



Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

Annual Report 2021-2022

Contents

Message from our Chief Executive	1
Message from our Chair	2
About Us	3
Who We Are	4
Staff Organisation Chart	6
Overview of the Year	7
What We Do	9
Review of Activities - Beds RCC	10
Community and Wellbeing	12
Supporting Communities	14
Community Transport	17
Finance and Business Services	19
Review of Activities - Beds RCC Trading Services Ltd	20
Financial Review	23
Highlights of the Year	25
Social Media Engagement	26
Plans for the Future	27

Message from our Chief Executive



"Welcome to our Annual Report. It is a pleasure to share news of our activities and accomplishments during 2021/22. Once again, the pandemic brought us challenges, but we remained focussed, flexible, connected, and finished the year in a very positive position.

As we continued to support our communities with a wide variety of projects and people it was clear that we still needed to remain fully flexible to enable staff teams to deliver our services. We continued with working from home for the majority of our staff and as the year moved forwards, we were able to bring everyone back to their offices whilst still supporting a flexible work ethos.

Our amazing on the ground services such as Community Transport, our Community Wellbeing Champions and Community Agents continued to support our most vulnerable communities, and our Good Neighbour Networks continued to be a lifeline for many of our communities.

We were able to support our wonderful Village Halls with re-opening and getting back to normal – as well as welcoming back lots of people to our Healthy Walking programme and Community Rail Partnerships.

We continued to grow welcoming new staff to #TeamBRCC from a wide variety of places to support us with new initiatives such as Mental Health Social Prescribing, Time2Connect, Timebanking and a great new Digital Inclusion project called You Can Do IT!. We were honoured in October 2021 to be asked to host the brilliant Dunstable Cultural Consortium by Historic England and our new Marketing team arrived in October 2021 to support us with our many varied and diverse projects including our Community Vineyard, Heritage Centre and Farm shop!

During the year, we celebrated many exciting events including the 175th Anniversary of the Marston Vale Line, a memorial bench for Captain Sir Tom Moore and an SME Gold Winner National Business Award for Community Business of the Year. I was super proud to be awarded an SME National Silver Award for Lockdown Leader – which I could not have done without the whole of our tremendous team.

It really has been a busy, positive and productive year for us this year and my teams never cease to amaze me with their passion and creativity that shines through in everything they do for us.

Finally, I hope you will be as inspired as I am and enjoy reading this year's report as much as we enjoyed producing it for you."

Tracy Cowan, Beds RCC Chief Executive

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracy Cowan".

Message from our Chair

"Our creativity, innovation, and careful planning throughout 2021/22 have ensured this is a strong, progressive and enormously valuable charity."



"Thank you to everyone who is part of Beds RCC: staff, volunteers, Trustees, Patrons, and contractors. I am so delighted by the many ways in which we have helped all the clients and beneficiaries of our projects. Everyone has worked with kindness and enthusiasm in assisting people to feel safe, supported and positively engaged in their communities. We have increased support for our staff so they can maintain their impressive contributions. Our creativity, innovation, and careful planning throughout 2021/22 have ensured this is a strong, progressive and enormously valuable charity."

Paula Grayson, BedsRCC Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Paula Grayson'.



About Us

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) is the leading community development agency working across Bedfordshire, with a proven track record built up over 65 years.

Founded in 1953 as Bedfordshire Rural Community Council, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity is a member of a national network of Rural Community Councils under an umbrella organisation, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE).

The charity's objects are:

To promote any charitable purpose for the benefit of the community primarily in the historic county of Bedfordshire, and in particular, the advancement of education, the protection of health and the relief of poverty, distress or sickness.

In furtherance of that said purpose, but not otherwise, to promote and organise cooperation in the achievement of the same and to that end to bring together representatives of the voluntary organisations and statutory authorities in the historic county of Bedfordshire.

Our mission:

BRCC exists to support local community life in Bedfordshire. Its role is as follows:

A coordinator of local community activity to enable communities to do more for themselves and reduce reliance on the state

An intermediary between public (and private) service providers and the people in local communities they need to reach

A manager of partnerships across public, private and voluntary sectors to achieve common objectives (e.g. conservation, rural economic development)

A direct provider of services (e.g. community transport) that help people to participate in the community

Who We Are

Trustees

The Trustees who are also Directors of the company who served during the financial year are as follows:

Miss Paula Grayson (Chair of the Board to March 31st 2021 and Director of BRCC Trading Services Board)

Mrs June Barnes

Mr Christopher Barker

Mr Barry George (Also a Director of BRCC Trading Services Board *Resigned as Director of BRCC Trading Services Board in October 2021)

Rev Stephen Holroyd

Cllr Tim Hill

Mr Ian Kelly (Also a Director of BRCC Trading Services Board)

Mrs Ann Lovesey

Mr Eric Masih

Cllr Caroline Maudlin

Mr Brian Prickett

Miss Hina Shafi

Mr Ian Riches (Also a Director of BRCC Trading Services Board)

Mr Tim Marcus (A Director of BRCC Trading Services Board only)

Who We Are

Officers

COMPANY SECRETARY

Mrs Tracy Cowan

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Mrs Tracy Cowan

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Mr Cliff Andrews

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Ms Janice Janes

Mr Neville Jephcote (retired October 2021)

Mr Simon Bailes

Mrs Kate Ellis

Mr Matthew Philcox (left March 2021)

REGISTERED OFFICE

The Old School, Southill Road, Cardington, MK44 3SX

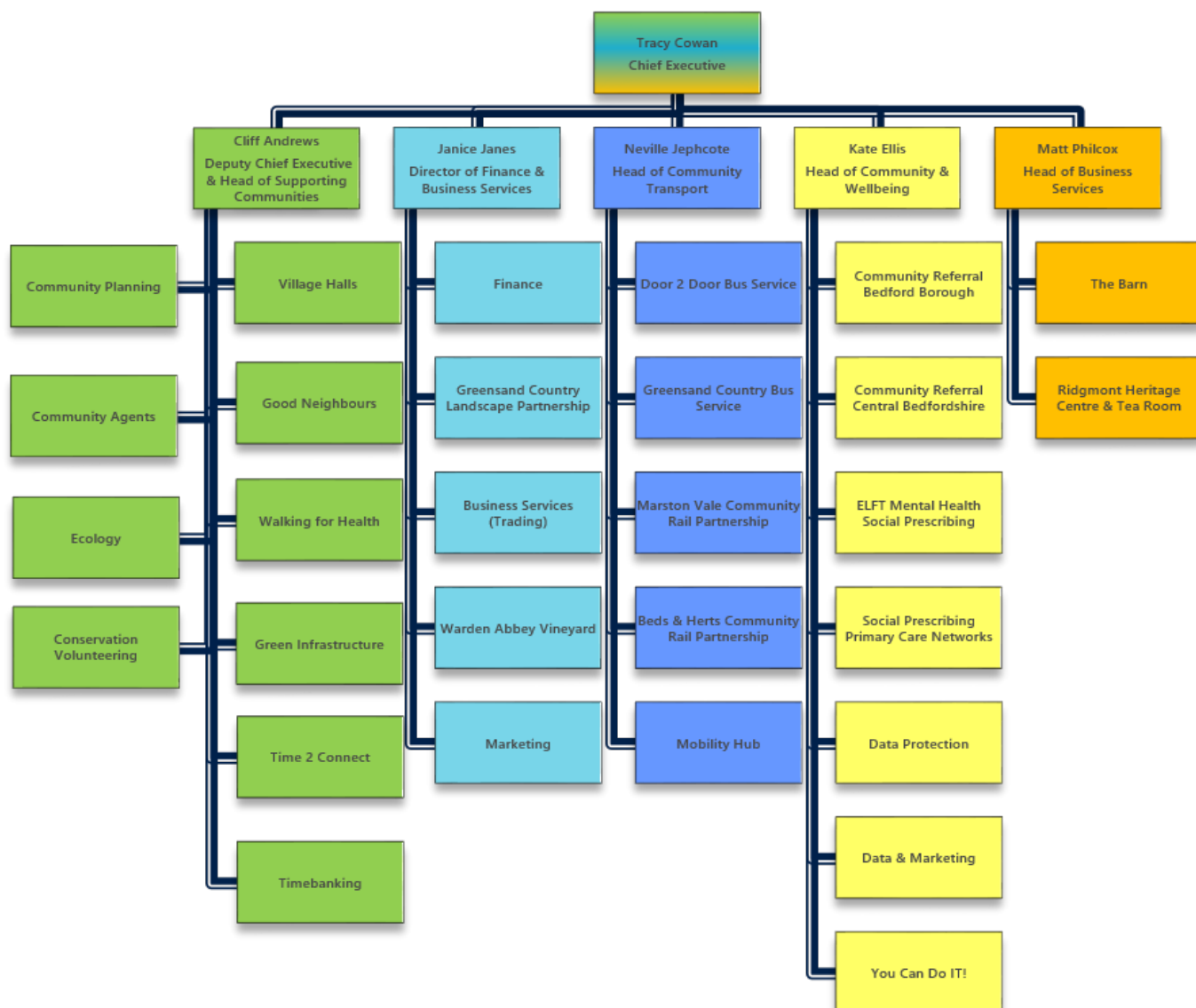
BANKERS

CAF BANK, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4JQ

AUDITORS

Streets Chartered Accountants Potton House, Wyboston Lakes, Great North Road, Bedfordshire, MK44 3BZ

Staff Organisation Chart



Overview of the Year

Following on from the previous year the pandemic continued to affect the normal day to day operation of the Charity. We continued to support our contracts and projects with different ways of working and some of our usual activities did not happen fully until the end of the reporting period. This ensured that, whilst we did not deliver our entire portfolio, we continued to support and meet the needs of our communities.

Our Supporting Communities Department continued to support those affected by Covid-19, and helped change many lives in communities across Bedfordshire.

The GNS Team supported 42 good neighbour groups (8 Borough; 34 Central) to carry out 29,465 tasks/acts of kindness helping an average of 1363 residents each three-month quarter. 911 new people contacted their good neighbour group for the first time during this year. Amongst a wide range of jobs, Good Neighbour volunteers carried out 12,179 recorded acts of befriending by phone and by visiting people at home – plus much more not recorded.

Between April 2021 and March 2022, our team of 4 Borough Village Agents and 2 Central Beds Community Agents supported 1140 clients including 388 new people seeking help from their local Agent for the first time.

Our Village Hall Advisor has been supporting Village Halls and Community Buildings as they reopened after lockdown. The Advisor offers support such as one-to-one advice to hall committees, and email updates on issues affecting community buildings, which was important as they dealt with new challenges and rules due to the pandemic.

Our Community Transport Department Team continued to adapt to different needs due to the pandemic, such as taking passengers to vaccination appointments. During this year, our Door-to-Door and Greensand Country bus services carried 9,022 passengers and 991 carers on their trips in total.

It was also a busy year with new projects and staff members joining us. In May we were very honoured to welcome two members of staff and their projects Timebanking and Tme2Connect as part of a service transfer from Community Action Bedfordshire, who sadly ceased as a Charity in 2021.



Overview of the Year

Our Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (MVCRP) gave a unique commemorative bench in memory of Captain Sir Tom Moore. This was unveiled at Millbrook Station on 29th May 2021 by Captain Tom's daughter, Hannah Ingram-Moore, and Eric Robinson MBE, County President Royal British Legion Bedfordshire. It was also the starting point for the Routes of Remembrance gathering on the 10th November 2021.

July saw us win the SME National Business Gold Award for "Community Business of the Year" which was a testament to all the hard work our teams put in every day.

In October we were proud to be asked to host the Dunstable Cultural Consortium: an Historic England funded programme that aims to make our high streets more attractive, engaging and vibrant places for people to live, work and spend time.

The MVCRP began celebrating the 175th Anniversary Year of the Marston Vale Line in November 2021, which included unveiling commemorative plaques at Bletchley Station and our very own Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre, distributing goody bags to rail passengers and staff, and an Anniversary Exhibition and Family Fun Day at Fenny Stratford.

In December, our CEO Tracy Cowan won the SME National Silver Winner Award for "Lockdown Leader".

We appeared several times in the media- including for a "view from a window" item featuring our tiny museum at Ridgmont, and our Deputy Chief Executive Cliff Andrews was filmed for a 'Escape to the Country' showing off the Biggleswade Green Wheel.

We were fortunate to receive funding to enable us to introduce specialist Mental Health Community Wellbeing Champions to work alongside our current Community Referral Social Prescribing (CRSP) team.

The work ethic, passion and tenacity of our staff has been amazing in this extremely difficult year. All staff, whether frontline facing or back office, have been an absolute credit to BRCC and we are very privileged to have such a wonderful staff and volunteer team.



What We Do

As a Rural Charity we work to support our communities with a wide and varied approach across four main areas:

Supporting Communities

This area of our work focusses on the health and wellbeing of people, and the environment they live in.

Under Supporting Communities, we have:

- Community and Wellbeing
- Village and Community Agents
- Good Neighbour and Village Care Scheme Network
- Housing and Planning
- Green Infrastructure
- Community Engagement
- Voluntary Sector Support

Finance and Business Services

Our Finance and Business Services includes our finance team, marketing and IT, and the Greensand Country Project team, as well as our three not-for-profit businesses:

- The Barn Cardington
- Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre and Tea Room
- Warden Abbey Vineyard

Community Transport

Community Transport assists with the needs of vulnerable people across Bedfordshire.

Under Community Transport, we have:

- Door to Door Dial-A-Ride
- Greensand Country Dial-A-Ride
- Community Rail Partnerships
- Bedford Mobility Hub
- Ridgmont Heritage Centre

Rural Development (Paused)

Rural Development Programmes

The LEADER programme was due to complete by December 2021. Due to the pandemic this was extended again and only a small amount of scheme administration is happening to close down the programme by end of 2022.

Review of Activities - Beds RCC

The year started as the previous one with the pandemic still very much in our lives and the lives of our communities. We continued to ensure we were flexible and fast reacting to ensure we met the needs of all including our staff and volunteers.

During the year we strengthened our core team with the introduction of a Data and Marketing team to help us get our good work out to the public and increase the brands of our small not for profit businesses.

In October, one of our longest standing staff members and Head of Community Transport - Neville Jephcote retired. He was a huge part of Beds RCC and will be missed. Simon Bailes took over as Head of Community Transport.

In March 2022, Matt Philcox left us as Head of Business Services.

Throughout the year our departments and projects continued to grow and adapt to ever changing needs.

The team spirit is always evident at Beds RCC and at our celebration event in September 2021 it was very clear that we are very fortunate to have such a wonderful set of volunteers, trustees, patrons and of course staff. As we move into next year we are in a great position to continue the great work completed in 21/22.



SME Business Awards

Gold award at the SME Luton and Bedfordshire Business Awards

We're delighted to announce that we won gold in the Community Business of the Year Award category, sponsored by London Luton Airport, at the SME Luton and Bedfordshire Business Awards on 29th June 2021.

The awards, held at Bedford Corn Exchange, looked to recognise those small and medium-sized enterprises that had demonstrated the upmost dedication and innovation in the way in which they adapted to, and weathered, the Covid-19 pandemic. In the case of Beds RCC, this recognised the way in which our staff and volunteers have supported their local communities and those vulnerable residents over the last year.

Gold award at the SME National Business Awards

Following the regional win, we then went on to win gold in the Community Business of the Year Award category at the SME National Business Awards on 28th July 2021.

Tracy Cowan, Beds RCC CEO said: "I was delighted and honoured to pick up and accept this award on behalf of the whole of #TeamBRCC. This award is for everyone – our stupendous staff, terrific trustees, passionate patrons and our very special volunteers".

Deputy CEO, Cliff Andrews, added: "We are so proud of the amazing work our teams do that keep Beds RCC the best Community Charity in Bedfordshire and in fact – after this award – the whole of the Country!"



Community and Wellbeing

You Can Do IT!

At the end of 2021 Beds RCC recruited a Digital Lead to lead the You Can Do IT! Digital Inclusion Project. In February 2022 the project was launched, starting with the first group set up in Biggleswade which meets in a local community building. Over the next two years, more groups will be added to increase the amount of people benefitting from the services across Bedfordshire.

You Can Do IT!'s aim is to improve people's lives by getting them online and accessing services and systems that will improve their health and wellbeing. During the sessions, participants are shown how to use smartphones, tablets, or laptops to carry out tasks such as joining an online activity group, shopping, making video calls to friends and family, and much more. These sessions are run by volunteer Digital Champions, who without the project wouldn't be able to run.

Social Prescribing

The need for Social Prescribing has increased across Bedfordshire in response to Covid-19 and the cost of living. In November 2021, the Community Wellbeing Champions' Mental Health transformation programme began which aims to dissolve the boundaries between primary care, secondary mental health care and social care and the voluntary sector. Mental Health CWC's will assist in providing wraparound support for people with varying levels of need, including those with longer-term and complex requirements.

Village and Community Agents

Village and Community Agents continued to help older people and were able to offer remote help during lockdowns such as filling in applications for Blue Badges, Attendance Allowance or benefits, organising food shopping, and generally helping people access the many valuable support services which are still functioning in the Borough of Bedford. As Covid restrictions eased, Agents were able to make 439 home visits to clients with more complex cases.

During lockdown, one of our agents helped a client whose cat knocked his laptop off of the kitchen counter. As a wheelchair user, his laptop was his lifeline and the £160 repair bill was beyond his means. When Mark told his Village Agent she leapt into action and soon found a local IT enthusiast able to get it fixed, and he only had to pay £10 for a spare part.



Case Study

Community Wellbeing Champions

Our team of Community Wellbeing Champions (CWCs) help people to connect with their local community, improve wellbeing, and empower people to make decisions to support their health. They also help people to access practical advice and support with social issues such as debt, housing, and carer support.

Read below about two people who our CWCs have helped changed their lives for the better. *Please note: names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.*

Liam came to our CWC team with severe chronic pain, anxiety and depression. Having a new person to talk to who listened and cared was very valuable to him. Right from the initial appointment, Liam's CWC was able to help him to release a lot of emotional pain and suffering.

Liam found he was able to see his past with a new perspective, by his CWC encouraging him that he had already achieved so much getting this far.

"Such simple words made a difference to me in a positive way and still do."

After going on the courses recommended to him, Liam found that baking allowed him to make his days more meaningful. He is looking into other things he can do from home, to find new ways to spend his time.

"I can see more positives in my life than what I could before you all helped me with what you do. So thank you all very much!"

Alexis came to our Social Prescribing team with a range of physical health issues which were impacting her mental health in a very negative way. During her time with one of the team, she made great progress with just a small action list every few weeks. Alexis built her support network, came to terms with inner conflict and improved her outlook on life by miles.

Alexis found the support and guidance she received since being referred by her GP to be priceless. It was what she had been in need for a while, and was very thankful for the help she received.

"I have now gained in confidence, and have a realisation of what I can achieve. Many thanks."

Supporting Communities

Walk 4 Health (Wellbeing Walks)

It has been an extraordinary and very difficult time for group walks through Covid lockdowns with restrictions on walker numbers and social distancing, yet our walk leaders have shown great patience and adaptability. Some have been keeping walks going when possible and others have kept in touch with walkers while their walks have not been operating, even to the extent of one group producing chatty newsletters for (and with) their walkers. Most of the health walk groups have relaunched or are planning to in the near future – though abiding to current restrictions – and this is proving very welcome to their walkers, many of whom have been isolated for many months.

Good Neighbour and Village Care Scheme Network

Good Neighbour groups helped people throughout lockdown with shopping, prescriptions, pet care and telephone befriending (plus the occasional surprise doorstep delivery of cake, flowers or seasonal fruit and veg). Good Neighbours remain very busy and are now also supporting people to reach vaccination appointments and resume trips to hairdressers, shops and garden centres.

Houghton Regis Helpers, one of the first Good Neighbour groups, celebrated their 10th birthday in November. There are now over 50 volunteers in the group, and more than 700 residents have received help over the ten years.

Studham, Kensworth and Whipsnade (SKAW) formed a joint Good Neighbours group in response to the pandemic. One lady was so delighted with the help she and fellow residents received from SKAW Good Neighbours' volunteers that she is saying thank you by knitting amazing colourful characters to raise funds, so that the group can continue and help even more people.

Green Infrastructure

Our Green Wheels (linking publicly accessible green spaces and routes within and around rural towns) continued to be a place for people to enjoy exercising around during the pandemic. On 11th September, Beds RCC joined in with the the 3 Green Wheel Challenge as part of the Bedfordshire Walking Festival. Walkers from across the county were invited to walk the Sandy, Biggleswade and Etonbury Green Wheels over the course of the weekend.

Beds RCC continues to deliver a variety of other activities that involve local people in designing, conserving and being active in their local green spaces, such as the Ivel Valley Conservation Volunteers. It's been a hard year with restrictions on numbers but there has been an increase in people accessing the countryside. In response, our loyal group of volunteers have stepped up and worked hard on a wide range of activities with a smile, whatever the weather.

Housing and Planning

Beds RCC supports local communities to plan for their future through Neighbourhood and Green Infrastructure (GI) planning. During the year we supported 14 Neighbourhood Plan groups; we provide support to groups via phone and email and also through attending their Neighbourhood Plan steering group meetings. We worked with six communities on Green Infrastructure Plans, including the identification of important sites to be designated and protected as Local Green Spaces.

In addition we help rural parishes to meet their affordable housing needs by carrying out household surveys. This year we carried out 3 housing needs surveys, working in partnership with Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Plan steering groups, Local Authorities, Housing Associations and local landowners.

We actively support Eastern Community Homes, a community led housing hub for the eastern region – formed with our ACRE colleagues in the East of England. We continue to raise awareness of the benefits of community-led housing projects.

Community Halls

Village and community halls have now been able to open their doors again due to the easing of restrictions. The village hall team had been looking forward to helping communities get back together for a wide range of events and activities.

Dunstable Community Halls

Beds RCC are in the final stages of taking over another Charity known as Luton and Bedfordshire Youth Association (LUBYA). They are a long established Charity that focussed on the community, children and young people. As part of the merger, LUBYA have two community halls in the centre of Dunstable which are currently let out to community, church and youth groups. This has been an exciting opportunity for us and will give us a much needed presence in the south of the County. It will also help with our strategic objectives to be more involved in delivering projects for children and young people. We will be continuing to let the Halls for community and young people use and will have a Beds RCC hot desking facility there.

Dunstable Cultural Consortium

We were delighted to be awarded a £92,572 grant from Historic England as part of the Dunstable High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) to create and deliver community-led cultural activities on the high street over the next three years. The programme will be designed and delivered by the Dunstable Cultural Consortium in partnership with and led by Beds RCC. Ongoing support will also be provided by the Dunstable HSHAZ team at Dunstable Town Council.

New Community Services - Time2Connect and Timebanking

Following the closure of Community Action Bedfordshire, Beds RCC took on the delivery of two additional projects. Time2Connect connects residents with each other and provides guidance and information about local services, community groups, and activities. In Timebanking people give up some of their time to help someone in exchange for help for themselves, which enables people to help neighbours and their local community.

Beds RCC NEWS

Beds RCC to Feature on BBC's 'Escape to the Country'

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity will be making a star appearance on an episode of Escape to the Country this year, which will be aired in May 2022.

The episode will focus on a couple's search for a home in Bedfordshire. Some of Team BRCC participated in filming, including our Environment and Community Officer Mike Fayers, who is involved in our Wellbeing Walks and Good Neighbour Schemes:

"There's some beautiful villages in Bedfordshire, it's really lovely looking round. So although I've lived here as long as I have, I've still got a lot more exploring to do."

With 800 miles of public right-of-way in Central Bedfordshire alone, the county is filled with places to walk, run and cycle. Our deputy CEO Cliff Andrews shares about the Biggleswade Green Wheel, which Beds RCC was involved in bringing about.

Cliff explains how the Green Wheel benefits the local community, explaining the many ways it gets used. When asked who uses the Green Wheel, Cliff says:

"Everyone. Loads of people from the local community, runners, walkers, cyclists, parents with buggies, parents teaching kids to ride their bike, dog walkers, everyone."

The episode will highlight how the Friends of Biggleswade Green Wheel look after the Biggleswade Green Wheel by keeping the vegetation off the path so it's clear for everyone to use.

We will also see a Wellbeing Walk in action, who regularly use the Green Wheel for walks. One wellbeing walker explains the importance of paths like these:

"It's just uplifting. ... It really is very pleasant to just go out and forget all your worries."

As well as featuring some of our staff here at Beds RCC, the episode also highlights how important volunteers are to the work we do, and gave them an opportunity to be celebrated.

Community Transport

Head of Community Transport Retires

In October our Head of Community Transport Neville Jephcote retired. Neville had been with us for eight years, so it was very sad to see him go after all this time. He was a great asset to the Community Transport team and will be missed by all at Beds RCC.

Door to Door and Greensand Country

BedsRCC's personalised transport services for those unable to use public transport continued to work incredibly hard the past year. The pandemic meant they had to continue to adapt their services, for example by helping people get to Covid-19 vaccination appointments.

Driver Lisa King shared what makes her proud to be a part of the transport team:

"...Just taken a lovely, partially sighted lady to Sainsbury's and then picked her up and dropped her back home. It was her first time travelling with us as she usually gets lifts from family and a neighbour, but they're all away at present. Naturally she was quite anxious as it's her first time doing the shopping on her own, but I set her mind at rest, helped her on and off the bus and took her to the door at Sainsbury's.

I got her to call me when she'd finished so that she didn't have to wait until her booked collection time, swooped in to pick her up and then got her and her shopping safely home. She said how at ease she felt with me and what a wonderful service we provide."

Bedford Mobility Hub

The Mobility Hub was closed during the whole of 21/22 at the request of Bedford Borough Council as Bedford was a pandemic hotspot.

Travelling Safely

Numbers of people able to travel on our community buses increased again as restrictions eased. We continued to have measures in place to reduce the spread of Covid-19, such as mask wearing, to protect those on board. It was great to be able to help people get used to going out and about again after several months of lockdowns, which many found extremely isolating.



Community Transport

Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership

MVCRP began celebrating the 175th Anniversary Year of the Marston Vale Line in November 2021, which included unveiling commemorative plaques at Bletchley Station and Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre, distributing goody bags to rail passengers and staff, and an Anniversary Exhibition and Family Fun Day at Fenny Stratford. A special vinyl was unveiled on the outside of two of the trains celebrating the Anniversary and promoting Greensand Country, an area of special landscape character through which the Line runs.

MVCRP has station adoption (Station Friends Groups) at the majority of stations along the Line. The Line was used as the base for a London Northwestern Railway Station Adoption Film in May 2021 in which members of the groups at Millbrook, Ridgmont and Fenny Stratford, and Khush Haal (an Asian Women's Well Being Group in Bedford) featured. The film is available at: www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk/get-involved/station-adoption/. All Station Friends Groups continue to welcome new volunteers.

A unique commemorative bench in memory of Captain Sir Tom Moore was unveiled at Millbrook Station on 29th May 2021 by Captain Tom's daughter, Hannah Ingram-Moore, and Eric Robinson MBE, County President Royal British Legion Bedfordshire. It was also the starting point for the Routes of Remembrance gathering on the 10th November 2021.

The MVCRP team were saddened to learn of the death of Michael Taylor in August 2021. He was a loyal member of the team since 2012 assisting with administration and events.



Beds & Herts Community Rail Partnership

In August, Bee Friendly Trust volunteers and Beds & Herts CRP staff constructed a bee friendly planter at Flitwick, which will be filled with pollinator-friendly plants. The CRP also launched their Symbol Spot in October 2021. Symbol Spot is a rail-based family on a train 'Eye-Spy' type of activity. When all the rubbings have been collected in the activity book, and all the tasks completed, a completion certificate is given out.

Beds & Herts CRP's joint entry with the Southeast CRP, Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton CRP, Darent Valley CRP and Marston Vale CRP for 'Countryside, Capital, and Coast' – an Online Thameslink Guide' was awarded second place in the Best Communications Category at the 2021 Community Rail Awards. On 17th January, staff gave out hundreds of tea bags to rail users for Brew Monday with teams from Bedford Samaritans, Network Rail, and Thameslink Rail Enforcement Officers.

Finance and Business Services

Finance and HR Management

During this year the progress that was started in 2020/21 continued to be consolidated and developed. The team ensured that the focus remained on maintaining the positive changes from the previous year and continued to improve finance procedures and debtors.

IT and Website

Due to Covid and lockdowns many staff contained to work at home for most of the working week. Our flexible IT infrastructure enabled staff to work in any location and still have access to their own and shared files through the cloud.

The Social Prescribing Team in conjunction with the CCG and Primary care worked towards Community Wellbeing Champions being able to securely access patient records via the clinical software SystmOne. A new website was designed for Beds & Herts Community Rail Partnership and the Time2Connect community website directory was launched to promote community activities in Houghton Regis.

Marketing

During the year we said 'goodbye' to Marianna Brown, our part-time Marketing Manager, and 'hello' to Hannah Penwright as our new Marketing and Communications Officer. Dave Gray also took on responsibility for leading the marketing team with a combined job role of Data and Marketing Manager. Increasing our marketing team has enabled for a greatly increased social media presence across our projects and services, as well as a more accessible helping-hand for different departments to promote themselves.

Greensand Country Landscape Partnership

The Greensand Country Landscape Partnership programme was scheduled to be in it's final year of delivery. An extension to the programme was granted and this meant the handover to the Forward Plan/Legacy phase will be in December 2022. The Greensand Country Festival was held virtually with events across the month in May 2021. It is hoped it can be back to face to face in May 2022.

As part of the Greensand Country Festival, MVCRP introduced 'On Track in Greensand Country', an Audio Journey along the Marston Vale Line in May 2021. 'On Track' was produced by Radio LaB 97.1FM for the University of Bedfordshire. The producers take a journey along the Line alighting at some of the stations, learning about some of the local greensand landscape, history and characters along the way. It is available on all podcast platforms and via the MVCRP website 'Days Out' page.

Beds RCC Trading Services Ltd

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity operates a wholly-owned subsidiary company entitled BRCC Services Ltd, the purpose of which is to raise funds to support the charity. The directors of the company are:

P Grayson

B George (resigned October 2021)

I Kelly

I Riches

T Marcus

T Cowan (Secretary)



Review of Activities

The Barn - Cardington

2021 was a year of change at The Barn, with many developments occurring as we continued to come out of the pandemic and subsequent. The marquee continued to be a place for people to meet safely outside. A major change saw the Woburn Country Foods in-house butcher be replaced with the fridges of freshly-prepared cuts of meat, still supplied by Woburn Country Foods.

This year we saw Simon Bailes take over the operations at The Barn after our 'Head of Business Services' Matt Philcox moved on in March 2021.

External improvements

Our refurbishments began by taking down the marquee seating area after it had served its purpose fantastically during the pandemic. The seating area was moved indoors temporarily to give people a warmer cafe experience. Taking down the marquee was the start of our new plans for an indoor and outdoor seating area, to provide both a warmer area for people to eat and relax in colder months, and a new area to enjoy the sun during warmer weather.

Donations for Ukraine

Due to the war in Ukraine, the staff team set up a donation collection point at The Barn. There was a really positive response to this and many customers bought in items including first aid supplies, hats, gloves and scarves, torches, and sleeping bags. These donations were then delivered to The Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain to be taken to Ukraine.



Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre and Tea Room

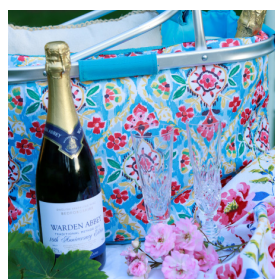
Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre Tea Room reopened its doors to the public on 12th April 2021. The Heritage Centre opened on the 19th May 2021 - one of the first visitor attractions in the county to do so. Volunteers from the Friends of Ridgmont Station run the day-to-day activities at the Heritage Centre, with the 25-strong team contributing an average of 1,500 hours each year. Thanks to their commitment the Heritage Centre's opening season has been extended to all year round. New opening hours were also introduced (Wednesday - Sunday 10am-4pm). Following the pandemic, the Heritage Centre has also been able to participate in Heritage Open Days again.

Tea and Cake with the Lord Lieutenant

We were delighted to welcome HM Lord Lieutenant Helen Nellis on 26th July 2021. Her Majesty's Lieutenant is our Patron and came to say "Thank you" to Beds RCC staff for the amazing work that they have all done throughout the pandemic. The Lord Lieutenant and some of our staff joined us for tea and cake. It was also a chance for her to see the restoration work that has taken place at the Heritage Centre.

Heritage Centre Featured on BBC

In January 2021, BBC published an article: 'Your Pictures on the Theme of "View from a Window"', showing snippets of life around the world. Photographer Alison Wilkerson sent in a picture of her husband David posing through the ticket window in our Heritage Centre. This ticket window is part of the original Booking Office from Ridgmont station, dating back to 1846. We are honoured that the BBC featured us, and love the way it brings the history of the past into an article full of life.



Warden Abbey Community Vineyard

After having to close its doors to the public due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our community vineyard was able to reopen for tours and events in May. This was met with enthusiasm from people who had missed being able to visit, and the tours were soon fully booked. Events held over the summer included Flying Day Picnics, Fizz and Chips, and Outside Cinema experiences. The annual open day was also able to happen in September, which was a great success.

The vineyard team navigated hurdles thrown up by the weather, pandemic and haulage shortages to bring in a very respectable harvest this year, which meant they had good stocks of both still and sparkling wine for the coming year. During the two harvesting days, the team picked almost 4.4 tonnes, of which over 2 tonnes was Bacchus, making it one of our best ever Bacchus years. Thank you to our volunteers for their continued hard work this year tending to the vines, planning and running events, harvesting grapes - among other jobs.

Financial Review

Reserves Policy

The trustees have identified the need for the Charity to hold unrestricted reserves for three principal reasons:

- a) To remain resilient and manage risk in an increasingly uncertain and volatile operating environment
- b) To accommodate cash flow pressures at a time when a number of BRCC's income streams involve payment in arrears
- c) To allow for significant contingency, particularly the costs incurred in the event of closing down the Charity

Its unrestricted reserves will therefore contain two elements:

1. Resilience funds: BRCC will hold between 1 and 3 months' total budgeted operating costs in order to provide sufficient cash flow for the organisation while enabling it to address future opportunities, threats and risks as part of its long-term financial planning, as well as sensitively managing the cessation of services to beneficiaries where required.
2. Designated funds: the trustees have designated a Contingency Fund (to cover the costs of winding up the organisation); a Building & Vehicles Maintenance Reserve (to cover extraordinary repairs or maintenance costs); and a Fixed Assets Reserve (reflecting the current value of its Fixed Assets). These funds will not be used day to day for the purposes outlined in 1 and 2. The trustees review the levels of these designated funds annually.

The Charity will not hold more reserves than it needs to deliver the aims of this policy, in order to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of its current beneficiaries as effectively as possible.

The level of reserves held will be monitored monthly by the Management Team and quarterly by the Board of Directors. The Board will review this reserves policy annually.

Financial Review

During the year, the charity and its trading subsidiary BRCC Services Ltd raised income of £2,888,801 (2020/21 £2,345,953) to enable it to deliver a range of activities under its charitable objectives. This income came principally from local and central government, the European Union, lottery distributing bodies and other funders through a range of service level agreements, grants and contracts. A proportion also came directly from clients and beneficiaries (through fees and charges), and some from retail activities and donations.

Total expenditure during the year amounted to £2,661,143 (20/21 £2,305,528), with the result that the overall net movement in funds for the year amounted to a surplus of £227,658 (2020/21 £40,425). The surplus reported for 2021/22 includes grant income totalling £220,844 which has been recognised as income in these financial statements and carried forward in reserves at 31 March 2022 for projects which will start in 2022/23.

Highlights of the Year

SME Award Celebration

Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre welcomed many of Beds RCC's staff, volunteers, trustees and patrons on 6th September to celebrate the charity's successful win at the SME National Business Awards in July.

The event was a celebration to recognise and thank all those staff and volunteers who have worked so tirelessly throughout the pandemic to support residents and communities across Bedfordshire, many of whom were extremely vulnerable, and to celebrate winning the SME National Business award for Best Community Business of the Year.

Helping Those Affected by War in Ukraine

Our donation collection point at The Barn was a fantastic opportunity for people to come together to help those in need of support due to the war in Ukraine. There was a really positive response to this and many customers bought in items including first aid supplies, hats, gloves and scarves, torches, and sleeping bags. Those who did not have supplies to donate but were interested in helping were encouraged to donate money to charities offering help and support.

Staff Wellbeing Surveys

The Senior Leadership team released a Staff Wellbeing Survey 2021. This survey sought to uncover how staff were feeling about work, changes caused by the pandemic, and how the Senior Team can support them.

Wellbeing Group Launch

Following on from the 2021 Staff Wellbeing Survey, a group of staff took on the voluntary role of being part of the Wellbeing Group. This group has been set up as a point of contact for any wellbeing queries or concerns staff and volunteers have, if they do not feel able to discuss the matter with their manager. The group provide support and hear about any praise, ideas, or concerns that the team have.

Marston Vale Line's 175th Anniversary

Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership and the wider charity celebrated the 175th Anniversary Year of the Marston Vale Line this year. Celebrations included unveiling commemorative plaques at Bletchley Station and Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre, distributing goody bags to rail passengers and staff, and an Anniversary Exhibition and Family Fun Day at Fenny Stratford. A special vinyl was unveiled on the outside of two of the trains celebrating the Anniversary and promoting Greensand Country, an area of special landscape character through which the Line runs.

Social Media Engagement

Facebook (@bedsrcc)

1,317 followers

943 likes



Instagram (@bedsrcc)

401 followers



Twitter (@bedsrcc)

1,317 followers



Business/Project Social Media Engagement

Our three businesses (The Barn, Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre, and Warden Abbey Vineyard) have all seen positive Social Media growth over the past year. Other parts of Beds RCC also have a Social Media presence, including Your Wellbeing Bedfordshire, Community Rail Partnerships, and Time Banking, which all help to build community and share news.

Plans for the Future

Future Developments:

1. Produce a new 3 year Strategic Plan
2. Complete the merger with Luton and Bedfordshire Youth Association and develop our offer for children and young people.
3. Continue to develop our presence in the South of the County and Luton.
4. Continue to grow our Community and Wellbeing Service securing funding from LA's/ CCG and the Primary Care Networks and further expand into Green Social Prescribing and Digital Isolation areas
5. Continue to develop the Good Neighbour and Village Care Scheme Network
6. Acquire full Museum accreditation for Ridgmont Heritage Centre and develop the offer
7. Build on the success of the LEADER programme and look for further opportunities (Shared Prosperity Fund) to be announced in April 2022
8. Deliver the HLF funded Greensand Country Landscape Partnership programme
9. Continue to develop collaborative relationships with other local organisations and within the ACRE Network
10. Continue to diversify income streams where possible



**Beds
RCC**



Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

GOLD WINNER

COMMUNITY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

**BEDFORDSHIRE RURAL
COMMUNITIES CHARITY**



Get In Touch!

**The Old School,
Cardington, Bedford
MK44 3SX**

01234 838771

info@bedsrcc.org.uk

Follow us on Social Media:

Twitter: @bedsrcc

Facebook: @bedsrcc

Instagram: @bedsrcc

www.bedsrcc.org.uk