

# ***The Listening Ear***

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# **ACA**

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## **Richard's Scriblings**

As promised, another issue of *Listening Ear* for you in what is turning out to be, as Professor Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer for England, described it, "the long haul"! Never mind all the doom and gloom, the signs are beginning to indicate that we are at least heading the right way. The Committee are now meeting via Zoom, and we are thinking we could do this on a regional basis, even perhaps after all this is over. The wonders of technology!

This month articles include a reflection by David Legh, the Chair of Derbyshire Rural Chaplaincy (and many thanks for sending it to us); items on the rural challenges due to COVID-19; even more fly-tipping issues; the clarification of lockdown travel arrangements; and timely words from Bob Baker in 'Thoughts from a Northern Mart'. As usual, we are grateful to the Rural Services Network, Alan Spedding and RuSource for their contributions. Whilst there is a lot in this edition, it would be very good to hear from chaplaincies or individuals about their ministry context. We would welcome all contributions.

## **Reflection from David Legh** (Chair - Derbyshire Rural Chaplaincy Steering Group)

Dear Friends

Here, this week, is a reflection from a lay person. I have been struck by the ingenuity, resourcefulness and kindness of people during the pandemic, accompanied by renewed community engagement – previously seen by some as an old-fashioned trait in a fast-moving world. As an example: David, who delivers our daily newspaper, mentioned the other day that if we were short of a household need, he could probably get it and deliver it with the paper. Jane asked him if he could procure some compost for our roses. "No problem", he said "I'll get three bags and deliver them Monday or Tuesday. Just leave the cash in an envelope."

When we emerge from COVID-19 there seems to be every chance that some changes will be permanent, that families will be more self-sufficient, re-learning old techniques, taking less for granted. One concept that seems to have disappeared in recent years is seasonality. The supermarkets have indoctrinated us with the belief that any fruit or vegetable is available throughout the year, and we have lost the excitement of the first bunch of asparagus or punnet of strawberries. I hope this new realisation will filter down into a greater respect for our farmers and fruit-growers. Their world entirely depends on seasonality; their annual goal is to reach harvest, and they cannot afford to miss it – be it grass for our livestock, wheat for bread, barley for malting, or timber for construction. At least Mother Nature has been kind to us since lockdown. The appalling floods and saturated ground of the autumn and winter have given way to warm spring sunshine for sowing crops and mowing the first cuts of silage.

Like so many of us, Jane and I have expanded our IT skills over the past month or so. We regularly record acts of worship and post them on YouTube. The very act of compiling circulation lists has widened our pastoral reach and rekindled relationships. We were amazed by the number of views in the build-up to Easter. Many have been out of curiosity, but enough people have shown their appreciation to indicate that they wish this to be a regular feature in their lives. For those of us actively engaged in rural ministry this is a new challenge – and a very real opportunity.

With every good wish, **David**



## COVID-19 exposes the rural / urban divide

Philip Dunne MP has written an article for PoliticsHome arguing that, due to factors such as a concentration of jobs with key employers as well as a lack of connectivity, the coronavirus crisis has starkly exposed the rural/urban divide. He highlights that in rural areas above-average elderly populations requiring greater support, fewer medical settings, and greater sparsity and distance have all increased pressure on clinicians and care workers.

In particular, he argues that rural areas have been slower to receive broadband and even mobile phone connectivity, leading the crisis to expose real challenges. While home working is feasible for many jobs in urban areas, lack of connectivity excludes too many in sparsely populated parts of the country. Employment in rural areas is also disproportionately in essential roles – hospitals and local authorities are often the largest employers in county towns, and residential care homes are frequently the largest employers in villages.

He argues that when the crisis passes, the Government will need to look seriously at rural/urban inequalities to ensure rural areas recover alongside urban areas, both in health and the economy.

The full article can be read at: <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/despite-a-strong-community-spirit-covid-19-is-exposing-real-challenges-in-our-rural-areas>

Philip Dunne is Conservative MP for Ludlow and Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee and APPG for Rural Services



Cartoon by MATT

## Combatting a spike in fly-tipping



Councils across the nation have closed down Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) in response to the coronavirus lockdown and some have also scaled back rubbish collections due to reduced staff numbers.

Rural insurance specialist Lycetts is calling on farmers and landowners to take all necessary steps to protect their land, liaise closely with neighbours and ensure they have sufficient insurance cover in place should they fall victim to fly-tipping. Members of the public are also being encouraged to report any suspicious activity they witness to the police.

*“At a time when farmers are working flat out to feed the nation ahead of the busy harvest months, they can ill-afford to contend with the costly and time-consuming burden of removing waste from their land,”* said Rupert Wailes-Fairbairn, Rural Divisional Director, Lycetts.

*“Although the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) has strengthened local authorities’ enforcement powers in recent years, the onus still lies with farmers and other private landowners to dispose of fly-tipped waste on their land. They can even be prosecuted if they fail to do so quickly enough.*

*Despite pressure on government from organisations such as the Tenant Farmers Association and the Countryside Alliance, there are currently no plans to change the law.*

*Although local authorities can investigate fly-tipping incidents on private land, and bring prosecutions when there is sufficient evidence, the Local Government Association has called for more funding to help them do so. The coronavirus pandemic has further intensified the pressure on stretched council resources.*

*It can be difficult to prevent fly-tipping, but we should look to support each other as much as possible during these testing times by keeping a lookout and reporting incidents.”*

Wailes-Fairbairn has also reminded farmers of the steps they can take to help deter those responsible, including ensuring that fields, particularly those which are roadside, are gated and locked where possible.

*“Security lights and cameras at vulnerable locations throughout farms, and at entrance points hidden from view, can also be effective and help to provide crucial evidence should councils decide to investigate,”* he added.

*“Furthermore, farmers should consult with their insurance broker to see what cover is afforded to them in the event of an incident, particularly in the case of repeat offences. Many combined farm insurance policies will cover the cost of the cost of removal and disposal of fly-tipped waste – generally around £5,000 per incident and capped at £15,000.”*

According to Defra statistics, 1,072,431 incidents of fly-tipping were dealt with by local authorities in 2018/19, an eight per cent rise on 998,000 in 2017-18.

## **Timely Words of Caution** (from *Thoughts from a Northern Mart* by Bob Baker)

Please don't buy sky lanterns to support the NHS. These lanterns are killers in the countryside!! Give the money direct to the NHS if you want to support them.

With all the time on our hands, a lot of us are turning to DIY and gardening, but, with the Councils having to shut recycling/waste collection sites, please store your waste at home until they reopen. Do not fly-tip it in the countryside. This is especially true of garden waste, with five cows and calves being found dead in one field as result of somebody dumping yew tree branches and foliage! Even lawn clippings can prove toxic to livestock. (See *previous article!*)

## **A Challenge to Travel Guidelines**

Several news outlets, including the BBC, Yorkshire Post and Sky, report on calls from rural groups against recent advice to police forces that it is lawful to drive somewhere to exercise, including a trip to the countryside.

The groups argue the new rules would cause 'untold anxieties' in rural communities and risk spreading the virus through unnecessary journeys. Driving to the countryside for a walk is 'likely to be reasonable' if more time is spent walking than driving, the guidance says. But in a letter to Justice Secretary Robert Buckland, the rural groups claim the guidance would make managing COVID-19 more difficult. Police groups say the advice is not for the public - it is meant to help officers decide when to charge someone. The letter challenging the guidance is signed by the National Rural Crime Network, the Countryside Alliance, the National Farmers' Union, and the Country Land and Business Association.

## **And finally...**

A COVID complaint from a cat...



"Get a human." they said.

"They are away from home all day." they said.