



## **REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, ELAINE FOX, GIVEN AT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 19 OCTOBER 2021**

Since our last AGM it seems the world has been dominated by COVID and its repercussions. I would like to start by saying a very big thank you to everyone who has kept us going through difficult and changing times. As I commented on many occasions my crystal ball seemed to be perpetually misted up requiring numerous changes to our plans and new ways of working as we went along.

It is worth reviewing the new things and thanking the people who made it all happen:

- Zoom (where would we have been without it! – thanks to those who administered it for us.
- Centrally organized virtual events (COVE), weekly online talks about anything and everything.
- Monthly quiz – once an annual event which became a monthly one
- Health and wellbeing sessions
- Online games – not quite so popular
- A buddy system for those without technology
- The Christmas Spectacular!
- Monthly concerts with the Settlement, supported by Making Music, compelling recitals by young musicians. Events in the Settlement when that was practicable.

We encouraged our groups to meet when it was safe to do so; some were able to, others stayed in contact on Zoom or by email. And our Group Support Team were there with the Group Contacts all the way. Sadly, some groups have closed but more are starting up – so we are still able to say that we have 120 groups. Thank you to everyone who runs our groups which are the bedrock of LALG.

To make all this happen we have to recognise in the background: the Website Technical Team who worked through ever-changing specifications, for example introducing our online booking system; the Newsletter and Web Editor Teams who kept on top of what was happening – and that was not easy – so that people could find out what was going on; our health expert who provided guidance on what was and was not permissible as the rules changed.

Alongside all this we increased our presence on social media – thanks to Emma van den Veen - and found a new audience so that more people could find out about us and what we offer.

We have a new coordinator for our discount suppliers – many of them have been through the mill sadly some have ceased trading, but we are signing up new businesses too. Do give them your support.

We have redefined our relationship with linked organizations' so we can connect with even more like-minded groups who share our values and provide activities of interest to our members.

We have appointed a new Diversity Officer, Amandeep Dhillon, and will continue to build links across our local community.

And along the way we picked up 100 bags of litter to smarten up our neighbourhoods – thanks to our Blitz an Open Space group!

Some organisations are having to restart almost from scratch. But LALG has come through strong and vibrant with even more on offer to our Members. We have proven we are flexible and accomplished. For an organisation consisting entirely of volunteers we delivered a lot and when it mattered.

My vision for the future is that LALG continues to provide well run, stimulating and fun things for our Members. That we welcome new Members from across the local community. That we find partners we can work with when that is beneficial – like David's and the Settlement. That we recognise other organisations also provide things that our Members might enjoy so we signpost them via our network of linked organisations and other contacts

I am not yet convinced we are completely out of the COVID woods. I know many people are still unsure about large gatherings, public transport and being in enclosed spaces with strangers. Each of us has a level of risk we are willing to tolerate and we manage our lives accordingly.

But we have proven that LALG has the resilience and strength to cope with what life throws at us so thank you to everyone who has made that a reality. I hope you will all be with us in 2022 and beyond as LALG grows and thrives.

A particular thank you to the Committee which has soldiered on through our Zoom meetings and kept the show on the road!

Another new Committee member, Emma Rowe, will be helping with some of our events. A non LALG event which she is organising is the Baldock Community Fireworks, hosted by St Mary's Schools PTA, on 7 November. The evening will feature the London Show Choir and a Diwali element.

Finally, to recognise that the last 18 months have not been normal and LALG couldn't offer its usual full range of activities we extended last year's membership by 3 months. The majority of renewals now happen in December. To enable our Membership Team to enjoy the Christmas festivities we have decided this year to use a fulfillment company to produce and mail the new cards. The cost is about £1 per household which we will meet from our reserves. We have also decided that to avoid this problem in future we will spread out future renewals from December 2022 through January to August 2023. This will distribute the workload through the year and the members who have been with us longest will be rewarded for their loyalty by getting the longest renewal date. Look out for your new membership card, which will arrive in December, where next year's renewal date will be printed. Membership remains a bargain at £10 per household per year, with an additional £4 for the printed newsletter.