sight loss and brain damage.

Kirsty said: "For a while, and I found myself isolated from the outside world."

She was told about Shropshire RCC's cycling group by the Guide Dogs Association, and after joining was encouraged to also start attending SLOG, which meets every month and provides activities, information, advice, friendship and support.

She said: "I have found the group particularly helpful and non-patronising and to have a safe environment to go to continues to be an immense help with building my confidence. If it wasn't for SLOG I would be in a much worse position socially, fitness-wise and through knowing where to go to find information."

Kirsty now feels confident enough to support new members and share her experiences.

She added: "Groups like these are important to help prevent people from becoming socially isolated whilst being able to talk with others in a similar situation about concerns and getting the information needed to overcome these."



## Tackling Rural Poverty

**To develop, maintain and expand innovative practical solutions that tackle rural poverty and bring economic benefits to people in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.**

Our community oil buying scheme continued to support people living in 'off gas' areas access competitive prices for their heating oil. The scheme utilises its size to negotiate prices to a level where everyone gets a discount, which particularly benefits the more vulnerable members of the community. In 2019/20, over £32,700 was saved for Shropshire residents, with more than one million litres of oil brokered by us.

Our affordable warmth support was also delivered through our work with the Big Energy Saving Network (BESN). Our BESN "champion" visited 21 community locations across Shropshire and toured around villages across the county during Big Energy Saving Week in January 2020. In total 102 people were given advice on their energy bills.

In 2019/20 we ran our Winter Warmth Appeal to encourage people who receive, but don't need, Winter Fuel Payments to donate them to us so they can be redistributed in grants to local people who are experiencing fuel poverty. This year we received £2,701 (before Gift Aid), and worked with housing associations and charities to identify suitable recipients of the grants, which were up to £250.

Our Wheels2Work project received over 200 referrals and supported 87 people looking for help getting to work. The scheme provides transport advice and offers short-term loans of mopeds and electric bikes. It assists people to move from benefits to work, start careers and support themselves. In March 2020 a number of mopeds were returned as a result of furlough or redundancy, but we maintained skeleton staffing to ensure that key workers still had access to transport.

## Our Impact

**Shropshire RCC funding provides a 'lifeline' to grant recipient**



There are over 16,000 homes in Shropshire that are 'fuel poor' - their energy costs are above average and their remaining disposable income after paying their bills puts them below the poverty line.

Our Winter Warmer Fund, and the appeal to fundraise for it, was established to help those people affected by fuel poverty.

For many of the applications we receive, it can be a set of circumstances that can lead people to a place where they need our support.

This was the case for Denice, aged 74. Denice is a tenant of a housing association, and after her fire grate broke she was told she was unable to receive a replacement because her fire was considered a secondary source of heat.

Denice said: "My storage heaters are old and very expensive to run - I simply could not afford to put them on. I worked out that one storage heater cost me £3 a day."

An application to the Winter Warmer Fund was approved, and Denice was granted the money she needed to replace the fire grate.

Denice added: "My fire is my lifeline. I simply cannot thank you enough for your help."

## Helping Communities to Help Themselves

**Working collaboratively with statutory, voluntary and private sector partners to establish the charity as a “hub” for the community and voluntary sector in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and to strengthen our role as independent experts in rural communities.**

Our Village Halls Advisor continued to support community buildings across the county, covering a wide range of issues from GDPR and child protection, to complex governance issues around possible hall closure, employment, leases, hiring agreements, conflicts of interest, and compliance with Charity Commission requirements. Village hall committee members were also invited to attend our biennial Village Halls Conference at Ryton Village Hall, in September 2019. The event was fully subscribed and very well received.

We continue to offer small grants to groups to support their work through funds we have available, either from the yield from our endowed funds or through grant schemes we operate on behalf of others.

Funds raised for the Shropshire Community Fund, our endowed fund which provides grants to small charities and community groups, included £2,000 from the Wrekin Cricket Day in July 2019 and almost £5,000 from a golf day hosted by local law firm Aaron & Partners.

At the end of his Shrieval year, High Sheriff Josh Dixey was unable to hold his legal service due to the pandemic. Instead he wrote to all the people who would have been invited and asked them to make a donation to the Shropshire Community Fund. This was specifically for the Community Resilience Fund which was set up initially for supporting organisations affected by the flooding but widened to include any organisation experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In total over £5,500 (including Gift Aid) was raised.

## Our Impact

### Community building competition offered at RCC conference

In 2019 we invited local construction firm SWG to our Village Halls Conference after working with them on an idea that would benefit one Shropshire hall: a competition prize of £1,000 in materials and professional expertise to a community building in need of some improvements. This was a fantastic opportunity to help committees invest in their halls, and make a space more appealing for the local community to use.

The opportunity was promoted at the Shropshire RCC Village Halls Conference and through the village halls network. After an application process and follow-up inspections, Ford Village Hall was chosen as the winner. A further grant of £500 was awarded from our Millichope Village Halls fund to enable the support from SWG to go even further.

On behalf of the Ford Village Hall Committee, chair Katharine Robinson, said: “We have concentrated on the hall’s meeting room, known as the Urwick Room, and the toilets which were in desperate need of attention. The Urwick Room is an ideal space for activities and meetings but hasn’t been used much in recent times because of its appearance.

“The improvements look fantastic and will hopefully encourage more members of the community to come and use the hall.”



# Financials 2019/20

## Where our money comes from

	2019/20	2018/19
Donations and membership	44,472	88,668
Grants	281,622	296,263
Other charitable activities	88,588	78,816
Other trading activities	41,228	34,081
Investments	25,600	25,154
Other incoming resources	3,339	4,675
<b>Total income</b>	<b>484,849</b>	<b>527,657</b>

Our 2019-20 income excludes the 12,108 volunteer hours generously donated by 159 volunteers to support the work of our charity. (2018/19: 8,926 hours)

## How we spend our money

	2019/20	2018/19
Rural Isolation	218,514	216,105
Rural Poverty	95,900	113,064
Helping Communities	126,051	104,214
Strengthening our Organisation	43,472	52,702
Raising funds	43,180	53,234
Governance	17,703	17,679
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>544,820</b>	<b>556,998</b>

Our charitable expenditure includes £30,679 grant payments to community groups and individuals in need in Shropshire (2018/19: £33,889)

Securing the long-term financial future of our organisation remains a high priority. The Trustees are keen to examine opportunities for growth, and we continue to actively work in partnership with other local organisations to ensure that we are best placed to take advantage of these opportunities as they come along.

## Summary of our Funds

	2019/20				Total Funds	2018/19
	Designated Funds	General Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total Funds	Total Funds
Freehold property	1	-	617,341	-	617,341	634,093
Other Tangible Fixed Assets	-	1,474	481	-	1,955	5,025
Investments	134,002	265,685	-	754,977	1,154,664	1,191,613
Current Assets	156,223	88,411	133,746	11,636	390,016	445,978
Current Creditors	1	(60,905)	(14,572)	-	(75,477)	(74,578)
Long-term creditors	1	(213,774)	-	-	(213,774)	(232,566)
<b>Total 2019/20</b>	<b>290,225</b>	<b>698,232</b>	<b>119,655</b>	<b>766,613</b>	<b>1,874,725</b>	<b>1,969,565</b>
<b>Total 2018/19</b>	<b>307,759</b>	<b>757,526</b>	<b>117,848</b>	<b>786,432</b>	<b>1,969,565</b>	

1. The charity has a 25 year mortgage secured against its property. At the 31st March 2020 the value of the outstanding loan was £231,038

To protect the charity from serious disruption to its charitable work it is the policy of the Board to build up free reserves as part of its strategic planning. At 31st March 2020 the charity's free reserves were £79,419 (2019: £119,503)

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following organisations whose grants, donations, fundraising, sponsorship or "gifts in kind" have financed our work this year:

Defra	Shropshire & West Midlands Agricultural Society
Drayton Action for Health	Sight Loss Shropshire
Dyke Yaxley	Sir John Sumner's Trust
Larkhill Ramblers	Smart Energy GB
Ley Gardens Knit & Knatter	Telford & Wrekin Council Mayoral Fund
Lord Leverhulme's Charitable Trust	The Hilton Jones Charitable Trust
Millichope Foundation	The Kelton Charitable Trust
Much Wenlock Forester Charitable Trust	The National Lottery Community Fund (previously known as the Big Lottery)
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux	The Wrekin Housing Group
NHS Telford & Wrekin Clinical Commissioning Group	West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner
Persimmon Homes West	Westcroft Trust
Shrewsbury & Telford Hospitals NHS Trust	Whittingham Riddell
Shropshire Council	Wynn Foundation
Shropshire County Cricket Club	
Shropshire Masonic Charitable Association	

We would also like to say a special thank you to those individuals who have donated, sponsored or raised funds for our charitable services, including for the Shropshire Community Fund and those who donated their winter fuel payments to our "Winter Warmth" grant fund for individuals in fuel poverty.

## How You Can Help

**Become a member** - By joining Shropshire RCC you will help us to continue delivering our vital work for communities across the county.

As a member you will receive all the latest news, updates and information relating to our work and have access to knowledge and expertise in helping communities become more sustainable economically, socially and environmentally.

**Volunteer for us** - From hearing aid support to bike maintenance, we have a diverse range of activities that volunteers can get involved in.

**Raise funds for us** - If you like what we do and want to help by organising event, get in touch! We can offer advice plus provide you with publicity materials such as posters and flyers to help you to promote it.

**Make a donation** - By making a one-off or regular donation, your generosity can help some of the most disadvantaged people in Shropshire to enjoy an improved quality of life.

**Hire our equipment** - We offer a loan service on office equipment to community groups and voluntary organisations. We also have a collection of vintage crockery available for hire, plus a smoothie bike – a great addition to any fundraising event!

For more information on how you can help, please contact us on 01743 360641, email [enquiries@shropshire-rcc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@shropshire-rcc.org.uk) or visit [www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk](http://www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk)



# Making a difference to lives in Shropshire

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