

In this letter: **A time of renewal: Opening up again: Looking to the future: Care home visiting: Winter's wonderland: And finally.**

A time of renewal:

So much has changed for the better over the last month – We already have daffodils in bloom in the garden and it is proving a special year for the snowdrops, the sparrows and blue tits are gathering ready to begin nesting, the trees and hedgerows have taken on a fresh green tinge. Whilst out exercising with our dog Nelly I stood not much more than 2 arm's length away from a [song thrush singing](#) its heart out. Further round the lake I came across a [robin in full song](#) so close that if I stretched out my hand it might have hopped on. Yet further on a [blue tit](#) and a [wren](#) were both seemingly competing for the "[Birdsong Opera](#)" lead. Truly, Spring has arrived for Nature, so who are we to argue?

For most, if not all, of us the last 2 or 3 months has been a struggle to keep positive and not worry about, ourselves, our family, friends and neighbours contracting Covid and requiring hospitalization. But now the future is looking considerably brighter - The statistics are looking good, well over 90% of the elderly and vulnerable have been vaccinated, and a third of the whole population has had the jab – Time for us to "wake up and smell the coffee". I believe we can start to think about how we can get back to "life as we knew it". But carefully! I am sure there will be some lumps and bumps along the road.

Opening up again: We will need to be extra careful when the time comes to start reopening The Debenham Project. However, I very much hope that we may be able to resume some of the face to face contact we used to offer such as One-to-One support, transport, individual help and advice, etc. perhaps towards the end of April or the beginning of May. We may even be able to hold some socially distanced outdoor events, activities, and lunches towards the end of May when the weather has become more reliable. But running our groups and activities in Dove Cottage is something that will have to wait significantly longer. Sadly, we have had to delay our Annual Debenham Project Garden Party, so wonderfully and generously hosted by Mike and Lyn at the Limes, until next year – You can bet we will make it a very special occasion!

Looking to the future: Over the past year our thoughts and concerns have been dominated by trying to do what we can to keep in touch with everyone, and offer support, by phone, e-mail, newsletters, and on-line. But that doesn't mean we haven't been looking beyond the pandemic and to how care and support could be made so much better for all (carers and those they care for) who are living with the impact of dementia on their lives. As a member of the Suffolk and North East Essex Dementia Forum (an official advisory group of experienced practitioners) we are contributors to two very important debates about the future of dementia care investment and practice in our county:

Firstly "giving the diagnosis to, and supporting the families of someone with dementia". Over the last 12 years I have listened to the experiences of so many family carers and those they care for who have sought a diagnosis of the their illness and found it a daunting and very frustrating experience. There is no doubt that the County's memory assessment services and GP practices have made substantial efforts to make the process of seeking and receiving a diagnosis less clinical and more personal. However, there remain concerns

that have been expressed by families living with dementia many times but seem to be difficult to address. So we have asked a group of local current and past family carers to let us know what they think were the problems they encountered and what would make things better in the future. If you are in this group and have received my e-mail, we will be very grateful for your input. And if anyone else would like to contribute please do contact me.

And secondly asking the Health and Well-Being Board (The top Bananas in the County!) on March 11th to use their position and influence to not only “Make Suffolk a Dementia Friendly County” but also “Make Suffolk Dementia Pro-Active”. Please think of us trying to do our best to convince our Council Leadership, Health and Social Care Management, and other key agencies that they can “get on and do something more” and help local communities and businesses make a difference. A dementia friendly community is not only understanding, helpful, and supportive but, above all, active. I know that Debenham is such a community.

Care Home Visiting: The Covid crisis has taken a terrible toll on so many in all age groups and all communities and we grieve for everyone whose lives will never be the same – that their memories of this past 12 months will be of worry, sadness and loss. I have been especially saddened by the plight of families with an elderly loved one with dementia in a care home. They have been physically and emotionally isolated from them and unable to give comfort and express their love except at a distance and encased in PPE. They have seen the confusion and lack of understanding in the eyes of their husband, wife, parent, partner and had to watch from afar as their life force diminishes. I am sure that many of you were aware of Jean’s courageous efforts last year to persuade the Government to change the guidelines so that family carers could visit and care for their loved ones inside the care home in a meaningful way, which led to Look East’s Susie Fowler-Watt’s TV interview with Prime Minister. Jean was not alone – The Alzheimer’s Society, Mind, John’s Campaign, and other groups have all been campaigning for such a step. So it was a great relief to hear the Prime Minister’s announcement that the guidelines on care home visiting will be relaxed to permit one close relatives to visit (and touch!) their loved one in a care home as from March 8th. Thank you. It means so much. It may not meet all that was asked for but I hope that it will be just the start of a “new normal” in which all care homes welcome family and close friends of their residents not just as visitors but as integral members of their care team.

Winter’s wonderland: I began this letter looking forward to a spring of renewal and confidence and I look back on a winter of sadness and loss. However, in nature, there are always special moments in time which lift our spirits and bring us hope. Only 2 weeks ago Arthur Jackson took these wonderful photos. Enjoy.



And finally: A big thank you everyone who has made donations to the Project. It is your support that has ensured that we will be around for years to come. You can access all of our on-line help by visiting our new "[On-Line Resources](#)" page and can find our "Coronavirus - Local Information and Support" list on our [News and Project Progress page](#). You can also call us on 01728 862003.

Take Care and Keep Safe.

All best wishes,

Lynden.

P.S. If you haven't tried it yet, click on the birds in "A time for renewal" which opens this letter to hear their delightful songs.

Lynden Jackson

