

ANNUAL REPORT TO COSTESSEY TC PUBLIC MEETING BY THE RBL COSTESSEY & DISTRICT BRANCH

None of you will need reminding that the last year has been difficult for those organisations normally dependent upon regular social interaction. It has certainly been a different year, but we have striven to ensure we overcame the challenge of the environment created by the pandemic. Many of you will have seen the article I recently published in the Costessey TC Newsletter, so I do not intend to go into great detail repeating this information. I will simply focus on the highlights to enable anyone who missed the article to get a full understanding of our activities. I should also like to draw your attention to the fact that on the 15th May 2021, the British Legion was formed and so this year is our centenary

Membership has remained steady at around 115 members.

At the outset we developed a network of buddy groups to enable members to stay in contact with each other. These networks have been so successful that they have now grown to include beneficiaries outside the branch right across the county and some completely unrelated to the RBL or the military in any way. These referrals came from SNDC. We estimate that over 4,000 telephone calls have been keeping people in touch via the Buddy Group network.

Our members have also provided a significant number of volunteers for the Rubicon initiative which sought veterans to help with some of the less glamorous tasks that may have to be undertaken in the event that the usual services become overstretched. The first of these was the provision of mortuary services for the county - fortunately this plan did not have to be activated.

Helped to create Costessey Cares with the RBL as a member organisation. This participation in a wider community group has generated a great deal of attention from the RBL nationally and as a branch we have been asked to help generate future policy for the RBL nationally in developing an engagement programme with local communities. Whilst beneficiaries of the RBL charity will always be serving or ex-serving personnel or their families, the RBL can do much to help the local community without financial implications as the Costessey Buddy Groups in particular have demonstrated. I should add that over Easter a few of our members undertook a litter pick around Costessey as part of the Costessey Cares Easter Activity Programme. Around a dozen bin bags of rubbish were collected but the exercise demonstrated that there seem to be two prime sources of litter in Costessey: litter by the roadside is predominantly dropped from vehicles as the drive through the town, and there are gathering points where groups clearly congregate and leave litter before departure, this is particularly so around the mill, the Co-op Shop and the One Stop Shop. The impact of this on the environment is clear, especially when litter close to the River Wensum can easily enter the waterway and this eventually effects us all, not just the wildlife of the river.

Poppy Appeal to date in 2020/21 stands at £10,230.83 - well down on last years £24,000 but still a remarkable achievement given the lockdown and other restrictions. We hope to build this more as we arrange events coming out of lockdown.

Finally, I should like to draw everyones attention to another issue that the RBL Is involved with. Since the erection of the flag pole at the Costessey Centre the site has become a successful location for events when tribute is paid to those who served in HM armed forces. In the coming months we hope to erect a permanent memorial to the fallen of WW1 and 2 (including the USAAF aircrew) outside the Costessey Centre so that when commemorative events are held, there will be somewhere to place tributes. This is intended to be multi-cultural and secular so that any group will have somewhere they can openly participate in acts of remembrance and other tributes. It is hoped that the memorial will compliment the development of gardens to the front of the Costessey

Centre. This will not detract in any way from the use or maintenance of the existing war memorial within the grounds of St Edmund's Church, but will compliment it.

Gp Capt Stewart Blackburn MBE DL RAF Ret'd