**Secretary’s report for Wickham Market Good Neighbours AGM on Wednesday 14th April 2021 at 7.30pm via zoom.**

This is now our 14th year of operation, a year in which we’ve been challenged by the Covid 19 pandemic to work in different ways. When the country went into lockdown last March, several of our volunteers had to withdraw from face-to-face contact. However, we were able to recruit some younger, temporary volunteers to help us maintain our service in the village, helping with prescriptions, shopping or a friendly chat. Some of these volunteers are still with us and 3 have joined us on a more permanent basis. I’m happy to report that we carried out 1,401 jobs between the end of February 2020 to 1st March 2021 of which an amazing 852 (mainly phone calls) were done by the befrienders. Maureen’s befriending report will have more details about that. Much of the demand for our service, especially during the lockdowns, has been for delivery and collection of prescriptions. We have been fortunate to have the local Co-op phone order and delivery service available to help people with their shopping as not everyone is able to shop online. The outpatient hospital appointments are now coming through in greater numbers and we’ve also been able to take people for their vaccines.

I would like to sincerely thank all our volunteers for their commitment and hard work; also, the many organizations that have helped us. The Parish Council, who give us an annual grant of £150 which goes towards our public liability insurance and phone contract, also assisted with the printing and distribution of guidance leaflets around the village. Community Action Suffolk, especially Jane Arkley-Crouch, our development officer, have given us invaluable advice and guidance on maintaining our service in a safe way whilst following government health protocols. The East Suffolk Council community officer has been available to give advice and also help in practical ways with support parcels to the most vulnerable in our community. It has been amazing and encouraging to see so many voluntary and statutory groups working together to ensure the right level of support to all who most need it. In addition, we have seen a huge amount of spontaneous help within Wickham Market, something very common in such a community minded village. In November last year we were pleased to be awarded the Lord Lieutenant’s special Certificate of Merit for our service to the community during the pandemic, a tribute to the remarkable team effort within the village.

Last September our treasurer, Julie Cuninghame, moved out of the village and Penny Jenkinson kindly agreed to take over as treasurer. She was able to negotiate a more favourable phone contract from Tesco for £10.00 per month with 5,000 minutes, more than we would normally need. We currently have 8 phone holders who are doing an excellent job, booking the tasks, but also providing a listening ear in these uncertain times and being able to access other help which might be needed.

This last year we have greatly missed our normal social events like the get-together for volunteers, markets on the hill (one of the ways we’ve often recruited new volunteers) and garden party for those we befriend. We hope it won’t be too long before these can be resumed, although at this stage it’s hard to imagine how these events will look in the future. I think we’ve all lost some confidence about meeting in groups, our clients certainly have, and this is something we need to address. We’ve recently been introduced to a Buddy Up scheme, run by Community Action Suffolk, which aims to pair those suffering from the effects of isolation with volunteers who can help them build confidence and re-engage with the community. This is certainly a much-needed initiative.

 We’ve continued to meet as a committee via zoom and have recently welcomed 4 new members- Lynette Tucker, our new secretary-elect, Linda Merriam to help with minutes, Dick Jenkinson, our new chairman- elect and Glynis Buckmaster, one of our newer volunteers. Many thanks to Lynette and Dick for agreeing to be office holders, ably assisted by Linda with the minutes and Paula who will be helping with the recruitment procedures. Also, many thanks to Penny for all she’s doing as our treasurer.

This will be my last secretary’s report and I would like to thank the members of the committee and all of you very much for all your help and support over the years. I intend to continue as a volunteer and befriender, though with considerably less admin, which I will welcome.

Pam Jenkins. Secretary.