**From Chair of Trustees, Pete Bowman**

The start of 2020 looked promising for The Mill project, with tenders for ‘design and build’ project management and quotes for an archaeological survey sent out to local organisations.

We had also started to plan for the 2020 Village Fete, following the terrific success of the 2019 event, and the Fundraising Team were making significant inroads into identifying grants from national, regional and local agencies.

However, as March came to an end, we – like the rest of the country – had to put our fundraising efforts on hold due to the escalating Covid-19 situation.

Despite this, we were all still working away in the background and in March, we appointed GSS Architecture in Kettering as our project managers. We also engaged the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) to undertake the archaeological survey, which was completed in April.

The first project management task was to create a ‘meaningful start’ to the process so we could secure the planning permission before its deadline in August 2021. We were advised by GSS that digging the first foundation trench would establish planning permission as agreed and approved by Corby Borough Council Building Control. In August, we appointed a Structural Engineer to oversee the works and the foundation trench was started and completed over two days in October 2020.

As the Covid-19 situation continued, our supporters – undaunted ­­– were still doing their bit to raise funds for The Mill project. I’d like to thank all of those who put their haberdashery, gardening and cookery skills to good use to help raise extra funds.

So thank you to Julie Connachie, Wendy Curtis, Julie Murray, Diana Sharvill and Chris West-Robinson for raising over £600 in face mask sales. We’d also like to thank Sarah Brant, Ro Freeman, Gerry Henson, Diana Sharvill, Sue Trengrove and Chris and George West-Robinson for raising nearly £340 in plant sales. And not forgetting Paula Orton, whose jars of home made chutney and piccalilli raised nearly £140.

As far as our total finances go, the project’s own cash funds amounted to £40,687.52 (as of 31 December 2020), which included £35,990.50 received from Middleton Parish Council which had been specifically ring fenced for the new community hub.

As always, we are all humbled by and extremely grateful to all the villagers who continue to support the project, especially during a very difficult year. I’d like to extend our thanks to Jan and Del Robertson, and Rachel Raj, who have all been working hard behind the scenes as part of the Fundraising Team. Your commitment and patience is very much appreciated.

I’d also like to thank the Trustees who have helped move this project forward and achieved some notable successes to keep The Mill on target.

On a personal note – and after much hard thought and reflection ­­– I have finally decided to step down as Chair at the end of this AGM and also to retire as a Trustee.

I’ve been with the project for over 15 years (including five years as Chair) and I feel it’s now time to get a new pair of hands on the wheel. I’ve watched the project grow from its earliest days, through three different locations and on to finally securing planning permission and acquiring CIO status. None of this could have been achieved without the hard work, time and effort of the Trustees, and I know the project will be moved even further forward safely, reliably and diligently.