

The Covid pandemic – the impact on Wheathampstead

Background

A new virus, Covid-19, emerged in China in 2019 and quickly spread all over the world. The first positive test for the disease in the UK was made on 29 January 2020. The World Health Organisation declared a “global pandemic” on 11 March. A considerable amount of “behind the scenes” government activity took place between late 2019 and 23 March when the first national lockdown was announced, to be enforced from 26 March.

On that day, 26 March 2020, life in Wheathampstead, like everywhere in the United Kingdom, was transformed as the first “lockdown” came into force. National regulations made it illegal to leave your home without an essential reason such as shopping for food or medicines, exercising once a day, and going to work if it was impossible to work from home. Participating in a gathering of more than two people was prohibited except where the gathering “is essential for work purposes”.



CORONAVIRUS
STAY AT HOME
PROTECT THE NHS
SAVE LIVES



Stay at home

The single most important action you can take is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

You should only leave the house for very limited reasons:

- ✓ Shopping for basic necessities, for example food and medicine, as infrequently as possible.
- ✓ One form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household.
- ✓ Any medical need, including to donate blood, avoid risk of harm, provide care or help a vulnerable person.
- ✓ Travelling for work purposes, but only where you cannot work from home.

These are exceptions – and when doing these activities, you should minimise time spent outside of the home and ensure you are two metres apart from anyone outside of your household.

Critical workers, and parents of vulnerable children, may leave the house to take their children to and from school or their childcare provider. More detail is available online. Children can be moved between homes if their parents live separately.

All the pubs and restaurants and most of the shops in the village closed overnight.



Notices like these appeared in almost every shop and office doorway



Essential shops were allowed to stay open, including Tesco, the post office, Manor Pharmacy and the Wheathampstead Fryer (fish-and-chip shop), albeit with restrictions.



In the first few days the bakery, Loafing, stayed open for delivery only and organised volunteers to deliver bread to vulnerable residents. Later, it re-opened to serve customers on the basis of “Two-at-a-time in the shop” and continued to deliver to residents who couldn’t or didn’t want to go to the shop.

Businesses relating to transport also qualified as essential so the Electric Bike Vault stayed open while Jessamine Garage, though closed for the first six weeks, reopened fully in mid-May.



The churches, schools, doctors’ and dentists’ surgeries, the library and all the playgrounds closed. All the voluntary groups in the village had to cancel face-to-face meetings, and many soon turned their attention to Zoom. Elderly and vulnerable people were required to “shield” themselves by staying indoors. Manor Pharmacy organised volunteers to deliver prescriptions to those who were shielding.

The problems this posed, especially for the elderly and isolated, were obvious and Wheathampstead had already swung into action. The rector of St Helen’s Church, Richard Banham, had held a meeting at the church on 16 March to consider how village organisations might respond to the emerging crisis. Representatives of the churches, the schools, the doctors’ surgery, the Parish Council, the County Council, local voluntary groups and the police met and set up a core team. Within days this leaflet was distributed by volunteers to every household.

Wheathampstead Support for all



During the current coronavirus crisis, several village organisations are working together to provide support to those in need. For example shopping, fetching medication, telephone calls for the isolated and lonely and help with groceries for those struggling to cope financially.

We aim to do this in a safe manner with trusted individuals to minimise the risk of abuse to people at a time of vulnerability.

If you need help

Please contact the Parish Council's dedicated line:

01582 380910

You can also email info@wheathampstead-pc.gov.uk

We will then put you in touch with a named, trustworthy volunteer.

Please do not hesitate to ask, whatever your situation. All communication will be dealt with sensitively.



Whilst we are organising a village-wide system, please continue to contact your friends and neighbours to support each other. This could be by phone or even through a closed window between you if personal contact is risky to either of you.

SCAM ALERT - Keep your money safe

Sadly, there will always be individuals who aim to profit from others' misfortunes.

- ✗ Be vigilant - although a person posting a postcard through your door may be well meaning, it could also be a way of tricking you out of money.
- ✗ Never hand over debit or credit card details or money in advance for shopping or errands.
- ✗ Beware of groups/individuals on social media offering help. DO NOT give out your personal details online.

Please keep this leaflet safe in case you need it at a later date.

If you would like to volunteer to help

Please contact the Wheathampstead Community Group Helpline on:

07539 176481

You can also email wheathampsteadCG@gmail.com

Although we aim to use volunteers with a valid DBS certificate, this is not essential as there are many ways to help.

Should your circumstances change or if you become unwell, please step down as a volunteer to protect yourself or others.

Organisations involved:

Beech Hyde Primary School and Nursery, Herts Police, St Helen's & St Peter's Churches, St Helen's C of E Primary School, St Thomas More Church, The Village Surgery, Wheathampstead Community Group, Wheathampstead Dementia Wellbeing Group, Wheathampstead Friends, Wheathampstead Parish Council, Wheathampstead Patient Participation Group.

The Parish Council arranged a separate emergency telephone line and a logging and call-handling system was put in place. The Wheathampstead Community Group made funds available immediately so that shopping could be bought for residents with no cash physically changing hands; recipients were asked to pay back the cost of their shopping at a later date. Some large donations were received from residents – one for £1000 and one for £500.

All this was achieved in the ten days between the meeting on 16 March and lockdown on 26 March. After the first meeting, the Support for All core team met on Zoom.

St Helen's + St Peter's · Wheathampstead
living and working for the glory of God

Coronavirus Update

PRAYER

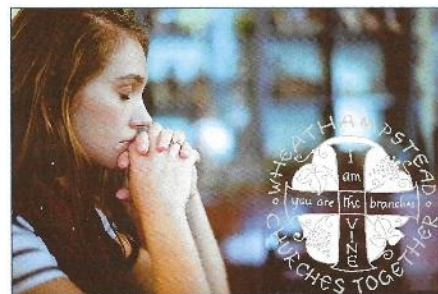
Calendar

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving." *Colossians 4:2*

This monthly cycle of prayer is for your personal use as an individual or a family during this time of self-isolation. It covers aspects of:

- ✓ our church life and village community
- ✓ Those in particular need and all "Key Workers"
- ✓ outreach and Charity Partners supported by our church

Keep Calm and Carry on Praying



Some prayers from Wheathampstead Churches Together to provide Spiritual Support during the Corona Virus Outbreak.

Two of the leaflets distributed by the churches

“Although St Helen’s church closed its doors and we were not physically able to worship together, the ministry of the church didn’t miss a beat. We quickly established a YouTube channel and recorded and broadcast services each Sunday. Teams of volunteers made telephone contact with the vulnerable and prayers, resources and newsletters were regularly distributed. We worked with schools to provide online resources in place of Assemblies and our Easter worship was especially creative. All of this would have been impossible without such a fantastic team of dedicated volunteers.”

Rev. Richard Banham

As many people started working from home and commercial activity ground to a near-halt, road traffic fell to the lowest level for many years though it picked up as online shopping, and particularly the ordering of food from the major supermarkets, led to increasing numbers of delivery vans.

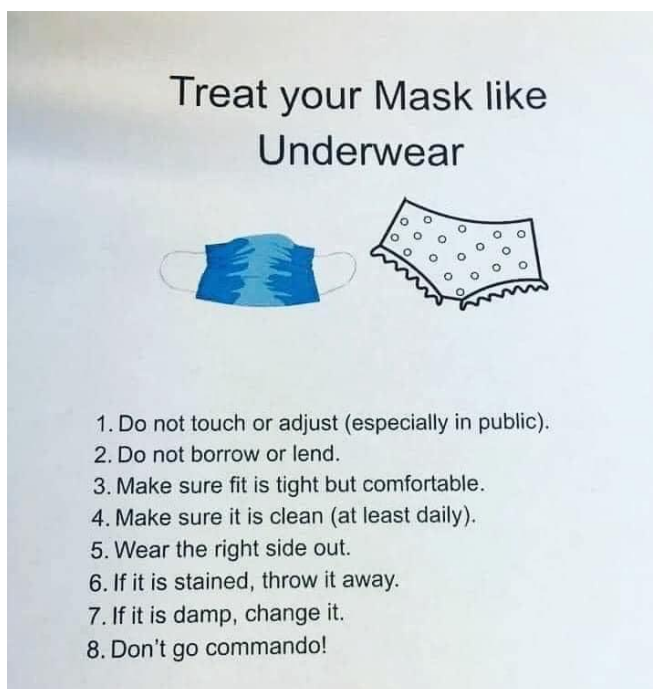
“I enjoyed the quiet that resulted from the lack of traffic and I was even happier at the silence in the skies after Luton and Stansted airports closed.”

Groups of walkers disappeared to be replaced by individuals or pairs.

“I remember the number of children being trained to ride their bikes, even down the (then traffic-free) Lower Luton Road. Also the vast numbers of people walking and cycling out on the lanes and field paths.”

Rod Adams

People began to get used to wearing face coverings.



Despite the doom and gloom, people kept a sense of humour

Home testing kits became available, free of charge, in the same month.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Home Test

Instructions

Watch video on how to administer test:
ipsos.uk/swabvideo

Make sure you book your courier before doing your test

This test can be conducted on people of different ages. Please follow this guide for who should administer the test

Age	How to administer
18+ years old	Self-administer test (unless unable to do so)
13 - 17 years old	Self-administer test with adult supervision
5 - 12 years old	Adult to administer test on the child – see instructions from page 9 onwards
Under 5s	Do not test using this test kit



On 13 May 2020, some of the regulations were relaxed and some pupils (Reception, Year 1 and Year 6) were able to go back to school on 1 June. St Helen’s and Beech Hyde schools, like schools everywhere, turned their attention to online learning but, also like schools everywhere, had difficulties with the often-changing rules about contacts and “bubbles”, with pupil absenteeism and with teacher absence through illness. The lives of parents of school-age children were especially disrupted throughout the pandemic.

People became accustomed to observing “social distancing” – the notorious “2-metre rule”.

Non-essential retail shops reopened on 15 June and pubs, restaurants and hairdressers on 4 July if they were “Covid-19 secure”.

MANY BUSINESSES AND VENUES IN ENGLAND CAN REOPEN FROM SATURDAY 4 JULY IF THEY ARE COVID-19 SECURE:

- Hotels, B&Bs, holiday homes and campsites
- Restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars
- Cinemas, museums and galleries
- Hair salons and barbers
- Libraries and community centres
- Places of worship
- Outdoor playgrounds and gyms
- Funfairs, theme parks and amusement arcades

STAY ALERT ▶ CONTROL THE VIRUS ▶ SAVE LIVES

Gatherings of more than 30 people were still prohibited, though up to six people could meet outdoors. With the increase in the number of people and groups taking outdoor exercise, the Meads had never been so popular and the number of dogs in the village increased rapidly.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Dear Local Resident,
Over the last year, as a result of Covid-19, the Common has experienced many more walkers, dogs and vandalism than ever before.
As a Golf Club and the owners of the land we want both members and local residents to continue to enjoy their exercise on Gustard Wood Common. To help everyone, we would like to make you aware of the Rules of the Common and would kindly ask you to observe them.
The following public notice will be posted at certain entrances to the Common.

GUSTARD WOOD COMMON
(To the West of B631, Whetthampstead-Kimpton Road)

THIS LAND IS THE PROPERTY OF THE MID HERTS GOLF CLUB LIMITED. Although it is a Registered Common, the public's right of access to this land is limited to air and exercise under the provisions of section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925.

Please note the following:

- The members of Mid Herts Golf Club have the right to construct and maintain a golf course on this land and the exclusive right to play golf on it. These rights have been enjoyed since 1893.
- Please observe the following:**
 - Dogs must be kept on a lead
 - No organised games
 - No lighting of fires on any part of the common
 - No driving or parking of vehicles except on the metalled road
 - Cyclists and horse riders should use the bridleways which are clearly signposted
 - Please clean up any dog waste and use the litter bins provided. Please do not leave litter or dog waste on the common.
- This land is maintained at the sole expense of Mid Herts Golf Club which also pays rates and property taxes as in the case of any other landowner. Members of the public are therefore requested to walk round (not over) the greens and sand bunkers, not to damage any trees or shrubs and generally to treat the course as they would wish their own property to be treated.
- Members of the public taking exercise on the Common are requested, in the interests of their own safety to exercise care when golf is being played. In the absence of negligence on the part of the player or the Club, no liability is accepted for any injury to any member of the public on the Common.

Mid Herts Golf Club, Lower Gustard Wood, Lamer Lane,
Whetthampstead, Herts AL4 8RS
Telephone: 01582 837342 www.midhertsgolfclub.co.uk

The Mid Herts Golf Club on Gustard Wood Common was prompted to send a leaflet to all the households in the village reminding residents that, while the golf course is on common land, there are Rules of the Common that should be observed, including that dogs must be kept on a lead, dog waste and litter must be picked up and there can be no lighting of fires. In addition, the Club requested that people walk round (not over) the greens and bunkers and not damage any trees or shrubs.

The NHS Test and Trace system was launched on 28 May 2020 in the hope that anyone who developed symptoms of COVID-19 could quickly be tested. If it was confirmed that they had the virus, the idea was that anyone with whom they had been in contact could be traced and advised to isolate. It was felt not to be a success.

On 14 September a restriction on gatherings of more than six people both indoors and outdoors (the “rule of six”) was introduced subject to exceptions including “where the gathering is reasonably necessary ... for work purposes”.

HM Government **NHS**

From Monday 14 September, you *must not* meet socially in groups of more than 6 in any setting.

This limit will be *enforceable in law.*

Rates of infection in Wheathampstead varied over time, more or less in line with the national figures, though with occasional localised peaks and troughs. Overall, the village was proportionally less affected than were the major urban settlements such as Luton.

However, as the Alpha variant of Covid-19 and a “second wave” drove up the number of infections, a national “tiering” system was introduced in October 2020. This placed each area in one of four tiers (Tier 1 being the lowest) with increasingly strict restrictions according to local infection rates. In the following months, Wheathampstead moved up and down between zero infections and Tier 3. Plans made by families, shops, the church and the schools had to change, often at very short notice, every time we moved between tiers.

Despite all the restrictions, a second national lockdown (a “circuit-breaker”) was introduced for one month from 5 November 2020. This required people to stay at home and prohibited gatherings with people from other households except for work purposes. St Helen’s Church marked Remembrance Day on 8 November with a “Doorstep Act of Remembrance”. This leaflet was distributed to every house in the village and villagers were invited to gather on their doorstep or at the end of their drive to share in prayers and observe the Two-minute Silence.

"I'm a keen cook. In lockdown, I tried to cook three new dishes a week that I hadn't tried before. Some were more successful than others!"

Pat Walker

Doorstep Act of Remembrance
11am - Sunday 8 November 2020

This year it is not possible to gather together for our Act of Remembrance. Instead, we invite you to gather on your doorstep, or at the end of your drive, and use the words overlaid on your own or with neighbours.

The annual Act of Remembrance unites us as a community in thinking of and praying for all who in bereavement, disability and pain, continue to suffer the consequences of fighting and terror. We each commit ourselves to work for peace so all people may live free from fear and injustice.

In keeping with tradition, we have included prayers from the Christian faith - you are free to replace these with prayers from your own faith, to offer them as non-religious thoughts, or simply leave them out.

*** Please maintain social distancing ***

Join us online
An online Act of Remembrance has been filmed in the village - including laying wreaths and the Roll of Honour. This will be available from 10.45am on Sunday 8 November at www.wsth-stp.org. This includes contributions from local schools, Wheathampstead History Society and other individuals.

Plant your poppy
Join in this season of remembrance by adding your poppy to make a beautiful display by the War Memorial in the centre of the village. The display will 'grow' from 1 to 15 November.

The Church bell will toll for ten minutes, stopping just before 11am.

If possible, read by an older person | They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

If possible, a younger person responds | At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

All We will remember them.

Two-minute silence is observed.
Ever-living God, we remember those whom you have gathered from the storm of war into the peace of your presence; may that same peace calm our fears, bring justice to all peoples and establish harmony among the nations, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Act of Commitment
Let us commit ourselves to responsible living and faithful service.

Will you strive for all that makes for peace?
All We will.

Will you seek to heal the wounds of war?
All We will.

Will you work for a just future for all humanity?
All We will.

Merciful God, we offer to you the fears in us that have not yet been cast out by love; may we accept the hope you have placed in the hearts of all people, and live lives of justice, courage and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Kohima Epitaph
When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today.

[f](#) [t](#) [#WheathampsteadRemembers](#)

The circuit-breaker was followed by a revised tiering system on 2 December. Wheathampstead reached the highest level, Tier 4, on 19 December when the whole of Hertfordshire was raised to

this level. This meant the reintroduction of what amounted to total lockdown. Christmas was a very low-key affair. By 30 December, 80% of the country was in Tier 4.



The High Street at 3.24 pm on Christmas Day 2020

“I was really saddened that we had to cancel so many much-loved village events such as Village Weekend, Lights Up, and the Christmas Carol Service. It’s lovely to see them all coming back.”

The first Covid vaccination had been administered in Coventry on 8 December 2020. Residents of Wheathampstead who qualified for vaccination (for example, the medically vulnerable and the over-75s) began to receive their first “jab” in January 2021, most at either Batchwood Hall in St Albans or the Harpenden Public Halls, followed by a second jab from April onwards.



The queue for vaccination at Harpenden Public Halls

From April 2021, it was possible to have a Covid jab at a number of local walk-in centres.



Market Place, St Albans

The first cases of the highly-infectious Kent variant had been diagnosed on 27 November 2020 and it spread rapidly. A third national lockdown came into force on 6 January 2021 with restrictions similar to those in the first lockdown, including schools being closed again.

As before, restrictions were eased in stages in the following months in line with the government's "road map" out of the pandemic, announced on 22 February. Schools reopened on 8 March, though some of the rules about "bubbles", contacts and isolation continued to change. On 12 April non-essential retail businesses and many outdoor venues reopened but restrictions on social mixing indoors and outdoors remained.

All five of our pubs (Bull, Cross Keys, Elephant and Castle, Reading Room, Swan) found ways of re-opening their businesses when the rules allowed people to meet outdoors. They all survived the pandemic.



A VE Day celebration street party on 6 June 2021

"One of my happy memories of the pandemic is how neighbours regularly sat outside on their driveways (while maintaining social distancing) and, over coffee or a drink, caught up with everyone, checking on their well-being and helping out where needed. A legacy of this is that neighbours continue to meet up and offer help to each other."

Sandra Wood

Most people who wished to had by now received their second jab.

19 July 2021 had been hailed as “Freedom Day” when all restrictions would be lifted though face masks were still encouraged in shops and on public transport. In the event, the arrival and rapid spread of the Delta variant and with it a “third wave” meant that many restrictions remained in place. On 8 December 2021, the government’s Plan B was put into effect with associated restrictions, including making face coverings mandatory again.

Hearts sank with the arrival of the Omicron variant but happily, and largely due to the success of the vaccination programme, its impact was less than feared.

On 24 February 2022 all the restrictions were finally lifted in England.

All the shops, restaurants and hairdressers in the High Street have survived the pandemic and life has returned to the village. We have learned to live in a “New Normal” which is not, at the time of writing, very different from the old.

Patrick McNeill

September 2023

Photographs by Sandra Wood

Please send us your personal memories and stories about how Covid-19 affected you and Wheathampstead. Please send your contribution to whs@wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk